Doing Democracy in Malawi: MPs and their Home Styles

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Political scientists have under-studied those who actually "do" formal politics – politicians, particularly those operating below the level of heads of state. This neglect has been acute in African politics, resulting from, and contributing to, a generalised disdain for African politicians and a set of unflattering assumptions about their allegedly self-interested and materialistic motivations and methods. This blind-spot has impoverished debates around democratisation, party-voter linkage, and economic development, amongst others. Approaching politics through the eyes of politicians, and taking Malawi as a case, this thesis focuses on an especially neglected yet important area: MPs' attitudes towards, and behaviour within, their constituencies. Utilising an adjusted version of Fenno's concept of "home styles" – and based upon close observation of MPs "at home" as well as extended interviews with them – the thesis addresses MPs' motivations for entering politics; their experiences of primary contests; the logistics and sociology of campaigning for election; their constituency service, before and after taking office, in terms of both development projects and "handouts"; and finally, how their experiences of being a constituency MP inform their reflections about how democracy is (and is not) working in contemporary Malawi. I argue that MPs' motivations transcend self-interest. Broadly (and in common with many aid donors) they have a deeply ambivalent attitude to democracy, grounded in an image of a country and of constituents lacking in necessary (self-) discipline. They seek office by making a presentation of themselves as an embodied exemplar of certain virtues and once in office usually try to hold a line on handouts, communicating a "presentation of (their) role" as elected representatives designed in part to limit the pressure that holding office places on their personal resources. Typically, MPs perceive themselves as failing on all fronts and adopt a distinctly pessimistic orientation towards democracy as a whole.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ADC – Area Development Committee

ADMARC – Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation

AFORD – Alliance for Democracy

CCAP – Church of Central Africa Presbyterian

CCP – Chaka Cha Pfuko (Party of the Clan)

CDF – Constituency Development Fund

DADO – District Agricultural Development Officer

DC – District Commissioner

DDF – District Development Fund

DFID – Department for International Development (UK)

DPP – Democratic Progressive Party

ESCOM – Electricity Supply Company of Malawi

FISP – Fertiliser Input Subsidy Programme

IGO – International Governmental Organisation

INGO – International Non-Governmental Organisation

JICA – Japan International Cooperation Agency

LDF – Local Development Fund

MCP – Malawi Congress Party

MEC – Malawi Electoral Commission

MP – Member of Parliament

MWK – Malawian kwacha (currency)

NAC – Nyasaland African Congress

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

NICE – National Initiative for Civic Education

ODPOD – Office of the Directorate of Public Officers' Declarations

PP – People's Party

PPM – People's Progressive Movement

T/A – Traditional Authority (senior chief)

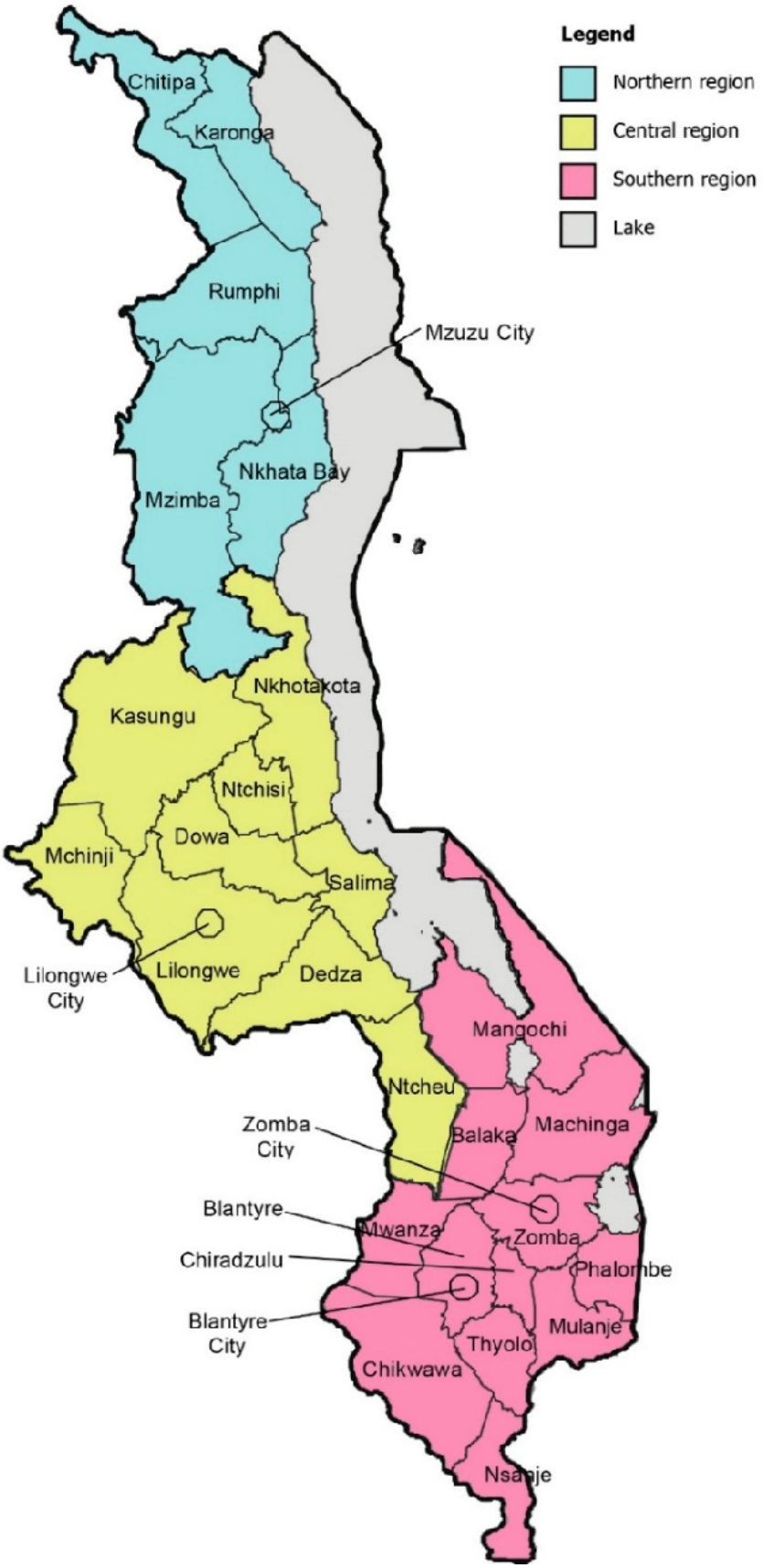
UDF – United Democratic Front

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UTM – United Transformation Movement

VDC – Village Development Committee

MAP OF MALAWI



Source:https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-Malawi-with-districts-and-administrative-zones_fig1_337760557

‘What a lovely, lovely moon. And it’s in the constituency too.’

(Alan Jackson, *The Young Politician Looks at the Moon*)

Chapter 1: Introduction

> '[D]emocrats should recognise the essential role of leadership without feeling any sense of guilt. Elites are not an imperfection in a democracy but, where they are themselves democratic, are the guarantor of the system.'
>
> (Parry 2005, 147 - on Giovanni Sartori)

This thesis is about the working lives of Members of Parliament in Malawi, especially as these relate to their constituencies. It is a sociology of work, a 'collective portrait' (Corbett 2015, 16) of these MPs and their lived-in worlds. While there has been much – and renewed – interest in African politics since the "third wave" of democratisation washed across the continent in the late 1980s and 1990s (Huntington 1993), those who actually "do" formal politics – politicians – remain largely ignored as a subject of sustained, detailed, interpretivist research into their work, lives, and lived-in worlds. There feels often to be a politician-shaped hole in our understanding and analysis of African democracy and politics (although this may slowly be changing: Scully 2016 on Ellen Johnson Sirleaf; and Bjerk 2017 on Julius Nyerere are amongst several (short) popular/scholarly biographies of African heads of state to have emerged recently. Both Larmer 2010; and Tendi 2020, meanwhile, are concerned to elevate and explore "alternative" historic/iconic figures.) This neglect is especially true, however, of those below the level of heads of state and prominent national figures. MPs, for instance – for the most part neither famous nor heroic, of minimal historic or national import as individuals, and in many cases unsuccessful politicians defeated roundly after one term – are in many respects the foot-soldiers of representative democracy in many still-young African democracies, charged with representing the people in Parliament and holding the elected executive to account. Charles Hornsby (1989, 275) long ago noted the neglect of parliaments and parliamentarians in the literature on African politics, such that 'basic knowledge of the operation of the political system is often absent.' Even in now-democratic contexts, however, we continue to know remarkably little about the "nuts and bolts" of MPs' everyday work and lives as representatives (Lindberg 2010, 118; Tamale 1999, on Ugandan women MPs, is a notable exception.)

Antipoliticians and disciplinary bias

Why this lack of interest in (African) politicians? There appear to be several issues at play, beginning with those which affect not only Africanists but the social/political sciences in general. Academics are, firstly, part of society – and their relative disinterest in, perhaps dislike of, politicians is very much reflective of a wider societal phenomenon. Politicians as a

group/class of actors are subject to much popular derision, distrust, and worse – and have been, doubtless, since whenever and wherever there have been politicians. At least in free and democratic societies where it is safe to do so, "politicians" as a category have long served a valuable, unifying social function as national punch-bags, discursively speaking. There are many things that profoundly and bitterly divide people within and across national societies, but not thinking much of their politicians feels like something close to a human universal.

There are reasons for this. Human beings doubtless have a natural (and healthy, democratic) scepticism when it comes to those who – especially at a distance – rule over them. This is perhaps especially the case when those exercising power are required or otherwise feel the need to disavow self-interest of any kind and to pretend that they are always, and in all things, motivated purely by the public interest – a claim that sooner or later must inevitably come face-to-face with reality, be it in small or in spectacular fashion.

What is more, there is a special and particular tension inherent in a system of *representative* democracy, where political leaders and leadership must exist in a political system and culture in which the ideas, ideals and rhetoric of popular sovereignty are daily venerated, above all by politicians themselves. '[T]he tension between leadership and the democratic principle of popular sovereignty, where all people are equal, is at the heart of the problem democratic publics have with their politicians' (Corbett 2015, 5). Elected politicians are in many respects *actually* in charge, but are so in a system built upon the principle that "the people" are in charge. Being able to point to a democratic process from which they derive their power and authority is important, of course, but will only carry politicians so far. It is arguably their fate, as a class, to be more or less derided and despised.

This has, moreover, never been more true than in the early part of the 21st century, in which anti-politics and anti-politician ideas and arguments have become a topic of recognised public as well as scholarly concern (Corbett 2015, 1–23). As Geraint Parry (2005, 4) argues, we live more than ever in an 'era of egalitarian sentiment,' in which the zeitgeist is ever more anti-deferential and at odds with any positive readings of elites and leadership. In increasingly democratic-egalitarian (and arguably egalitarian-populist) political cultures across the global North and South, we are more and more accustomed to discourses and rhetoric that criticise (and outright condemn) politicians as "elites," "elitist," "the establishment," and so on – much of it ironically from (aspirant) politicians themselves (on populism as rhetoric, performance and representational style see for example Müller 2016; Moffitt 2020). Politicians have rarely, in short, seemed more derided than in recent years as a class apart – abnormal and self-serving in various ways, and "out of touch" with "ordinary people."

When healthy scepticism of politicians turns to corrosive cynicism and hatred of "the establishment" – cynicism capable of itself being mobilised in the service of populist political

projects that fetishize their anti-politics, anti-politician credentials – the results are, in the view of some at least, rarely good and frequently dark and demagogic. Certain scholars, as a result, have been concerned to mount an actively anti-populist, open defence of representative politics and, by extension, of politicians as a class of actors (for example Crick 2005; Corbett 2015; Flinders 2012; Reeher 2006; Riddell 2011). This thesis originates from a similar perspective.

There is secondly, however, a more specific disciplinary bias in social/political "science" that tends to favour impersonal, structural explanations and approaches, and to leave the experiences and reflections of politicians to journalists, popular historians and (auto)biography. "Human interest," perhaps, is considered unscholarly, certainly unscientific; irrelevant at best and even actively "unhelpful" at least in respect of politicians – that is, somehow obscuring or supportive of oppressive structural relations of power, and liable to crowd out alternative and more deserving (subaltern) voices (Fisher 2020a, 814).[1] This is the case, it should be noted, both on the positivist/rational-choice right, as well as the critical theory/Foucauldian left. Neither has a great deal of room in their theories for the in-depth investigation or fine-grained analysis of ordinary politicians; for both camps, in fact – albeit for (sometimes) different reasons – the agency of such persons is largely irrelevant and/or can be easily presumed. That is, their theories already tell them all they need (or want?) to know about politicians' agency – be it that they respond "rationally" to "interests" and "incentives" (VonDoepp 2005) and/or that they are agents of an inherently unjust and corrupted system of oppressive power (Mbembe 1992b). In either case, politicians as people, doing a job creatively, reflexively and with individual agency, are not much worth worrying about; where relevant at all, they are to be abstracted away from as much as possible into – according to taste – "variables," "subjectivities," or the like.

A partial exception, especially at the positivist end of the discipline, is a long-standing recognition of this disciplinary bias in favour of structural explanations, and a concern to integrate agency-related variables such as "leadership" into regression and other comparative modelling (for instance VonDoepp 2009). These have met with limited success, however, as it is in the nature of such modelling that the particularity of individual circumstances – such as the personal characteristics and/or qualities of specific politicians – tend to be under-explained and

[1] Many of my fellow Politics PhD students and certain members of my (Politics) department considered my interest in politicians an amusing and eccentric quirk, with perhaps a whiff of the sinister and unsound. Explaining to a curious colleague that I was "interested in what makes politicians tick," she laughed and replied that, "Well I think we know what makes them tick!" I mention this not merely for personal therapeutic purposes, but also because it seems to me wholly illustrative of anti-politician attitudes and how those attitudes lead to scholarly neglect – given such a view, how could in-depth research into politicians and their lived-in worlds be anything other than surplus to requirements, or worse actively unhelpful in potentially eliciting empathy where it does not belong?

under-theorised, and often end up functioning as variables of last resort. What is more, such agency-variables tend to focus on *leaders*; and to consider merely politicians' *explanatory* (causal) role in a particular outcome and not their reflections and experiences for their own sake.

African politicians: the curse of democracy

If neglect of politicians and their work is an issue across the discipline, it is particularly marked in the case of African politicians (see Eyoh 1996). There has long been a marked preference for deep-structural accounts of African politics, rooted in theories of neopatrimonialism, dependency, neoliberalism, or any combination thereof. Once again, these tend to render politicians' agency either irrelevant or predictable/knowable according to the precepts of the theory itself: politicians behaving as neopatrimonial "big men," for instance, or as a largely self-serving comprador bourgeoisie. In African studies in particular, moreover, has what interest there is in politicians tended to focus on those in positions of preeminent executive authority such as heads of state and the like (notably Jackson and Rosberg 1982). There is much less interest in exploring the lives, experiences, and thoughts of those politicians considerably farther down the food chain, and to see what their "lived-in worlds" reveal about the character of democracy and politics in contemporary African settings.

What is more, if general disdain and intellectual disregard for politicians is an issue in citizenries and scholarship across the globe, it is arguably at a different order of magnitude in the case of African politicians. Whatever intuitive or analytical sense a fundamentally hostile, cynical vision of African politicians might have made in the dictatorial period, it is striking the extent to which such ideas not merely survived but so effortlessly transferred into the "democratic" era and to, in many countries a least, a new generation of politicians. There was thus maintained, as Richard Werbner (2004, 61) puts it, 'a bias, notoriously well-established among social scientists, against elites' – now cast anew as the inevitable enemy within of the new democratic dispensations, 'as if they were the curse of liberal democracy.' African politicians were and are arguably viewed with suspicion and distaste in this respect to an extent (at least prior to the presidency of Donald Trump) frankly unthinkable in the global North.

In the Malawi literature, for instance, about the best Malawian politicians can hope for is that they are viewed in line with the assumptions of rational-choice theory: *homo politicus* responsive to (individual, self-regarding) "interests and incentives" (VonDoepp 2005; *Africa Confidential* 2019; 2020). Frequently, however, even these approaches are inclined to pathologize politicians, portraying them as self-interested and ruthlessly calculating to a degree verging on the sociopathic. Young (2014, 105–6), for instance, sees politicians' motivations in politics (see Chapter 2) straightforwardly in terms of pure personal interest, ambition, and

advancement. Brown (2004, 716) suggests Malawi is a 'democracy without democrats' and sees a recent election (2004), for example, as 'of little import, regardless of electoral shenanigans, since the various parties shared the same kind of thinking and neopatrimonial politics and sought power primarily for their own benefit, rather than with a vision for improving living conditions in Malawi.' Englund (2002), meanwhile, notably cast Malawi as a 'democracy of chameleons' – with politicians who swing from party to party, and from one alliance or political position to another, with dizzying ease and 'self-serving rhetoric,' in pursuit solely of their own self-interest, money and power (Englund 2002a, 24). '[I]s there a culture of politics beyond mere greed?', he asks, and as far as actual politicians in the legislature and executive are concerned his answer is clearly "no" (Englund 2002a, 14; see also Rakner, Svåsand, and Khembo 2007).

"Democracy," then, is seen to have been a huge disappointment, fulfilling little of what was promised to the people beyond an obvious improvement in civil liberties. And why has it failed? Politicians, of course. According to one of the earliest assessments of the new democratic dispensation, politicians remain people who practice 'dirty politics' and who have 'neither permanent enemies nor permanent friends, but permanent interests which they will pursue at any cost' (Moyo 1995, 121). 'Born-again politicians hi-jacked our revolution!' in the memorable words of one Malawian intellectual (Brown 2004, 713). Clive Gabay's (2015) analysis of civil society organisations in Malawi, meanwhile, employs dependency and postcolonial approaches to suggest, as Joey Power (2016, 282) argues, that 'Malawi's state and governing elites cannot be anything but predatory… as long as Malawi's development and democracy are driven by external forces.' In the gothic stylings of Achille Mbembe (1992a; 1992b), finally, African politicians are truly dehumanised and rendered *un*-human – predatory, endlessly vulgar, and positively vampiric.

Such understandings of politicians, furthermore, are very much reflected beyond the academy in African societies and popular/media commentary. Malawi's Afrobarometer 2020 results indicate that over 50% of Malawians disapprove or strongly disapprove of how their MPs have performed their job in the previous 12 months; the vast majority, moreover, consider at least some MPs to be corrupt, and MPs to generally be "missing in action" between elections (Afrobarometer 2020; see also Chunga 2014).[2] On a more qualitative level, discussion in Malawi of politicians is often strikingly virulent. One of the country's foremost political commentators, George Kasakula of the Daily Times, is far from unusual in describing Malawi as 'a nation taken hostage' by its self-serving and corrupt politicians (Kasakula 2017). Lacking 'any

[2] Although 'only' 15% of voters reported having dealings with their MP in the 12 months prior to the 2014 Afrobarometer survey, this seems fairly impressive to me (Chunga 2014, 4). Could anything like the same be said by UK voters, even in an election year?

sense of duty,' he argues, '[t]his is how rotten the political leadership in this country is. All they care about is their bellies and that [*sic*] of their families' (Kasakula 2016). Another leading commentator suggests that, 'Malawians are shackled by soulless leaders driven by self-interest manifested in the practice and tolerance of fraud and corruption' (Hauya 2017). Politicians themselves are far from being above such rhetoric when it comes especially to castigating their opponents and the incumbent government (Chakwera 2017), but also more generally – as discussed at several points throughout this thesis, Malawian politicians are invariably scathing about "(other) politicians," including parliamentary colleagues. Such trenchant commentary on the political class is entirely representative of popular narratives regarding politicians that I encountered at all levels of Malawian society. Old-fashioned arguments about the innate deference of African cultures towards political leadership and hierarchy crumble in the face of the sheer, wearied contempt with which the political class appears to be viewed and disparaged by the vast majority of its own population.[3]

The attitudes towards politicians discussed above have a history. They come, I wish to argue, from long-standing ways of looking at and of understanding African politics that treat African politicians as – when not literally psychopathic or deranged *à la* Amin, Bokassa, Nguema *et al* – then at least as materially-motivated and self-interested to a quasi-pathological extent. When it comes to how African politicians get and maintain power, the literature on African politics has long tended to emphasise two themes: money, on the one hand, and violence, on the other – as well as, of course, both of these at once (Lwanda's 2006 article is sub-titled 'the violence of money in Malawi's politics'; see also here Reno 1999). It is these twin forces that have long been highlighted as fundamentally defining and underpinning the relationships between African politicians and their publics – and the "third wave" transitions to electoral politics are not seen to have fundamentally or even significantly altered that reality. Although violence clearly underpinned a great deal of the Kamuzu regime, and is by no means absent from electoral politics in the post-Kamuzu era,[4] I shall focus here on money as it is seen to be by far

[3] There is perhaps something of a distinction to be drawn between discourses and actual views here. I myself found, in the course of a number of interviews with non-politician participants, that vehement anti-politician commentary quite quickly became ever-more nuanced and qualified under cross-examination (although not always.) No doubt much vocalised anti-politician sentiment, anywhere, is designed to be taken seriously, but not necessarily literally.

[4] Malawi is no Zimbabwe or DRC in this respect but elections underwritten (and undermined) by violence should not be ignored. On a relatively low and sporadic level, clashes are commonplace. Periodically, however, election-related violence can become a major concern – Karonga Central earned the grim moniker of "Benghazi" in 2009, after dozens died and hundreds were injured in clashes (which began at primary level – see Chapter 3) between supporters of local rivals Frank Mwenifumbo and Cornelius Mwalwanda (Chavula 2014). The constituency has remained a flashpoint for political violence ever since.

the most significant factor underpinning politics in contemporary, "democratic" Malawi (Lwanda 2006; see also Seeberg et al 2018).

Prevailing, fundamentally material(ist) understandings of African politics can be traced back at least as far as Guenther Roth (1968), who first applied the Weberian concept of patrimonialism as a means of understanding politics in 'the new states.' It was an enormously influential innovation, taken up by myriad Africanists since, as was Roth's specific characterisation of the form of modern patrimonialism in young African states – a 'detraditionalized, personalized patrimonialism' characterised by 'personal rulership on the basis of loyalties that do not require any belief in the ruler's unique personal qualifications, but are *inextricably linked to material incentives and rewards*' (Roth 1968, 196 (my emphasis)). Arguably at least as important as Roth's general use of the concept of patrimonialism to describe politics in Africa, therefore, was the specific (materialist) way in which he developed Weber's concept (see Weber, 1964, 324–85) and applied it to these young states – for the most part stripping it of its ideational content (and potential to be seen as a morally legitimate form of rule) as in Weber's original, and instead explicitly rooting any legitimacy that African politicians might attain merely in their capacity to provide material rewards to their supporters.

It is not far from here to Ekeh's (1975) classic statement regarding the "civic public" (i.e. the "modern" state and politics), which he characterises as a literally amoral space *to* which there is no emotional attachment and *in* which there are no intrinsic or innate normative principles governing conduct. It is instead a realm of pure materiality, from which politicians and public alike seek only to extract as many material resources as possible. Provided they distribute and share the proceeds, indeed, the populace are seen to generally approve of politicians' material extraction from the state, and to share with them an entirely material-instrumental approach to political life – given that they have no more moral or value-rational attachments to the civic public than do their leaders. The relationship between the state's politicians and the public, then, in the best-case scenario can be expected simply to settle into unequal but mutually beneficial instrumental-transactional relationships of exchange.

From here in turn do we arrive at myriad analyses of African politics rooted in a particular (and wholly materialist) understanding of "neo-patrimonial" politics (Médard 1982) or myriad closely related concepts such as clientelism (Clapham 1982), 'spoils politics' (Allen 1995), prebendalism (Joseph 2014), the "rhizome state" (Bayart 2009) and even, rather wonderfully, 'bigmanity' (Utas 2012). And while there may now be competitive elections and citizens may have political choices, "neopatrimonial"/"clientelist" etc. politics is seen to comfortably live on in the electoral era (Bratton and Van de Walle 1997; Erdmann and Engel 2007; Pitcher et al 2009) – when not (still) openly violent, abusive and intimidatory, relationships between politicians and public in Africa are seen still to be mediated by clientelist relationships of instrumental and

material exchange. Politicians get votes, in other words, as "big men" – 'part representative, part local celebrity, part welfare state' (Cheeseman 2015, 64) – doling out money and/or equivalents to voters. Indeed, if the transitions are seen to have done anything, they are seen to have shifted the balance – reducing (though by no means eliminating) the presence of repression and violence, and increasing politicians' reliance instead on clientelism to "bribe" and otherwise play nice with voters (Lindberg 2003, 136–37). In this way electoral politics may actually increase neopatrimonialism rather than reduce it (as argued for instance by Lindberg 2003).

African politics, in sum, has a long history of being understood overwhelmingly in material terms – instrumental-rationalities, value-free, extractive, amoral, 'the politics of the belly' (Bayart 2009). Such approaches naturally purport to tell us, or at least to strongly imply, much about African politicians specifically and their (overwhelmingly material) motivations and methods at least as far as their political lives in the modern state sector are concerned. The state being an amoral space means that those who operate within it cannot be anything other than amoral when doing so, at least in relation to official state morality itself (pro-"nation," anti-"corruption" etc.) – rendering all of their rhetoric and claims to the contrary hollow, cynical and meaningless even by the widely accepted (low) standards in this regard of politicians the world over. Why indeed, then, would we ever want to study or think about or take seriously such actors? If not actively wicked, they are entirely predictable in their (pathological?) self-interestedness. Who cares what their lives are like, or what they think?

Needless to say given that you are reading this thesis, I do not agree with this dismissal of African politicians nor with the characterisation of them that underlies it. In fact, I begin from the viewpoint that both public and scholarly disdain for politicians have the quality both of a moral panic (Flinders 2012) and of being excessively intellectually and perhaps psychologically convenient as far as subscribers to this view are concerned. The thesis itself and the people and perspectives it presents will I hope stand as a clear rebuttal of the cynicism through which African politicians are so often viewed; as Corbett (2016, 534) has argued, 'the views, experiences and reflections' of politicians themselves are a neglected aspect of the anti-anti-politicians literature.

In seeking to "bring politicians (back?) in," I begin from the premise that African politicians are not necessarily bad-faith actors but are, like politicians anywhere else, complex, multi-faceted individuals driven on the whole by a mix of motivations both public-spirited and altruistic as well as self-interested and egoistic. If this is true, then we cannot be satisfied with simplistic readings of their motivations and behaviour in their jobs as being all about self-interest and self-aggrandizement. On the contrary, their jobs, and their work in those jobs, quickly become interesting, complex, important, and worthy of study – in their own right and for their own

sake, and also for the light they can shed on fundamental issues such as representation, democracy, and the nature of/exercise of political power in contemporary Africa. This is perhaps particularly true of those particularly neglected politicians who are not heads of state or other "leaders" in any conventional sense: the ordinary, and in many cases rather unsuccessful, politicians who are charged with staffing and executing the everyday, generally unglamorous functions and workings of a democratic political system.

MPs' home work

Parliamentarians are an excellent case in point. In the considerable literature on democracy and democratisation in Africa, parliaments have been an enormously neglected theme (see however Barkan 2009; Salih 2005; Bauer and Britton 2006). While doubtless reflective of the fact that African parliaments are justifiably regarded as often weak and ineffectual, the omission is nonetheless puzzling given the vital role played by legislatures in the history of democratisation in Europe, for example.

Members of Parliament, moreover, are constitutionally designed to act as the primary embodiments of "representation" at national level and – at least in that majority of electoral democracies in which parliamentarians receive their electoral mandate from small sub-national territorial units (constituencies) – it is the *constituency* that each individual MP is above all tasked with representing. Acting (formally at least) as the foremost conduit between people at local level and the far-away realm of national politics, parliamentarians occupy a unique, critical, and fascinating position within democratic thought and practice as it relates to the modern state – required as they are to straddle two connected but ultimately separate worlds (Fenno, 2003, p.xxvi). The world of the political centre, of parliament, and of dealings with government and bureaucracy in the "corridors of power," may receive the most attention from outsiders – be they scholars, journalists or donors. The world of "home," however, can be expected to command a considerable proportion of the MP's own attention, not least because their continuance in office beyond the next election requires, *ceteris paribus*, the electoral support of their constituents. In Malawi, certainly, it is little exaggeration to say that backbench MPs are, in terms of where and how they direct their time and energies, overwhelmingly constituency representatives and servants first and foremost, with their parliamentary work (which in terms of plenary sessions meets at most four months per year at three and a half days per week) of distinctly secondary importance to them, and of virtually no electoral importance to their constituents (see Chapters 5 and 6.)

Fundamental to this research, then, is the conviction that scholars should very much care, just as MPs themselves do, about the world of home. This is not least because the demands of home will obviously have an impact on the MP's work at the political centre. While this will be

true, moreover, of any parliamentarian, anywhere, who represents a territorial constituency, it is frequently argued – and strongly supported by the research presented in this thesis – that the demands of constituency work are particularly acute in African settings (Barkan 2009b, 14; Dulani and van Donge 2005, 262).

Home is important, however, not merely for its second-hand effects on MPs' national-level work. It is also fundamental to the work of representing with which they are charged. Many comparative (as opposed to theoretical) studies of representation have tended to measure the "representativeness" of a particular legislator-constituency relationship in terms of the congruence between the surveyed views of constituents on matters of national policy and the voting record of their parliamentarian (Jewell, 1983, pp.321–329). Hanna Pitkin (1967), however, long ago argued that representation is best conceived not in such static terms but as a constantly evolving *process* and *activity* (Jewell 1983, 304). Moreover, we here understand representation to be something inherently performative. "Representing" is not, in other words, something an MP does simply or even primarily by voting periodically in parliament. It is instead a fundamental part of all her activities to the extent she is styling herself before an audience of constituents for whom she claims and seeks to act as their representative. A fundamental part of representation, in other words, is for an MP to be seen "doing" representation and "being" a representative in the eyes of those they claim to represent. We ought to be sceptical, therefore, of analytical boundaries erected not only between representation and constituency work, but also between representation and campaigning (see Chapter 4). Representatives themselves, it has been noted, recognise no such distinctions (Fenno 2003, 233).

Given this understanding of representation, home therefore takes on critical importance as a stage upon which MPs "do being" an MP for their audience of constituents. Far from being distinct from, let alone diminishing of, the activity of representing as many have implied (Barkan 2009b; Salih 2005), home is in fact where much of the crucial work of representation, and therefore of democracy, is actually done – and perhaps especially so in African contexts. The comparative study of representation, long concerned largely with refining measures of politician-voter congruence in terms of public policy and roll-call votes in the legislature, ought at least as much to recognise that a core aspect of representing is 'being the kind of person the represented want representing them' (Hibbing 2003, vii). Representation is a fundamentally *inter-personal* process; the work of representing a profoundly human, creative and open-ended endeavour.

The foundational – and still classic – text that pointed the way in terms of how best to approach representatives' constituency work remains the late Richard Fenno's *Home Style* (2003 [1978]). Fenno argues first that to understand representatives' constituency work we must first seek to

see the constituency through their eyes, because after all 'the constituency a representative reacts to is the constituency he or she sees' (Fenno 2003, xxvii). Depending on what they see, legislators will then make decisions about how best to relate to their constituencies across three interconnected dimensions – the allocation of time and resources to constituency work, the "presentation of self" they make to constituents, and the explanations they make to constituents of their work in the national legislature and at the political centre. Together the behavioural consequences of these decisions constitute for Fenno any individual legislator's "home style."

Like many before me, in contexts from Colombia to Northern Ireland, I have found Fenno's work an inspiration and model throughout this project (see for instance Anagnoson 1983; André and Depauw 2013; Cain et al 1979; Ingall and Crisp 2001; McGraw et al 1993; Haughey 2017; see also Fenno 1977; 1990b; 1998). Indeed, a chance encounter with *Home Style* was the original catalyst for a thesis on Malawian MPs' relationships with their constituencies. I have however found myself departing from it in at least two important respects. Fenno was writing about United States' House Members in their districts in the 1970s, a quite different context from Malawi 2015-17. I quickly found that whilst the presentation of self resonated very strongly with what I was observing and talking about with Malawian MPs – and that in many respects I concurred with Fenno's (2003, 60) conclusion that '[p]resentation of self is the centrepiece of home style as we have observed it' (see Chapter 4) – I found the other two aspects considerably less resonant and less helpful for my purposes. The labour of Malawian MPs is not neatly divided and allocated between parliamentary work and constituency work. They generally met my attempts to pin down "averages" in terms of number of hours or days spent on parliament vs constituency work with amusement. They had no or very little idea, they said, so intimately intermeshed did they feel the two to be, and found compartmentalising them a faintly bizarre notion. It also became clear to me from spending time with MPs that constituency work generally took up the majority, and often the vast majority, of a backbench MP's working life. My initial questions might have been better posed had I asked how much of their busy working days they tried to allocate to parliamentary work – decidedly the side-issue as far as most MPs were concerned – rather than the other way round (nevertheless see Chapter 5 for some discussion of how often MPs estimated they physically visit their constituencies).

To a still-greater extent, I found little of MPs' concern or energy spent on explaining to constituents their work in Parliament or at the political centre. There were occasional references, especially by those relatively few MPs who could meaningfully be termed "active parliamentarians," and these are discussed in Chapter 6 as part of MPs' "presentation of role." However, the MPs I observed, at least, engaged their constituents very little on such matters, and many interviews backed this up. There was very little faith in constituents' enthusiasm or

understanding for anything their MPs might be doing in Parliament, and so MPs typically avoided the topic (for instance Chinthu-Phiri 2016; Constituency Observation 3 (Lunguzi) 2016). Such attitudes are explored further in Chapter 7.

I have therefore found it more apposite to approach the home styles of Malawian MPs in terms of, yes, the presentation of self (Chapter 4) but then on two other dimensions of my own that resonate vastly more with the experiences and concerns of Malawian MPs in 2015-17 than Fenno's originals. These are, first, the constituency servant/facilitator of development (Chapter 5), and second, the provider of "handouts" and the "presentation of role" (Chapter 6).

The second primary way in which I have departed from Fenno is in terms of the balance struck between the analysis of commonality, on the one hand, and of difference on the other. Although Fenno does set out a universal framework for his cases as discussed above, he is very much concerned to explore and to leverage differences between his "cases" in order to explore the variety of home styles he encountered in terms of a range of variables and a tentative typology. Not least for practical reasons of language barriers and limited time and resources, I found myself unable to explore differences between Malawian MPs systematically in the way I ideally might have liked. I did also find, however, that the commonalities and shared experiences of my participants and interviewees about their work were in many ways more striking and more important. In this respect I have departed from Fenno and followed more the approach of a small group of texts that aim to take seriously, and in the round, the job of a politician and to paint a "collective portrait" of such persons in a particular legislative, national or regional context (above all Corbett 2015; Crewe 2015; Reeher 2006; Tamale 1999). I of course encountered many differences between Malawian MPs and these are noted throughout the text – most especially between a small cadre of arch-"reformist"/moderniser MPs and the rest – but a sustained leveraging and exploration of differences and what might undergird them must remain a topic, I very much hope, for further and more fully equipped multi-person research.

Malawi: a potted history

The borders of what is now Malawi were established by the proclamation in 1889 (and subsequent ratification in 1891) of the British Central Africa Protectorate. In the decades prior, the arrival of David Livingstone had brought in its wake a number of mission stations established especially by the Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland, in addition to a small number of settlers (see McCracken 2008; see also McCracken 2012, from which much of what follows is drawn). Portuguese ambitions to claim the area led Britain to proclaim the Protectorate in response, but the BCAP (or Nyasaland, as it became in 1907) was about as far from the centre of British imperial focus and concern as it was possible to be.

This changed somewhat in the 1950s as Britain, under pressure from the self-governing Southern Rhodesia settler colony, agreed to enforce a colonial federation between North and South Rhodesia and Nyasaland (1953-63). Dominated by the racist Southern Rhodesian regime, the Federation galvanised opposition within Nyasaland not only to the Federation itself, but to British overlordship in general. The youthful leadership of the nationalist Nyasaland African Congress (NAC) – fearing their own capacity to attract support and mobilise the masses would be limited on account of their youth and inexperience in what they themselves considered a deeply conservative society and culture – invited home to lead their movement a stern sexagenarian medical doctor, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, who, having been educated in the United States and UK, had practiced as a physician in Hackney in London for some years but was now living in Gold Coast (Ghana.) After an absence of over 40 years, Banda landed on 6th July 1958 at Chileka Airport near Blantyre to a hero's welcome and to take total charge of the Congress. It was a grip he would not relinquish for 35 years.

As the "winds of change" swept across Africa, the newly renamed Malawi (meaning "flames" in Chichewa, but also deriving its name from the pre-colonial Maravi Empire that had once ruled over much of the country's territory) became independent on 6 July 1964, with Hastings Banda its first leader and Prime Minister. Within months, in the so-called Cabinet Crisis, Banda had purged his cabinet of critics and rivals – some were killed, others imprisoned, still others exiled – and established himself as dictator (see Baker 2001). Malawi became a republic and an official one-party state in 1966 with Banda as head of state. In 1970, the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) declared Banda its "President for Life"; one year later, the National Assembly declared him President for Life of the country itself.

Banda's rule was mercurial and deeply authoritarian (see Lwanda 1993; Short 1974). The President sought to impose upon his country the values of a Victorian gentleman – he for one would dress the part, always in homburg hat and double-breasted suit, and imposed a strict dress code on the population: women were forbidden to wear trousers, and men must have neat, short hair and no beard. Touring the country to address adoring crowds, he refused to speak the vernacular, always speaking in English through an interpreter. In his dress, his language, and his attitudes he was a one-man embodiment of post-colonial theory; he no more believed Malawians should rule themselves than had the colonialists, though as a "civilised" Malawian he allowed that *he* was fit to rule them.

An arch social, political, and economic conservative, Banda naturally aligned himself wholeheartedly with the Western, anti-communist camp during the Cold War, and secured economic and political support from the US and UK as a result. He went considerably further, however, by establishing diplomatic and economic ties with apartheid South Africa, the only black African state to do so. The South Africans, in exchange for this diplomatic coup, funnelled

much money to Malawi, to Kamuzu and to his personal vanity projects. They built him a new capital city at Lilongwe in his home Central Region, for instance – he moved the capital from Zomba in the South in 1971, although Parliament continued to be based in Zomba until 1994.

Domestically the first 15 years or so of Banda's rule were characterised by economic growth and development (Cammack et al 2010; Cammack and Kelsall 2011), albeit also by extreme repression and regular promises from Banda that his enemies were "food for crocodiles." From the late 1970s, however, following the international oil shock, the associated debt burden, and the introduction of World Bank-mandated Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), Malawi's economy descended into a tailspin. The 1980s, as in much of Africa, became known as the first of Malawi's "lost decades" as the economy stagnated, food security declined, and the now octogenarian dictator became increasingly frail and ceded more and more control to widely disliked and ruthless lieutenants such as John Tembo and his niece, Banda's "official hostess" Cecilia Kadzamira.

'With the end of the Cold War in 1989, the Western rationale for maintaining close relations with a brutal dictator in a small, poor African country became obsolete' (Brown 2004, 710). Regimes such as Banda's found themselves suddenly without international support, and facing demands for democracy and political liberalisation from both within and without. In April 1992, the Catholic bishops of Malawi released and had read out in churches across the country a "Lenten letter" that for the first time in decades made open and public criticism of the Banda regime, and called for democratic change (on the transition as a whole see Brown 2004; also Venter 1995; Ihonvbere 1997; Englund 1996). Other churches soon followed suit, public demonstrations and riots followed, and donors made clear to Banda that change was required. Assailed on all sides, the dictator reluctantly conceded in October 1992 to a referendum on whether Malawi should adopt multi-party democracy. This was held on 14 June 1993, and over 64% of voters approved the change proposition on a 67% turnout. Although still head of state and MCP leader, and seeking at every turn to thwart the process, the Banda era as Malawians had come to know it was now over.

The first multi-party elections in Malawi's independent history were held on 17 May 1994. During the prior two years since Banda had promised his referendum, two significant political parties had emerged from pro-democracy pressure groups: these were the United Democratic Front (UDF), a group of mostly Southern Region businesspersons and business-friendly ex-MCP politicians who had fallen out with Banda, and who were led by Bakili Muluzi; and the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD), led by Northerner and long-time exile Chakufwa Chihana, a trade unionist long considered the leader of Malawi's pro-democracy movement in exile. With Banda, at the reputed age of 96, standing as the MCP candidate, Muluzi won the presidential election with 47% of the vote (against 33% for Banda and 19% for Chihana), in a poll which saw

Malawian politics heavily divided along regional lines – Muluzi's votes came overwhelmingly from the most populous Southern Region, Banda's from the Centre, and Chihana's from the sparsely populated Northern region (Kaspin 1995). The parliamentary vote mirrored the vote for the presidency, necessitating throughout his ten years in office an on-again, off-again coalition government with AFORD in which Muluzi created the position of "Second Vice President" for Chihana in return for a working majority in Parliament. The dislike and dismay with which Chihana's manoeuvrings, widely regarded as self-interested, were met by his own supporters led to splits within the party and its eventual collapse in the 2004 elections. In the 2014-19 Parliament AFORD had just one MP – Chihana's son Enock.

The ten years of Muluzi/UDF rule became, for many, a second "lost decade" for Malawi (Muula and Chanika 2004). While civil liberties and human rights undoubtedly improved, the economy went from bad to worse as livelihoods collapsed and famine emerged in 2002. The new government was widely seen to be mired in corruption, and everyday corruption as experienced by ordinary Malawians soared. Having spent much of his second term trying (and ultimately failing) to pass an amendment to the constitution allowing him to stand for a third, Muluzi eventually selected a little-known World Bank economist, Bingu wa Mutharika, as his hand-picked successor (see Morrow 2006). Aware that Malawians widely regarded his economic legacy to be catastrophic, Muluzi promised Malawians that just as he was the "political engineer" who had brought freedom and human rights to Malawians, he had now brought them an "economic engineer" who would get to work on the economy. Mutharika and the UDF won the 2004 presidential election with 36% of the vote, again on the back of overwhelmingly Southern Region votes (see Ott 2004).

Tensions between Mutharika and Muluzi soon spiralled upon the new president taking office, and in January 2005 Mutharika split with Muluzi and the UDF to form his own Democratic Progressive Party (DPP.) This split appeared to be the making of the new president, as he presided, throughout his first term, over a period of unprecedented and sustained economic growth, and popular public policies such as the Fertiliser Input Subsidy Programme (FISP) (Cammack et al 2010). He was in turn rewarded with an unprecedented victory in the 2009 presidential election, securing a landslide victory with two-thirds of the national vote, and scoring a majority of votes even in the Northern and Central Regions – beyond his Southern Region home area and stronghold – and thus upending the hitherto predictable, and seemingly inevitable, regionalised voting patterns (see Ferree and Horowitz 2010).

At exactly this moment of his greatest triumph, however, things began to go wrong for the re-elected President and for his country – the economy entered a slump, and fuel and other shortages brought protestors onto the streets. In response to stinging domestic and donor criticism, Mutharika behaved in an increasingly authoritarian and desperate fashion, vowing to

"smoke out" his enemies and sending security forces to crack down on nationwide protests in July 2011, in which dozens were killed (on these events see Wroe 2012; Cammack 2012). Prior to his sudden death from cardiac arrest in April 2012, Mutharika was on the verge of pariah status, another once-promising African leader apparently corrupted and driven mad by power (see Africa Confidential 2012, on 'How Mutharika Went Wrong').

Upon his death, a group of DPP cabinet ministers known as the "Midnight Six" made attempts to subvert the constitution to allow Arthur Peter Mutharika, the late president's younger brother and Minister of Education, to succeed him in office. Various forces, however – not least donors and particularly the army – stepped in to ensure that, as per the Constitution, Mutharika was properly replaced by his Vice President, Joyce Banda, from whom he had become estranged and who the previous year had left the DPP to found her own People's Party (PP). Banda, only the second female president in Africa, faced enormous political and inherited economic challenges from the start (on this period see Gabay 2014). Economically, she worked to restore relationships with donors that had become strained or broken under the previous administration. Urged on by donors, she also devalued the Malawian kwacha, causing an economic crisis for many ordinary Malawians from which her reputation never recovered. Politically, she began with few allies in Parliament or elsewhere in the political system, and reports began to abound of money and favours being handed out at a furious rate in her attempts to put together a cabinet, a government and at least a sizable number of MPs in Parliament to support her.

In September 2013, a civil servant was stopped as he drove out of Lilongwe's Capital Hill area of government ministries, and his car was discovered to be carrying several millions of kwacha (thousands of dollars) in banknotes. The following week, Budget Director Paul Mphwiyo was shot outside his home, and so began to unravel the "Cashgate" scandal, in which corruption and graft on a massive scale were discovered amongst civil servants and – it has been strongly suggested but with few criminal convictions thus far – prominent politicians (see Zimmerman 2015). The scandal, in which USD$32 million were discovered to have been stolen from the Malawi treasury merely in one six-month period, suggested that approximately one quarter of Malawian government money had been regularly stolen (S. W. Kayuni 2016, 169). The scandal shocked Malawians and donors alike, and sent shockwaves through the political system. Although few believed that the graft had begun under Joyce Banda, it had certainly continued and been unearthed on her watch.

Malawi returned to the polls on 20 May 2014 to elect a president, a parliament and newly democratised and empowered local district/town/city councils following a donor-led set of decentralisation reforms. In a somewhat chaotic and decidedly imperfect electoral process, it was eventually determined that the incumbent president had come third, behind the MCP's

Lazarus Chakwera and the winner, the DPP's Arthur Peter Mutharika (popularly known as APM). Regional patterns of voting had very much returned, and APM had dominated in the populous Southern Region (on the 2014 election see Dulani and Dionne 2014; Patel and Wahman 2015).

Parliament, MPs and the literature

The modern-day National Assembly (or Parliament) of Malawi has its origins in the colonial Legislative Council, established in 1907 (this section is drawn primarily from Banda 2014; and Khofi 1974). In common with its contemporary descendant, this body was constitutionally granted full and sole legislative authority in the territory; and could likewise be fairly characterised as being dominated by the executive branch. It consisted of seven members, with the Governor as Chairman and the three additional members of the Executive Council (the colonial equivalent of a Cabinet) as official members (Deputy Governor, Treasurer, Attorney General.) These were joined by three "unofficial" members nominated by the Governor, of whom 'one, a Missionary, was to represent African interests while the other two, European planters or businessmen, were to represent non-African interests. In 1911, the unofficial members were increased to twelve – six to represent African interests and six non-African interests' (Khofi 1974, 1).

The number of Members continued to expand incrementally over subsequent decades, and Malawians themselves first entered the Council in 1949 when membership was expanded, on the basis of so-called 'sectional representation,' to include 'two Africans appointed by the Governor on the recommendation of the African Protectorate Council, [and] one Asian selected from a list put forward by the Indian Chamber of Commerce' (H. C. Banda 2014, 12). Although the negligible community of white settlers had for decades pressed for direct election of their representatives in the Legislative Council (as in Kenya, for example), it was not until 1955 that the non-African unofficial members of the Council became subject to direct election by the non-African population.

The franchise was extended to include Malawians (subject to literacy and income requirements) for the first general election in the colony's history in August 1961, from which Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda and his Malawi Congress Party (MCP) emerged triumphant. It was at this point that Dr Banda became *de facto* (and in 1963 *de jure*) Prime Minister. Immediately prior to independence, a universal suffrage "election" in which the MCP ensured it was

unopposed in all 50 constituency seats delivered total victory to Banda and the MCP without a single vote being cast.[5]

Following a brief period of marked influence and high drama during the Cabinet Crisis of August/September 1964 – following which Banda purged his enemies and established himself, with no room for doubt, as dictator – during the one-party era Parliament settled into being something of a "dignified," ornamental branch of the political system (Bagehot 2001). Parliamentary candidates were subject to presidential vetting and approval, and Kamuzu could nominate an unspecified number of MPs himself (Nzunda 1995, 28). MPs were not merely for show, however: there were competitive elections (albeit all within one party) for MPs – representing single-member, geographical constituencies – during which there were real campaigns and high-profile incumbents could and did lose their seats to more popular upstarts. There were committees and plenary debates but it is clear that, given Banda's total and unquestionable control of the national executive, in many respects the main political function of MPs was *constituency* based, and was a representative and communicative one – to voice and to flag up grievances and concerns from the grassroots to the national government, and also to communicate back to their constituencies propaganda and directives that the government wished to have publicised and dispersed (Barkan 1984, 74). Legitimacy at home, moreover, came from MPs' capacity to 'bring home the pork' from the centre to the constituency (Barkan 1979, 266). In this respect, Malawi was by no means unique: MPs in one-party states with competitive elections to single-member districts (such as Kenya) had very similar roles and functions (Cheeseman 2015, 64; Barkan 1979; Hornsby 1989, 278).

The job of MP in this era, then, was hardly one at the heart of vital affairs of state but nevertheless did have an important role in representing the public even if within very strict boundaries. Ironically, one of those who took the role of MPs most seriously – at least in certain respects – was the President-for-Life himself, who in 1977-8 declared himself ashamed of the low quality and poor English skills of "his" MPs, who were embarrassing him abroad when they allegedly couldn't sustain conversations with their fellow MPs from other Anglophone countries (Anon Expert 12 2017). Up until this point, MPs had tended to be retirees from the civil service – especially teachers and agricultural extension workers – but Banda sacked his entire Parliament, called fresh elections in which English proficiency tests/requirements were first imposed that remain to this day, and actively sought out more

[5] The three remaining seats were "special role" seats reserved for Europeans (of whom registered voters numbered just over 800) and all held, also unopposed, by Michael Hill Blackwood's Nyasaland Constitutional Party (NCP.) The NCP was dissolved in 1966 with the shift to a one-party state under the MCP.

highly educated candidates such as academics in order to improve not least the stature and image of his legislature (Anon Expert 12 2017).

The general scholarly literature on the Malawian multiparty era has tended to emphasise the continuities with the Banda era and the severe shortcomings/aborted promise of Malawi's democracy. Elections have been considered flawed and subject to irregularities and an un-level playing field but have also been adjudged on the whole to be a reasonable reflection of public opinion (for instance Smiddy and Young 2009; Chinsinga 2010; Dulani and Dionne 2014; Patel and Wahman 2015b). In governance, the continuance of neopatrimonial politics is a major theme (Cammack 2007; Cammack and Kelsall 2011); in tandem with the weakness of key democratic institutions such as Parliament and political parties (N. Patel and Tostensen 2006; D. J. Young 2014); the prevalence of corruption (Anders 2002; M. Hussein 2005); and the persistence of poverty and largely negative effects of neopatrimonial politics on economic growth and development (Cammack 2007; Cammack et al 2010). Across the vast majority of this literature, as discussed above, Malawian politicians are a regular target for condemnation and dismissal, be it sustained or tangential. Greedy, selfish, and corrupt, interested only in their own "personal poverty alleviation" (J. M. Kaunda 1998, 62) and never in the lives or struggles of their voter-constituents (see Englund 2002a; 2002b; Gabay 2014), it is evident that the best that can be hoped for is a strong enough set of democratic institutions that might force these politicians, despite themselves, to serve the public and the public interest. A prominent concept here, returned to repeatedly by a number of authors, is "chameleonism." This has its origins in the poetry of Jack Mapanje (1991), and is taken up notably by Englund (2002c 11) as a characterisation of the political class in the "new Malawi" – the (undeniable) shifting nature of their political alliances and allegiances at national level being taken as the ultimate proof of their greedy, unscrupulous, self-serving character(s?) (an improved employment of the metaphor is to be found in Anders 2002 on civil servants).

The Malawian Parliament as an institution has attracted little scholarly attention, beyond the fact that it is weak and dominated by the executive. There has been recognition of its occasional importance and capacity to thwart the executive under rare and specific circumstances – most prominently in refusing Muluzi, for all his underhand inducements, the constitutional amendment he required to stand for a third term (Morrow 2006). These occasional moments notwithstanding, however, Patel and Tostensen (2006, 17) – in one of the few sustained assessments of Parliament's power and performance – conclude that it has if anything become weaker since 1994, at least in the Muluzi years.

This weakness is in part constitutional – Malawi remains a presidential republic under a strong executive presidency. Authors have, however, pointed to other factors: including logistical ones, to do with inadequate time/resources with which to exercise adequate oversight of the

executive (Chirwa 2009, 91; N. Patel and Tostensen 2006, 12–13); and also related to the capacity of political parties to divide MPs against each other and of the governing party to ensure near-total obedience from its own MPs such that oversight is thwarted and Parliament is characterised by 'factional splits and re-splits among the leading politicians [which lead] to highly partisan but essentially content-free debates' (Chirwa 2009, 91; see also Patel and Tostensen 2006, 12; Dulani and van Donge 2005, 222). Underlying much of this assessment is a general tendency noted in post-third wave African legislatures: to fail to act *as* a legislature, as a corporate body charged with vital political functions of legislating, oversight and representing, and instead to behave as 'little more than agglomerations of individuals whose principal activity [is] constituency service and the search for political survival' (Barkan 2009a, 15). Barkan is here speaking of legislatures in the one-party era, but the question is repeatedly raised of how much has changed. In the small body of literature on African parliaments in the multiparty era, Vliet (2014, 45) speaks to an ongoing consensus: that '[t]he prevalence of [MPs' individual,] particularistic interests [continues to] undermine collective parliamentary scrutiny of matters of national interest.'

Indeed, as these last comments suggest, much of the commentary on the weakness of African parliaments, including Malawi's, bemoans the pressures of constituency service that MPs as individuals are seen to continue to face, citing these as a major obstacle to legislative strengthening both from the point of view simply of legislators lacking sufficient time and energy to properly exercise their parliamentary functions, but also of the accompanying financial demands and obligations MPs face that may end up putting them 'under huge financial pressure and… even contribut[ing] to financial insecurity and vulnerability to the executive's manipulation' (Salih 2005, 262; see also Barkan 2009b, 17; Vliet 2014, 45). Certainly, my own research confirmed that the sheer pressure and weight of constituency service expectations and demands did indeed occupy most of most MPs' time and energies, and moreover fundamentally affected even their parliamentary work – as when they occupy much of their time in plenary during what is supposed to be ministerial "question time" merely by lining up to beseech ministers for public infrastructure projects (roads, schools, clinics, markets and so on) to be given to their own constituencies (Parliamentary Observations, 2015-17).

Despite, however, an acknowledgement of the centrality of constituency life and work to African/Malawian parliamentarians, what little work there is in this area continues to focus on parliaments as institutions and on what, to a large extent, is "*not* there." My own research seeks to come at things from a different angle: I am concerned first and foremost with what *is* there, and what is there – by the parliament literature's own admission – is above all individual MPs, overwhelmingly constituency-facing, and primarily (pre-?)occupied with constituency service. Whether it be for its own sake as an under-explored empirical feature of African

politics; or be it because "home styles" are in fact central to issues of representation as discussed above (and as none of this African parliaments literature, it should be noted, acknowledges or seeks to explore), I contend that African MPs' relationships with their constituencies, as a focus of study in their own right, are unjustly neglected. In combination with an approach that also seeks to consider MPs as people, and to consider the complex work of a politician through their own eyes, this research thereby brings together an epistemological/methodological approach and an empirical field of study which are both highly unusual in studies of African politics.

Such is the dearth of such work in relation to African politics, in fact, that I have found epistemological and methodological inspiration primarily in non-Africanist scholarship (although see also Tamale 1999; Hansen 2003; Gilman 2009; Muriaas 2013). Fenno (2003) is clearly a major conceptual inspiration for this project for the reasons set out above, however my interpretivist approach more closely follows a small group of texts that, in settings as diverse as the Pacific Islands (Corbett 2015, *Being Political*), the UK House of Commons (Crewe 2015) and New England state legislatures (Reeher 2006, *First Person Political*), have been concerned to explore the workings of leadership, of representation and of democracy from the point of view of politicians, their work, and their experiences of their work (Tamale 1999, on Ugandan female MPs, appears to be the one instance of such an approach (mostly) applied in African politics; see also Rhodes 2011 on *Everyday Life in British Government*). These texts draw upon extended interviews and participant observation of politicians in order to paint a collective portrait of those who do politics.

Most of these texts to a greater or lesser extent focus on the political life in the round, from entering politics to defeat or retirement. All discuss constituency work, but for none is it a primary focus. My initial instincts and knowledge of Malawi and its politics, however, suggested to me that the relationship with the constituency would be the major focus of most MPs' working lives, and would constitute a worthy topic for in-depth research on its own – and so it proved. This thesis, therefore, is more narrowly focused than most of the interpretivist, politician-focused literature from which it draws methodological inspiration. Like Fenno, it is focused exclusively on MPs' relationships with their constituencies – in terms of their motivations for entering politics, their local campaigning and the like, as well as their actual constituency service work – rather than their work in Parliament or at the political centre. At the same time, its overall approach is different from Fenno's in that he is far less interested in the human experiences and dilemmas of being a politician (at least in *Home Style*; this changed somewhat in his remarkable later book-length treatments of individual U.S. senators (Fenno 1989; 1990a; 1991; 1992)). Indeed, Fenno's concern to leverage differences in home styles across a range of variables and circumstances is arguably always undergirded by the anti-interpretivist assumptions of rational-choice theory.

The research 'site'

The wider political and national context within which I conducted the research for this study was the Malawi of September 2015 until April 2017.[6] Malawi is, first of all, an excellent example of many of the characteristics of a young, "third wave" African democracy: a long history of authoritarian rule, an imperfect electoral democracy and continued patterns of authoritarianism, ethno-regional divisions and patterns of voting, widespread and endemic political and bureaucratic corruption, mass rural subsistence-living and urban poverty alongside a small but significant urban middle class (although Malawi is unusual in its low rate of urbanisation – it remains over 80% rural (World Factbook (CIA) 2021)), and finally a very substantial role for donors and international agencies in the domestic political economy (see for example Cammack, 2007; Englund, 2002a; Gabay, 2014; Lwanda, 1996; Nzunda and Ross, 1995; Ott, 2004; Ott, Phiri and Patel, 2000; Phiri and Ross, 1998). In common with many electoral democracies on the continent, the political system is characterised by a strong executive presidency alongside a legislature that is undoubtedly weak by comparison.

What is more, the country also has a broad range of constituency demographics, largely rural but with significant (and expanding) urban centres. Like many parts of Africa, it is ethnically and regionally divided in ways that are politically relevant; it also has religious divisions familiar across the continent, with a Christian majority of 77% and a significant Muslim minority of 14%; and areas both in which the population is ethnically/religiously homogeneous and in which by contrast it is very diverse (World Factbook (CIA) 2021).

There are also in Malawi a wide range of MPs – men and women, an age range from early-30s to mid-80s, Christian and Muslim, black Africans, Malawian Asians and two white Malawian MPs in the 2014-19 Parliament. A diverse range of parties are represented in Parliament – including relatively strong, coherent, and institutionalised parties (such as the MCP) alongside smaller, younger, "briefcase" parties formed around one more or less prominent individual and his/her faction (see Rakner et al 2007). Parliamentary turnover, as in many African contexts, is and long has been high by global standards, averaging almost two-thirds in recent elections (Smiddy and Young 2009, 665). Some seats constitute relatively "safe" party strongholds (although the recent vogue for electing independent candidates is complicating this somewhat (see Chapter 3)) whilst others regularly change hands.

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[6] The extent to which Malawi is or is not representative of other places is an important one, but not one which a case study of this kind is equipped to answer in any kind of systematic fashion (Gerring 2004). The concern in a research design of this kind is with *internal* rather than external validity: to develop inductively, as Rebecca Emigh (1997, 657) puts it, 'the content of theory, not the range of its applicability.'

Crucially, moreover, one does not have to spend long in Malawi to realise that anti-political – and specifically anti-politician – feelings and discourses are extremely prevalent. If scholarship has tended to be dismissive and disdainful of African/Malawian politicians, this is as nothing to the contempt with which "the politicians" are typically discussed in Malawian newspapers and Malawian bars.

As for the 2015-17 time period in which research was conducted, this was – in contrast with many of the years before and since – a time of relative calm in Malawian politics. The election of President Arthur Peter Mutharika of the DPP had been accompanied by the election of a Parliament composed initially as follows:

Party	Seats	% seats
Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)	51	26.05
Malawi Congress Party (MCP)	48	25.00
People's Party (PP)	26	13.54
United Democratic Front (UDF)	14	7.29
Alliance For Democracy (AFORD)	1	0.52
Chipani Cha Pfuko (CCP)	1	0.52
Independents	52	27.08
Total	193	100.00

Source: (EISA Malawi: 2014 National Assembly Seat Distribution by Party and Gender)

32 women MPs were elected, just 16.6% of the total and reducing their tally from the 2009-14 Parliament in which 43 women (22.3%) were elected. The election of 52 independent MPs – initially the largest single bloc in Parliament – was unprecedented, although in the following weeks and months the majority of these MPs had surrendered their independence and (re-)joined party groupings, a process that continued on a slower scale throughout my time in Malawi until only a handful remained as independents by the time of the 2019 parliamentary election (see Chapter 3.) As is constant in Malawian politics, I was there to witness multiple

shifts in the precise composition of Parliament. These were a result of deaths, by-elections and, above all, of MPs "crossing the floor" by either leaving their parties and becoming "independents" (e.g. Felix Jumbe (Salima Central, 2014-19, elected as an MCP MP but subsequently falling out with leadership and leaving the party in 2016); or by "independents" officially (re-)joining party groupings (such as Esther Jolobala (Machinga East, 2014-) and the UDF group in 2016, or Felix Jumbe again, who eventually officially joined the DPP in 2018.)[7] Nevertheless, the general situation in Parliament throughout this period was of a coalition government of the DPP and UDF (with UDF leader Atupele Muluzi (Machinga North East, 2004-19) a minister in an otherwise DPP cabinet), which – while officially a minority in Parliament – in practice frequently had a majority after government-aligned "independents" were taken into account. In opposition sat the MCP under Lazarus Chakwera (Lilongwe North West, 2014-2020), and the third party, Joyce Banda's PP, led in Parliament first by Uladi Mussa (Salima South, 1994-2019) and subsequently by Agnes Nyalonje (Mzimba North, 2014-19).

Economically the country was by no means booming at this time but was exhibiting some slow signs of recovery from the acute problems of the latter Bingu Mutharika and Joyce Banda years. Politically the government was stable, albeit with widely reported tensions and jockeying for position within the DPP, and a conflictual relationship emergent between the President and his Vice President, Saulos Chilima. (Subsequent to my research period, this conflict between President and Vice (a constant in Malawian politics across every such relationship since 1994) would eventually lead, in July 2018, to Chilima leaving the DPP (though not the government, to which the Vice President is required constitutionally to belong) and launching his own United Transformation Movement (UTM.) This in turn, over time, began to adjust somewhat the composition of parliament as various politicians defected to the new party as the 2019 elections approached).[8]

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[7] Section 65 of the Constitution mandates that MPs "crossing the floor" must have their seats declared vacant by the Speaker of Parliament. Given how inconvenient myriad MPs, governments, party leaders and indeed Speakers have found this injunction, it has been a major topic of friction and debate since the dawn of multiparty politics, and invariably honoured more in the breach than in the observance. The oft-used work-around has been for MPs, officially at least, to make only the intermediate step of leaving/joining the ranks of "independents," as this is not considered to constitute a change of party. However, several MPs in the 2014-19 parliament did sooner or later join the parliamentary group of an entirely different party from the one in which they were elected – such as Jumbe, who was nominally an independent in the interim for two years, or Uladi Mussa (Salima South, 1994-2019), who leapt quickly from PP opposition leader in Parliament to a senior role in the governing DPP in 2017-18. As is typical, the Speaker did not declare seats vacant even in these cases.

[8] Malawi politics beyond 2019 has been somewhat dramatic. Following a widely disputed election marked by considerable irregularities, the incumbent Mutharika was declared narrow winner of the 2019 presidential poll, scoring 38.6% of the vote against 35.4% for Chakwera of MCP and 20.2% for Chilima and his UTM. Parliamentary results showed the DPP the largest party with 62 MPs (reduced subsequently to 59 following the annulling of three results as unsafe), MCP with 55, UDF with 10, UTM with 4, a widespread collapse of Joyce Banda's PP which

Methodology

I lived in and conducted research in Malawi from September 2015 until August 2017. I began in Parliament, watching plenary proceedings – something I continued to do throughout my time in the country. My primary aim from these observations was to acquaint myself with the individuals in the chamber and to begin introducing myself to potential research participants. Ultimately I conducted 108 semi-structured interviews for the project, in interviews lasting anywhere from 19 minutes to almost 3 hours, with most interviews approximately 60-70 minutes long. 60 of these interviews were with incumbent MPs in the 2014-19 Parliament, including six then-current cabinet ministers, three Speakers/Deputy Speakers and one party leader (Lazarus Chakwera.) 14 interviews were with former MPs (half of whom were also former cabinet ministers, and one former Vice President (Justin Malewezi)): with the exception of Malewezi, all had served in the 2009-14 Parliament and had been defeated in the 2014 election; some had also served in parliaments prior. The remaining 34 interviews were with non-politicians – parliamentary staff, academics, civil society actors, journalists, and other experts/specialists.

These interviews constituted the single most important research method. As befitting an interpretivist research project, interviews with politicians were overwhelmingly concerned to get politicians to describe and recount their work and experiences *as they see them*. I was keen for conversation about their work to go wherever they, rather than I, took it – and so each interview was (very) different, and might cover a different selection of topics depending on what arose and what the interviewee sought to stress and highlight at the time. Certainly I imposed no standard order or sequence upon questions or discussion topics – this I felt to be too unnatural for an interviewee whom I was essentially asking to describe their lived-in world, although it did present considerable and mercilessly time-consuming challenges when it came eventually to processing the interview material! Interviewees were selected with variety and diversity of MPs in mind, but also by a snowball sampling method by which I asked previous interviewees to recommend who else I might approach. I was on the whole delighted with Malawian politicians' willingness to speak to me about their work, but of course the research

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emerged with just 5 seats, and a record 55 "independents" elected. Following large-scale protests and a succession of legal challenges, the Malawian Constitutional Court in February 2020 became only the second court in Africa to rule a presidential election result so unsafe as to be null, and mandated a rerun (Fisher 2020b). Following the joining together of the MCP, UTM, PP and several other parties in the Tonse Alliance, with Chakwera as presidential candidate and Chilima as Vice; and following also the passing by Parliament, on the instructions of the Court, of a long-promised change in the electoral system from first-past-to-the-post to a two-round, 50%+1 system, Chakwera easily won the June 2020 rerun on the first round with 59% of the vote against 40% for Mutharika. The DPP and UDF thereby entered opposition, and the MCP returned to government for the first time since the fall of Kamuzu Banda in 1994.

was constrained and affected by who was and was not receptive to my request for an interview, and by the sheer chance of who I encountered, or for whom I managed to find a functioning phone number or email address. The priority in this project, however, was always to build theory through thick description of an empirically neglected subject. What we might call "suggestive variety," not "representativeness," constituted the extent of my ambitions as regards sampling.

Almost every interview began with the question, "So how did you get into politics?" For all that I was keen to allow discussion to flow freely from there, I did of course have a loose topic guide and set of issues that I had in mind to cover. In interviews, and throughout the research as a whole, I was led by four major research questions:

- How do MPs become interested in entering politics?
- What do they do in order to campaign and seek to win (re-)election?
- What do MPs do in terms of constituency service and constituency work?
- How do they think about their work, and about how by extension democracy is (or is not) working in contemporary Malawi?

I employed a team of five university students from the University of Malawi's Chancellor College campus in Zomba – where I was a visiting scholar at the Centre for Social Research between May and July 2017 – to transcribe the approximately 75% of interviews that I had recorded. All interviewees were asked at the outset if they were content for me to record the interview or preferred otherwise, in which case I took extensive notes and have not used verbatim quotes. At the end of each interview, interviewees were asked to sign a consent form for their data to be used, and also asked if they would prefer to be named or anonymised in the thesis. Most did not want to be anonymised – some were emphatic on the subject – and so this thesis does use real names and identifies my participants where they gave permission for me to do so. Those who did request anonymity are referenced as AnonMP1, AnonExpert2 etc. I have also occasionally thought it wise to anonymise a specific remark from a participant who is otherwise identified by name in the thesis – or was asked during the interview to do so by the interviewee themselves – and in such cases I have referenced with the generic "AnonMP," "AnonExpert" etc.

In addition to interviews, another significant research method was observation. Throughout the four months each year that the Malawian Parliament meets, I sat in the public gallery on the vast majority of sitting days to observe proceedings. I also spent much of my time on the parliamentary estate as a whole, interviewing MPs and staff, working in the Parliament's library, and absorbing the atmosphere. I also observed six weeks of committee proceedings with several different parliamentary committees. All such observations provided me with an opportunity to see MPs' work in the round, and to locate their constituency work, the focus of

my research and of this thesis, into a somewhat broader context. The most significant observation work, however, came from five visits "home" to constituencies in the company of MPs. These were with Hon Davies Katsonga (5 days), Hon Boniface Kadzamira (2 days), Hon Juliana Lunguzi (1 day), Hon Beatrice Mwale (3 days) and Hon Emily Chinthu-Phiri (7 days.) This latter in particular provided a wonderful opportunity to stay in the constituency home of an MP and observe every moment of work and family life – and not least the way in which her constituency work came to her (in the form of queues of constituents each morning) as much as she also went out to visit projects, conduct meetings and attend funerals each day (Constituency Observation 5 (Chinthu-Phiri) 2017). Not least language barriers prevented me from necessarily making the most of such opportunities from a research point of view, but nonetheless the opportunity to spend so much concentrated time observing and talking with MPs about their constituencies and their constituency role, providing me with a 'guided grand tour' of their constituency life and work (Leech 2002, 667), was invaluable and vindicated my interest in this as an unjustly overlooked area for empirical and conceptual study in contemporary African politics/democracy. In addition to regular surveys of local newspaper coverage of politics and Parliament, interviews and observation constituted my primary research methods.

INTERVIEWS

Gender		Constituency Region			Political Party				
M	**F**	**North**	**Centre**	**South**	**DPP**	**MCP**	**UDF**	**PP**	**Ind.**
52	22	18	24	32	19	18	10	13	14

Total: 74

OBSERVATIONS

Gender		Constituency Region			Political Party		
M	**F**	**North**	**Centre**	**South**	**MCP**	**PP**	**Independent**
2	3	1	3	1	1	1	3

Total: 5

Note: All categorisations correct *at time of interview*. In the case of former MPs, political party is designated according to the status in which they spent at least a plurality of their term(s) of office. In the case of those who have represented more than one constituency and in different regions, they were categorised according to the constituency they had most recently represented.

One obvious question arises in relation to any project that aims to empathetically understand the lived-in worlds of politicians – '[b]ut can we believe them?' (Corbett 2015, 18). Don't politicians, after all, lie for a living? And why on earth would they speak frankly to me of all people? There are several responses here. The first is that it was soon clear that, if anything, my obvious "outsider" status encouraged frankness. Politicians were often flattered and eager to talk about their work, and several openly acknowledged that they felt it easier to speak frankly and easily to an outsider academic researcher than they could to any kind of domestic audience. My outsider-ness may also have encouraged the frank pessimism so many MPs expressed, at length, about their work and about their fellow Malawians as constituents and citizens (see final chapter); although, this having been said, what they said to me chimed very much with myriad comments any Malawian might read in the newspaper or hear on the radio as the state and the political class berate the Malawian masses for their many perceived inadequacies, and so the extent to which my presence could be accused of fanning such commentary can only go so far. There is, moreover, much to be said for professional judgement when it comes to "believing" one's interviewees, and for the triangulation of methods and sources that one can achieve following two years of in-country fieldwork and myriad observations and interviews.

Secondly, however – and more importantly – whether politicians are telling me the "objective" truth is not really the point. This aims to be a collective portrait of Malawian MPs and their relationships with/work in their constituencies from their point of view, rather than any kind of 'realist-objectivist exercise that seeks to identify good or bad politicians' (Corbett 2015, 18). It is by its nature and design "one-sided" – and, like Corbett (2015, 18), 'I do not deny that there are many alternative and often critical viewpoints, but rather claim that there is value in documenting politicians' perspectives, given their centrality to any democratic system and the aforementioned vocality of popular critique. As a result, rather than undermining my findings, self-justification was necessarily encouraged in this instance.' Interpretivist research is far less concerned with truth-telling and fact-checking than a positivist approach would be. Based on 'constructivist-subjectivist rather than realist-objectivist' principles, '[f]or interpretivists, the study of political life entails interpreting the beliefs and desires of human actors from within existing governing traditions or "webs of beliefs" rather than attempting to sit outside and make objective judgements' (Corbett 2015, 18; see also Bevir and Rhodes 2003, 18). "Explanation," within such an approach, is rooted in subjective narrative(s), not "objective" variables (Bevir 2006); I am not seeking to establish the objective "truth" about Malawian MPs, but rather am engaged in 'interpreting [their] interpretations' (Hay 2011, 167). In doing so, swathes of work has employed a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' (Ricoeur 2008) regarding African politicians; in adopting a 'hermeneutics of trust' (Dostal 1987, 413), the present thesis at least has relative novelty on its side.

Structure and outline of the thesis

Having set out where the thesis is coming from in terms of its premises and thematic concerns, as well as the national context in which research was conducted and the methodology behind that research, it remains in this section to set out the structure of the thesis and to summarise its major findings and contributions. The focus on Malawian MPs' work, their experience(s) of that work, and the thoughts and feelings about their role(s) that result is an empirically novel one. It is also somewhat methodologically novel to treat African politicians' narratives (including unabashedly self-justificatory narratives) as a genuine data source to be taken seriously – albeit never literally or wholly at face-value, of course. This empirical and methodological novelty have, I argue, brought out a range of interesting and original findings and contributions on a number of fronts.

Chapter 2 unpacks MPs' narratives of entry into the political arena in order to discern their motivations in public life. I find that MPs are *not* motivated simply by money. Money is far from an irrelevant consideration, but Malawian MPs are no less complex in their motivations than politicians (and indeed people) elsewhere. I find, moreover, that a distinctive feature of Malawian politicians' narratives of entry – at least in comparison with those found by the likes of Crewe (2015) in the UK or Reeher (2006) in the USA – is their stress upon the ambitions and desires of others in their decisions to enter politics. There is an obvious temptation to treat such narratives sceptically, but I argue that they ought not to be so readily dismissed. It would be difficult, in fact, for the wealthier and more prominent sons and daughters of any constituency *not* to be approached, and often on a semi-regular basis, to enter politics. Moreover, MPs' testimonies suggest that these approaches can be genuine moments of reflection for them that spur and persuade them to enter politics.

Taking these "call to politics" narratives seriously fits within a wider argument and contribution that takes MPs' professed public service motivations for entering politics seriously. I argue that MPs do genuinely seek to serve their communities, and that they frame their narratives of such in ways that are revealing in themselves. I find, for instance, that when MPs say they want to "make a difference" and feel they have a capacity to do so, they overwhelmingly mean this in relation to their *constituencies*. They frame their election, to an overwhelming extent, not in terms of becoming a (national) parliamentarian, nor indeed of becoming a representative of their party and fighting for a particular ideology or political faction, but in terms of becoming a representative, advocate, and servant of their (home) constituency. This constituency-centrism, after all, is reflected in how candidates are initially approached and encouraged to enter politics in the first place.

Altruistic and public-service motivations are not all, however. The attractions of money and of the opportunity to make money in politics are clearly present, even if they are wildly over-egged in Malawian popular commentary and in much academic commentary also. There is money to be made in politics, and for many entrants the salary and expenses of an MP are alone a significant step-up on their prior source of income; although there are also exceptions who took a significant pay cut in order to enter politics. MPs are also motivated by status. I argue that there is a paradox here – politicians are despised, and yet the position of MP is seen to have enormous standing in the wider society. I argue that this paradox can to some extent be resolved by acknowledging, as some MPs do, that there is a thrill in the negative, fearful emotions they can inspire in others. There is also, conversely and to no less an extent, a genuine faith in the capacity of politics to do good and to be a realm in which the public interest *can* be served – even if the extant crop of politicians are failing badly. Finally in relation to motivations, I find that politics is often felt to run in families at local level – and that the children and other junior relatives of a prior local grandee often feel the weight of these family histories not solely in terms of entitlement or of an inherited interest in the role of politician, but also in terms of an *obligation* to run for office that some neither welcome nor enjoy.

Building on this discussion, I argue that the "home" constituency MPs so venerate is not necessarily fixed to only one constituency – though it is very far from being infinitely flexible. Far more than residence, what matters are deeper connections rooted in family ties and links to a particular local area (at least in the rural context) – the ability, in short, to claim oneself as a "son" or "daughter" of the constituency.

I argue further that the general thrust of MPs' narratives around their choosing of a political party broadly support the academic consensus around Malawian political parties – as instrumentalised factions which politicians primarily join on the basis of which they consider most likely to carry/sustain them into Parliament and perhaps even into government too. MPs overwhelmingly see themselves as "party-takers" – responding as best they can to the party preferences of their electorate, which they see to be rooted in ethnoregional identities. Notwithstanding the considerable rational-instrumental calculation here, I do nonetheless depart from the Malawi literature somewhat in arguing that MPs' narratives reveal that parties *do* mean things to them beyond self-interested calculation. Just as parties have meaning for voters, primarily rooted in ethnoregional identity, the same is true of politicians. MPs, however, engaged in politics on a daily basis and operating within its upper echelons, are likely to have additional attachments that many of their constituents will not necessarily have – an ideational or ideological attachment to a particular government's (and especially President's) legacy in office, for example, or personal connection and loyalty to a particular political leader. It is in this way – and in the interplay of these feelings and meanings about parties alongside

rational-instrumental calculation – that one can often find MPs who talk of being "naturally Party X" but who are not, at least at present, actually in that party.

In **Chapter 3**, I discuss how MPs navigate the primary process. Although there has been in recent years some work emerging on this hitherto neglected theme in African democratic politics, my work brings Malawi into the discussion – an unusual case, with what nominally appear to be exceptionally decentralised and open primary contests – and offers an unusual politician-centred approach to the study of these contests, exploring politicians' own narratives and experiences of competing in primaries.

I find that candidates detest primaries. They must navigate them, but they loathe doing so. Part of this is their unpredictability and what candidates have to do in order to compete; they are also expensive, frequently chaotic, and even dangerous. There was also near-unanimous agreement amongst my participants that primaries are by far the most corrupted part of the political-electoral system, and indeed a widespread view that they are corrupted and rigged to the extent of being "stage-managed."

It is for this reason, I argue, that we should think about how candidates navigate primaries in terms not only of "bottom-up" work – appealing to the (s)electorate through campaigning, as well as having to bring one's own voters to the polling station (and, at times, trying to thwart other candidates' efforts to transport *their* voters) – but also, and indeed above all, in terms of "top-down" work i.e. corruptly securing the support of those in party hierarchies charged with running primary elections in order that the primary be rigged in the candidate's favour. This is the reality of competing in Malawian primaries as candidates experience it. It is a very far from democratic reality – and the so-called "rise of the independents" in recent elections is the result. The increasing capacity of "independents" to get elected represents the failure of political parties to manage their primaries properly and/or to impose the outcomes of those processes at local level. Party loyalist voters are increasingly unwilling to play ball with rigged primary outcomes, and are instead inclined at the general election to reject their party's official nominee and support/vote for/elect their actual favoured candidate – robbed in the primary and now standing ostensibly as an "independent" but in reality as an alternative, unofficial candidate of the same party.

Candidates hate primaries but they are useful to them, win or lose, because they identify them with a party – something which candidates recognise to be essential. Primaries thus demonstrate, I argue, how parties do and don't matter. They have little, and it appears diminishing, importance as organisations and institutions, able for instance to impose their preferred candidates on their own voters. They matter hugely, however, as brands, and as vehicles for factional representation and competition at the political centre – in their own right, and doubtless also as proxies for ethnoregional identity.

In **Chapter 4**, "campaigning" is examined as a sociological phenomenon in which politicians are involved not only in the run-up to elections, but whenever presenting themselves to voter-constituents for their approval. The chapter considers campaigning through the eyes of politicians themselves: it is thus a one-sided picture, naturally, but a vital one hitherto rather neglected in academic work. In common with Cheeseman *et al* (2021)**,** I find that there is much more to competing in, not to mention winning, Malawian elections than mere financial resources. Politicians know this and behave accordingly; although most think financial clout is hugely important, and a necessary if insufficient condition for victory. I argue that MPs and candidates strategize about how they can appeal to their constituency electorate in two broad ways – via their party affiliation, on the one hand, and via a presentation of self, on the other: that is, a projection of their qualities as a human being.

On the first of these, and for reasons trailed in previous chapters, politicians consider their party affiliation to be crucial. For all the cliches about "big men" and their devoted, wholly personal(ised) followings in African politics, Malawian MPs consider their party affiliation vital to their ongoing survival in politics – and with good reason. For campaigning politicians, I again find that they understand parties to matter as brands, as "moral" support and as symbols of attachment to a national formation; and scarcely at all as organisations, or as sources of campaigning resources.

MPs understand, however, that their party affiliation is not enough. Indeed, many cite an uptick in the willingness of Malawian voters to look beyond party labels and judge the person of the candidate – as indicated in the dramatic rise in the number of "independent" candidates elected in recent elections. Drawing on a long-standing theme in the literature on representation, I argue that at the heart of the representative relationship is *trust* – and that Malawian MPs intuitively understand this. I therefore argue that at the individual level Malawian candidates and MPs are seeking to communicate one message above all – "*trust me*." Trust is an inter-personal quality. In pitching for trust, therefore, politicians anywhere are involved primarily in a Goffmanite (1959) "presentation of self."

Drawing on the framework established by Richard Fenno's (2003) celebrated work on U.S. House Representatives, I argue that the presentation of self can be broken down into three fundamental component parts – as relevant in their outline to politicians in Lilongwe as in Los Angeles. These are messages of identification ("I am one of you"), of empathy ("I understand your situation and I care about it") and of qualification ("I am qualified to be your MP"). I do find, however, that the precise content of these messages as Malawian MPs perform them is less universal, and more specific to Malawi – and chimes with the literature specifically on African societies, anthropology, and political culture.

Identification, I argue, is largely about a presentation of one's *ethnic* self. There is also, however, a strong element of populist political style and class-based concern: candidates and MPs stress the need to display "the common touch" and to show that one is not like "other" politicians but rather is "part of the people." One of the crucial elements of what I call MPs' "folk wisdom" (the cautionary tales they tell themselves and each other about political life and its moral perils) concerns the dangers of arrogance, and of being seen to be arrogant: these are widely cited by MPs to be entirely natural yet simultaneously fatal in politics, and thus to be worked and guarded against constantly.

Central to the presentation of empathy is generosity. A long-standing anthropological literature has stressed the vital importance of redistributive expectations in African societies; I find, in common with Lindberg in Ghana (2010) that these have attached to the institution of MP in Malawi. The job of MP itself, in other words, comes with redistributive expectations, independently of the wealth or otherwise of the person occupying the office. Candidates understand, however, that this is primarily about a display of personal qualities and not merely a material transaction. This is not vote-buying.

Finally, the demonstration of qualification for office in many ways cuts across the "I am one of you" message because it is about a display not of the common touch, but of *specialness* of some kind. Candidates often stress dynastic or quasi-/proxy-dynastic links with politicians who have gone before. Another key aspect of qualification is to demonstrate the capacity to bring resources to the constituency. Again, personal wealth can be helpful, but this is less about the presence of personal wealth than it is about the capacity to source resources from elsewhere. Paradoxically, this in turn involves MPs in a display of post-colonial *difference* from their constituents to cut across their "I am one of you" message: candidates often go out of their way to stress their Westernity, their expertise in "development" and so on. In this way, they demonstrate qualification for office by demonstrating difference and distance from their constituents – not in terms of their place of origin, or their ethnic group, or their home, or their fealty to local culture and traditions, but in terms of their level of education and understanding of political/developmental issues, and very often their vision of good government and of proper politics. Some candidates and MPs, indeed, campaign very explicitly on how they are going to do politics differently, and even on how the electorate had best re-think its own attitudes, expectations, and behaviours.

Chapters 5 and 6 are concerned with MPs' "constituency service" work. This has historically been a neglected subject in the study of parliamentarians the world over, although the idea of constituency service as a residual category, an optional extra in the analysis of parliamentarians and what they do, is increasingly difficult to sustain even in the 21st century United Kingdom (Norton 2013). For Malawian MPs, I argue that constituency service is nothing less than the

pre-eminent aspect of their work. MPs find it extremely burdensome, to the extent that if any aspect of their job might be called a "side line," it is their parliamentary, not constituency, work.

MPs, moreover, are clear – constituency service is *demand*-driven, a consequence of constituents' incessant demands and expectations. MPs see this demand as rooted in the culture or "mindset" of Malawian voters and see themselves, to a large extent, as victims of the same. They consider it, moreover, to be getting worse, with constituents' expectations and demands becoming ever-more rapacious. Constituents' demands are split *by MPs themselves* into two fuzzy but ultimately opposing categories – "development" and "handouts." MPs universally perceive these demands, and this distinction between them; how they respond, however, can vary sharply. Chapters 5 and 6 are concerned with those responses.

Having first discussed the basic set-up of constituency representation in Malawi, and the benefits and dangers that their own constituency teams (of volunteer, on-the-ground lieutenants) can bring them, **Chapter 5** is primarily concerned with MPs' understandings of, and responses to, that collection of constituents' demands that they categorise as "development." By this is meant projects, investments, donations etc. that MPs consider "developmental" – a productive investment in the economic health of the community.

The introduction of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) has provided some small relief to MPs, but it is small beer. MPs still very much require to source the majority of development funds from beyond the CDF – from their own pocket, from friends, networks, family businesses and international "well-wishers." The search for resources is constant, and of course includes lobbying government for resources for the constituency. Interestingly, most MPs – on all sides – in the 2014-19 Parliament emphasised that government (or at least the DPP-UDF government in office at that time) did not treat preferentially its own MPs in relation to government funding for constituency projects. Most, though not all, opposition MPs found government ministers to be fair-minded brokers at least in this respect.

I argue that the constant expectations gap between what constituents expect and what MPs can deliver in terms of "development" is a source of constant frustration and not a little despair to MPs. Above all, however (and in sharp contrast to their other category of constituent demands as discussed in Chapter 6), all MPs accept, and the vast majority actively embrace, their role as a facilitator of development. This is true even as, on some level, they do think it "wrong" or mistaken of constituents to have imposed this role upon what technically are supposed to be legislator-parliamentarians (see Chapter 7.)

The political contestation that exists around their development role concerns not MPs' own resistance to those expectations, but rather their dealings with other local politicians who have

heavily overlapping mandates as "development actors." These include chiefs and, above all, councillors. Whilst there have been some high-profile conflicts between councillors and MPs that have attracted much attention, I argue that the reality is that for most MPs, councillors are at worst an irritant and frequently, in actual fact, a partner in their development efforts – albeit one they eye warily.

In concluding the discussion of MPs' development role, I argue that while there is much concern in the academic literature with CDFs as a democratic disgrace on the basis of MPs' unilateral control over them, I find that the real problem with CDF projects (and many other "development projects" pioneered by MPs) is often more basic: they simply don't work. The Malawian landscape is littered with half-built or derelict schools, clinics, and houses, left to moulder into the landscape as monuments to the political logics that invariably scupper MPs' efforts to be meaningful agents of development even in the short- to medium-term.

In **Chapter 6**, I consider the other major category into which MPs divide what they consider to be the rapacious demands of their constituents: demand for "handouts." By these is typically meant small donations of cash or equivalents directly into the outstretched hands of residents. In this respect they are distinct from "development" works in *scale* – developmental goods are far more likely to be club than individual goods, and to be investments in longer-term economic/health/educational projects rather than cash or food handed directly to individuals or small groups. The distinction, however, is ultimately rooted not in the kinds or scale of goods distributed, but in MPs' attitudes towards that distribution: "development" goods are developmental; "handouts" are not, and indeed are widely viewed as being actively *anti*-developmental.

Handouts are a familiar theme in the literature on African politics and are often viewed in terms of a corrupt and clientelistic political culture which politicians fundamentally control within which they are at a huge advantage, buying votes and support. Looked at through the eyes of Malawian MPs, however, I argue for a very different emphasis: with politicians as victims of a political culture over which, at least as individuals, they have had no choice – and of which they strongly disapprove and often despair. In this respect I echo Lindberg's (2010) research with Ghanaian MPs which likewise stresses the bottom-up nature of role-making via accountability pressures.

MPs see "handouts culture" as being imposed upon them by their constituents. Unlike the facilitator of development role, however (which all have accepted and most embraced) the vast majority of MPs regard expectations upon them to be a purveyor of handouts as profoundly wrong – not just as a matter of confusion or misunderstanding, but in a moral and ethical sense. They consider handouts as fostering a destructive and degrading "dependency culture."

MPs at this point divide sharply in terms of how to respond to their constituents' expectations and demands. I thus go beyond Lindberg's work to show how MPs go about *responding* to the accountability pressure that they face – and demonstrate how informal "institutionalisations" and bottom-up role-making are always contested, not least by MPs themselves. I argue that on this matter MPs are confronted, as they are in so many other areas, with a fundamental structure/agency question: to what extent do they have to "role-take" i.e. conform to received wisdom and practice when it comes to how they do their job as an MP; and to what extent can they break with received wisdom and practice in order to re-make and re-shape the role of MP in accordance with their own wishes ("role-making")? The point is not to offer an "objective" answer to this question, but to explore the ways in which MPs themselves answer it in relation to handouts expectations.

I employ an original concept to explore this dilemma and how MPs respond – the "presentation of role." This, I argue, is a fundamental aspect of Malawian MPs' home styles, no less important than the presentation of self. MPs present to constituents not only a display of their fundamental qualities as a human being, but alongside it a presentation of *what they consider the proper role of an MP to be*. This latter is generally very self-conscious – it is aimed at constituents in the hope that they will learn and absorb the boundaries thus delineated between what it is fair and reasonable to expect/ask of the MP, and what it is not. MPs' home styles are designed, therefore, not only to legitimate themselves – but also to (re-)shape and to (de-)limit the terrain upon which that legitimation takes place. *All* Malawian MPs, I argue, are involved in a presentation of role because all Malawian MPs, to some extent at least, require some sort of defence mechanism against the excessive demands of their constituents.

Real-world presentations of role, I argue, fall on a spectrum between two poles. At one end is "role-taking": MPs who see handouts, yes, as morally wrong but who nevertheless conclude that there is nothing to be done about it: they must conform, or face political death. They cannot, however, realistically be wholly passive or acquiesce to every demand. I argue, therefore, that that there is a suite of tactics aligned with this attitude and approach – physical distancing from one's constituents; "compromising" and drawing lines with constituents; and the deployment of quasi-formalised structures and of collective goods. The fundamental stance, however, is a profoundly (self-)defensive one. MPs' object is to limit and restrict the demands and pressures coming at them – sometimes by literally hiding from their constituents. Most MPs I encountered were towards this role-taking end of the spectrum.

Some outspoken individuals, however, are "role-makers." These MPs, like all MPs, see handouts as morally wrong – but so unforgivably wrong as to be essentially unconscionable. The "culture of handouts," as they see it, creates dependency, indolence, the erosion of self-reliance and of individual and collective dignity. These MPs are determined to have nothing to

do with it – and to teach their constituents a better way. Their presentation of role, therefore, is particularly overt, self-conscious, and wholly unapologetic. A range of tactics are deployed to re-educate their constituents about how they should relate to the MP – training by lecturing; as well as training and disciplining by doing-being the kind of MP they wish to be held accountable for being. This latter includes proudly not giving handouts even if that spells derision and defeat for themselves; stressing their expertise in "D/development" and in how politics/economics ought "properly" to be done; and, to some extent, explaining and stressing to constituents their role as a legislator-parliamentarian.

The original concept of "presentation of role" developed in this chapter captures much of what Malawian MPs are preoccupied with in relation to their constituency work, and much of what they do there. It may be a valuable way of thinking about representatives' home styles in many other contexts.

In summary, then, and whereas Fenno stressed three core aspects of home styles as he encountered them – the allocation of time and resources to constituency work, the presentation of self, and the explanation of Congressional activity at home – over Chapters 4, 5 and 6 I lay out a different trio that I suggest are more relevant in the Malawi case as the core and central aspects of MPs' home styles. These are, like Fenno, the Goffmanite presentation of self – but now alongside the "development agent" function, and the presentation of role. These, I argue, are the core elements of Malawian MPs' home styles.

In **Chapter 7**, I conclude by drawing together many of the threads set out in previous chapters to explore what is, for the vast majority of MPs, the net result of the experiences at the coalface that have been detailed throughout the thesis: a belief that their constituents and the Malawian public as a whole have fundamentally misunderstood and/or actively corrupted democracy. I make an original argument that highlights and explores this "demo-pessimism" – how and why MPs believe their country to be doing democracy wrongly or badly, and how and why they hold their constituents (largely) responsible. Now "in charge" because of electoral processes and electoral accountability, constituents are seen to have imposed their (wilful or otherwise) misunderstandings and misuse of what democracy is and is not upon the entire political system – with politicians either as willing collaborators in this process, or at best as ineffectual opponents. Contemporary MPs now find themselves largely powerless in the face of a mass misunderstanding and/or corruption of how democracy is "supposed" to work.

This is an original and arresting argument about the political thought of Malawian MPs. It has been plain to see in Malawian (and wider African) politics for a long time that the political elite often have a fairly low opinion of the mass public, but this fact has rarely been taken seriously by scholars, let alone the arguments and thinking behind such opinions explored and explained, at length, in their own terms. This final chapter makes an original contribution by doing so. It

argues that there are multiple strands to "demopessimism." MPs variously cite as reasons why democracy is not working "properly" in Malawi: that development is a prerequisite for democracy, and that democracy actively harms development; that democracy encourages Malawians to indulge their divisive ethnic affiliations; that voters are insufficiently educated and/or informed to make sensible electoral choices, and are far too easy to lie to; that voters have no real understanding of parliamentary processes, and so reduce much MP behaviour in Parliament to silliness and theatre; and that voters, when they are making decisions about who to support and vote for, are short-termist in their thinking and prioritise handouts.

These are the main elements, I argue, that culminate for MPs in one simple but devastating conclusion: Malawians vote badly. They prioritise the wrong things, and they elevate bad leaders and make even the good ones somewhat worse. Democracy puts constituents in charge – but it is, in the memorable words of one MP, 'a gun in the hands of a kid' (Dzonzi 2016). The public do not understand public affairs, or what is best for the country. Indeed, they do not know what is in their *own* best interests. Democracy gives Malawians too much of what they want, and not enough of what they need.

Further exploring and digging into these claims, I argue that the underlying operative concept in such thinking relates to "*discipline*" – or the lack thereof. The concern with discipline is two-pronged. The first is an argument that there is a lack of discipline inherent in contemporary Malawian culture – or at least in the "mindset" of the vast majority of MPs' constituents – that renders Malawians "unready" for democracy. With no clearly understood distinction, for instance, between "rights," on the one hand, and "freedoms" on the other, democracy has come to be translated by the Malawian public into freedom-as-*license*. The resulting polity is unruly, ill-disciplined, and lacking in direction. While there is much othering by MPs here – they are talking about their constituents more than about themselves – this is not wholly the case, and Malawian MPs do not exempt themselves entirely from these allegations of ill-disciplined selves.

The second prong of the argument is related but distinct. It argues that democracy since 1993-4 has, in fact, eroded discipline and self-restraint still further amongst Malawians. It has encouraged indolence and the deep setting-in of a "dependency culture." It has exacerbated economic decline. It has so eroded (self-)discipline in the population that corruption, at all levels, and crime have increased, and the rule of law diminished. Social norms and values have been eroded and debased, and there has been a fundamental corrosion of national feeling and of patriotic loyalty since the time of the Kamuzu Banda regime – indeed a fundamental corrosion of public and civic life itself. Democracy, instituted "too soon," has corrupted Malawians and degraded their discipline. The charge-sheet against democracy is long indeed. In making this argument, moreover, MPs are very far from merely othering their constituents –

they implicate themselves and the wider political class profoundly in these processes. The political class, no less than the population as a whole, are held to miss the discipline Kamuzu Banda provided.

Having set out the logic of this argument, I consider its parameters and (briefly) some possible implications. In respect of parameters, I argue that this argument is found in Malawi very far beyond the confines of MPs or even of politics. My own interviews testify to the fact that this argument holds great sway amongst the urban middle-classes, and research by Dan Wroe (2020) suggests it may have considerable traction also amongst the wider population. I argue further that this is unlikely to be a Malawi-only phenomenon. I am unable to pronounce definitively on these matters, but I suggest that these arguments are very likely to speak to some of the fundamental themes and concerns in wider African politics over many decades: above all, the concern with political *order*, its establishment and preservation.

In terms of the argument's implications within Malawi itself, finally, I do not suggest that MPs are advocating for the abolition of electoral politics and the establishment of a dictatorship/one-party state or the like. I argue that although there is much nostalgia for Kamuzu Banda involved here, it is nostalgia for *discipline*, not dictatorship. To the extent that a model is being advocated it is closer to the Magafuli and above all to the Kagame mould than to Kamuzu Banda. In many respects Bingu wa Mutharika and his illiberal electoral authoritarianism is the domestic model – one that was seen to deliver to Malawi considerable economic benefits. In demonstrating and exploring Malawian MPs' deep and profound ambivalence about democracy, the final chapter draws on the findings of prior chapters to make an original contribution to debates about the performance and fate of democracy in Africa. This is one rooted in the experiences and thinking of those at the coalface – African politicians themselves.

Chapter 2: Entering Politics: motivations and meanings

Introduction – MP motivations: all stomach, no soul?

From the discussion in the Introduction of popular and scholarly narratives regarding African politicians, it follows that for many the motivations of those who (seek to) enter Parliament in Malawi are obvious: they are self-interested, of course, and above all financial. 'They want easy money!' says one civil society actor, speaking for many of my interviewees (Anon Expert 2 2017). This is certainly a view, and above all a discourse, that is widespread in Malawi, as evidenced in popular and journalistic commentary on politics. 'It's all about their bellies' (Kasakula 2016); Malawian MPs go into politics for the money.

Many MPs, it should be noted, suggest this of each other – both publicly as part of the cut-and-thrust of political debate and competition, but also in private conversations. Some talk to me, for instance, of their colleagues having run for office as 'a gamble' – they 'invest' in running a campaign in the hope of securing the pay-out that will allegedly follow from winning the election (their own public-service motivations, needless to say, are simply the rare exception that proves the rule) (for example Nnensa 2017).

As per the 2014 national budget, MPs received US$1,150 per month in salary (up from $242 per month in 2013, an almost fivefold increase before adjusting for inflation), as well as various allowances, the most significant of which is fuel allowance set at US$1,600 per month in 2014 (eNCA.com 2014).[9] MPs also enjoy a range of perks as part of their conditions of employment, including qualified immunity from prosecution. Also crucial here is that they are entitled to import two automobiles duty-free. This is seen to be a huge privilege – as one former MP puts it, the duty saved on a European executive car such as a Mercedes-Benz could easily be worth more than the value of an MP's house (Nnensa 2017). What is more, this need not simply be money saved – many MPs are alleged to buy one car for themselves, and to sell the other one, meaning a huge profit can be made from this perk alone (Nnensa 2017). Being an MP also gives access to bank loans in a country in which such loans are notoriously difficult to come by. These loans can be a valuable source of immediate liquidity, not least for MPs to invest in property or in their own businesses. Some go into politics, it is said, in order to establish businesses, others to boost the ones they have (Chinsinga 2015).

[9] As of July 2021, per the 2020/1 national budget, MPs receive MWK949,000 (US$1170) per month as salary but approximately MWK2.2m (US$2700) per month in fuel, housing, sitting and other allowances (Malawi24 2020).

What is more, a range of informal opportunities are often cited by which MPs may make their positions financially lucrative. These are typically pointing, in other words, to a range of opportunities for more or less overt corruption. Being in positions of influence, not to mention working with and around people in positions of enormous influence in the upper echelons of government, it is widely held that MPs may take advantage of these positions for their own private gain – by extracting bribes for parliamentary votes, for instance, or by securing lucrative contracts for their own businesses (for example Malekezo 2020). At local level, moreover, procedures for the disbursement and management of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) are notoriously opaque and open to abuse. Stories abound of potential abuses and irregularities, with one MP even suggesting to me that some of her colleagues simply steal the entire fund, channelling it into their personal bank accounts never to be seen again (Fieldnotes, 2017; see also for example Nyasa Times 2020).

The pay, perks, and conditions of an MP, then, are undoubtedly attractive, and it is very far from my intention to suggest that financial incentives for entering politics are non-existent. Far from it – they are real and doubtless of importance in many cases. For many who enter it, the job of Member of Parliament is very well-remunerated in comparison with their previous occupation and financial profile, especially when their allowances and perks are taken into account. Having spent almost two years around and amongst Malawian MPs at work, I can also testify that few appear to be selfless aesthetes – they are often assiduous and pre-occupied about their perks and allowances (I attended one committee for two weeks without once hearing the voices of several members, who nevertheless came alive and very vocal at the conclusion when it came to complaining that their allowances/committee *per diems* had not yet been paid (Parliamentary committee observations, 2016)). Stories and anecdotes abound of MPs getting elected and immediately spending less time in their constituencies and more time building houses, buying cars, and cultivating their businesses. It is also true that MPs collectively push for and approve improved terms and conditions for themselves (including larger loans) at regular intervals when in plenary (Chinsinga 2015). And Parliament is rarely more alive, exercised, engaged, and prepared to put pressure on government than when haggling over the allocation to the Constituency Development Fund during the annual Budget Session, to which many inevitably attribute a sinister and self-interested motive (Parliamentary Observations, 2015-17).

What is more, there *is* very considerable corruption in Malawian politics (as the Cashgate scandal notoriously exposed), and this doubtless extends into Parliament. Some politicians, especially at Cabinet level, appear to acquire inordinate wealth whilst in office. There is money to be made in Malawian politics. It is a long-established claim in African political economy that in underdeveloped economies the state assumes an inordinately large role in the economy and becomes the key site of accumulation. The state, in short, is where most of the money is, and

becomes 'a resource in itself' (Szeftel 1982). At the human level, as a consequence, those strongly motivated in life by money would, in Malawi, find politics an attractive option, while this would be unlikely to be the case in the UK, for instance.

Nevertheless, I do wish to argue that there is, at the very least, considerably greater complexity at work than the "it's-all-about-the-money" narrative. First, this narrative is clearly over-simplified even on its own terms. Some MPs in fact take a considerable pay cut to become an MP. One MP, for example, is on 1/5th of her previous salary working in international civil society (Anonymous MP, 2016). Malawi is not Kenya or Nigeria, where MP salaries are stratospheric compared to the wider population. While there has been a considerable increase since 2004-5 – when the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association reported that 'the basic salary paid to a Member [of Parliament] in Malawi is less than half the amount paid to a secondary schoolteacher' – Malawi's MPs remain amongst the continent's least generously compensated (CPA, 2005).

What is more, many politicians claim to *lose* money in office, and there is considerable evidence of former MPs and even Cabinet Ministers being left destitute by their time in politics (Nyasa Times 2015b). Being an MP in Malawi is an expensive business, and many MPs across Africa claim to spend more on their constituents than they receive in their salaries (Economist 2021; Mussa 2017). Even those MPs sceptical of their own colleagues' motives did acknowledge from personal experience that, if there are actually so many of their fellows entering politics for the money, they must very quickly become terribly disappointed – and are indeed highly likely to emerge from politics poorer than when they entered (Anon MP2 2017; Mussa 2017). This is not to mention, moreover, that vast majority of candidates who spend considerable money seeking to be elected but do *not* succeed. It seems implausible that all were motivated solely by money and simply felt the "investment" worth the risk. Once again, for a realm of activity in which people are supposedly solely interested in self-enrichment and self-aggrandizement, we can at the very least say that, were this the case, the vast majority of participants would end up very sorely disappointed.

Secondly, I would also suggest that, more generally, an "its-all-about-money" narrative may say less about how human beings (including politicians) actually function than it says about how human beings like to talk about politicians, and about African politicians in particular. Few groups are as susceptible to materialist-reductionist interpretations of their behaviour; this is, however, absurdly crude. Inevitably, individuals vary and the balance of their motivations in politics can vary too. There *are* perhaps a few individuals in the 2014-19 parliament who might fairly be characterised as infamously self-interested and cynical – generally speaking observers know who they are, and their fellow MPs know who they are. But they are notorious for a reason – because whether or not such a cynical assessment of motivations is fair in each

individual case, relentlessly self-interested motivations in politics are (and are seen to be) unusual; almost as unusual, indeed, as saintly disregard for any such self-interest. It is possible to be attracted financially to politics but for this not to be one's only motivation for joining or deriving satisfaction from one's job (see Corbett 2015, 121). Other motivations are not precluded, even when a personal financial motive is present, and this is, indeed, strongly reflected in MPs' narratives.

Drawing upon over 70 interviews as well as sustained participant observation with current and former MPs, the rest of this chapter explores politicians' narratives of becoming a politician in order to explore the motivations and meanings informing their entry into politics.[10] I begin with where the inspiration to run for office might initially come from, before an extended discussion of the motivations that carry them through. I also discuss how decisions are made about *where* they run, and for which party (if any.)

The spark to entry and the call unto politics

Malawian MPs in the 2014-19 Parliament were 17% female (down from 22% in 2009, and rising again to 23% in 2019) (O'Neil et al 2016, 17; Inter Parliamentary Union 2018). The average age was, in 2013 (the most recent date for which there are records) 65 years old (Inter Parliamentary Union 2018). Literacy and proficiency in English are constitutional requirements, and MPs must have graduated from high school and obtained a Malawi School Certificate for Education (MSCE.) There is a wide range of education levels represented in Parliament, from MSCEs to PhDs, and (although precise data is lacking) it appears clear that the composition of Parliament is becoming progressively more educated over time (Chirwa 2009, 95–96). MPs are, moreover, considerably wealthier than the average Malawian and tend to be drawn primarily from the urban-based business, governmental and educational sectors – amongst my interviewees were many businesspersons, teachers, and civil servants, as well as academics, medical professionals, development professionals, journalists, and celebrity musicians.

The "origins stories" of these MPs vary hugely. There are multiple routes into the political class, and MPs cite multiple and varied factors and motivations for entering it. A striking feature, however – at least for those familiar with the basic contours of equivalent narratives in the likes of the UK and the USA (Reeher 2006, 25–60; Crewe 2015, 17–41), which tend to stress the spark of individual ambition, and an active personal desire to enter politics that is often nurtured in formative institutions of work or education such as trades unions and universities –

[10] All but a handful of my interviews with current or former MPs began with, 'So how did you get into politics?'

is how common it is for MPs to stress the aspirations of *others*, rather than their own, when discussing what initially sparked their involvement in politics.

Clement Mlombwa (Dedza South West, 2009-), for instance, is somewhat typical in talking of politics as 'a calling.' But this phrase has a very particular sense amongst Malawian MPs:

> 'I believe it's a calling to be a politician because honestly speaking I was just sitting at my home, in my house and then I find these people knocking at the door. They said, "we would want you to represent us at the constituency [as an MP]." Then I was a bit reluctant. Then they made second attempt, third attempt and on the third attempt I… felt I should respond to their call. Basically that's how I became a politician' (Mlombwa 2017).

The "calling" comes from without, rather than within – it is a call from "the people"/the community to enter politics.

Who precisely comes knocking varies – it may be party cadres, local chiefs (most likely at the Village and Group Village Headman levels), church leaders or similar local notables, and/or simply an ill-defined collection of local people to whom the politician-to-be is linked by ties of family, friendship, "home area," or combinations thereof. Initial invitations to Dennis Namachekecha-Phiri (Phalombe North-East, 2014-), for instance, came from a delegation of over 70 Village and Group Village Heads (chiefs.) Subsequently, political party cadres also approached him, although he ultimately decided to run as an independent without entering any primary contests (see next chapter.)

Collins Kajawa (Lilongwe Mpenu Nkhoma, 2014-), meanwhile, was first approached by a consortium of church leaders to join the short-lived Mgwirizano Coalition when it was emerging to contest the 2004 parliamentary elections (Kajawa 2016). Having failed to be elected in 2004, he was approached a decade later by a group of people from his home area:

> 'When I visited them during a funeral, they called me aside and [said] we think you are the right person to lead us here. I requested them for two months of reflection, after two months I went back to them and I assured them I was ready' (Kajawa 2016).

Local and national party officials or activists do of course also actively recruit – particularly from among known party supporters and activists. Subsequently a controversial Home Affairs Minister in Bingu wa Mutharika's DPP administration, Aaron Sangala (Blantyre Malabada, 2004-19) began in politics as a relatively rare MCP/Hastings Banda supporter in urban Blantyre *after* the 1994 transition. Involved in the MCP at local and regional levels, when in 1999 a high-profile by-election was to be held in what was then the constituency of Blantyre Ndirande (in which he had lived for many years), he was invited to stand for the party (A. Sangala 2016).

It is because of such "calls" to enter politics (and often many of them over a period of years) that many MPs echo the sentiment of Grain Malunga (Chikwawa North, 2009-14), or of Joyce Azizi Banda (Lilongwe Mpenu Nkhoma, 2009-14), to name just two, that their entry into politics and subsequent political careers were 'an accident' (Malunga 2016; J. A. Banda 2017). Invoked in such talk is a sense of *duty*, incorporating a lack of any long-standing, pro-active personal ambition to enter politics (indeed often active reluctance), alongside a willingness to ultimately heed the "calling" of their community to do so:

> 'It wasn't [an] easy [decision], and I don't think that I could have agreed to join politics but [for] the support of my husband. He is the one who encouraged me most. Because after getting the news, I sat down [to] think about [it]. And I thought it is something that I cannot manage, yeah. Thinking of the campaign, how it is done. More especially I was afraid of the campaign. [But] my husband encouraged me, [said] that he will be there for me, he will support me fully, and I will make it. That's why I got courage, and started it' (Adams 2016).

Such claims are likely to be met by many with considerable scepticism, and it is undoubtedly the case that politicians anywhere have an obvious interest in claiming that they entered politics at the behest of ordinary people, perhaps even against their own better instincts and judgement. This may be considered an appropriately (ostentatiously?) humble origins story, especially in a context in which a career in politics is heavily associated in the public as well as academic imaginations with dark arts, nefarious deeds, and personal enrichment.

Without re-treading arguments already made in the opening chapter, it is entirely reasonable to regard MP narratives as partial, biased and "spun" – as they very clearly were by at least some of my interviewees. This is far from being grounds to dismiss them out of hand, however. There are, moreover, excellent reasons to take claims on this particular matter seriously because it is a fact in Malawi that anyone of elevated financial means and/or social standing is extremely likely to be approached at some point by some person or persons from their community to stand to become their MP (Namachekecha-Phiri 2017; Anon MP1 2017).[11] Indeed, despite generally sharing in the predominant (knee-jerk?) cynicism regarding MPs' motivations and their stress upon "callings," very few of my non-politician informants in academia, journalism and civil society had not themselves been approached at least once to stand as an MP – generally by members of their local ("home") communities. Such persons are,

[11] There is a long-standing ethnographic literature on the centrality of social obligations, of material redistribution and levelling in African societies generally, including Malawi (see Smith 2004; Hyden and Williams 1994). Pressures and expectations upon those in elevated positions to assist those who have less are widely documented, in short, as being enormous (this includes Malawian Members of Parliament, as we shall clearly see in subsequent chapters) (see also Hansen 2003; Hansen 2010).

after all, obvious candidates for political office because they possess the social and financial attributes and eminence generally associated with the extant political class. What is more – *many* people are approached, and often multiple times. This is, after all, a very low-cost and possibly high-reward strategy for the approachers: if a would-be candidate heeds their call, they stand to gain not just an MP of whom they approve but a candidate of whom they have established themselves as favourites and confidantes, with all the access to material- and status-resources that this implies (Namachekecha-Phiri 2017; Anon MP1 2017). Approaches to stand for Parliament are, after all, not least invitations to redistribute resources – and with those who approach presumably among the first in line. The same group of community delegates may therefore approach multiple people as their "chosen" candidate, in the hope of getting at least one to stand. It is not uncommon for someone to be approached multiple times; and, if one has already been involved in politics in some way (whether as a former MP, or as a failed candidate, or a party activist, or a civil society actor, or the like), one can certainly expect to be approached on a semi-regular basis. It would be far harder, in fact, for persons of most MPs' background to *not* be approached to stand for Parliament than to be so. Being in the diaspora, even, is no barrier here – Justin Majawa (Mangochi South West, 2014-19) was first approached whilst working in the United States (Majawa 2016).

Crucially, moreover, there is of course no clear-cut distinction between receiving a request from constituency actors to join politics and having some measure of personal ambition, and certainly of positive motivation, to do so. The two are entirely complementary and often act in symbiosis – and many of my interviewees acknowledged a complex combination of both at work. After all none of those who do ultimately accept the call to enter politics seek to claim that they do not warm to the idea and to develop positive motivations towards seeking a political career. Calls to enter politics are never accepted blindly and are frequently, after varying amounts of contemplation, ultimately rejected. It is also the case, on the other hand, that it is not difficult to get oneself approached should one wish to be so, and especially if one possesses resources of value to potential approachers. Indeed, while the entering-politics-by-accident narrative is strikingly common, it is not ubiquitous – a significant minority of my interviewees did locate their entry into politics explicitly in terms of their own personal desires and ambitions, rather than those of others (for instance R. C. Banda 2016; Nyalonje 2016; Jumbe 2016).

Despite the necessary sceptical provisos, in short, narratives of invitations/external "callings" into politics ought to be taken seriously – for many they clearly act as crucial moments of persuasion and indeed as catalysts for serious consideration of, and reflection upon, a run for political office. They are oft cited, for instance, by those who have tried and failed to be elected in the past, as being important in convincing them that they may have the support to mount a winning bid next time. Having failed to secure much support in a prior election in her

constituency as an independent candidate standing on her own initiative, one MP was subsequently approached at the next election by 'traditional leaders and the faith groups from my community' – their support was key to securing her the candidacy of the dominant party in her area, and her ultimate victory in the general election (Anon MP3 2017).

Most of those non-politicians mentioned above who were approached to stand had clearly also taken these approaches seriously and genuinely reflected upon them – at least one, indeed, had accepted, stood and lost (Anon Expert 1 2017); others felt the time was not right (generally on financial grounds) but acknowledged a possible interest in standing in future (Chingaipe 2017).[12] It remains the case, however, that regardless of whether or not such a calling took place, positive personal motivations inevitably remain central to an MP's ultimate decision to embark on a political career, and indeed to their narratives of doing so.

Motivations

Making a difference

The most prominent theme in MPs' discussions of their motivations in joining politics is an expression of dissatisfaction with the *status quo (ante)* and a desire to make a contribution towards its improvement. This is most often expressed in terms of conditions in their home area/constituency:

> 'I was working in… Blantyre. But when during holidays come or if I want[ed] to visit my relatives back home in my village, I was finding difficulties to reach even to visit my own mother because of the road infrastructure. Even if I'm in the village, if you talk of water issues, it was critical. Even if we talk of safe motherhood – all things were not [going] in the right direction' (Jolobala 2016).

Likewise, Peter Dimba (Lilongwe South, 2014-) explains that:

> 'Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world, and my constituency, Lilongwe South constituency, is also one of the worst in terms of poverty levels. I grew up in the constituency, so growing up, going to secondary school, going to the university and then come back to the village I realized that not much had

[12] It is worth stressing again that many of these informants tended to more or less scoff at the claims of politicians to have been "called" to politics by anything other than their own personal ambition, and were likewise highly sceptical of the idea that any but a very few might genuinely have motives of public/community service and may not have entered politics motivated solely by self-enrichment and self-aggrandizement. And yet they acknowledged these things in their own case, and in those of their friends and colleagues in similar situations. Anti-politician narratives can generate impressive amounts of doublethink.

> changed in terms of water supply, in terms of classroom blocks, because I realized that so many pupils were still learning under the trees like during the time I was in primary school, so [as] I said not much had changed. Poor road network and quite a number of challenges socioeconomically. I also realized that most of the trading centres, you know, had dilapidated buildings which was a clear indication of poverty – that things instead of progressing had actually retrogressed, that was a clear sign to me that [we were] not moving forward as a constituency. So I thought that instead of pointing fingers at the then Member of Parliament I should take over, be in the driving seat and, you know, drive the development agenda for the constituency. Yes that's the sort of difference I wanted to actually make – in the constituency' (Dimba 2016).

The late Harry Thomson (Chikwawa North, 1994-2004; 2014-19), a veteran Cabinet minister, founding member of the UDF and senior member of the Muluzi government, reflects that of all the things he has done in politics, 'I would like to think that I've left Chikwawa a better place than I found it' (Thomson 2016).

This impulse to make a difference can, however, also be expressed in terms of concern for the state of the nation. David Bisnowaty (Lilongwe City Centre, 2014-19), for example, a prominent businessman and naturalised Malawian of Israeli origin, expressed his motivation for entering politics to a journalist for an American newspaper in 2016, and in terms resonant of well-meaning Western celebrities and gap-year students. As it is reported, he 'never thought he would end up in politics, but a December 2013 incident changed his life.' He goes on to be quoted:

> 'I was rushing to the airport and on my way there I saw this little kid licking the road with his tongue because he spilled his food and it broke my heart… I said to myself, 'There is no way this can happen in the 21st century.'… I told my kids, 'I think I'm going to join politics and I'm going to prove that I can be a peaceful freedom fighter and bring change.' My kids said 'Dad, you're crazy. You're a Jewish white person in an African country, you will never be elected'… I got a landslide victory… The people loved me' (Breen-Portnoy 2016).

While such sentiments and desires to help facilitate improvement to a lamentable status quo are often expressed in rather vague and unfocused terms, in some cases there is a more clearly focused sense of a specific contribution that they might make – be that in their constituency, or in Parliament, or in national life as a whole. Many candidates produce their own personal manifesto beyond that of their party, stressing the specific projects and commitments they aim to pursue (Lunguzi 2016; Nyalonje 2016). This is particularly notable amongst those who stress a self-initiated desire to join politics, and who are professionals with accumulated expertise in a particular policy area (such as health, education, or economic development) or who are lawyers with expertise in the formation and drafting of bills. These MPs also talk about joining politics

as an extension of their previous careers, a pursuit of ultimately similar (and public-spirited) goals by alternative, and more fundamental means (Lunguzi 2016; Nyalonje 2016; Mhone 2017).

Theresa Mwale (Mchinji West, 2009-14) had worked for the Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization in Malawi. She felt that her professional background and experience gave her something valuable to contribute to the public realm:

> 'as I was working with the World Health Organization I was exposed a lot to the community work, and with a lot of travelling throughout the country and seeing the problems that the communities were facing and how they were going about them to try and solve them. I thought, "why can't I be part of change? Why can't I also work with communities and see how I can help?" So while I was working with [WHO] I thought, "I think going into politics could make an impact in what I think I can contribute to the country." So I joined politics' (T. Mwale 2017).

Agnes Nyalonje (Mzimba North, 2014-19), meanwhile, had accumulated 25 years of experience in a range of generally health- and HIV/AIDS-related roles for organisations as diverse as Edinburgh City Council and UNAIDS. Returning to Malawi after decades living and working abroad with a desire to make a contribution towards policy-formation and good governance nationally and locally, the job of MP was not her first choice. She would have preferred to be either in charge of the National AIDS Commission or a District Commissioner, but admits to an initial naiveté, having been abroad for so long, in failing to realise 'that these positions are very political' and that, as she saw it, she lacked the necessary connections, was too outspoken and 'of course I come from the wrong part of the country… So that left the job of MP – where it wasn't going to be up to one person to tell me [whether] I'm suitable or not suitable' (Nyalonje 2016). For Nyalonje, in other words, the politicised nature of public appointments and ethnic discrimination left the job of MP and recruitment by open election as the most meritocratic (and indeed only viable) option for an eminently qualified but poorly connected person to enter public service.[13]

Personal circumstances and experiences of course may also feed into a sense of mission and desire to effect change – whilst working abroad on HIV/AIDS issues, Nyalonje lost siblings to the disease back in Malawi ('even with my salary in Geneva I couldn't afford to give them the gift of

[13] Nyalonje is a Northerner from Mzimba District. Privileged during the colonial era in terms of education due to the presence and influence of religious missions, Kamuzu Banda openly discriminated against and disparaged Northerners in response. There is a strong sense of Northern identity and marginalisation to this day: Banda-era education quotas to restrict Northerners' access to university spaces in the name of positive discrimination for the South and Centre remain in place, and many from the North continue to feel discriminated against in the job market, in politics etc.

life' (Nyalonje 2016).) This informed her desire to return to Malawi and to do something for 'my biological sisters and brothers and also for my social sisters and brothers' (Nyalonje 2016).

The Parcel of Rogues

Expressions of dissatisfaction with local and national conditions are very often accompanied by a forthright and often ferocious critique of the extant crop of politicians (both nationally and locally.) It is they who are unfailingly held to be responsible (via sins of commission or omission) for these conditions, and above all for a perennial "lack of development." The flipside of such critiques, of course, is a conviction that one could (and would) do better. For Juliana Lunguzi (Dedza East, 2014-19), this conviction in turn had the quality of a moral imperative. It was time to step up:

> 'After Cashgate, everybody pointed a finger at the politicians… So my issue was, if we feel it's the politicians who are not making it right, but when you look at the calibre of politicians who are there, they can't really articulate issues… [S]o I said, "let me go there and be part of the change agents," and that's the reason I joined politics. I wanted to be part of the change process' (Lunguzi 2016).

Felix Njawala (Blantyre Kabula, 2009-14) likewise emerged as a candidate from collective dissatisfaction amongst "youth" in the constituency with the performance of the constituency's MPs hitherto:

> 'So after thorough discussion with colleagues in the constituency, we reached to the conclusion that we needed someone – and unfortunately or fortunately, that someone was me. So I was entrusted with that responsibility, to come in and propose the agenda or rather deliver the agenda that people thought was missing' (Njawala 2017).

Some baldly cite this dissatisfaction with politicians as their preeminent motivation for joining politics. Lifred Nawena (Thyolo Thava, 2009-14) was a university lecturer:

> 'while I was at the university I disliked the idea that even university lecturers and those who are supposed to be, to have been exposed by way of education, were at the receiving end of… [the decisions of those] who comparatively have not gone to school that much. They made the laws and we simply were at the receiving end of what they decided. That bit I disliked. So I decided I would go [into] politics' (Nawena 2017).

Agnes Nyalonje (Mzimba North, 2014-19), meanwhile, was fairly disgusted with most of the MPs she encountered in her work as Malawi country director for an international charity:

> 'I found myself spending a huge amount of time coming like to MPs… advocating and sitting across from people who were not interested, couldn't care less, half of the time they were just sitting, and I would get there and they were saying, "aaaah what about allowances??"…. So I decided… ok I think I will want to join [politics] simply because I know that when I'm in there people will not have to come to me and advocate for the importance of [vital issues]. Because it's so obvious' (Nyalonje 2016).

Esther Jolobala (Machinga East, 2014-) also felt that her gender could make a meaningful contribution to the quality of political leadership in her constituency – and, just as important, be seen to do so locally:

> 'Because I'm coming from a constituency whereby they don't believe in empowering women… I'm the first female Member of Parliament to be elected from that area. It might be it's because of culture because I'm coming from a Muslim community, where we are just understanding now that even women can sit in different positions. Yeah so for a long time we have been electing men. Then I started thinking myself, do I need to wait for someone to come from somewhere to tell me that even myself, I can [stand]? So I made up my mind and I had to explain to my relatives that I know that I can deliver. Actually, I joined politics to serve people where I'm coming from. I know that I have a duty as a Malawian and as a woman to serve my own country and the area I'm coming from' (Jolobala 2016).

Three additional points might be noted regarding these make-a-difference narratives. The first is that while Malawian politicians often judge each other and/or their predecessors extremely harshly (some of the most ferocious anti-politicians are politicians), it is worth noting that such judgements unfailingly imply a compliment to politicians' agency, albeit in the abstract rather than the actuality. For if "the problem" is (bad) politicians, then if only (better) politicians would act in good faith and/or were more accomplished in technocratic terms, then the problem will be solved. Their narratives imply, therefore, an authentic faith in the capacity of individual political actors to make the difference aspirants claim to wish to make, if only they are possessed of sufficient good will.[14]

Secondly, it should be noted that the "difference"/contribution, however precisely or otherwise it is expressed, that MPs stress they wish to make is unfailingly expressed in terms of improving "development." This in turn reflects the ultra-hegemonic status that "development" has, as a

[14] The extent to which this faith survives experience of actually doing the job and of being an MP for a significant period of time is a moot point. Based on my interviews, it is clear that many do become quickly disillusioned with their capacity to effect real change – at least as a humble backbencher, and even at the level of their own constituency never mind at national level.

discourse and *telos* in national and political life, for politicians as individuals as well as for governments collectively. It is almost the only political discourse in operation (in the national, anglophone public sphere, at least), and all issues, it seems, must be channelled into or filtered through it.

Thirdly and finally, it is the development of the *locality* – of the constituency – that is most often cited by aspirant MPs as their paramount concern. Those expressing their motivations for entering politics primarily in terms of national concerns and issues were in a small minority amongst my interviewees. MPs for the most part appear less to "stand *for Parliament*" than to run to be the MP *for their constituency* (as indeed, those who approach them overwhelmingly intend.) If the public-service motivations of aspirant MPs should, as I argue, be taken seriously, then so too should be the fact that public service appears to predominantly translate as *constituency* service.

Indeed, such local orientation need not stop at the constituency-wide level. Intra-constituency politics is often fierce, and often has a primarily geographical basis, as reflected in Dennis Namachekecha-Phiri's (Phalombe North East, 2014-) discussion of his entry into politics:

> 'In Malawi, politics is associated with development, and development will also stress as to where you are coming from. For example, if a politician is coming from Mzimba, *eti* [right]? He will try to do his best to develop Mzimba. Huh? He won't go to Phalombe to develop it, no way! That's how we do in Malawi, [in] Africa basically. So in my case, I come from Mauzi ward… There are two wards [in Phalombe North East constituency]: we've got Mauzi ward and Swang'oma ward. So the people of Mauzi ward wanted me to join politics with a view that Mauzi could be developed. All the previous politicians, Members of Parliament, were coming from the other ward, Swang'oma ward. As a result, Mauzi was sort of backwards as far as development is concerned. So the people there wanted me to assist them in developing [Mauzi ward.]' (Namachekecha-Phiri 2017)

Being in the thick of it

Beyond the ubiquitous make-a-difference narrative and its close relative disparaging the extant political class, other themes also emerge from MPs' origins-stories in terms of their motivations for joining politics. Many cite a long-standing interest in politics as spectators and observers. Knowledge of, and interest in, politics is indeed extensive at least amongst urban and educated Malawians – reflective, perhaps, of the exhaustive (and occasionally exhausting) coverage of political ups and downs offered in Malawian newspapers, as well as other media. One MP, for instance, says that becoming a politician was 'an in-born thing' – he was listening attentively to the news from aged 10, and was always interested in political issues (Anon MP5 2017). Such "innate interest" is often connected with a family involvement in politics (see below.)

For people instinctively interested in politics, the attractions of becoming an MP are obvious – it offers an opportunity to be in the thick of things, and to move at last from the spectating audience to take one's place on the stage of politics as an actor and participant. For many, this is intoxicating. As Reeher (2006, 71) puts it, the 'joy of mattering' should never be underestimated when considering the psychology of politicians. George Nnensa (Balaka South, 2009-14) speaks for many when he cites his desire to enter politics in terms of a long-standing desire 'to have influence in society,' shaped not least by his father and uncle both being MPs in the past (Nnensa 2017). Many interviewees talked of an 'addiction' to politics that only gets worse once one gets inside the tent; veteran MP and minister Henry Mussa (Chiradzulu East, 1999-2019) says: '[I am] deep, deep sunk into politics now. If you cut me, even my blood is politics now!' (Mussa 2017).

Status

It is perhaps a paradox that while the political class is widely despised and disparaged within popular discourses regarding politics and public life in Malawi, it is difficult to find anyone (especially beyond the elite) who does not consider attaining the job of MP to be one of the ultimate symbols of achievement, prestige and status in this society; and not solely for its (real or perceived) opportunities for personal enrichment or aggrandisement, but also because of its conferring of (and validation of) status and importance/honour within this society. Many of my friends and acquaintances in the Lilongwe middle classes despaired of my interest in MPs and could be excoriatingly rude about 'those rogues,' and yet astonished me by acknowledging that they dreamt of someday running for Parliament themselves, and described the pride they would feel in 'representing my people/my community' (Fieldnotes, 2015-17). Similarly, some of my key informants in the academic and activist/civil society communities, who spend a great deal of their professional lives lambasting the political class, would often voice similar sentiments – and there is indeed a history of such persons becoming (unlikely?) parliamentarians.[15]

Many MPs thus acknowledge a self-aggrandising element in their attraction to the job of MP and the status it bestows, both at national and, especially, at constituency level:

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[15] Academic trade unionist Jesse Kabwila (Salima North West, 2014-19) is discussed below. Raphael Kasambara was once one of Malawi's leading human rights lawyers and a strident critic of the Bingu Mutharika administration, who subsequently became Minister of Justice under Joyce Banda (during which time, according to a subsequent criminal trial and conviction, he conspired with others to murder a civil servant.) Long-term civil society activist and government critic Timothy Mtambo, meanwhile, is currently Minister of Civic Education and National Unity in the Chakwera cabinet.

> 'I think it's the status and the power. Being a Member of Parliament brings you a certain status. A certain prestige. And by nature, particularly men, we are ambitious. You want that kind of status, you want that kind of respect and you want that kind of power. I don't know whether you've noticed – Malawians are very good at giving respect… What they think may be different, but [on the surface] they will give you a lot of respect [even if] deep down in their hearts there may be something else. It's that kind of pull… You want to be recognized as a powerful person. Being a Member of Parliament is quite a prestigious job in this country' (A. Shaba 2017).

Not only men, however, appear to be susceptible. This is Nasrin Pillane:

> 'I think it's the respect, it's the recognition, it's the fact that you can walk into any place and get things done as quickly as possible because you are a Member of Parliament. I think that's what you get out of it, it's the power…. People run around you. It's the power that you want, and it becomes addictive' (Pillane 2017).

Politicians 'fall in love with power,' says Davies Katsonga (Mwanza Central, 1999-2009; 2014-19) (Constituency Observation 1 (Katsonga) 2016) and Alekeni Menyani (Dedza North West, 2009-19) appears similarly attuned to the moral and psychological perils of being in politics, and especially of being in politics too long:

> 'It's also perhaps to do with so much respect that you get, because I think this is a job that commands a lot of respect out there, like in the constituencies, especially in the rural setup. And so you feel like you have been elevated to a king status of some sort. And I don't know – it's the same thing as you could ask what keeps dictators in power – most of the times, it's sort of a disease that just eats at you' (Menyani 2016).

Abbie Shaba (Mzimba East, 2004-14) acknowledges that 'the respect you get as a politician – that fascinated me' (A. Shaba 2017). Alexander Kusamba Dzonzi (Dowa West, 2014-19), indeed, is frank about his attraction to the *fear* that politicians can inspire in others (Dzonzi 2016). He expands on this thus:

> 'Since I was a small boy there has been one thing that has actually caught my interest. When this country was a single party, there was the silent understanding that you cannot mention the name of the President, you cannot even discuss the President anywhere because the walls of your home would actually report you to the President. If you are in a forest… the trees may even report you to him and you would be arrested, maybe killed. And as a little boy I didn't really understand what that meant. And that was actually the beginning of my being interested in this game. How can one person wield so much fear in

> people? And the answer was, well, he is a politician, he is the President, or he is a minister. I said "maybe, let me see…"' (Dzonzi 2016).

He is clear that while Kamuzu Banda may be gone, the power and capacity of politicians to evoke fear in others (such that, for instance, they radically alter their behaviour in the politician's presence) remains fascinating, and clearly enticing, to him (Dzonzi 2016).

Such self-interested and self-aggrandizing motivations are real, few MPs seek to deny them, and they are well-represented in popular understandings (both in Africa and elsewhere) and not least literary representations of African politicians as well as academic work (see for example Achebe 2013; Aluko 1970; Kirk-Greene 1991). Such motives can, and do, co-exist with nobler and more public-spirited ones, however, and it is a considerable distortion to fixate upon MPs' supposed lust for power and status as much as it is to fixate on their alleged love of money. Related to such matters, for some MPs the job is clearly a stepping-stone to bigger and better things: to jobs in Cabinet, and perhaps even to the very top. Felix Jumbe (Salima Central, 2014-19), when asked why he became an MP, states simply that he wants to be 'president of this country' (Jumbe 2016). Likewise, however, no such ambitions remotely preclude public-service motivations.

Running (for office) in the family

In many cases there is also a dynastic thread running through the motivations (and motivation-narratives) discussed above. For many, politics runs in the family and their involvement in it is an intergenerational matter connecting them (vocationally and otherwise) with their forbears. Many trace familial roots into the politics of the Banda era and even before.

Dynastic elements may also be key to someone getting approached to enter politics – Nasrin Pillane's (Balaka West, 2009-14) father was a former MP for the area who declined to re-enter politics but was invited to 'give us one of your children because they will still be under your guidance' (Pillane 2017). Thus was Nasrin chosen and her contemplation of an entry into politics begun. Similarly, for George Nnensa (Balaka South, 2009-14):

> 'I would think people are born politicians – because what I would say is that my father was an MP in my constituency, [and] after that my uncle came in as an MP as well… When we were fighting for multiparty democracy, I was quite active… but then I left, I went to Canada to do my Masters' and there I became so active in politics, I was secretary for the Malawi Action Committee. Malawi Action Committee was an international body of Malawians that were fighting for change from outside the country... I was asked to join active politics [and] become an MP but I wanted to finish my… Masters Degree' (Nnensa 2017).

Following his uncle's retirement, he first ran for Parliament in 2004.

It is true of course that dynastic factors may confer legitimacy upon candidates and thus have electoral advantages, as shall be highlighted in Chapter 4. It would be a mistake, however, to presume that dynastic factors are only important to candidates on the basis of political and electoral convenience. For potential candidates, on the contrary, family lineages have real meaning both for their sense of their family's "natural" place in political life, and of their own sense of self in relation to their communities, and of the contribution they might make to those communities in the political arena. One MP, for instance insists that, 'I'm naturally a politician by birth' because 'politics is in the family' – her father, uncles and cousins served in various political positions, some of high rank (Anon MP3 2017). Aaron Sangala (Blantyre Malabada, 2004-19), likewise, points out that his grandfather is represented on the MWK100 note – he was James Sangala (1900-74), founding member and one-time president of the Nyasaland African Congress, the precursor to the MCP. Thus, he says, 'we are political in the family' (A. Sangala 2016).

This sense of one's own and one's family's political role need not always constitute an entirely welcome sense of destiny. While one MP attributes her family's history in politics to her 'having the passion for it' (Anon MP3 2017), for some it invokes a less welcome sense of obligation – both to one's family, as well as to the community. Nasrin Pillane, for instance, felt more obliged than delighted as she made her first steps into the political arena. Selected by her father to represent the family and continue his legacy:

> 'When I started, I thought "I can't do it!"… When I had done my primaries… I just thought "I can't do it," and I remember lying in bed and not wanting to get up, covering my whole head in with the blanket, and my husband was pulling the blanket, pulling me out of bed, saying I have to go and campaign! (*laughs*)' (Pillane 2017).

The Importance of Circumstances

Motivations (that is, active personal desires) to join politics for a positive purpose are not, of course, the only thing to be weighed up when actually considering a run for office. I have already pointed to the significant role that exterior "callings" to enter politics can have on an individual's decision to run for office. The role of personal (family, career and financial) circumstances, and those circumstances being judged "right" for a run for office, are also of great importance.

Women MPs in particular talk of being able to consider an entry into politics only when their children are old enough to relieve them of many of the burdens of motherhood – this was

particularly acute for Agnes Nyalonje, for instance, for whom joining politics also meant returning to Malawi after several decades as an expatriate (Nyalonje 2016). While such considerations fall disproportionately on women, more general concerns about "the time not being right" or being "not ready yet" span the gender divide and invariably relate to family circumstances and in particular to family finances. Many men and women only feel able or seek to join politics once they have retired. All must make some assessment of their financial assets, and a judgement about whether they can afford to mount a credible campaign and how much money they are prepared to lose on a run for Parliament.

The thoughts and feelings of family members, moreover, also figure heavily in entrants' decision-making – even if their ultimate impact varies widely. Dennis Namachekecha-Phiri (Phalombe North East, 2014-) insists he could not so much as contemplate an entry into politics until his late mother had passed away, such was her association of politics (informed especially by the Kamuzu Banda era) with darkness and death – 'she did not want me to die in vain, she did not want that' (Namachekecha-Phiri 2017). Agnes Nyalonje speaks for many in describing the reaction of family members to a mooted entry into politics:

> 'well first of all I spoke to my family and they said "eeeeeerhu oh my God!" (*laughs*), but after they recovered from that and they saw how charged I was, they said that they weren't going to put anything on my path [to block it] anyway' (Nyalonje 2016).

Family concerns and objections are commonplace, and typically revolve primarily around the same concerns as those of one MP's wife, who was 'totally against it' because she felt the family could lose a lot of money and become poor, like the families of so many MPs before them (Anon MP5 2017).

Circumstances can also occasionally "push" people into running for office in curious ways – far above and beyond the appeals of a delegation of constituents to do so. Several MPs who had been opposition activists prior to entering Parliament, pointed out that the high public profile offered to a Member of Parliament, alongside parliamentary immunity from prosecution, provided a kind of refuge from government harassment (actual or potential) for which they were grateful and which incentivised their entry into politics. Billy Kaunda (Blantyre City South East, 2004-09; Mzimba West, 2009-14, 2019-), for instance, one of Malawi's leading popular musicians, released a song in 2003 that was heavily critical of then-President Muluzi's attempts to alter the Constitution to allow him to run for a third term. As a result, he claims, there were numerous plots from government against his life. While acknowledging that the approaches of local people did help to incentivise him and to rate his chances of election favourably, he acknowledges that in large part he joined politics because otherwise he feared he would have no voice, no-one to speak for him and no-one to defend his life. He felt protected by running

for office, and by being in a party, 'in a grouping' under the wing of well-connected and well-informed former minister Brown Mpinganjira, who had split with Muluzi over the third-term issue and formed his own National Democratic Alliance (NDA) (B. Kaunda 2017).[16]

Jesse Kabwila's (Salima North West, 2014-19) arrival into politics was sparked by her confrontation with the Bingu wa Mutharika government in her role as president of the academic staff union at Zomba's Chancellor College (the largest constituent college of the University of Malawi) during the academic freedom crisis in 2010. Having, in her words, 'defeated' the President, she became 'known as an academic freedom fighter. So after that the academic space became too political for me. Nobody could just read me as a Senior Lecturer that I was. I came to be seen much more as a politician' (Kabwila 2016). Here too Dr Kabwila felt the weight of particular circumstances pushing her into politics – her new-found status as a political actor and the closing off, as she saw it, of her capacity to remain in academia as a "neutral" Senior Lecturer in Education. 'I always say politics found me,' she says, and expresses bitter regret that it ever did so:

> 'I don't have time to read anymore, I don't have time to connect with friends, to be with family. I've one daughter. It's come at a huge price… So there are times when I wake up in the morning and ask [myself], "can I still recognise that which I see in the mirror?"… I told you politics should never get my soul. So every day it's about negotiating, and I ask myself – "was I right [to get involved]?" And I say, "no." I don't think I was. I think my skills would have been better used in academia as a researcher, as an activist. But I'm here [now] – and for the sake of those who believe in me I will do this, and I will do it well… But at the bottom of my heart I know this was a mistake' (Kabwila 2016).

While all decisions to join formal politics must ultimately of course be pro-active in that they finally rest upon a positive commitment of time, energy, and most likely money in order to run for office, Dr Kabwila's narrative is an indicator that some such decisions are considerably more self-initiated, and happily made, than others.

In summary, then, I find the widespread conception that Malawian MPs are solely motivated to enter politics for their own financial gain to be unconvincing. While this motivation is clearly very real and cannot be disregarded, it is a considerable over-simplification. Candidates may or may not be attracted by the salary and perks of office, however they are also attracted by the

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[16] Respondents acknowledge that such fears of harassment have varied greatly depending on the willingness of particular governments to target and harass their opponents. The Muluzi government, for instance, was typically cited by several as a more egregious culprit in this regard than any of the administrations that have followed it (Nnensa 2017).

opportunity to represent and to serve – and to serve, above all, their (home) constituencies. Many feel they have something to offer, and this in turn is informed in many cases by a family history in politics. Many are very critical of the extant political leadership both nationally and in their constituencies, but what also emerges clearly from MP narratives is a sense of optimism about the possibilities of politics. Indeed, those who are most critical of the status quo, and cynical about the motivations of colleagues, are often the most emphatic about the potential of politics still to be a place where one can do good (Lunguzi 2016; Nyalonje 2016).

This apparent paradox also appears to be reflected in wider public discourse and perceptions at least as I encountered them: to the extent one might wish to "rationalise" the simultaneous presence both of huge popular cynicism about politics/politicians yet also a strong feeling that the position of MP commands enormous status, prestige and respect, it is presumably that whilst the current crop of politicians (and indeed most of their predecessors) may be seen to have been "rogues," there are nevertheless always exceptions – and the possibility of doing the job well such that the honour and prestige accorded is actually deserved. The job of MP remains one in which people can still have the high honour of genuinely representing and serving their communities – however much actual MPs are invariably felt to fall drastically short.

For all the cynicism at large in the body politic (much of it, no doubt, deserved), the idea of parliamentary politics as a realm so corrupted that only private, self-aggrandising ends are pursued has not, therefore, subsumed all else – neither amongst its aspirants and participants, nor amongst the wider public. There is still a strong, genuine *conviction* (and not just a hollow rhetoric) of politics as a place where public goods and ends not only should but genuinely *can* be pursued – even if, admittedly, against what are often described by politicians themselves as huge odds. It seems, then, that the 'civic public' can be said to retain genuine value-rational content amongst both MPs as individuals as well as the wider political discourse, and remains, mercifully, a realm in which it is seen that interests beyond the private might still be striven for and aspired to – a low bar, admittedly, but one that a great deal of commentary concerned with African politicians often seems inclined to refute (cf Ekeh 1975).

The "home" constituency

As was implied in the discussion of MPs' constituency-service-centric motivations above, the vast majority of Malawian MPs describe themselves as running in their "home" constituency. This is in sharp contrast with the situation in a country such as the UK, for example, where politicians have historically tended to be recruited by more or less centralised party machines, and where it is by no means the norm for MPs to represent "where they are from." In Malawi, by contrast, such claims are ubiquitous, and an enormous premium is placed upon being able to

claim, in Fenno's (2003, 58) terms, that, "I am one of you"; and in Malawi the relevant bonds of commonality being stressed here are overwhelmingly ethno-geographic. In short, aspirant MPs seek to establish that they are (at least in some sense) "from" the constituency that they seek to represent.

In few cases, however, will this be an entirely simple issue. In particular, despite the fact that enormous importance is attached to aspirants' personal-familial connections to the constituency, few are likely to actually have their primary residence in the area by the time they are making a run for Parliament – if indeed they ever did so. Over 90% of my interviewees, for instance, reported living in one of Malawi's handful of urban centres immediately prior to running for office.

Nevertheless their "home" constituency (or constituencies) is generally self-evident, and will depend on family and ancestral links. The precise contours of such links and which are most culturally and politically salient will depend on the traditions of specific ethnic groups – in particular whether they are from matrilineal or patrilineal cultures. For Collins Kajawa (Lilongwe Mpenu Nkhoma, 2014-), for instance, his constituency is his home constituency because, in matrilineal Chewa society, 'my mum… came from there' (Kajawa 2016). Likewise for Esther Jolobala (Machinga East, 2014-), a Yao:

> 'in the eastern [Yao] part of Malawi… children, they're taken as they're coming where their mother is coming from. So it's my mother's home. We can say our ancestors' home because it's where my grandmother is coming from. So I grew up there, starting Standard 1 up to Standard 8 there. I only left there when… I started secondary school education' (Jolobala 2016).

Davies Katsonga (Mwanza Central, 1999-2009; 2014-19), meanwhile – being from patrilineal Ngoni culture – considers Mwanza his "home" because his father, the late politician Chester Katsonga, was from there (Katsonga 2015).

Urban constituencies are a qualified exception here (Malawi is less than 20% urbanised (World Factbook (CIA) 2021).) It is simultaneously more likely that urban candidates will actually reside on a regular basis in their would-be constituency than their rural counterparts, yet also far less likely that they will consider these constituencies "home." Bonds of mere residence are far shallower than the links of family and ancestry that typically bind aspirants to rural constituencies. Indeed, Aaron Sangala's (Blantyre Malabada, 2004-19) immediate family have lived in Blantyre since 1921 and yet he still talks about Zomba district, from which they moved, as his "home district" (A. Sangala 2016). As Geschiere and Gugler (1998, 309) argue, '[a] special characteristic of urbanisation in Africa is the continuing commitment of many urbanites to 'the village.''

There is nevertheless generally some room for manoeuvre should political or other circumstances necessitate or encourage a deviation from the most obvious constituency choice. Whilst Hornsby (1989, 285), discussing 1980s Kenya, finds that the "home" constituency is fixed, and defined in most cases by literal birthplace, I find the category somewhat more fluid and less clear-cut. Other family links, links through marriage, and residence, can also be employed to make a claim as a credible and suitable representative and MP for an area. Indeed I once enjoyed a lengthy car journey with an MP as he talked me through the whole manner of ways in which he could claim to be from (or "of") huge swathes of the country – from his own self-defined "home" district from which his mother came, to his father's home district, to those of his wife and her extended family, to various urban areas in which he had resided, to increasingly tenuous links to distant members of his family, and so on; around half of the country seemed to be included by the end (Fieldnotes, 2016).

More concretely, the aforementioned Davies Katsonga of Mwanza Central – a former Minister, Speaker of Parliament, and then backbench government MP – announced in July 2018 his decision to abandon his attempt to retain his Mwanza Central constituency in the May 2019 elections, citing internal party politics that favoured his long-standing constituency rival, Nicholas Dausi (Mwanza Central, 2009-14; 2019-) (Nation Online 2018). He (ultimately unsuccessfully) contested Zomba Ntonya instead, citing that he grew up and studied in Zomba, and that his parents are buried there (Nation Online 2018). Such shifts are not entered into lightly, but they are not uncommon when political circumstances necessitate.

Several MPs in the approach to the 2019 elections found themselves in similarly unpromising positions against a rival in the same party and sought nomination in neighbouring constituencies, citing family links and connections as they did so. DPP MP Felix Jumbe (Salima Central, 2014-19) moved to Salima North in order to make way for then-Minister of Justice Samuel Tembenu (Salima Central, 2009-14), whom Jumbe himself had defeated in 2014 as an MCP candidate (he defected in 2018, having sat as an independent for some time after being removed from the MCP for "disloyalty" to the Chakwera leadership) (Nyasa Times 2018); Amon Nkhata (Kasungu Central, 2014-19) likewise decided to contest in Kasungu West in 2019, in what was widely considered a strategic decision to make way for veteran politician Sam Kandodo Banda (Radio247 2018). (Neither of these candidates were ultimately successful in winning the new seat.)

While such moves remain relatively unusual in rural areas, they are more common in urban constituencies where the incumbency-disadvantage is still-higher, such that it is extremely

unusual for an MP to retain their seat.[17] Billy Kaunda (Blantyre City South East, 2004-9; Mzimba West, 2009-14, 2019-), for instance, succeeded in his urban-to-rural move in 2009, while former minister Moses Kunkuyu (Blantyre City South, 2009-14) failed in his bid for (rural) Dedza South in 2014. In the run-up to the 2014 election, meanwhile, incumbent Lilongwe City Centre MP Shadreck Jonas was defeated in his own DPP party primary, before promptly moving to rural Dowa (his wife's home district) to contest in the rival MCP party primaries just weeks later (Nyasa Times 2014). He won that primary but went on to lose the general election to the DPP candidate.

In sum, then, when it comes to choosing a constituency, there is an unambiguous discursive stress in the wider political culture upon candidates being "sons" or "daughters" of the constituency. While such bonds are of course instrumentalised (and by constituents too) and are subject to the kind of rational-political strategizing and manipulation detailed above, it would nevertheless be a mistake to dismiss these bonds as necessarily solely of political and instrumental concern to (aspirant) politicians. These bonds of kith, kin and lineage are likely to be of profound personal importance to the politician as a human being and are likely also to play a part in the striking extent to which, as discussed above, politicians discuss their motivations and rewards in politics in relation to their desire to serve and to improve conditions in their *constituency*.

At the same time, we ought not to romanticise such bonds – either in terms of their importance to MPs above and beyond their political and strategic value, or indeed in terms of their wider utility. Modernising MP Juliana Lunguzi (Dedza East, 2014-19) acknowledges that her own links to her constituency were tenuous after decades of absence but that the good name of her father (a former Inspector General of Police and son of the constituency) secured her the MCP nomination over candidates who, she feels, much more truly belonged to the local community and local party than herself (Lunguzi 2016). In Lunguzi's view, the stress on bonds of lineage over those of residence may actually obviate the need for deep and close affinity underpinned by personal connections and everyday familiarity with the community. It is certainly true, after all, that few of those approached to stand for a rural constituency actually live there, and that MPs are overwhelmingly drawn from the strata of comparatively wealthy urbanites.

[17] At the 2014 election – as in 2009 – two-thirds of MPs elected were not in the previous parliament (Smiddy and Young 2009, 665). Parliamentary turnover rates, as in many African democracies, are very high by global standards (Barkan 2009, 65; 83; 148) and Malawian MPs, in short, face a marked incumbency *dis*advantage. For women MPs, prospects appear to be worse still – only 14% retained their seats in 2014 (O'Neil et al 2016, 41) and for urban MPs worst of all – only one (Aaron Sangala, Blantyre Malabada) retained his seat in 2014.

Choosing a party

In the US and perhaps especially the UK, political parties serve not only as crucial mediating institutions in terms both of entering politics and navigating one's wider political career once in office, but also emerge as critical to political identity and political formation, often from a young age (Crewe 2015, 17–41; Reeher 2006, 35–46). African political parties are seen very differently in multiple ways, but not least of these, and most relevant to my purposes here, is in terms of their assumed importance to politicians – for whom they tend to be seen as mere vehicles for self-interest (see for instance Rakner, Svåsand, and Khembo 2007; Young 2014). Leaders are seen to establish and operate "briefcase parties" – basically personalist and clientelist factions masquerading as "proper," mass-membership, socially-grounded political parties – for the purposes of competing for power in what is formally, after all, a multiparty and parliamentary constitutional framework (Chunga 2014, 9). Followers such as MPs and parliamentary candidates are likewise seen to join such parties in the hope of attaching themselves to those leaders by whose coattails they might best advance and secure their own interests. Hence, of course, the ubiquity of "chameleonism," as politicians jump from party to party and as elite 'fissions and fusions' make and re-make the parties themselves (see Rakner, Svåsand, and Khembo 2007) – one of the earliest studies of post-Banda Malawian politics was even entitled 'A Democracy of Chameleons' (Englund 2002c) and Daniel Young has talked of 'politics without positions' (D. J. Young 2014). To the extent that such manoeuvrings are understood to be constrained by factors in the wider society, ethnic ties are commonly understood to fundamentally shape such competition, with politicians constrained by the ethnic voting allegiances that they themselves cynically encourage in the population in their pursuit of a support base.

Party takers

As far as Malawian MPs' perceptions relate to these debates, it is certainly the case that they feel constrained by the ethnoregional voting allegiances of the population, many of them acutely so. Indeed, many MPs talk in terms that make clear that their choice of party was to a greater or lesser extent made for them by these allegiances. Notwithstanding long-running academic debates regarding the origins, salience, and overall role of ethnicity in African politics, as far as Malawian MPs are concerned ethnoregional identities and their political salience are simply an unquestionable, and unquestioned, fact of political life and of the social terrain that they confront – one which, as politicians, they have no choice but to work with and to navigate. As Esther Jolobala (Machinga East, 2014-) says:

> 'Politics in Malawi – we follow where you are coming from. If you are coming from the Southern region, you have to look which party is familiar [popular] in

> that region. If you are coming from the Eastern region, it's the same, Central region, it's the same, [and in] the North' (Jolobala 2016).

There is, then, a widespread acceptance of a pre-existing (political) reality into which MPs have to fit – and in this way many MPs see themselves as effectively "party takers." For Abbie Shaba (Mzimba East, 2004-14), for instance, being from a Northern constituency in 2004:

> 'there was no doubt at all [that I would seek to join AFORD] because then the precedent had already been set that you have regional parties… I had no choice, I wanted to join AFORD… there was no doubt whatsoever… The assumption from the local party leadership of AFORD in the area was that this is the party which we should join. There was no question about it' (A. Shaba 2017).[18]

For Shaba, the choice of party is expressed in baldly instrumental-calculation terms – he wanted to join AFORD as it was (or so he thought) the party vehicle most likely to deliver him victory in that constituency at that time.

MPs in the heartland areas of other parties talk in overwhelmingly similar terms. 'I [stood] as UDF ticket, and I won up to now – I'm still a Member of Parliament for UDF because the area that I come from, the UDF is popular' (Yaumi Mpaweni, Balaka Central East, 2009-19; (2016)). Victor Musowa (Mulanje Bale, 2014-) likewise was encouraged to stand by members of the community and:

> 'when they gave me a positive note I had to ask them if they wanted me to join a political party – which they did, which according to the community here, you need to join the DPP' (Musowa 2016).

Musowa is by no means alone, indeed, amongst aspirants who report being essentially instructed which party to join by those who approach them to stand in the first place. One MP, for instance, was not approached by party activists *per se*, but was nevertheless told by 'traditional leaders and the faith groups from my community,' who did approach her, that she

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[18] As it happens, he was wrong. Having established itself in 1994 as the "Northern" party, led by Northerner and trade unionist Chakufwa Chihana, many in the region had been left alienated by Chihana's on-again, off-again alliances with first the UDF government, then the MCP opposition, and then the UDF government again. 'What I didn't realise was that at that particular time in 2003, 2002-3, AFORD actually had ceased to exist in the North. But being based in Lilongwe I didn't know that' (A. Shaba 2017) – which recalls Juliana Lunguzi's suggestion noted above that MPs may be linked by long-standing ties of lineage to their constituencies (and may indeed harbour profound attachments to these constituencies) but may nevertheless be out of touch with their political and other realities on the ground. AFORD's support had indeed collapsed in 2004 – the party went from a tally of 29 MPs in 1999 (most of the Northern region's seats) to just 6 MPs in 2004. Shaba ironically ended up losing the AFORD primary yet winning as an independent.

should stand for the dominant party in her area, and had their support only on that basis (Anon MP3 2017).

The vast majority of MPs talk in at least somewhat similar terms about their choice of party involving at least some (strong) element of pure political calculation and strategizing. For those in constituencies where no single party is entirely dominant, however, the choice (or, as it were, non-choice) is obviously less stark. This can be both a blessing and a curse. Few are not ultimately thankful for a (relatively) safe seat, one in which they feel that, because of their party affiliation, 'I can even go to America on a holiday [for the entire campaign] and come back on election day, I would [still] win!' (Mlombwa 2017). However, one heartland seat MP is nevertheless envious of those 'lucky' enough to have the far-greater room for manoeuvre in terms of party affiliation (and the possibilities of party-switching) that a "swing" constituency represents (Anon MP3 2017).[19] Regardless of such room for manoeuvre, however, MPs and candidates still see their practical choices as constrained in fundamental ways by a pre-ordained "character" or "reality" of the constituency – its ethnoregional allegiances (and consequent voting preferences) being the key aspect here. MPs see these fundamentals as "given" – they are things to which they themselves must adapt, and over which they have no control.

Such constraints are offset, however, by the fact that ever-evolving political circumstances may open up new and surprising possibilities for creative political entrepreneurship. New parties (especially those such as the DPP in 2005 or the PP in 2012 which happen suddenly to be led by a sitting president) may open up new possibilities for strategizing about party choice in all manner of constituencies, as might the performance of a sitting president and his/her party. Who could have predicted, for instance, that DPP-affiliated parliamentary candidates could almost sweep the board in (Kamuzu Banda's home district and arch-MCP heartland) Kasungu district in 2009, owing to the unprecedented popularity of President Bingu wa Mutharika? President Joyce Banda's incumbency in 2014, meanwhile, likewise changed electoral calculations across the nation and allowed her new People's Party to elect MPs from Chitipa in the North to Zomba in the South and East. Similarly, the UDF once dominated the Southern Region and was seen to be "the Southern party." This was the case as late as 2004. Just six months later, however, President Mutharika had left the party and established the DPP. Within just a few years, the DPP was "the Southern party" and the UDF reduced to a rump in the Muslim Yao East. And most MPs in "safe" UDF seats were quite suddenly very much not.

[19] "Chameleonism," of course, does not cease upon entry to Parliament – MPs' manoeuvrings can often change the composition of a parliament across the length of its term, in particular at the outset (as independents return to their "mother parties") and at the end as the next election approaches (see Young 2014).

While the basic "character" or "reality" of a constituency is not seen to change, then, the relationship between that reality and the wider political and party system decidedly *can* (even in the hitherto most electorally predictable of constituencies) – allowing always for at least the possibility of politicians and aspirants responding creatively and strategically to these wider developments and forging new political paths.[20] (Although these manoeuvrings certainly need not always be successful! The third-place performance of the governing People's Party in 2014, for instance, was a highly unpleasant surprise for many veterans and newcomers alike who had pinned themselves to its colours. The possibilities of calculating anew always allow for the possibility of *mis*calculating anew, and in potentially myriad ways.)

This is fortunate, of course, because circumstances may frequently *force* creative strategizing, especially if one's first-choice avenue is closed off. Only one person ultimately gets to be the party's candidate in any one of its heartland constituencies – obliging all those who have tried and failed to secure that nomination to consider alternative paths (see also next chapter.) An increasingly viable option is to run as an independent candidate. One former DPP minister and MP in the Central Region, meanwhile, admitted that she would ideally prefer to secure the MCP nomination for the 2019 election in her constituency, given its electoral advantages in her part of the country (and notwithstanding her past as a proud member of the DPP government). She reluctantly concluded, however, that 'I think I have to stick to DPP,' because her prospective MCP-primary opponent was an incumbent MP of high rank and influential connections, and she stood no chance, in her estimation, of unseating him as the party's official candidate. She hoped, however, given his poor record in office, that she had a chance nonetheless of ultimately defeating him in the more democratic context of the general election (Anon MP2 2017). Such are the always-particular local political circumstances in which MPs and candidates operate and which can shift, influence, and ultimately determine their choice of political party affiliation (or none) – and often on a nakedly instrumental basis.

What parties mean

However, while electoral/political calculations are clearly enormously important for almost any MP as far as their choice of party is concerned (indeed quite unabashedly so), it would nevertheless be a mistake to conclude that parties have no meaning for MPs beyond the purely instrumental jostling for self-interest (*pace* for example Rakner, Svåsand, and Khembo 2007; Englund 2002a). Even here, in an area which by MPs' own admission is steeped in rational-instrumental calculation, a materialist-reductionist analysis is not called for. What is

[20] This includes the increased opportunities in recent years for "independent" candidates to not only stand but actually win, which is perhaps putting the concept of a "safe seat" anywhere in Malawi somewhat in jeopardy – see next chapter.

interesting, in fact, is how such self-interested electoral/political considerations can run up against others. There is very often much more going on, connected to personal and family histories and the meanings of parties for MPs as people. Party identifications can run much deeper.

For Alekeni Menyani (Dedza North West, 2009-19):

> 'I would say I have always been MCP [because]… my father worked for the… Malawi government for a very long time in Dr. Banda's regime, and so, so naturally it also happens that my mother is from Kasungu where the MCP is also very strong and my father is from Dedza where the MCP… also has its other roots, also very strong. And so, naturally, I have been involved in activities of the party at a passive level for quite some time' (Menyani 2016).

This family history and, crucially, ethnoregional origins, make Menyani, in his own mind, a "natural" MCP loyalist and he was to some extent politically socialised within the party. Crucially, then, the MCP was not merely the "natural" choice for him in electoral/political calculation terms (although of course, as a candidate in Dedza North West, it was), but this affiliation is something "natural" to him in a much deeper and more personal sense.

MCP MPs are particularly likely to discuss their party affiliation in such terms. Clement Mlombwa (2017) is a case in point, whilst frankly acknowledging the importance of pure political calculation also:

> 'My father used to be the [local] party chairman for the MCP… So the people know that my blood is MCP (*laughs*)… Plus the area is predominantly MCP. I wouldn't accept, even if somebody from a different party approached me, that I would stand for that party, because then I would lose.'

While no other party can come close to rivalling the MCP's longevity since the colonial era, and thus its capacity to inspire a long-standing, family-historical loyalty as an institution in its own right, it would be a mistake to conclude that other parties cannot also inspire loyalty and identification. MPs often talk of themselves as being "naturally" one party or another, for instance – and not just in the MCP. The "natural-ness" of such ties, moreover, appears to be clearly rooted in ethnoregional identity. As Dennis Namacheckecha-Phiri (Phalombe North East, 2014-) says:

> 'Naturally, I should be honest, I'm natural pro-DPP… I would say DPP is the party for the South, although I know it is a national party. But the base of the DPP is the South and I come from the South, and Phalombe [in particular] is actually, I mean is always for DPP, yeah… DPP is associated with Lomwe, I am Lomwe… Lomwe Belt is DPP – nobody [else] can go there and win, no way' (Namachekecha-Phiri 2017).

What is more:

> 'People knew I was DPP. They knew I was DPP because, apart from the [regional party affiliations], we have got our own cultural grouping [/association] called Mulhako wa Alomwe, and I happened to be one of the seniors in Mulhako wa Alomwe. There is no way I could have turned against my party, there is no way! Despite being independent [in 2014] – they knew I was independent [only] because there was no intraparty democracy at primaries' (see next chapter) (Namachekecha-Phiri 2017).

There is more to party loyalty and identification, however, than ethnoregional loyalties. After all, few ethnic groups in Malawi and no region can be said to entirely follow one party. Ethnicity may heavily shape and impact upon MPs' party loyalty, but it is neither sufficient as an account, nor indeed determining. Veteran Blantyre politician Aaron Sangala (Blantyre Malabada, 2004-19) has been in many parties but stayed loyal to the MCP throughout the 1990s – certainly not the "natural" thing to do as a politically-engaged or -ambitious Southerner at that time:

> 'I still stayed in Malawi Congress Party, thinking that as young people we would change the mindset, to make it compatible to the realities of the day. That's the real reason for staying there. But also giving credit to Banda, over the [achievements of the previous] administration – although I am not Chewa, but I am (*chuckles*) Mang'anja, this has to taken into account' (A. Sangala 2016).

The MCP continues, then, to be associated not merely with Chewa-ness but also with the legacy of Hastings Banda – both his authoritarian-disciplinarianism (an increasingly popular mood in Malawi, reflected also in Bingu's regime and thus the image of the DPP – see final chapter) as well as his developmental emphasis on agriculture and the interests of rural farmers. This latter is emphasised as crucial even by such a socially progressive figure as Jesse Kabwila MP (Salima North West, 2014-19), who might seem a strange fit for such a historically conservative party, but who stresses her loyalty to the MCP in terms of its status as a reasonably functioning, institutionalised, organised political party with deep roots in communities themselves (at least in the Central Region); as opposed to all other parties in the country, which she sees as briefcase parties and personalist vehicles for one person or one family, with few real connections with the wider society (Kabwila 2016).

It is also clear that loyalty to a particular leader personally or, more often, to their legacy, is often a key component of party loyalty and identification cited by MPs. This is certainly true, as Sangala indicates above, of Hastings Banda and the MCP but equally also in less-established parties of younger provenance. What emerges from DPP partisans, for instance – and far beyond its Lomwe belt or wider Southern region heartlands – is a strong association with the leadership and legacy of Bingu wa Mutharika, the party's founding president. Although perhaps

best known outside of Malawi for the economic and political traumas of his final years in office, in Malawi he remains primarily associated with the unprecedented economic growth and prosperity of his first term, as well as with a disciplinarian and autocratic style of leadership that drew explicitly upon Rwanda's Paul Kagame as well as Kamuzu Banda, whom Mutharika actively rehabilitated (see final chapter).

Much of Alexander Kusamba Dzonzi's (Dowa West, 2014-19) early moves in politics were in the DPP – despite his Dowa home being an MCP heartland district – because, as he says:

> 'I was convinced!… The guy [Bingu] changed this country from a hunger-stricken country to [one of] abundance' (Dzonzi 2016).

Similar sentiments can be found amongst politicians across the country and across the parties, and Bingu remains a highly respected figure ubiquitous in DPP rhetoric and whose image remains emblazoned across much of the DPP cloth and clothing. Citing Bingu's tenure in office, many MPs associate the DPP with "development" above all, and food security (the party's emblem is a maize cob, from which Malawi's staple food is derived) – and many cite this and their admiration of Mutharika as their reason for joining the DPP, even in MCP-Chewa heartlands (Kalilani 2016; T. Mwale 2017; Anon MP2 2017). Meanwhile Lifred Nawena (Thyolo Thava, 2009-14) was an outspoken and troublesome DPP backbencher from its Lomwe heartlands, persecuted and ultimately de-selected by his party and consequently defeated by its official candidate in the 2014 elections. He thinks, moreover, that it stole those elections both in his constituency and at national-presidential level. Despite all this, he remains a loyal DPP member:

> 'I was approached to join [People's Party, after Joyce Banda became president] but I refused. I don't think I can join any other party in this country if I left DPP. The reason is very simple…. DPP is the only party in this country which has the right vision for the nation. That's my view, except that after the passing on of Bingu, Peter [Mutharika] has failed to actualize that vision. I mean I'm talking of things like the decision to construct a port at Nsanje. That was in my view a very powerful tool that was going to help to bring this country, to develop this country. Bingu always [had] vision, his vision was to, to build to have the Greenbelt which was going to ensure that we have food enough for the country, and exports. Bingu intended to construct 6 universities for the nation. All of these things have fallen apart since the death of Bingu' (Nawena 2017).

This expression of disappointment with Peter Mutharika's government is a view well-represented amongst DPP loyalists within and far beyond parliament, but for Nawena and many others the DPP is bigger than its treatment of him, or its current performance in government, or even its mere incumbency. It has an identity and essence beyond these things, rooted in Bingu's developmental vision and leadership.

The other parties represented in the 2014-19 parliament, the former governing UDF and PP, are both associated with their respective periods in government (1994-2004 under Bakili Muluzi for UDF; 2012-14 under Joyce Banda for PP) – neither of which are remembered with much fondness, associated as they are with undisciplined "freedom" and licence, and consequent outbreaks of rampant corruption and general economic disorder and decline (see final chapter.) Both parties are still alive but are shadows of their former selves, increasingly resembling mere briefcase parties, with little identity or loyalty of their own as distinct from that accruing personally to their leaders. The once-mighty UDF has long been reduced to a south-eastern rump in Mangochi, Machinga and to some extent Zomba, where it now appears to be an ethno-religious party for the Muslim Yao population who dominate in those districts.

It is widely held, finally, that loyalty to the People's Party is skin-deep – the party went from a handful of MPs on the day of Joyce Banda's sudden ascension to the presidency to approximately 110 MPs just four months later in August 2012 (Svåsand 2014, 284). Those who joined the party therefore have a reputation for being prepared to jump ship in pursuit of money and positions – for themselves or (in a considerably rarer and more generous version of this narrative) at least for their constituencies. Several women MPs do however point to Banda's status as Malawi's, and one of Africa's, first female leaders as being genuinely significant and inspiring for them. Agnes Nyalonje (Mzimba North, 2014-19), for instance, cites this as well as her attraction to the new president's de-tribalized vision, as her key motivation for joining the PP, perhaps even for entering politics at all:

> 'JB [Joyce Banda] came in and for me – regardless of what has happened since then – for me what happened at that point was when she got up and spoke, she sounded like somebody who was serious about unity in the country because I was seeing also lack of unity, this politicization of everything and the tribal whatever, that is a big undertow that prevents our development…. So I decided the time was right, I was going to go for it' (Nyalonje 2016).

At least one other female MP felt ultimately unable to defect for political-electoral reasons, but dearly wished she could, and for the same reason (Anon MP3 2017). Lacking, however, a stable heartland or "home area," however small – notably unlike the UDF – a mere five PP MPs were elected in 2019, and the party looks to be in terminal decline.

In sum, then, parties mean more for MPs than simply meaningless factions by which to compete for power – although just how much more will vary by MP and, moreover, by party. All parties can attract genuine and sincere identification and loyalty, but there is little doubt that some can and do command considerably more of such identification and loyalty than others.

What is more, and crucially, there is often a profound disconnect between the party loyalties we have been discussing, and MPs' actual current party *affiliations*. One MP describes himself as absolutely/die-hard "naturally" MCP, yet in the course of a reasonably lengthy political career has spent far more time *outside* the MCP, and in other parties, than he has spent inside it (Constituency Observation 2 (Kadzamira) 2016). Dennis Namachekecha-Phiri, quoted at length above describing DPP as the Lomwe party and thus his "natural" party, entered Parliament in 2014 as an independent, and having defeated the DPP candidate in Phalombe North East. This disconnect neatly points to the interplay between such deeper attachments and principles, and the vagaries of the political system in which MPs find themselves, riven as it is with ever-shifting elite 'fissions and fusions' – and in which they of course are concerned to pursue their own personal and political interests by, where necessary, being "chameleons" and manoeuvring appropriately (see Rakner, Svåsand, and Khembo 2007).

But given this disconnect, isn't it affiliation that ultimately matters? Don't we see self-interest and meaningless factionalism winning out, rendering all such talk by MPs regarding deeper party loyalties and attachments simply so much hot air? This would certainly be a popular view, but I wish to push against it. In fact, the ultimate outcome of this tenson between (for want of a better phrase) "principle" and self-interested expediency – one faced endlessly by all politicians – is rarely simple and/or binary. When it comes to their strategizing and manoeuvring regarding their party affiliation, for example, MPs frequently talk in terms of "red lines" – of being prepared to do X to advance themselves but to draw the line at Y; of being prepared to join parties A or B should that prove convenient, but never parties C or D (Fieldnotes, 2017). Perhaps the most frequent sentiment expressed in this respect comes in terms of a negative attitude towards the MCP and a refusal to ever contemplate joining it – on grounds generally of its association with the regime of Kamuzu Banda (a hated figure for some) as well as a certain amount of openly, if anonymously, expressed anti-Chewa prejudice (Anon MP, 2016; Fieldnotes, 2017). On the other hand, I spoke to several MPs who admitted being prepared to switch parties if it looked electorally profitable, but could not contemplate joining the DPP regardless of the inducements of incumbency. Such sentiments were expressed in terms of their revulsion at the violence and repression of the Bingu years, as well as the alleged corruption and dishonesty of the then-current administration (Anon MP, 2016; Fieldnotes, 2017). In matters of party choice, then, as in many others – self-interested political expediency and personal factionalism undoubtedly play a major role for politicians, but are far from being all that matters or all that is going on. Principles, commitments, ideas, and ideologies are at work in Malawian politics and wider society, and amongst MPs in Parliament at least as much as anywhere else.

Conclusion – 'Of' or 'Apart'?

Politicians, and perhaps nowhere more than Africa, are often disparaged and dismissed as "elites" – by which is meant that they are most likely self-interested and self-serving, and certainly that they are separate, disconnected, out-of-touch with the constituents and wider populations whom they claim to represent and over whom they rule; that they are in short "apart from," rather than "of," their communities and societies (Corbett 2015, 50–51). This chapter has argued, however, that in Malawi at least this is a caricature.

It is true that most politicians are "apart" in some significant ways. They mostly live in urban areas, away from the constituencies in which they stand. They are also typically significantly wealthier than the vast majority of their constituents, and more highly educated. It is exactly on the basis of these comparatively rare attributes, in fact, that they are approached to run for Parliament in the first place and can afford to mount a credible campaign.

However, and while self-interest is of course never absent from politics, MPs are socially-embedded and -connected beings as well as political ones, and genuine human and social bonds and connections are crucial in their decision-making – including their motivations for joining politics. Their being approached, their desire to make a contribution, their profound concern with conditions in their constituencies – all of these speak precisely to MPs' social concern and to their connectedness with societies, communities and families which profoundly shape their political activities. So too, moreover, do their finding of a constituency in which to stand (and to which they are invariably linked by family and other deep affective ties) and even, to some extent, their choosing of a party to join and of which to seek nomination.

Of course, such affective social bonds can and do themselves become instrumentalised and manipulated to some extent, they will always mean more to some than to others, and there is invariably a heavy dose of self-interested and rational-political calculation involved in such decisions too. To only see the latter in politicians' decision-making, however, is analytically impoverishing.

Chapter 3: Baptisms of Fire: Navigating the Primary Process

Introduction

In the outpouring of academic work that naturally followed the political transitions of the "third wave," one form of election was very little studied – those held within political parties themselves to select their (parliamentary) candidates. In recent years, however, a small – but now burgeoning – literature has begun to emerge to correct this neglect. In many young African democracies, after all, primary elections are clearly important aspects of the political process. Nowhere is this more true than in Malawi, where primaries are – by continental and indeed global standards – unusually decentralised and, at least theoretically, unusually "democratic" in terms of the scale of involvement of local people at the grassroots (Seeberg and Wahman 2019). For almost any aspirant to the Malawian parliament, primaries are a major and recurring obstacle to navigate en route to starting or continuing their political life.

In established Northern democracies, primary elections are generally seen to 'generate nominees that have higher valence – better campaigning skills and popularity within the party – at the potential cost of being more ideologically extreme' (Ichino and Nathan 2018, 369). Scholars looking at primaries in Africa's younger democratic systems, however, have stressed the difficulty of applying this framework to those countries – not least because ideological contestation between primary candidates is generally minimal (Ichino and Nathan 2018, 369). Instead, primaries are seen to be driven by clientelistic networks and patronage (Ichino and Nathan 2013, 428; Acheampong 2021) – as well as, perhaps to an overlooked extent, by localised violence and intimidation (Seeberg et al 2018).[21] '[A]spiring candidates compete for nominations through the distribution of patronage to local party members, not [through] their policy positions' (Ichino and Nathan 2013, 428).

Building on this fundamental clientelistic understanding of primaries, scholars have addressed a number of themes such as: how the size and composition of the primary (s)electorate can alter outcomes in terms of who stands and who wins (Ichino and Nathan 2016); how primaries might impact on the party itself at national level in terms of its internal cohesion (Giollabhuí 2013; Wilkins 2019) and electoral performance (Ichino and Nathan 2013); how primaries might impact upon and disadvantage women's participation in politics (Chiweza 2020); and, as

[21] Seeberg et al (2018, 961) suggest that in Africa 'violence is much less studied than money as a political tool for gaining power' through the primary process. There is of course a third possibility, that ought not to be entirely disregarded: granted that ideological contestation is minimal, but this does not preclude genuine, meaningful attachment to – and enthusiasm for – particular candidates as people, rooted in their perceived qualities as human beings and (potential) leaders, rather than merely in their capacity to bribe or to intimidate.

mentioned, a particularly prominent thread concerned with how primaries can become locuses of localised political violence (Seeberg et al 2018; Goldring and Wahman 2018; Reeder and Seeberg 2018; Wahman and Goldring 2020; Kjær and Katusiimeh 2021).

This chapter makes a further contribution to, and expansion upon, this literature on several fronts. Malawi is, firstly, a neglected case in terms of the study of African primaries – despite being a particularly interesting one in terms of its unusually decentralised, participatory primary election tradition. Secondly, and above all, I depart from the extant literature by centring the experiences and reflections of those who must enter and compete in primaries – and by thinking about primaries through their eyes, in terms of how they navigate them. To do so I draw upon over 70 extended interviews with current and former MPs, as well as interviews with local experts and academics, and local newspaper coverage of primary elections.

Such a politician-centred approach produces revealing results. I find that primary elections are a major concern for almost any aspirant or serving politician in Malawi, and largely regardless of seniority. Many "big beasts" have been felled by them, or at least by the fallout from them that can result in one, some or many "independent" candidates at the general election; these so-called "independents" being, in fact, unofficial/alternative party candidates in all but name, whose ever-expanding number of victories have more to do with the failure of parties to manage their own primary processes than with the decline of party partisanship *per se*. In addition, primaries are by common consent the most chaotic and corrupted part of electoral politics, and therefore involve new aspirants in a corrupt (and potentially corrupting) process from the very moment of their induction into the system.

What is more, a politician-centred approach sheds important light on the reality of primaries, in Malawi at least, and raises some doubts about how scholars have hitherto understood them. Because while I find that there is indeed a heavily clientelistic element in primaries, and that MPs are – as one would therefore expect – involved in the distribution of considerable patronage, my participants were overwhelmingly clear that their preeminent concern as far as meaningfully competing in, let alone winning, the primary had little to do with voters and much more to do with getting those in the party hierarchy charged with running the election on one's side. The emphasis in the scholarship, in other words, on "*bottom-up*" competition – whether it be based around patronage, violence or indeed genuine popular support in the constituency – appears misplaced at least according to my interviewees, who placed far more emphasis on navigating "*top-down*" elements.

Before the primary

Having decided to enter politics, and either before or after having chosen or been invited into a political party, some preliminary steps are generally taken. Among the first persons to be formally told of one's intention to stand, especially in rural areas, are expected to be one's local Village and Group Village Headmen – not least as a courtesy to inform them of the intention to campaign in their area(s). Although formally chiefs are not supposed to be involved in electoral or party-politics, in reality their assistance is often sought in relation to securing a team of campaign volunteers (see Chapter 5) and also to assist and facilitate opportunities for candidates to introduce themselves or otherwise interact with the wider electorate.

Indeed across the Central Region in particular – throughout which the Malawi Congress Party is deeply embedded at grassroots/village level – those seeking to compete in the party's primary elections are expected to follow an elaborate procedure of "introductions," as explained by Sam Kawale (Dowa North East, 2014-):

> 'MCP is well-structured compared with other political parties. So first of all I had to talk with the chief in the village that I come from; the chief would [then] take me to what we call an Area, the MCP Area Committee. Once they accept me then they will take me to the Constituency Committee; once they accept me they will take me to the District Committee; then the District Committee will take me to the Regional Committee…. Then they will say this is an aspirant' (Kawale 2016).

Some also report having to be introduced and accepted, finally, even at National (MCP) Headquarters (Kabwila 2016). The exhaustiveness of this process clearly reflects the sheer social, political, and cultural dominance of the MCP in the Central Region, and the concomitantly high competitiveness of its primary contests.[22] Most pre-primary preliminary steps are somewhat less extensive; they can also vary considerably in their specifics. Sooner or later, however, the vast majority of candidates will be obliged to compete in a primary election for the candidature of their chosen party. For most, this represents their first real taste of competitive politics and the first major hurdle they must clear en route to a hoped-for political career.

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[22] It is also worth noting here that, in this case and in many others – especially in the "heartlands" of various parties – local chiefs were frequently cited as the first, albeit unofficial, step on the rung of the *party* ladder/hierarchy. This is a clear indication (one of many) that the supposed hard and fast line between chiefs and (party) politics is very much honoured more in the breach than in the observance (see here Eggen 2011).

Primary contests in Malawi

Primary elections are a ubiquitous and critical component of electoral politics in Malawi. As each general election approaches, major parties conduct them in every constituency in order to choose a candidate as their standard-bearer. Although often overlooked in the African and especially Malawi literatures, they are not merely a crucial barrier to entry for early-career politicians, but remain a major concern and potential career-destroyer for even the most established of MPs – incumbents are, at least officially, as open to primary challenge as any other candidate.[23] In party heartland seats, primaries are widely regarded as 'the main battle' in which candidates of any vintage or seniority are likely to spend far more time, effort and indeed money than during any eventual general election campaign, which they have historically tended to regard almost as a 'formality' once they have the party nomination (although this may be changing – see below) (Lowe 2017; Menyani 2016).

Primaries' precise rules and procedures vary widely – from party to party and from election to election. Indeed, given that they are run by local parties and at local level, they also vary widely from constituency to constituency even within the same party and at the same election – at least according to the testimony of my interviewees, few of whom reported identical procedures. Seeberg et al (2018) found that, across the African political parties they studied, 80% 'either have no clear rules for candidate selection or, more often, have rules that they regularly disregard' (Seeberg and Wahman 2019). There is, however, a general pattern, at least in terms of the formal procedures. Primary voters are members of local party structures, generally of "Area" committees. An Area is typically congruent with the jurisdiction of a particular chief or Group Village Headman, and there are likely to be hundreds of these in a typical constituency. Area committees are themselves made up of representatives of a certain number of "Branches" (or "Zones") and their committees, each of which will normally have a Governor, Secretary, Treasurer, a Woman's Representative, and a Youth Representative – 'it is not unusual for local primaries to include a few thousand delegates' (Seeberg and Wahman 2019). At a pre-appointed time and place, generally a football stadium, school ground or the like, all such "party members" will gather. Generally presided over by an official from the party's District or Regional level, all candidates are blindfolded, and voters invited to line up behind their preferred candidate. Those at the head of the longest line win the primary and represent the party at the general election in that constituency. This, at least, is the theory.

Primary contests are ostensibly designed to add an additional layer of democratic accountability and engagement to the political process, and to the process of political recruitment in particular. The Malawian system is striking by African and indeed global

[23] There are occasional exceptions here – notably, for instance, when parties have protected incumbent female MPs from primary challenge (see below.)

standards in terms of how involved local-level, grassroots voters are invited to be in the choice of a party's candidate. MPs' experiences of primary contests and what they have to do in order to meaningfully compete, however, raise serious questions about primaries' democratic credentials. My interviews, as well as much local newspaper coverage, abound with tales of the opaque, chaotic and above all corrupted nature of the primary process (see also here Seeberg and Wahman 2019). Candidates do not like primaries, regarding them as a highly regrettable, corrupt hurdle that they must scale (or at least be seen to be trying to scale in good faith.). They did not choose this process, but feel they have no choice but to somehow navigate it in order to have any chance of entering politics – even if that means becoming (somewhat) corrupted by it themselves.

Candidates navigate primaries, and above all navigate their opacity and corruption, not only from the bottom-up (by appealing to primary voters but also by manipulating the composition and size of the primary (s)electorate to their best advantage); but also, from the top-down (in terms of manipulation of the conduct of the election and the processing of its results by those involved in its management). I deal with each in turn.

Navigating "bottom-up"

Alekeni Menyani (Dedza North West, 2009-19) highlights the critical importance of primaries thus:

> 'In the Central Region, because here the MCP is very strong, you have higher chances of making it to parliament if you stand on the [MCP] ticket. And so it becomes a heated race, and sometimes it can be very costly… For you to [reach parliament] you must go round all these [primary voters], you know, committee by committee, sometimes one on one, and convince them that you are the ideal candidate. And sometimes there can be, like in 2008 we were eleven of us, you know, going around [competing for the nomination in Dedza North West]. And you go [somewhere, then] somebody comes, distorts all your messages because you are all fighting for the seat – and [so] eventually you must [go] back if you want to be very sure… So you must go around and convince people. Even for my re-election [in 2014] it was as if they [had] never seen me before – I had to go through this exercise once again to convince the people that I was the ideal candidate to once again run on the party ticket' (Menyani 2016).

Appealing to primary voters becomes particularly expensive when the stakes are high and the contest is highly competitive – primary voters no less than general election voters (as discussed in the next chapter) expect displays of gift-giving, "handouts" etc.:

> 'So [around] 700 voters are going to make a final decision on [the] day… in each constituency.[24] So you have to continuously talk to them, convince them – and this is where it's very expensive. At this particular time, the most challenging thing is that as Malawi Congress Party we have been now 22 years in opposition so we [don't] have resources even to buy party materials, party cloth and the T-shirts for the young men and the like. So that was a challenging thing – that you have to buy party cloth, you have to buy party materials… yourself, and distribute them to the voters. When they meet, you have to feed them. You have to buy food and give them money for travel and everything. We could have one meeting in a constituency and they would expect you to provide resources and everything, and that is quite challenging' (Richard C Banda, Dowa East, 2014-(2016)).

Both of these (MCP, Central Region) candidates tellingly spoke of the general election, by contrast, as a vastly easier (and cheaper) prospect than the primary – indeed as something close to a formality.

None of this is to say that all political support is simply paid for; some may be, but such reductionism is nevertheless as grossly simplistic in relation to primary contests as it is – as argued in the next chapter – in a general election.[25] Even if we should not conclude that candidates simply pay *for* political support, however, it is certainly the case that candidates do *pay* (and otherwise materially reward) their supporters. The logic of "party membership" in Malawi turns that of mass-membership political parties in Western Europe, for example – at least in theory financially supported by their members – on its head. In Malawi, by contrast, parties and candidates pay their supporters – 'the one who looks to be a big boss is the one to feed us, so we don't contribute [money] but we only receive,' is how one close observer of local politics explains this logic (Anon Expert 5 2017). As one MP describes it:

> 'It was really expensive because all [of my] supporters, all the people that were in my campaign team, even the ordinary people, the voters themselves – whenever we went to see them, [when] we went to campaign…, to persuade them to vote for me, they would need something… you had to give them something' (Anon MP6 2016).

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[24] 700 is a low number as an estimate of the primary (s)electorate. Tellingly I rarely found agreement or precision amongst interviewees on who exactly constituted the primary electorate. Most, however, spoke in terms of thousands rather than hundreds.

[25] The discussion in the next chapter regarding campaigning and the presentation of self, therefore, applies in primary contests as well. Suffice it to say here that genuine appeals to the electorate based on one's actual popular appeal and suitability for the job – rather than solely on the distribution of money or violence – should never be overlooked.

Appeals to the electorate, however, are only one aspect of primary election expenses and efforts. There is also much money to be spent – and politics to be navigated – in relation to the *composition* of that electorate. Despite the remarkably elaborate formal hierarchy of local parties – ostensibly stretching all the way down to committees even at village level – the reality is that in almost all cases the precise composition of the primary electorate is up-for-grabs, and in extreme cases the process verges on a free-for-all. Malawian political parties do not have official membership lists or subscription fees, and while there is much talk in common parlance of people being "members" of particular parties, this term more accurately denotes supporters – who may, in turn, be genuine long-term partisans or, on the other hand, those who have been incentivised to turn up to a particular party function on a particular day. In this political lexicon, "members" thereby "enter" and "leave" parties entirely as their preferences and interests dictate, and without any formal bureaucratic process having to take place (Anon Expert 5 2017).

This means, therefore, that who exactly does and does not constitute the primary electorate in a particular contest becomes extremely ill-defined and flexible. The rules themselves often appear to be subject to considerable confusion, variation, and adjustment – very rarely did my interviewees' descriptions of who precisely is designated as the primary electorate match each other, even when they should have. What is more, the multiple committees and structures from which the primary selectorate is typically to be drawn are themselves often vaguely and opaquely defined and constituted; and still more – in the case of parties out of power in the constituency – they are often long-dormant and (re-)activated only for the purpose of the primary election itself. As one study of the 2018-19 primary season commented:

> 'candidates were often quibbling about what area committees to recognize and whether certain delegates were actually representatives of those area committees. Parties have designed elaborate electoral systems, but usually lack the capacity to ensure that primaries actually follow these rules' (Seeberg and Wahman 2019).

What this practically means for candidates themselves (quite apart from the incentive to spend money getting those who adjudicate such matters onside, to which we will come below), is a fierce contest-within-a-contest to ferry as many truckloads of "supporters" as possible to the location of the election on the day itself. These will generally number in the thousands if the candidate is to have any serious expectation of winning. The logistics of this task alone are considerable, given the size, geography, and extant road conditions of so many constituencies. It becomes, for candidates, an extremely expensive day:

> 'It's a lot of money. Because at the first time you need to ferry those people… from wherever they are living, from their villages. You need to hire lorries to ferry them from their villages to the centre where you are going to conduct primaries. You need to feed them. Then also you need to have like maybe

> MWK500 to give them [for their attendance]… So we are talking of millions [of kwacha, (thousands of dollars)] here, yeah' (Jolobala 2016).
>
> 'What happens in primaries is that the people competing provide transport [for voters to the voting centre]. So if you don't have a lot of money, you only provide for a few people. Of course, because I was working abroad, I had a little bit more, so I was able to send transport to pretty much everywhere in the constituency, in the far-[flung] parts of the constituency, everybody who wanted… [I brought] 3000 people. I provided transport for those people to come and attend the primaries' (Kumpalume 2017).

Candidates, then, are essentially required to bring their own electorate on primary day. This in turn is subject to myriad dirty tricks such as the blocking of routes to the voting centre, and violence and intimidation from rival candidates and supporters to prevent one's voters from attending (Kumpalume 2017). Many interviewees, moreover, reported spending millions to get their supporters to the voting centre on a particular day, only for the primary to be rescheduled by organisers at the last moment – a huge financial burden for many.

Notwithstanding the considerable bottom-up difficulties outlined above, this last point brings us to that which was overwhelmingly cited by interviewees as the major issue as far as primaries are concerned – that of top-down manipulation and corruption on the part of parties themselves and those personnel in charge of running the primary. As one close observer simply lays out, 'in most cases, the people that conduct those primaries have got their own preferences. And they will go there to be silently campaigning for [i.e., supporting] a particular candidate' (Anon Expert 12 2017). One former minister, indeed, simply dismisses primaries as, 'stage-managed, yeah. Those are stage-managed' (Malunga 2016).

Navigating "top-down"

For (aspirant) politicians, their preeminent concern as far as primaries are concerned has relatively little to do with voters. It is, on the contrary, to secure the support of those within their party who are directly charged with running the election, and within the party's hierarchy more widely. Where there is so much debate and confusion about the rules of the process and how to apply them, what better to do than get the adjudicators of those rules onside? It is they, after all, with the capacity to rig the process in all manner of ways for or against one's candidature – if necessary multiple times. As one former minister puts it:

> 'You know, for you to stand for a political party, the regional team has to accept you and during the campaign period, the regional team gets rich – gets very rich because if I am so desperate that I want to stand for this party, and I know this party is very popular, I will go to the Regional Governor, to the Regional

> Treasurer. I [will] start giving them money to endorse me… and that team will [then] go the constituency and [say]: "this is our candidate, the party has chosen this one."' (Malunga 2016).

This, then, is the key task of the aspirant politician looking to scale the primary election hurdle and enter politics, as Nasrin Pillane (Balaka West, 2009-14) also makes clear:

> 'The constituency governor of that area… he is the one that signs off to say this is the candidate that won. So… if you are standing, you have to be in cahoots [with him]… it's [determined by] who bribes this guy more' (Pillane 2017).

While this may be a little too stark, Pillane's basic point chimes with the experiences of the vast majority of my interviewees – that party hierarchies invariably manipulate primary contests to ensure (or at least try to ensure) that their favoured candidate wins; and that a large proportion of primary expenses are consequently spent not on voters at all but on those in party hierarchies.

As Lobin Lowe (Lilongwe Central, 2009-) makes clear, however, this is not always simply a matter of "who bribes this guy more," as Pillane suggests (Lowe 2017). Local party functionaries/cadres, for instance, 'know that if the current guy loses, then the new guy will have his [own] people' and they risk losing their position close to the MP (a very big deal at local level – see Chapter 5). To reassure these functionaries Lowe (2017) made sure to go beyond a simple financial transaction – 'if you only give them money, you won't make it – I made friendships with them too.'

Many of my interviewees detailed myriad forms of malfeasance in the conduct of primary elections.[26] The 'menu of manipulation,' in Schedler's (2002) phrase, that they set out encompassed interventions at all stages of the process – before, on and after the day of the primary election itself. 'There are so many tricks that are played' (Kunkuyu 2017). These include attempts by local party officials to sabotage candidates' campaigns (Anon MP2 2017); as noted above, the very regular occurrence of primary contests being scheduled or re-scheduled at the last moment (often multiple times), with the knock-on financial and logistical

[26] Of course most were complaining about being the *victims* of such malfeasance – of legitimate victory having been stolen from them – rather than being the perpetrators or collaborators in a stolen election. If such narratives are open to the charge of being self-serving in specific instances, however, it is beyond question that exactly such occurrences are extremely well-documented in the Malawi press and elsewhere, and that the general picture painted is an accurate one. None of my interviewees directly acknowledged being the beneficiary of a rigged primary process, although their descriptions of the campaign and what it required of them often spoke for themselves.

implications for candidates who need to assemble and transport truckloads of supporters (Majawa 2016; A. Shaba 2017; Anon MP2 2017); senior figures covertly instructing or manipulating primary voters into standing behind their own favoured candidates on election day (Anon Expert 12 2017); wilful miscounting, confusion and intimidation to affect who stands behind which candidate(s) (Munkhondya 2017); and finally, (legitimate) victory actually being declared only to be subsequently annulled on some pretext following back-room manipulations, and a re-run announced (Majawa 2016; A. Shaba 2017; Anon Expert 12 2017; Anon MP2 2017).

The literal last-minute cancelling – or else post-hoc annulling and subsequent re-running – of primary contests, indeed, is a particularly common tactic. A considerable number of interviewees reported this happening to them multiple times, until the powers-that-be at last got the result they wanted, or else were persuaded to back down (see below). Justin Majawa (Mangochi South West, 2014-19) experienced both:

> 'when they don't want you [to win], they just say [at the last moment] "oh we are not coming today, we are coming tomorrow." So you are put in a fix. Do I take the [truckloads of supporters] home? Or I have to go and buy food in town and feed them here until the person who runs the elections arrives tomorrow? Sometimes we were there for three days and I had to feed 3000 people… [And] I am already transporting them from different places. Each vehicle that would carry 200 people would charge MWK25,000 per day.[27] Even when it's just sitting there, they were still charging you' (Majawa 2016).

Eventually, primaries were held:

> 'We did primary elections four times and I spent MWK20 million,[28] and the district governor of the party would just call the people who were the presiding officers at the election centre and he would say, "although he has won, it's null and void"… Because they didn't want me to win. So at the fourth [time], there was a big fight. Four people from my camp died, and it was at that moment… I decided to pull out so I will just stand as an independent' (Majawa 2016).

As a result of such myriad manipulations the real competition between primary candidates is one primarily conducted in the currency of money and connections *to the party hierarchy.* These officials are supposed to be 'there to see to it that you don't have bogus committees that have just been created for the sake of rigging the elections' and to otherwise ensure their

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[27] Approximately US$65 at early 2013 rates (https://fxtop.com/en/historical-currency-converter accessed 23/07/21).

[28] Approximately US$50,000 at early 2013 rates (https://fxtop.com/en/historical-currency-converter accessed 23/07/21).

smooth-running (Kunkuyu 2017). 'But since they are given that role… [they can] control the process of the election, then they take advantage and call for all kinds of coins so that they can influence the decision. It has really worked for them very much' (Kunkuyu 2017). Indeed, repeated cancelling and re-running of primaries allows these officials to make more and more money – 'if they see that they haven't gotten much [money] from you [yet], they set another date and raise another fake alarm to say the elections are tomorrow' (Kunkuyu 2017).

Long before the actual primary election day, meanwhile, one candidate had her party's constituency governor arranging the standard meetings for her to address party members, only to arrive and find no-one there; or else cancelling meetings without informing her. This, she maintains, was a result of competing against a businessman far wealthier than herself, who could be expected to furnish the local party hierarchy with far more resources than she could, both in the immediate term as a candidate and in the longer term should he become their MP (Anon MP2 2017). In response she was obliged to establish a "task force" – a parallel structure of her own people whom she could trust to actually work in her interest (Anon MP2 2017).

While in many cases favouritism of this kind is primarily to do with the private interests of local or regional party functionaries ('in the campaign, [these] people think "now is the time to eat"' (Anon MP2 2017)), it can extend also to the interests of cash-strapped (especially opposition) political parties as a whole, who are reliant on candidates to entirely fund their own general election campaigns. As Esther Jolobala (Machinga East, 2014-) says:

> 'I stood on UDF ticket [in the primaries]. But because of my challenges that I was coming from a poor family and I was not financially fit… the party couldn't accept it because to them they were thinking that it will be a lot of work for them to take someone who doesn't have anything, any materials, [and campaign for her]. So I was left out' (Jolobala 2016).

Reprieve?

In the light of the preceding discussion, it is hardly surprising that primary results are invariably challenged as illegitimate by at least some participants (be this fairly or indeed unfairly in specific cases.) In fact, a number of interviewees were able to find eventual reprieve in the fact that, for all that corruption of the process is commonplace or even ubiquitous, there remain official rules and procedures that have been breached – thereby leaving room for challenges to be made and recourse to be sought in reference to those rules. It is also in the nature of Malawian primaries and the very public, mass-participation way in which they are run that they are not easy to control or in fact to neatly stage-manage, and that corruption of the process tends therefore to be particularly public and brazen.

Persistence, it seems, *can* pay off at times. Alexander Kusamba Dzonzi [Dowa West, 2014-19) was unpopular with the local MCP as a consequence of previously being a DPP candidate: 'three times elections [were annulled] because I was winning, and the party officials didn't want me. The fourth election I won, they had no choice but to accept' (Dzonzi 2016). The problem for Lobin Lowe (Lilongwe Central, 2009-), a future MCP Chief Whip, meanwhile, was the national leadership's preference for the incumbent MP, whom he was challenging. Lowe – considerably more popular with local party members – like Dzonzi fought and won three primaries which were subsequently annulled. As a fourth approached, he visited the national leadership with some local leaders and a petition insisting that he was their chosen candidate and that if the MCP wished to hold on to the seat they had better accept him – which, at last, they did (Lowe 2017).

A number of interviewees who had successfully challenged rigged primary results had, similarly to Lowe, ultimately solicited the intervention of someone far higher up in the party hierarchy than they – not infrequently, indeed, at the very top. Several DPP candidates from the 2009 election, for instance, testified to appealing to President Bingu wa Mutharika directly, as then party leader, against primary elections being stolen from them by his own lieutenants at lower levels. In one case the candidate had contacts close to the President; in another, they simply happened to hear that he was visiting nearby and rushed to make their case in person. In both cases, after representations had been made, Mutharika accepted the justice of their arguments and had the previously declared results overturned (Pillane 2017; Anon MP2 2017).

This power in the hands of the party leadership can cut both ways, however. Lifred Nawena (Thyolo Thava, 2009-14) claims to have made the same appeal to Mutharika at the same election, only to come to realise that the powers-that-be who had overturned his own local primary victory appeared to have acted, in this case, on instructions from the President himself. Nawena's experience appears to demonstrate the ultimate inadequacy of appeals to the party leadership as a substitute for a clean primary process in the first place. Such appeals favour the connected (or, occasionally, the downright lucky) who are best placed to make them; and rely for adjudication on the judgement of a person or persons who may very well have their own interest in the outcome. By leaving the power to reprieve, or not, in the hands of the party president, they reinforce the presidential dominance present in all Malawian political parties, and ultimately make a mockery of the primary process.

Going "independent"?

Having finally lost in a primary for whatever reason, and exhausted any and all avenues for reprieve, aspirant politicians have various options. Many, doubtless, give up. It may be possible to seek to gain the nomination of another party and/or to stand in another

constituency – as Shadreck Jonas (Lilongwe City Centre, 2009-14) did in 2014, moving within weeks from the DPP primary in Lilongwe City Centre to the MCP primary in Dowa Central, and ultimately winning the latter (Nyasa Times 2014).

Increasingly, however, running as an independent candidate has emerged as a serious and credible option by which to enter parliament. '[E]xiting the party with one's supporters to contest the election may be a viable option for a losing aspirant' (Ichino and Nathan 2013, 428–29). From electing none in 1994 and just four in 1999, Malawian voters have shown themselves increasingly willing to elect independents. 32 (of 193) were elected in 2009, and this rose to 52 in 2014 – no less than 27% of the total, and initially the largest single bloc in the new parliament (Chinsinga 2010; N. Patel and Wahman 2015b).[29]

Mounting an independent candidature remains, however, a very significant political and financial gamble and, given the resources required, is not a decision which most aspirants will make lightly. Candidates will generally require a reasonable expectation of considerable support in the constituency and of actually being able to carry the seat. It is not least for this reason that serious contenders who stand as independents are, in the vast majority of cases, candidates who stood and lost already in party primaries – and not necessarily, as Ichino and Nathan (2013, 428–29) find in Ghana, in those of the *governing* party, but rather in those of the party which is electorally dominant in that region. Most such contenders, indeed, appear to be those who feel they have been unfairly robbed of the nomination by a rigged process – and thus already are in reality the most popular representative of the most popular party in the constituency. Abbie Shaba (Mzimba East, 2004-14) recounts his experience thus:

> 'The party [AFORD] had decided to have another candidate… At the district and regional level, [party officials] were convinced that I was not the right candidate… We went for primaries three times and each time we went they would give an excuse that, "no let's not do it today." But fortunately, what I had was the grassroots structures with me. So the last [thing] was we went for [another] primary, and they said, "you can't stand," but I had brought all the delegates and the delegates walked out with me. So I decided to stand as an independent and I won. The party candidate was very far away [from my number of votes]. So that's why I'm saying you need to convince the grassroots structures… to me the most important is the lower level' (A. Shaba 2017).

Similarly, following his realisation that the President had, in his view, personally hobbled his candidacy, Lifred Nawena said: 'I was out… And the constituents said, "we were at the elections, we saw the queues that stood behind you, we know you won. We want you to stand

[29] This rose further still in 2019, to 55 independent MPs elected.

as an independent." So that's what happened. And I stood as an independent… And won!' (Nawena 2017).

This feeling of being the popular choice, thwarted by the machinations of party bosses, is what frequently convinces candidates to push on with an independent candidacy, confident that "the people" share their disillusion with the primary outcome. Assurances to this effect can also reassure candidates that the logistical and financial hurdles of an independent candidature can to some extent be overcome by genuine, authentic popular support. Victor Musowa (Mulanje Bale, 2014-) for instance:

> 'participated in the primary elections and, lucky enough, I won. And then I started to campaign. Then a month later I was called by the headquarters of the [DPP] party here in Lilongwe telling me they were not happy to have me, a newcomer, stand for their party. They were not confident in my ability. They were not sure if I will take their party to success… They would rather replace me with a veteran politician to stand for their party. It was I think a little disturbing because… I had already prepared myself… [So] I summoned the chiefs and all the political leaders and I told them what the party had told me… And then everybody was surprised, they said, "no you've gone through elections and you've won, what should we do?" And then [a] week later I was summoned by the chief's council who told me that, "actually you need to stand independent, we are going to support your candidature." Then I had no resources because then I had already printed T-shirts, with the money I had, in the DPP colours. Now… I had to ditch my DPP materials, which was a little challenging. So I had no money that time they were telling me to campaign. But the community did a lot of campaigning for me' (Musowa 2016).

There has been a certain amount of heralding this surge of successful independent candidates in recent elections – and especially since 2014 – from participants, activists, and observers from within Malawi itself. Many of my interviewees cited this as a sign of "progress" and of a maturing (democratic) political culture, including some MPs (Chisoni 2015; Anon Expert 12 2017; Anon MP2 2017; Anon MP3 2017; Majawa 2016). Esther Jolobala echoes many:

> 'now people, they have realised their powers… not just following what the party officials [say]… The mindset of the people is changing… [They] are able to see that, "oh no, we have [obeyed the party ticket] for quite a long time. I think let us make our stand and do whatever we want to do." That's why we end up, they ended up voting [for] a lot of independent members' (Jolobala 2016).

This liberal-modernising view is common amongst politicians and observers alike – that after several decades of democracy, Malawians are "learning" to not blindly follow "their" (ethnoregional) parties, but rather to elevate their horizons and reach "independent" decisions

as individual citizens in the political marketplace. Such a perspective is taken by many democracy activists and "civic education" advocates in particular as a vindication not only of their entire worldview, but also of their day-to-day work to "civic educate" the Malawian population so that they might learn to do democracy "properly" (Anon Expert 3 2017) (see final chapter.)

Modernisers' excitement at this alleged shift from party- to personal-voting is at first glance odd, given that modernisation theory's typical conception of political-cultural progress emphasised a shift *away* from vertical, direct, personal ties between politicians and populace – and *towards* corporate, impersonal, horizontal ones. The apparent contradiction arises, however, from what party voting is widely considered to represent in Malawi – not class-consciousness or other cross-cutting, "modern" solidarities and a consequently "programmatic" appeal, but rather a fairly naked proxy for ethnicised voting. From the point of view of these liberal-modernisers (well-represented and arguably hegemonic in the Malawian political and intellectual class), Malawian parties are the "wrong" kind of parties – and voting for them is seen largely as an expression of primordial, "tribal" and above all fundamentally *un*modern political-cultural characteristics. 'In Malawi, [party] politics goes along geographical and cultural and even tribal [lines],' says Richard C Banda (2016). 'What is the party [really]??' asks Agnes Nyalonje (Mzimba North, 2014-19) – it's 'our regional, tribal whatever' (Nyalonje 2016).

More remains to be said about such attitudes, and I shall return to them again, especially in the final chapter on MPs' "demopessimism." What is important to stress here, however, is that it is clear that "independents" are very rarely as independent as they might look at first glance. They are, on the contrary, profoundly associated (in their own minds *and* those of their constituents) with a particular party – the party in whose primary they invariably ran. On the ground, they explicitly pitch themselves as to all intents and purposes an alternative candidate of that party (their 'mother party,' in local political vernacular (Mlombwa 2017; Anon MP3 2017; Anon MP7 2016)) – and make it clear in most cases that should they win, they will sooner or later (and generally sooner) re-join that party.[30] Of the 52 independents elected in 2014, all but a handful had re-joined their mother parties within six months – many on the day they first took their seats.

Aisha Adams (Mangochi Nkungulu, 2014-) agrees that her constituents 'are UDF people' (Adams 2016). Having nevertheless ran successfully in 2014 as an "independent" candidate, she acknowledges that, in her area:

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[30] For the avoidance of any doubt, as one (once "independent") MP puts it, 'when you are campaigning you say, "I'm still a ["member" of party X]… but I was frustrated [in the primary] therefore vote for me as an MP, but vote for [party X's presidential candidate] for presidency"' (Constituency Observation 2 (Kadzamira) 2016).

> 'if you are independent, it should be that your background is UDF… You can't be independent [and] your background is not UDF – you won't make it. For instance when I [had]… problems with [UDF] primaries people told me, "don't worry if you don't make it during primary elections, you just contest as an independent candidate. We will vote for you."' (Adams 2016).

For Joyce Azizi Banda (Lilongwe Mpenu Nkhoma, 2009-14), indeed, her first primary contest as she entered politics was, she knew at the outset, a lost cause – running as she was against MCP veteran and then-Speaker of Parliament Louis Chimango. For her, she says, the primary was about 'proving I was MCP': she knew she would inevitably lose against such a well-connected and high-profile figure embedded in the party hierarchy, but in the process she could demonstrate to general election voters (amongst whom Chimango was far less popular than with party high-ups) where her true loyalties and affiliation lay, and that although notionally an independent, she would "re-join" the MCP immediately upon her election – a crucial message in a party-heartland constituency (J. A. Banda 2017). She duly did so – and indeed felt she had absolutely no choice in the matter such was the importance of this implicit commitment to her election in the first place. She understood, and considered her constituents to have understood, that she had won to all intents and purposes as an MCP candidate. As another MP makes clear, indeed:

> 'After the elections, the people actually tell you that, "we are the same people from the party which is popular in this constituency. So we demand – not ask you, not request, but we *demand* – that you [join] this party. If you don't, you won't make it in the next elections"' (Anon MP3 2017).

It is a sign of how rapidly political fortunes can rise and fall that, just five years later, the boot was firmly on the other foot. For the 2014 election, in fact, Azizi Banda (now an MCP MP) was in the unusually privileged position of not facing a primary contest, the MCP having decided to protect incumbent female MPs from primary challenges in the light of concerns amongst domestic and donor actors about female under-representation in the political class. This did not prevent rival aspirants for her seat, however. Indeed, she explicitly blames this policy and popular resentment of it – she claims it caused her to be seen as a candidate "imposed" by party bosses, and consequently de-legitimised – for her ultimate defeat by Collins Kajawa (Lilongwe Mpenu Nkhoma, 2014-) in the general election (J. A. Banda 2017). He was obliged to stand against her as an independent but, as he says, precisely echoing his predecessor, 'they knew I was MCP' (Kajawa 2016). Like her, he too "re-joined" the party immediately upon entering Parliament.

The surge of "independent" MPs, then, is not quite all it seems. 'Very few would stand from the beginning as an independent. They are actually a product of a party failing to manage their own internal affairs' (Magolowondo 2016). Their swelling numbers in recent elections,

therefore, results less from a collapse in party-partisanship *per se* than from what one MP calls 'a crisis [*with*]*in* political parties' in terms of how they manage primaries (Jolobala 2016) – continuing, as they do, to consistently subvert internal democratic processes in order to select candidates according to the interests and preferences of their leaders and local party bosses, rather than those of their so-called "membership" and supporters. It is *this* against which voters appear to be reacting, not party partisanship, identities, and affiliations themselves. 'That's why this time in 2014 we had a lot of independent members – because political parties [had]… their own candidate, and the community themselves they had [another] candidate' (Jolobala 2016).

It is without question a significant development as far as democracy is concerned that voters are increasingly willing to defy their favoured parties by voting against their official nominees. It is *not* a small matter that seats are less and less "safe" for party-candidates, and that parties are less and less able to assume that heartland voters 'will vote for a stone,' as one MP puts it, provided it is wearing their rosette/party cloth (Kaliati 2016).[31] It is important, however, not to overstate this alleged shift from party-based to candidate-based voting. Of the 52 "independents" who entered Parliament in 2014, only a handful did so without having tried and failed to secure the nomination of a party beforehand – and were not widely understood to be party candidates in all but name. The claim of Wahman and Brooks (2020), then, that there are 'no safe seats in Malawian parliamentary elections' anymore could be misleading: it is true (and important) from the perspective of individual candidates and the party machine/lieutenants who might seek to control or rig the nomination on their behalf. For parties as a whole, however, it is far less true – given that candidates themselves often feel that they are (and pitch themselves as) the *true* party candidate fallen victim to a corrupt process, and guarantee a return to the "mother party" following the election; and given also that voters likewise understand such candidates as party candidates, albeit unofficial ones. Parties remain as (hugely) important as ever as brands reflective primarily of ethnoregionally-based blocs – voters simply understand that they may now have more than one candidate of "their" party to choose from. And it is in this way that primaries can perform a vital function for aspirants even when they lose them – by *identifying them clearly with a party,* yet simultaneously providing

[31] There appear to be regional differences here, which MPs themselves have noticed: '[in the] Southern Region and the Northern Region, people are used to independents; but [in the] Central Region, because it is MCP-heavy, people are not used to independents' (T. Mwale 2017). Even in the Centre however, where the MCP's grip has a quasi-mythic quality amongst Malawians, "independents" have been able to defeat the official MCP candidate in some recent contests (see for instance Joyce Azizi Banda vs Collins Kajawa aforementioned.)

them with a credible reason (or indeed excuse) for running against their party's official candidate.[32]

Conclusion

The profoundly problematic character of primary elections has effects that ripple throughout the Malawian political system. Firstly, they tend towards favouring the wealthy and those already embedded and well-connected, whilst working against (potential) new entrants. 'If you don't have connections to the National Executive Committee of the party, forget it' (Jolobala 2016). Aside from simply bribing and/or becoming friends with party officials, bankrolling a party (by supplying campaign materials, offering discounted access to transportation and myriad other forms of assistance), for instance, becomes a sure-fire and reasonably common way to secure a seat (Anon Expert 12 2017) – not, however, an option that many can afford. Poorer, less connected aspirants, meanwhile – regardless of their popularity with ordinary party supporters – may nevertheless be put off from even attempting to run. I encountered a number of individuals (not politicians thus far) who wished to stand in their home constituencies for a particular party but saw the option as closed off in practical terms until well-connected incumbents had departed the scene (Fieldnotes, 2015-17).

Secondly the system as it operates greatly strengthens the party hierarchies and their leaders – and encourages candidates to orient themselves towards these leaders rather than ordinary "party members" (however amorphously and imperfectly defined this group may be). Accountability relationships, in other words, become profoundly distorted, and those who are popular with party hierarchies can rest reasonably easy, *ceteris paribus*, in the knowledge that they are likely to be favoured and protected regardless of their popularity amongst local primary voters. One former MP, for instance, was allegedly very popular with those in the then-ruling party as a result of his considerable wealth and largesse towards them and the party, but was considerably less admired by his constituents – not least as a result of living in the United States throughout his tenure as their MP (Anon Expert 12 2017)! The emphasis in the extant literature on African primaries' clientelistic qualities, then, slightly misses the point at least as far as Malawian MPs are concerned: their major emphasis and concern was unambiguously with getting the party hierarchy/those running the election onside. This is notwithstanding that the successes of "independents" in recent elections may increasingly

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[32] Dennis Namachekecha-Phiri (Phalombe North East, 2014-), discussed in the last chapter, may be a revealing exception here. He did *not* take part in DPP primaries in 2013-14 yet still was able to pitch himself as an (unofficial) DPP candidate. He did not need a primary contest to establish this party affiliation, however, because, as he himself says, 'people knew I was DPP' because of his senior position in the Lomwe cultural association Mulhako wa Alomwe (Namachekecha-Phiri 2017).

somewhat counterbalance this trend, and may thus represent a democratisation of primaries, as it were, via the back door. Despite increasingly suffering the consequences of rigging and manipulation in the form of electoral defeat – officially and as organisations if not as brands/banners – Malawian political parties continue to find it hard to let go, and to let this theoretically highly democratic and participative process run its natural course.

Thirdly, the primary process does after all involve aspirant politicians in a corrupted process from the very outset of their entry into politics. As even one crusading anti-corruption, "modernising" MP has to acknowledge, 'you need… to have something to give the officials, [so] that whenever they come for primaries, they have to conduct [them] in favour of you. If you don't pay anything, don't expect anything' (Jolobala 2016). Almost everyone, she suggests, bribes the officials – it's just that some do so more and/or to better effect than others (Jolobala 2016). Corruption, it seems, is a necessary albeit not necessarily sufficient condition to meaningfully compete in a primary. Worse still, it is not uncommon for primary disputes to descend into (so-called) "inter-party" violence, with "supporters" of rival primary candidates clashing violently on the streets, destroying lives and property – the ultimate signal of primaries' failure as a political process (see Seeberg et al, 2018).

The continuing influence and importance of parties in campaigning and electioneering shall be further explored in the next chapter. At this point, however, it is important to note that it is no doubt an encouraging sign that the machinations of parties and party officials to manipulate primaries appear to be more and more frequently backfiring, as voters show themselves increasingly willing to vote for independents – and candidates thus increasingly willing to stand as such. That the large majority of independent candidates are failed primary aspirants, however, is just one indication of how parties continue to matter profoundly, if less as organisations *per se* and more as brands/ethnoregional banners to which candidates seek to attach themselves. As such they remain important gatekeepers for entry into politics – as one former MP argues, in the end 'people [still] want to identify an individual with a party' (Theresa Mwale, Mchinji West, 2009-14 (2017)). This is why the vast majority of aspirant politicians continue to embark upon and try to navigate the corrupt primary process. Candidates do not like doing so – but they recognise it as part of the rules of the game, and one of the early compromises they have to make in order to have any hope of entering politics.

Chapter 4: Campaigning: parties and the self

Introduction

How do African politicians get and maintain power? How do they secure public support and/or at least acquiescence such that they can attain, and retain, positions of political seniority and influence? As discussed in the thesis Introduction, the literature on African politics has long tended to focus on instrumental-materialist factors such as money and violence in answer to such questions.

There have been in recent decades some attempts to challenge this materialist understanding of African politics (notably Cheeseman et al 2021; one of the most striking examples remains Chabal and Daloz 1999, although these authors arguably replace materialism with culturalism; also Chabal and Daloz 2006). Materialism remains, however, close to hegemonic not least as the "common sense" around African politics. A passing remark in a recent Special Issue of *Democratization* on primary election violence is telling – stressing their contribution to the African democracy literature, the authors stress that 'violence is much less studied than money as a political tool for gaining power' in Africa, as if there were no third possibilities to consider (Seeberg et al 2018, 961). It is Rothian, materialist patrimonialism that prevails in understandings of how contemporary African politicians in the "democratic" era predominantly amass votes. '[M]aterial incentives and rewards' continue to be seen as the principal way by which politicians gain support from the public, and the means by which they accrue any (limited) legitimacy they may have (Roth 1968, 196).

This chapter challenges this perspective. Drawing upon my 100+ interviews with current/former politicians and expert observers, as well as five extended visits with MPs to their constituencies to observe their work there, I found an overwhelming consensus that while money and material exchange *are* indeed important in building political support, they are very far from being the be-all-and-end-all, and in many eyes were seen to be of distinctly secondary importance. Tales abounded from many interviewees, for example, of those who had spent exponentially more money than their opponents on their election campaigns only to go down to humiliating defeat because they had failed to connect with or to impress voters (Mwenifumbo 2017; Chabunya 2015). The testimony and lived experiences of my politician interviewees, on the contrary, testify unambiguously to the need they feel to do much, much more to gain and to maintain political support from constituent-voters than simply 'splash cash' (Anon Expert 12 2017). They work hard at, and think deeply about, how they appear to their public – and are deeply concerned with coming off well and establishing a positive impression. This speaks to their personal pride in their work and innate desire to be liked and respected, as

well as – naturally enough – to their desire to be re-elected and/or otherwise remain in the political game, for which a more or less positive impression upon the public is considered essential. Democracy in Malawi, to this extent at least, is working as it should, and as it should anywhere – with politicians hugely and predominantly concerned to appeal to, and to leave a positive impression upon, the public.

I call this always-ongoing process of seeking to appeal to the electorate "campaigning" – whether it takes place in the immediate run-up to an election, or at any other time during what has been appositely termed "the long campaign" – and it is the subject of this chapter. How do MPs (and MP-candidates) think about, strategize, and present themselves in their efforts to gain support from their voter-constituents?

There are many possible ways to approach this question. Cheeseman et al (2021, 17), for instance, talk in terms of two broad 'registers of virtue' at work in African election campaigning: patrimonial and civic. "Neopatrimonial" theories – at least those concerned with modes of legitimation as opposed to material-governmental practices – suggest similarly a balance between the patrimonial and the "neo" (Pitcher et al 2009). My own approach is somewhat more prosaic – and is rooted precisely in the ways in which MPs themselves would talk to me about how they tried to appeal to their voters. I argue that MPs seek to appeal and to endear themselves to their electorate in two broad ways. The first is by attaching themselves to the optimum political party and party brand – although determining what is optimum in their own personal and political circumstances is not always simple or straightforward. Politicians know that their party affiliation (be it official or unofficial, as discussed in the previous chapter) matters hugely not least to their electoral prospects – which is why they often spend considerable time calculating and fretting about their party position and affiliation, especially if they are not presently where they want to be in this respect, as a number of my interviewees acknowledged they were not.

The second is the still-larger concern, not least on a day-by-day, year-in year-out basis. Malawian politicians, perhaps increasingly so, cannot rely on party affiliation alone even should they wish to do so. A huge aspect of campaigning in Malawi therefore involves a much more personal element, wherein politicians are obliged to make a "presentation of self" to the electorate by means of which they sell *themselves*, as a human being – and as a candidate worthy of support, votes and, above all, trust. I argue that in seeking to build trust between themselves and voter-constituents, they in turn seek to communicate three broad messages: of identification, of empathy, and of qualification.

I deal with each of these means of appealing to voters in turn. First, however, I address the major logistics of elections and electoral campaigning as far as MPs are concerned. Whilst I have defined campaigning expansively and this chapter is not solely about the "short" (election)

campaign, this period nevertheless represents much of what MPs are gearing up for in their "long" campaigning, and its dynamics and logistics are highly relevant beyond the election period itself, informing much of how MPs relate both to their parties and to the public over the longer term.

On election campaigning: logistics, expenses, and emotional and physical labour

Malawian electoral law prescribes a two-month official "campaign period" prior to a general election. The strict delimitation of this period is honoured far more in the breach than in the observance. Serious aspirants understand that campaigning is a permanent feature of a political career, and that it at very least begins in earnest many months, and most likely several years, prior to the election (and long before party primaries have been held and precise party affiliations determined). Emily Chinthu-Phiri (Nkhata Bay South, 2014-19), for instance, knew that she had acquired a politically useful profile and reputation across her career as secretary to local son and former cabinet minister Aleke Banda, and also as a social worker in the community of long standing. Having then determined to enter formal politics, she says:

> 'I think truthfully speaking my campaign started about three years [before the election]. I was not [officially] "campaigning" but I was doing work. On projects, working with the people, crying with them, dancing with them. You know, doing everything with them, I think that was my campaign. Not political campaigns, but *development* campaigns…. Actual campaign to say, "vote for me!, vote for me!" – I think it was about six months' (Chinthu-Phiri 2016).

Candidates' experiences of general election campaigning naturally vary. Notwithstanding the rise of independent candidates, for an ever-dwindling but still significant number of MPs in party heartland seats the primary remains their overriding concern and, having secured the official nomination of a particular party, they are profoundly relaxed about their general election prospects. Most, however, experience especially the official campaign period during which the election is imminent, as a time of greatly heightened emotional intensity. Most interviewees described it as a highly stressful and sleep-deprived period, albeit some were also keen to stress the emotional rewards involved in meeting people, hearing their problems, and discussing opportunities now or in the future to provide assistance. Candidates can enjoy the enforced degree of increased social embeddedness that an election campaign, if only temporarily, requires of them – Collins Kajawa (Lilongwe Mpenu Nkhoma, 2014-) describes the process as simultaneously 'stressful and quite spirit-lifting' (Kajawa 2016).

Nasrin Pillane (Balaka West, 2009-14), however, quoted in Chapter 2, speaks more to the prevailing sentiment amongst interviewees when describing her emotional state in the throes of the campaign period – overwhelmed, stressed, and 'lying in bed and not wanting to get up,

covering my whole head with the blanket' (Pillane 2017). The account Theresa Mwale (Mchinji West, 2009-14) provides to account for such a reaction is echoed by many:

> 'The last two or three months of the campaign, I settled there [in the constituency] but throughout the [previous] months I just used to go and come back. It's difficult to stay there full-time. Wheeeu! You don't sleep! They make you wake up at 5am, you hear a knock at the gate. You have to give them even breakfast. By the time you decide now I have to take off to go to campaign, your yard will [be] full of people. You don't know where they are coming from, with all different kinds of excuses like, "oh I come from afar, I come from this place, my bicycle is broken." So you need to give them money to go and repair their bicycle. "I didn't eat for the past [several days]" – [so] you have to give them something to take home. They [also] know that when you go to the rally, you will just leave the money with the chairman or the chairlady, and some of them don't get it because then they will be scrambling to share… So they follow you to the house before you go to the rally to… get [the money] personally from you. Uuuuh!' (T. Mwale 2017).

As another MP says:

> 'It came to a time when you could not rest. You go for campaign, [then] you come back [and] you find people at your house waiting for you. People would come very early in the morning, before you wake up… so it was very, very heartache at that particular time. But in the end, I think I would still [also] use the word "entertaining"' (Anon MP6 2016).

This MP is unusually generous in this final assessment. For Jesse Kabwila (Salima North West, 2014-19), 'I found it extremely gruelling. In fact I haven't lost weight the way I [did] during that time… Very tiring. Very intimidating' (Kabwila 2016). Rabson Shaba (Mzimba South East, 2004-19), indeed, highlights the sheer physical labour of campaigning in many of Malawi's mostly rural constituencies:

> 'It's stressful because most of the parts in Malawi are hilly areas. We have some areas in my constituency which are not accessible by road so you have to walk on foot ten or fifteen kilometres' (R. C. Shaba 2016).

For one MP meanwhile, the campaign was 'difficult, expensive, and dangerous' (Anon MP, 2016). Politics in Malawi, especially at grassroots level, can still become extremely nasty and periodically violent – she was, she insists, at times in genuine fear of her life from her main competitor and his supporters.

Above all, however, interviewees characterise campaigns and campaigning as *expensive*. Some reported spending merely MWK2m (Kabwila 2016) or 'less than MWK3m' (Namachekecha-Phiri 2017) but most talked of considerably more – around MWK10m (Menyani 2016) and MWK12 million (Malunga 2016), all the way to MWK22m (Pillane 2017) and indeed beyond.[33] Justin Majawa spent MWK20m on his *primary* campaign alone (Majawa 2016). Future Minister of Health Peter Kumpalume (Blantyre North, 2014-19) returned from a high-paying job in the UK to run for parliament and spent 'at least GBP£20,000' on his campaign (Kumpalume 2017).

These figures are mere illustrative indications. A survey of MPs and candidates by Michael Wahman (2019, p.1) on the cost of politics in Malawi suggests that, amongst those candidates with a realistic prospect of victory, the average primary + general election campaign spend is as high as MWK27m (US$36,700). He also notes significant variation, however, and my interviews indicate some explanatory possibilities. All MPs I spoke with agreed that campaigns were on average becoming exponentially more expensive with each election. "Handouts inflation" was invariably cited, as voters are held to expect more and more redistribution from candidates:

> 'I remember 1994 – when I [campaigned] I only had my one simple car. By 1999 I had spent a lot, [and] I even had one, two, three vehicles out [campaigning]. I've seen [the same with] other MPs as well. So It has become more competitive, more money spent, because the expectations are so high [for] the campaign materials especially. They really want some free handouts in terms of T-shirts and so on, that has made more expense' (Anon MP10 2017).

My MP interviewees very much echo Lindberg's (2010, 124) in Ghana in this respect, who similarly testified that:

> 'in 1992 only a few MPs printed T-shirts; by 1996, most MPs did but only a few hundred, mainly for campaign workers. Beginning from 2000 and especially in 2004, printing T-shirts had become the norm, with MPs printing thousands. By the time of the 2008 campaign, all MPs printed 10,000 or more, and some constituents would not even accept the T-shirts unless they carried brand names like Lacoste.'

What is more in terms of mounting campaign expenses, voters are, as we saw in the last chapter, increasingly unwilling to vote for their preferred party's official candidate simply because they are their preferred party's *official* candidate. The rise of "independents" (or rather of multiple *de facto* candidates for one party) and the knowledge that one's official-candidate status is less and less determinative of one's electoral support, is likely to drive candidates to sell *themselves* more and more – invariably spending more and more money in

[33] For all MWK figures cited here, MWK1m would translate to approximately £1000 in GBP.

the process – as campaigns and campaign messages become increasingly personalised. The need to sell oneself, rather than simply relying on one's party affiliation, pushes up the cost(s) of campaigning exponentially. By the same logic, there were indications that those in party heartland seats – where their party affiliation continues to count for a great deal as compared to their personal vote – generally spend far less than those in "swing" constituencies. This emerged particularly clearly in the case of MCP Central Region MPs, who did on average report campaign spending at the lower end of the spectrum.

It is also clear, however, that a great deal will depend on the contours and specificities of each individual race. Abbie Shaba (Mzimba East, 2004-14), for instance, contrasts his 2009 and 2014 campaigns in Mzimba East:

> '2009 I can't remember now but I must have spent maybe about MWK2-3 million. It wasn't that expensive because I remember, having won the elections, I still had money in the bank, which I didn't have in 2014. In 2014 I must have spent more than MWK20 million… [*Why that difference?*] Too many candidates. The opposition had become much stronger. The area [of the constituency] where I come from there were two of us [as candidates] so we were dividing the votes. The party didn't really help much. [I didn't like it but] it was a question of, "if I don't do it, then I'm gone"' (A. Shaba 2017).

Shaba won in 2009, but lost in 2014 despite this effort and expense.

Variation, in short, can be enormous. For almost all, though, there is considerable – and sometimes debilitating – expense involved. Some of this expense is clearly logistical, to do with mounting a campaign in a predominantly rural and mountainous country with poor transport and communications infrastructure:

> 'you have to run around the constituency. So you need fuel, you need a good car, you need [a campaign team]… So you actually move from village to village or house to house or area to area – that's very expensive. You know, fuel in Malawi is very expensive, maintaining your vehicle is very expensive' (Chinthu-Phiri 2016).

No campaign is complete, moreover, without campaign materials of various kinds – T-shirts, leaflets, and the like, which require significant amounts of money (Kunkuyu 2017). Meanwhile the assembling of a "campaign team" of supporters and advocates across the constituency generally begins very early in the process of entering into the political arena (and potentially years in advance of any election.) This extended network of locals (from extant party structures, family and so on) generally numbers in the hundreds, with a core of perhaps several dozen. While ostensibly "volunteers," they invariably expect and demand cash payment and equivalent rewards for their political labour, as well of course as requiring funding for all their

campaigning activities on one's behalf. They are to all intents and purposes a constituency and campaign staff requiring wages – albeit on an informal, ad-hoc basis – paid by the candidate themselves. Like Lindberg's (2010, 125) Ghanaian MPs, many of my interviewees also cited that not only were *voters* demanding more and more material resources from candidates, as discussed above, but so too were their own lieutenants and campaign workers agents of inflation in this respect. (I shall discuss politicians' constituency teams more fully in the next chapter). An additional source of expense, by common consent, are those local political and/or party notables whose support may be judged strategically important but who may often (though by no means always) expect or require financial support in return for any kind of endorsement or even fair treatment. Such figures include chiefs, as well as local religious/community/business leaders. 'Chiefs are very expensive, they are not happy with drinks and snacks!' (Lowe 2017).

Aside from these basic logistical expenses, many of the costs of campaigning relate to the fact that, as far as the general voting public is concerned, 'you know you are dealing with people that are poor,' and that the main 'time they get to enjoy something is campaign time' (Pillane 2017). If the presence of politicians is *always* an opportunity for financial extraction and redistribution, this becomes exponentially more true in the throes of a campaign for an imminent election. The pressure to spend comes from just about everyone with whom the campaigning politician or candidate might come into contact – from the party officials running the primary election, as we have seen, and one's primary voters and supporters; from one's own (general) election campaign team and front-line supporters; and, not least of course, from voters themselves, for whom campaign time is often referred to as "harvesting season." For all of these groups, it is not in the least to suggest that their votes and loyalties can simply be bought and sold on a material basis, to nonetheless acknowledge that the sight of a campaigning politician is – amidst all the other things it might be – an opportunity to *extract* as much as possible. For those on the receiving end of these demands and expectations, campaigning can become a seriously expensive business:

> 'it was really expensive because all the people that were taken as our front[line] supporters, all the people that were in my campaign team, even the ordinary people, the voters themselves – whenever we went to see them, we went to campaign, we went to persuade them to vote for me, they would need something. And the campaigners, wherever they were going, every day you had to give them something' (Anon MP6 2016).
>
> '[in campaigns] people expect you to sort of become a mini-government… and if somebody dies… the first person that gets phoned is me… Because they believe you will be a quicker solution, and they will put you sort of in a fix that, "you know if you do these things then you are exactly our ideal candidate." So you must ferry dead bodies from the big hospitals [in the cities] back home [to the

> village]. You must also provide some money, [and] maybe some food during the funerals or weddings of leaders that, you know, are working with you; and all these extracurricular sort of things. But these are things that actually have been taken by the general populace to matter if you [want to] become a leader or be re-elected as a leader, and so that's why you find the cost becomes so huge' (Menyani 2016).

Malani Mtonga (Karonga South, 2014-19) echoes this:

> 'it's quite expensive because Malawians… their understanding is that campaigning is about giving out material things. Not just party uniforms or what have you, but they believe that's time for them to receive from politicians. To receive clothes, food… a lot of things. So that time around it's really expensive because when you have got a constituency of about 20,000… registered voters and… you're targeting that at least you should reach out to about half of those voters for you to make it as MP. So your budget is quite huge' (Mtonga 2016).

One MP acknowledges that 'yes we had people who were lining people up at the campaign venue and handing out banknotes to each and every one who attends the rally' (Kunkuyu 2017). I shall return to the subject of handouts to the mass public later in the chapter.

What this amounts to, for many candidates at least, is that campaigning for office is not merely expensive or difficult but actually, as one says, 'a very huge financial risk' (Anon MP2 2017). Several interviewees invested much of their retirement plan and pension in an election bid (Malunga 2016; A. Shaba 2017). Others took considerable amounts from their businesses, and put those enterprises at risk, in order to fund their campaigns (Mussa 2017). Several accumulate money over time in fixed-term investments which are released just in time to help fund their (re-)election campaigns (R. C. Shaba 2016).

One MP spoke of spending 'every little tambala I had,' and of how 'my children were complaining – every night we were just eating *usipa* [little fish, amongst the cheapest food available]' (Anon MP2 2017). Another acknowledges that 'sometimes you would feel, "what am I really fighting for? Why I'm losing all these resources? I have got children, I have got a family, I have got other responsibilities. Why I'm spending all this money on this particular thing?"' – and that he had several times to be persuaded by his campaign team to continue with his campaign (Anon MP6 2016). As Grain Malunga says, finally:

> 'in 2009 I spent about MWK12 million… and thank God I had the money because I had retired from government [and] I had just finished doing some consultancy… So it was easy for me to campaign. [But] for those really that have nothing to

> campaign [with] and compete with those that have something – it's a big challenge, [no] matter what good ideas you have' (Malunga 2016).

Many talk of running for election (and re-election) thus as a major financial gamble. It might fail, but it might pay off – in which case they will be "rewarded", as far as their personal finances are concerned, with a well-paid, lucrative job (and, indeed, the time and means to recoup their losses acquired during the campaign, especially in the first few years of their incumbency). It is not at all to suggest that it is merely the prospect of such a "dividend" that motivates people into politics in the first place to nevertheless acknowledge that personal-financial considerations *are* present and of critical concern to politicians and indeed their dependents.

What this means, of course, is that the sourcing of money and equivalent material resources is a preeminent, indeed fundamental, concern of both aspirants and incumbents seeking to mount an effective election campaign (see Lwanda 2006). Campaign financing remains, moreover, a profoundly murky issue, subject to very little scrutiny or regulation. Several interviewees acknowledged "support" and "sponsorship" from "well-wishers" abroad and domestic – both direct financial contributions, as well as help with transport, providing materials and so on – such as friends with businesses, contacts in the international NGO industry and the like. One former minister acknowledges that, for his first campaign, 'I had a fleet of vehicles that were donated by my friends' (Kumpalume 2017). Another former MP says that, 'I had a friend of mine who had worked in South Africa and he came to join two months before the elections, and he put [in] I would say 20% of what I spent. But 80% was my money' (Majawa 2016).

None admitted, naturally enough, to any concerns about conflicts of interest in their own cases, although rumours abound in this area – to the extent of a small number of candidates' campaigns and operations being rumoured to be "sponsored" by other politicians or key business interests to such an extent that they are essentially placemen and/or ciphers for those interests. As Jesse Kabwila (Salima North West, 2014-19) argues, the problem with politics being so expensive is that, 'I know people who spent 17, 20, 24 million, you know? And this makes it very difficult because they end up bonded to the people who funded them' (Kabwila 2016).

I was unable to pursue such matters very far with participants – we discussed it, but there is no way to independently verify their claims. I, along with the Malawian public, must admit to remaining largely in the dark about such matters. Suffice it to say, however, that the murkiness of campaign financing represents perhaps the single most fundamental, and glaringly obvious, entry-point for private interests and corruption into Malawian politics. The Office of the Director of Public Officers' Declarations (ODPOD) is recently established and dedicated, but

grossly under-staffed, under-resourced and under-funded (as its own founding Director attests (Tukula 2016)).

How parties do and don't matter in campaigning

In relation to all that has been said about the expense of campaigning, it should be noted that the requirement to source campaign funds personally and to spend one's own money throughout the campaign is essentially as true for the official nominees of established national parties as it is for nominal "independents." With occasional (and partial) exceptions – unusually high-profile races and by-elections being the most obvious – *all* candidates are overwhelmingly required to fund their own election campaigns (Wahman 2019, 2 suggests 83% of the average campaign spend is self-funded). Many interviewees confirmed even having to buy their own party cloth to distribute at rallies – as one puts it, 'it's amazing when people say that the party has sponsored you. I don't think I was sponsored by the party, but [rather] I sponsored the party!' (Malunga 2016). In this remark Malunga echoes Wilkins (2019, 1493), who similarly finds that – much as candidates do seek to, and do benefit from, capturing the "flag" (nomination and thus branding) of Uganda's ruling NRM (National Resistance Movement) – the relationship is very much symbiotic in that the NRM is itself kept alive and rejuvenated by candidates bringing their personal networks and money *into* the party, and in exchange for little more than its brand.

As far as candidates themselves are concerned, the lack of direct material support notwithstanding, one veteran nevertheless highlights the crucial importance of parties in election campaigns thus:

> 'I was literally on my own in terms of resources. Where I received some support from my party is where some senior party officials including the party president at times were coming, especially the first time the party president would come and throw his weight behind me by [saying]… "look, this is the man that I know and please give him support." *That* kind of support. But not in terms of resources, in terms of funding, in terms of party materials – no [for] that I was literally on my own' (Anon MP10 2017).

Despite the complete lack of material or financial support, he loosely estimates his election victories as 60% down to his party affiliation and just 40% to his personal appeal (or any sort of "personal vote") (Anon MP10 2017). It is the "*moral*" support that a party offers during a campaign that, to an overwhelming extent, matters most to its candidates – be that, as the MP suggests, the visit of a party leader, or merely being affiliated with a particular party brand, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Being identified with a particular party (even if informally in the case of nominally "independent" candidates) can be hugely advantageous financially as well as electorally, not because of any direct material support that these parties offer, but rather because, as has been argued in previous chapters, parties come with a pre-established profile, identity and place in national politics – not to mention an up-ballot presidential candidate – that attaches to candidates at constituency level. Compensating for such brand-shortcuts – and having to build a personal profile and identity to compete against them – is likely to be, other things being equal, a particularly challenging and, indeed, expensive task:

> 'Being [a true] independent candidate is… costly, because you do not have the support of any political party. So a political party… would have their presidential candidate, they would have their manifesto which in some cases might be very appetizing. Could be the presidential candidate that is very appealing, [or] the manifesto that is appetizing to the electorate. And you come as an independent – for you to provide a manifesto that would be more appealing than those that are representing bigger entities, it will be very difficult. And for you as an individual, to outsmart an individual that's being… backed by a presidential aspirant that is so appealing, it [is] also a hard task' (Kunkuyu 2017).

It is the continued importance of parties in this sense that accounts for the very small number of true independents being elected. As Peter Kumpalume (Blantyre West, 2014-19) says, perhaps a little too baldly, 'if the party is popular, their candidate is going to win. That's the way it works. Unless of course if there are some issues in the primaries whereby people now rebel [and an "independent" stands] – but otherwise, if the party is popular, their candidate is going to win' (Kumpalume 2017).

In fact, for all the long-standing conceptions of African politics as being the realm of "personal rule" and "big men," Malawian politicians have a strikingly acute sense of the importance of party affiliation to their electoral prospects. Given the fluidity of those affiliations, moreover, calculating how to position themselves to their best advantage in this respect is a near-constant, carefully-calibrated focus of concern for them throughout their political careers – the cause of much party-switching and "chameleonism" throughout many a political life as formations and factions at national level fuse and fissure, regularly opening and closing possibilities to shift affiliation and thereby (if one has calculated correctly) secure improved public support, as well as (not an irrelevant consideration either) potential personal advancement (Young 2014; Rakner et al 2007; Englund 2002b). As far as campaigning and appealing to the electorate is concerned, however, this again has little to do with any direct, material campaign support that parties might offer, and everything to do with attaching themselves to a particular brand and formation/faction in national politics.

How exactly party-brand and this badge of factional affiliation at national level matters and is seen to matter is not, however, an entirely simple issue. As discussed in Chapter 2, many politicians see themselves as "party takers" on the grounds of ethnoregional partisanship. One (Central Region) Dedza MP offers a wry assessment of the electoral importance of his personal qualities and charms:

> 'I can even challenge you. If… my party elects me in the primary elections to say, "Clement, you are going to represent the MCP in this area," I [could] even go to America on a holiday and come back on the election day (*laughs*). I would win! I know that's insurance enough. If I'm standing for the party, that's insurance enough that I'm winning' (Clement Mlombwa (Dedza South West, 2009-) (2017)).

Many Central Region MCP MPs talk similarly; likewise DPP MPs in various parts of the Southern Region and UDF MPs in the Muslim-Yao Eastern Region.

Just as MPs' *personal* relationships with parties and party brands, as discussed in Chapter 2, are more complex than a simple ethnoregional reading would suggest, however, so too is this the case with the public – and candidates know it. When it comes to how and why party affiliation is seen to impact on one's electoral prospects, therefore, many candidates in fact contradict Mlombwa as quoted above, and acknowledge that ethnoregionalism is decidedly *not* all. DPP MP Theresa Mwale (Mchinji West, 2009-14), for instance, like Mlombwa insists that she did indeed win because of her party affiliation, but did so in a constituency which, in her own estimation, 'is basically MCP' (T. Mwale 2017). In her case, the performance of her party's President (Bingu wa Mutharika) at national level was, she insists, the key factor – indeed, one that clearly trumped ethnoregional loyalties across the Central Region in the 2009 election, which saw many MCP heartland seats turn DPP (Anon MP6 2016). For a parliamentary candidate to win, in her view:

> 'The leadership [of their party] must be popular… [In 2009] Bingu was very popular because of his first term, because of the availability of maize, because of the [fertilizer] subsidy… That made him very popular. So when you went and identified yourself with that party, *you* were popular' (T. Mwale 2017).

There is, then, no simple story about *how* exactly party affiliation matters – ethnoregional identities are clearly crucial, but equally clearly they cannot be taken entirely for granted. The likes of national leadership and government performance can clearly also play a hugely important role in terms of how a party and its candidates are received (see Ferree and Horowitz 2010) – and candidates are aware of this.

In sum, and regardless of how precisely it matters or is seen to matter, all of my interviewees and participants are agreed that their party affiliation *does* matter when it comes to attempting

to endear themselves as a candidate to the electorate – and profoundly so. There may be a very few "big men" (and women) in Malawi politics who command political authority and legitimacy on a personal basis and who can swap parties with relative ease, taking their supporters with them all the while (although even this is questionable, given how far even some of the once-mightiest have fallen after calculating poorly regarding their party affiliation(s)) – but the vast majority of MPs are not in this category. On the contrary, party affiliation looms so large in their working lives and political calculations because they understand it to be critical to their electoral and political fortunes. In this respect Malawian parliamentary candidates have much in common with political candidates in most electoral democracies, in that they rise and fall electorally, to a very large extent, not as themselves but as representatives of a wider formation that competes for power at national level (the "personal vote" literature is vast; Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987 remains a classic treatment).

The presentation of self

Notwithstanding the importance of party affiliation, however – and their clear acknowledgement of its importance – interviewees also understood that there is a great deal more involved in campaigning for, and certainly in ultimately winning, elected office in Malawi than merely tying themselves to the optimum party colours. This is for several reasons. Firstly, many aspirants do not arrive into the political arena with a party affiliation firmly affixed. On the contrary, this often comes late in the process of establishing oneself in politics, and is in any case always subject to change throughout one's career – sometimes by a very considerable amount. It is, moreover, not of course a relevant dimension of difference when it comes to party primaries themselves.

Secondly, the genre(s) of political campaigning activities prevalent in Malawi (whether elections are upcoming or not) mostly take the form of localised face-to-face meetings, appearances, campaign rallies and the like rather than nationwide campaigns mediated primarily through the mass media and party organisations. Party affiliation is of course a feature of these performances, but it might be suggested that something more personal and personalised is also required – and is written into the script of this genre of performance (see Gilman 2009).

Thirdly, 'for [the first ten years of democracy], most of the party candidates assumed by the mere fact of mentioning that "I belong to [a particular party]… in such an area where [that party] was popular, people will vote for you' (A. Shaba 2017). This is not, however, held any longer to be the case. Even if, as has been argued, the surge in voting for independent candidates is not challenging party-based partisanship as much as it may at first glance appear, it is nevertheless unquestionably the case that Malawians are increasingly willing to accept – at very least – voting for unofficial party candidates rather than their preferred party's official

nominee. In this limited sense, at least, there *is* a clear shift away from party-voting and towards personal voting – and candidates in this position are naturally obliged to differentiate themselves by means other than party affiliation.

It should also not be underestimated, finally, the extent to which many politicians (in Malawi and far beyond) doubtless find it something close to a psychological necessity to believe that they are, as it were, masters of their own fate and that they have at least some sort of personal vote and personal appeal as distinct from their party affiliation. Regardless of how true this may or may not be in particular cases, it is certainly borne out in my interviews that many like to (even need to?) believe it to be so. It is, no doubt, an understandable occupational bias.

In sum, then, most candidates understand that party affiliation is not nearly enough in order to sell themselves to the electorate, that (with all due respect to Clement Mlombwa) going on holiday throughout the general election campaign is probably not a good idea even in a heartland seat, and that they are in fact as (aspirant) politicians very largely involved in building a *personal* profile and reputation wherein they do just that – that is, they sell *themselves*. As even Sam Kawale (Dowa North East, 2014-), an MP in the MCP heartlands, sees it:

> 'A lot of people, they are not looking at the personality of the person, although it's kind of getting there now. We have seen a lot of people who are [elected as] independents – it simply shows people are now moving more towards the person and not [just voting for the] political party. And in my constituency, we've actually seen… there has been an MP of another political party because they were looking at the *person*. Actually it was a vote of no confidence against the previous MCP MP – it was a protest vote, that's why they voted for the other guy. But then when I came in under the MCP ticket, it was very easy to say: this is the person, firstly, it's the personality [of] the person coming [that you will like] – [*and* he] has aligned himself with the party that we like' (Kawale 2016).

Peter Kumpalume (Blantyre North, 2014-19) likewise concurs with the near-unanimous view amongst my interviewees that personal voting is increasing and that, in a sign of "progress," Malawians are less and less inclined to 'blindly follow' their party:

> '[More and more], for parliamentary seats, it's really about the individual – because we have quite a number of people that stand on an independent ticket and also win, so it's normally about the individual at MP level. I am not saying the party does not play a role… [but] you need to market both you the individual and the party' (Kumpalume 2017).

And as far as Esther Jolobala (Machinga East, 2014-) is concerned:

> 'Before the people… vote for you into power, they have to know *you*, basically – your behaviour, where you are coming from – and they have to get used [to you]

> for them to entrust you with that responsibility to represent them' (Jolobala 2016).

In campaigning, then, politicians are concerned to make what Fenno (2003), after Erving Goffman (1959), calls a '*presentation of self*.' This presentation of self is just that – profoundly personal, concerned with a positive projection of the politician's qualities and attributes *as a human being*. It is about demonstrating to the represented that one is the kind of person they want representing them (Hibbing 2003, p.vii).

MPs instinctively understand this profoundly inter-*personal* quality of the representative relationship, not least as a matter of professional necessity – and it is doubtless reflective of this that it is "*trust*" to which they most often refer and allude when discussing what they are trying to cultivate when pitching to their constituents or electorate. As Aaron Sangala (Blantyre Malabada, 2004-19) says:

> 'our role as Members of Parliament – the job of an MP – is given to us out of trust. Trust that, "you can do this for us, go and do it." When that trust is gone, that's when they choose somebody else' (A. Sangala 2016).

And in a similar vein:

> 'I never made false promises. I was open with people, I was realistic, telling people what is feasible and what is not feasible. That was something that I had to be sure of. I think in most cases people know if someone is just playing politics or someone is being genuine, and I [sought to] portray myself as someone who is genuine – and the people bought that. If you like, what they saw is exactly what they got from me' (Kumpalume 2017).

This, then, is the fundamental message and goal of Malawian MPs as they pitch themselves and present themselves to the public, the electorate, or their constituents – "*trust me*" (Gilman 2009, 344–49; Englund 2002b, 183). This is a finding in common with studies of politicians in representative democracies from the USA (Fenno 1977, 898) to the Netherlands (Andeweg and Thomassen 2005, 516), and is not particularly surprising: "trust" would indeed seem to be a reasonable way of capturing what anyone seeking to be represented by someone else could be expected to desire in such a person, given the critical promissory elements involved in any representative relationship and especially in the holding of political office. While the details of exactly how and with what messages politicians seek to build trust are more likely to be socioculturally specific, that trust is the ultimate goal is as true in Malawi as it is in the Netherlands or the USA. The representative-represented relationship is, after all, a relationship between *people* – and it is inter-personal *trust* that is at its heart. This is profoundly personal of course for politicians above all, as it relates so directly and so intimately to their person. It relates to the kind of person that they are and that they present to others – whether or not

they are (or are judged to be) a person worthy of trust. Money preoccupies Malawian MPs; building trust preoccupies them more.

The question I therefore turn to focus on for the remainder of this discussion of campaigning is this: how do MPs (and aspirant MPs) make – and think about making – presentations of self that they intend will cultivate this precious commodity of trust between themselves and their voter-constituents? I suggest, following Fenno (2003), that they seek to communicate three broad and internally variegated message about themselves, about *who they are as people* – one of identification ("I am one of you"), one of empathy ("I understand your situation and I care about it") and one of qualification ("I am qualified to be your MP"). Fenno was writing about representatives in 1970s USA, but like many others in a huge range of settings, I have found his basic presentation of self framework highly applicable to my own case – albeit the internal content of each of these broad messages is inevitably more specific.

I deal below with each in turn – although it should be noted, of course, that the exact contours of such messages and how they are combined will be unique to every case. Messages will be emphasised in different ways, and some aspects emphasised over others, according to the specific candidates and specific circumstances. What is more, sociocultural and semiotic communication is multi-faceted, complex and open to multiple interpretations. Real-world behaviour does not fall neatly into one or other of these three categories, which are employed for heuristic purposes of analysis and are inevitably imperfect and not at all exhaustive.

It is important to make three further points here regarding the scope of what is being discussed. The first is that, as emphasised in the introduction, the scope of "campaigning" here is such that it applies to both the "short" (election-imminent) campaign as well as to the "long campaign" – that is, the wider and continuous process by which incumbents "sell" themselves to their constituents as a politician worthy of their ongoing and continuing trust and support; a process or set of processes that intensify and become "official" as elections approach, but which extend far beyond those periods. There are, doubtless, particularities of the presentation of self that politicians make in the immediate run-up to an election as compared with when that election is years away (not least in terms of the intensity of these presentations), but the presentation of themselves that politicians make does not, other things being equal, greatly alter depending on where they are in the electoral cycle. Interviewees very much understood their constituency visits as being, in large part, "long campaigning." The three broad messages remain; Fenno's (1977; 2003) original analysis, indeed, was concerned with the "home styles" of incumbent politicians in their "long campaigns" *between* elections.

Secondly, and for the most part, the basic framework outlined below for the building of trust by means of a presentation of self is seen to be as applicable to aspirant MPs as it is to incumbents. Obviously, there will be considerable differences between the campaign

messaging offered by an incumbent MP with a record to defend, on the one hand, and the challengers to said incumbent on the other. However, at the very broad level of the presentation of self by politicians to the public, the commonalities are considerably more striking than the differences in this respect – and are the focus in what follows.

Thirdly, the discussion below focuses primarily on the internal content of presentations of self. It should be noted, however, that before worrying about one's reputation, one first needs a *profile* (Corbett 2015, 45–47). Politicians are profoundly concerned with their presentations of self, but they are also concerned to ensure that enough of the right people are paying any attention to those presentations in the first place – as several of the quotes above have indicated. This is one of the ways in which party affiliation assumes great importance: it is the ultimate shortcut to a political profile. Aside from this, however, money can clearly go some way, although it is very easy for spendthrift candidates to find lots of people willing to take their money, but far fewer impressed by their presentation of self and/or willing to vote them into office (see this chapter's conclusion). It is doubtless because of the considerable difficulties of establishing a profile for politics that so many candidates are those with a pre-established profile in another area (especially if that pre-established profile can be used to suggest qualification for political office). For instance, a large number of entertainers (musicians, comedians etc.) stand for parliament, and can trade on their popular-populist profile. Jesse Kabwila (Salima North West, 2014-19) similarly acknowledges that, 'I was riding on the wave of [the] academic freedom [struggle], so I already had a name' – a name as an outspoken anti-DPP firebrand – perfect for an MCP heartland seat (Kabwila 2016).

The discussion that follows, in sum, is not and cannot be an entirely exhaustive treatment of campaigning (both "long" and "short") in Malawi. It does not pretend to capture every campaign message or "pitch" to voters that politicians make. On the contrary, the work of Portia Roelofs (2019b; 2019a) on Nigeria, and of Cheeseman et al (2021) across Ghana, Kenya and Uganda, has demonstrated expertly how pitches for legitimacy, and political debate and contestation as a whole, are never fixed (for instance by "culture") but are instead *always* open-ended, creative and evolving processes. "What is good politics/the good politician?" are not "pre-political" questions, their answers somehow set prior to political contestation; they are, on the contrary, openly and vigorously contested questions – part of politics, and of political contestation and debate (Roelofs 2019b, 431–32; Cheeseman et al 2021, 3). Each campaign is unique and specific to its moment, its context, and its competitive dynamics – and so too are the complexities and fine-grain of any politician's presentation of self and pitch(es) for legitimacy (not to mention, of course, how these are ultimately received and interpreted by voters.) Such dynamics, and variation as a whole, are undoubtedly a subject worthy of extensive further research and elucidation. The discussion that follows, however, aims merely to highlight some (necessarily broad and generalised) contours of politics and political

campaigning, and to offer a means to begin thinking about how politicians themselves think about, as well as go about, trying to "sell" themselves (or 'performing virtue' (Cheeseman et al 2021, 211–49)) to the Malawian public as a good potential or incumbent MP.

IDENTIFICATION – "I am one of you"

Campaigning in any setting – whether by candidates seeking election as representative(s) of a distinct territorial constituency or by incumbent MPs ongoing selling of themselves as good and worthy examples of such – doubtless invites *any* politician, anywhere, to respond to what Milnor (1969, 31) calls 'the parochialism of his district.' This *can* be flattered, of course, by those who are not in any sense "originally" from an area, by stressing their love and commitment to the place and community which they have made their home (see below for the example of Jacqueline Kouwenhoven, Rumphi West's (2014-19) Dutch-born MP.) However, given that, as we saw in the previous chapter, the vast majority of candidates *do* run in constituencies they claim as "home," by far the most common manifestation of this is to actively demonstrate, not only that "I love and care about you" (see next section), but that *"I am one of you."* This aspect of political style is of course likely to have special resonance in relation to African politics, with the long-standing focus on the role of autochthony, ethnicity, and various other local particularisms in the continent's politics – not to mention the use (and abuse) of these by politicians themselves (see for instance Berman 1998; Posner 2004; Boone 2017). As Hornsby (1989, 296) said of elections in 1980s Kenya, people want 'one of us.'

Participants did indeed acknowledge a conscious effort on their part, as campaigning politicians, to present unbridled affinity with major aspects of the distinct and/or particular identities or ways of life in their localities and communities. One MP, for instance, during one visit to his constituency made repeated play in multiple speeches of a recent verdict by a major charity that only his district and one other did *not* have what they officially designated as a "hunger crisis":

> "Let them come to Ntchisi and see for themselves! I will show them the hunger in our district! I am fighting every day for this decision to be overturned so that our people receive what we are entitled to!" (Constituency Observation 2 (Kadzamira) 2016).

Davies Katsonga (Mwanza Central, 1999-2009; 2014-19), meanwhile, makes considerable play of his Ngoni identity, and his noble bloodline and elevated status within the group. He not infrequently wears his Ngoni chief headdress and vestments, both in the constituency and indeed in parliament (once being suspended for being "inappropriately dressed" according to Parliament's Standing Orders) (Parliamentary Observations, 2016). He also for a time founded and led his own "Ngoni party", Chaka Cha Pfuko (Party of the Clan). Similarly, veteran Northern

politician Kamlepo Kalua (Rumphi East, 2014-) is particularly vociferous in parliament and especially at rallies (or at least one I witnessed) at pressing claims of Northern grievance, of the North being excluded and neglected and marginalised (Constituency Observation 4 (Mwale) 2016) – a very long-standing discourse in Malawian politics dating at least from independence.[34]

There are doubtless many similar and related aspects of presenting ethnic affinity that are more subterranean. Whispers and rumours abound, for example, of MCP Central Region MPs' involvement in the Chewa *nyau* brotherhoods, a secret society (often labelled a cult) of initiated men, and its associated dance and witchcraft rituals known as *gule wamkulu* – indeed, of the MCP's own embeddedness in these grassroots practices and institutions which are widely regarded as being impenetrable to outsiders (on *nyau* see Kaspin 1993).[35] The same applies to some extent regarding DPP MPs and the Lomwe "cultural association" Mulhako wa Alomwe (Namachekecha-Phiri 2017).

Like all identitarian politics, such presentations are inevitably (and perhaps intentionally) both unifying for the in-group but also divisive in certain respects, in that they designate and exclude an out-group. Around 30% of Katsonga's constituents, for instance, are *not* Ngonis, but Chewas (Constituency Observation 1 (Katsonga) 2016). When visiting their villages, it is true, he takes off his Ngoni headwear; however these constituents are aware of their MP's wider presentation of self, and so are also likely to be aware that in displaying to the majority group in the constituency that "I am one of you," he is simultaneously communicating to the minority group that he is not, in this respect at least, one of them (Constituency Observation 1 (Katsonga) 2016).

Not all presentations of "I am one of you", then, can be or will be internally unifying for the constituency as a whole, any more than they are likely to be at the national level (Posner 2004, 529). There will always be internal differences:

> 'You cannot have support equally distributed in a constituency, you can't… In some areas you may never have support. It could be because of your personal touch that you have spent a lot of time in one area, [or] you have got more relations in a certain area [than] the other one, [or] maybe you went to school in

[34] Such claims can, of course, also be turned on opponents. The opponents of Jacqueline Kouwenhoven (Rumphi West, 2014-19), who would go on to become Malawi's first white female MP, targeted her rhetorically as being 'white and a foreigner,' and their campaigns revived anti-colonial songs from the liberation movement (Kouwenhoven 2016).

[35] The MCP grassroots are also known to be profoundly enmeshed with the grassroots of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian's Nkhoma Synod, the dominant religious denomination in the Central Region and a periodically prominent voice in politics (see Nzunda and Ross 1995).

> another area therefore people know you. And sometimes it [can] have something to do with religion [or ethnic divisions]' (Anon MP10 2017).

What is more, politicians play a crucial role in maintaining (and in some cases creating or exacerbating) the political salience of certain differences (Posner 2004). It is fundamental to politics anywhere, after all, that there be "dividing lines" by which parties and candidates essentially risk annoying or alienating some of the electorate in order to appeal more strongly to another part – one cannot survive long in politics solely on vague, unifying, but inevitably bland and unremarkable paeans to the "nation" or constituency entire. In pursuit of identitarian dividing lines, politicians will seek to mobilise groups and cleavages whose size relative to the whole (be that whole a constituency, a country, or anything in between) is large enough to be viable, but targeted enough to be meaningful, as a vehicle for support-building and political competition (Posner 2004, 529; see also Boone 2017). Katsonga, for example, has mobilised his Ngoni identity both at the constituency level (where he estimates approximately 50% of his constituents are co-ethnics) and the national level (10% of Malawi's population are Ngonis) as presidential candidate of his "Party of the Clan" (Constituency Observation 1 (Katsonga) 2016).

Dividing lines need by no means form only around cultural/ethnic differences, however. Simple geography, and indeed administrative units created (often very recently) by the state, often serve as a basis for mobilisation and cleavage – not least at constituency level where ethnic or religious differences are (with some notable exceptions) often minimal. Crucial here, on MPs' own account, are local government ward boundaries. There being two of these per (rural) constituency, these frequently present a useful and viable dividing line for MP-candidates: interviewees typically discussed intra-constituency political divisions and electoral tactics in terms of their "home" ward (or "side" in local parlance) and the "other side" (Namachekecha-Phiri 2017; Mwenifumbo 2017; A. Shaba 2017).

It should be noted, however, that interviewees also invariably took such divisions as to some extent "natural" or at least inevitable, rather than something over which they as an individual had very much power or influence to encourage or discourage. This suggests that ideas and dynamics centring wards as meaningful intra-constituency cleavages have very much taken on a momentum of their own and no longer require the self-conscious agency of enterprising politicians to sustain them. Abbie Shaba (Mzimba East, 2004-14), for instance, feels he fell victim to the logic in 2014, when he lost in significant part, he says, simply because there were two candidates from his "side" of the constituency: 'so we were dividing the votes' (A. Shaba 2017). Dennis Namachekecha-Phiri (Phalombe North East, 2014-) similarly takes the political salience of ward boundaries as given, and from there discusses his tactics and his luck. In common with most MPs with whom I discussed this, he saw the (short and long) campaign priority as being to reach out to the *other* side:

> 'In my case I did not do much in my ward, Mauzi. I never did campaign in Mauzi ward. I targeted where people don't know me. So I went to Swang'oma ward and I even camped there… staying there, day in, day out. I [did that]… because without that I couldn't have managed to get some votes there because they didn't know me. So I had to make myself available to them, they must know [me]… [In the results] I was number two in their… ward. I was the second, there were a number of candidates from that side. Out of the five [candidates], I was the only one from Mauzi ward so I had an advantage. While the four were from the other side, so… [they] had to share the votes there, so I had an advantage' (Namachekecha-Phiri 2017).

As incumbent MP distributing resources and constituency projects, Abbie Shaba acknowledges that his long-campaign strategy was, 'I would concentrate where I had won' (A. Shaba 2017). Lifred Nawena's (Thyolo Thava, 2009-14) opposite approach, however, was more typical:

> 'I got to know that [one] part of Thyolo Thava is seriously for me, but that [the] other part is not for me. So, you try and put more resources where you are not supported. You try to get people to be for you. And it worked in my case… By the time we had elections in 2014, that other side was perhaps more for Nawena than my own village! (*laughs*)… The people in that area got to know me better, because what I did, the constituents used to travel all the way to Thyolo Central and even Mulanje to access coupon fertilizers. But when I became a Member of Parliament, I put 2 ADMARC [(Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation]) depots in that area where I was unpopular… For the very first time, people on that side were able to access fertilizer from 2 ADMARC depots. So, that's one thing that I managed to do which I think touched the hearts of my opponents in that area' (Nawena 2017).

In sum, then, presentations (self-conscious or not) of particularistic (cultural, religious, ethnic, regional, ward or local) affinity can be both inclusionary and/or exclusionary; politically/electorally helpful to politicians in some ways, and unhelpful in others. Politicians must navigate their specific circumstances and work with what they have – but there is no question that such presentations *are* generally a significant element of candidates' presentations of "one-ness" with (at least parts of) their electorate and constituency.

Participants' other major concern and emphasis in respect of demonstrating "one-ness" with constituents was, as it emerged from observations and interviews, *class*-based – in the sense of their being very aware of their own relatively (or very) elevated and privileged position relative to their voter-constituents, and seeking to ostentatiously demonstrate humility and "the common touch" in order to compensate. This was a huge theme in my interviews (considerably more prominent than ethnic/cultural/geographic presentations of one-ness) and was very

much in the minds of MPs whenever they encountered constituents: they are aware of politicians as a class being disparaged and despised as arrogant, self-serving, out-of-touch, privileged elites, and are near-constantly concerned to demonstrate that *they*, at least, are different; that *they*, at least, in fundamental ways remain "one of the people" and have not gotten above themselves. In this respect, Malawian MPs are themselves reflecting and responding to anti-politician discourses and sentiments at large – and responding, moreover, with what Moffitt and Tormey (2014, 381) have aptly described as a populist 'political style.' This tends to involve an encouragement and exacerbation of anti-politicianism by means of an implicit or explicit contrast of *this* politician with the rest of the political class (Fenno 1977, 914 similarly found U.S. House Members 'polishing [their] individiual reputation[s] at the expense of the institutional representation of the Congress' and their fellow Members). It is doubtless an inevitable way that political entrepreneurs respond to widespread anti-politician sentiment, leaning into rather than contradicting it – and one we have obviously seen in recent years in a wide range of settings far beyond Malawi (see also Kennedy 2018, who discusses primarily in the UK context how politicians in recent decades have sought to portray themselves, above all, as "authentic").

How, then, do MPs seek to present that "I am one of you" in *this* sense? Many candidates, for instance, make some play of moving to the constituency – at least temporarily for the duration of the election campaign, and sometimes years in advance. Jacqueline Kouwenhoven (Rumphi West, 2014-19), meanwhile, *does* live in her constituency, but over a year prior to the election, 'I didn't… travel anymore… I made a conscious choice to be more [active and] visible in the constituency' (Kouwenhoven 2016). One future MP's set-piece campaign activity, meanwhile, was baking bricks with a large group of constituents for three days and nights at a time – going to live with them in their villages, working together, resting together, and humbling herself by taking a full part in this periodic ritual of village life (Chinthu-Phiri 2016; Constituency Observation 5 (Chinthu-Phiri) 2017). As Clement Mlombwa (Dedza South West, 2009-) says about his constituency profile as an incumbent MP:

> 'you have to… above all be part of the community. If you want to be an MP you have to be one of the people in that community… You have to be present at each and every gathering that is happening' (Mlombwa 2017).

Aisha Adams (Mangochi Nkungulu, 2014-) similarly stresses that she wants her constituents to feel that 'here is a leader who is with us all the time' (Adams 2016). Jesse Kabwila (Salima North West, 2014-19) is, in a similar vein, clear that 'you have to go to… funerals,' but that this is not simply about being available to buy coffins and contribute to funeral expenses:

> 'you must be *there* with them – it's important to be, culturally. One of the key things that gets you voted back is when you are seen to be humane and to be a… [fellow] Malawian. Funerals form a large part [of this]' (Kabwila 2016).

Self-conscious displays of in-touch-ness with the "common man (or woman)" are also deployed by means, for example, of overt displays of religiosity (visiting churches and mosques is *de rigeur*), or of fealty and respect for chiefs – both strongly and repeatedly emphasised by MPs I observed in their constituencies – as well as the mere fact of conversing in a vernacular language (Constituency Observation 5 (Chinthu-Phiri) 2017; Fieldnotes, 2015-17). MPs were careful, for example, even when in direct or open conflict with particular chiefs, to show appropriate respect and deference to the *institution* of chieftancy, which is one that most Malawians regard as emblematic of "our (particular) way of life" and thus a clear conduit through which politicians can emphasise their (wo)man-of-the-people credentials (Logan 2013, 362–63).

Collins Kajawa (Lilongwe Mpenu Nkhoma, 2014-) discusses his constituency visits as follows:

> 'I go to them honestly to make sure that I build our own partnership and relationship because we are one and the same people… to build relationships with them and organize sports and rejoice together just as a way of ensuring that we are one and the same. They should not be seen to be detecting a gap between me and them but *they should count me as one of them*. We can play together, we can eat together and share stories together, we can share the pains together and whatever comes along, we should be seen that we are together in that… [that] I am part of them' (Kajawa 2016, my emphasis).

When, for instance, he goes home to watch the football league that he, like so many MPs, has established in the constituency, he likes to take a turn as player – careful, of course, to spend fifteen minutes on *each* team.

Typically, on a visit to her constituency, Juliana Lunguzi (Dedza East, 2014-19) does not favour her typical business-suit, but instead dresses in the blouse, *chitenje* (wrap) and headscarf that is popular feminine attire in villages. She stops at a petrol station in the township and joins some patrons on rickety wooden benches in the forecourt. She talks and jokes with them, sipping Coke and passing around a newspaper. She calls this "greeting and shaking," and cultivates this ad hoc, relaxed, humble style, describing her constituency behaviour as "just talking to people" and her aim when visiting the constituency as being to "just greet people and hang about." "I don't expect special treatment. I sit with the people, I listen to them… you learn most that way" (Constituency Observation 3 (Lunguzi) 2016).

Boniface Kadzamira (Lilongwe City Centre, 2004-09; Ntchisi North, 2014-19) also goes out of his way to display the common touch, and considers this a key plank of his re-election appeal.

Driving through a remote village in his constituency, for instance, he sees an elderly woman walking on the road ahead. Unlike many constituents on this trip, she has *not* noticed him or shouted at him to stop, but he stops the car of his own volition, passes her MWK200 (approximately £0.20 GBP) out of the car window and exchanges pleasantries. His constituency governor in the back seat, meanwhile, explains to the woman that "this is your MP, this is your MP!" and we drive away. Citing this to me as a typical example of his humble political style and presentation of self, he contrasts himself proudly with his predecessors as MP in Ntchisi North, whom he insists would never have done such a thing as stop to greet and give a gift to an elderly peasant woman. "People are seeing the difference," he insists – "they are surprised an MP speaks to the likes of them!" (Constituency Observation 2 (Kadzamira) 2016).

As Kadzamira suggests here, in self-consciously presenting this "common touch," MPs are generally also self-consciously seeking to present that, "I am *not* like other politicians" – whom they know to be much-derided as a class, with a reputation as distant, self-serving, arrogant, and considerably more besides. Many MPs seek consciously to work against this narrative in their own (allegedly exceptional) case, whilst frequently publicly endorsing it as a fair reflection of the political class as a whole – thereby burnishing their own exceptionalism further. As long-surviving MP and former Home Affairs Minister Aaron Sangala (Blantyre Malabada, 2004-19) says about the "secret" of his close-to-unprecedented electoral success, having served *four* consecutive terms:

> 'My secret is to come down in terms of thinking. I think exactly the same as the people I am serving, because the mistake we make as leaders is [that] once we are there, we forget who put us there. So they must be able to shout at me the same way they were shouting at me when I was a candidate. If I have made a mistake, I must still say, "yes I think that was a mistake, next time we shouldn't do that"… But if [on the other hand] I retort back, then they gang up against me because now I have become "arrogant"… [I] emphasize this modesty kind of thing. That's what they want, you have to be modest. They have to be able to relate to you. You shouldn't be aloof. We [politicians] become aloof mostly because of the superiority complex, that's what I have seen, yeah, that's what I have learned' (A. Sangala 2016).

This final observation regarding the moral, as well as political, pitfalls that lie in wait for any incumbent politician, and that have befallen so many of their predecessors, constitutes something close to a "folk wisdom" amongst Malawian MPs (Fieldnotes, 2015-17). The development, slowly or quickly, of an overweening "superiority complex" or the like was cited by many as simultaneously: a significant danger to both their political and moral health, and therefore something that they must personally, internally be wary of; but also as something that their constituents would be sensitive to and/or expecting, and that they therefore should be concerned to externally, self-consciously and performatively work against and contradict.

As far as identification ("I am one of you") is concerned, in summary, whilst particularistic and cultural elements are decidedly (and no doubt inevitably) a feature of politicians' presentations of themselves to their constituents or electorate, it was the message of humility and one-ness with constituents (in often-explicit contrast to "other politicians") that the politicians I observed and interviewed were most consciously concerned to effect. They appeared generally to be, in other words, more actively concerned to transcend or at least bridge the social-class gulf between themselves and the vast majority of their people by stressing their humble character and day-to-day embeddedness in communities, rather than relying merely on proclamations and displays of shared ethnocultural characteristics. This concern and self-consciousness of a class barrier is hardly surprising given the enormous gap in incomes and overall lifestyles between (mostly urbanite) MPs and their (mostly rural or peri-urban) constituents.

EMPATHY – "I understand your situation and I care about it"

The emphasis on being "one of the people" bleeds into an emphasis on presenting empathy – "I understand your situation and I care about it." Many of the examples above indicate the interconnectedness, of course, of politicians presenting themselves as closely connected to people and as being embedded in their communities on the one hand; and showing love, care, and concern for those communities on the other. There is, however, an analytical distinction to be made between presenting that "I am one of you" and that "I understand your situation and I care about it" – perhaps most obviously in the rare case of an MP who does not claim to be "one of you" in any conventional sense. Jacqueline Kouwenhoven (Rumphi West, 2014-19) is a naturalised Malawian of Dutch descent, a white European, and so, by her own admission, stands out clearly as an "outsider" in her sprawling rural constituency in a remote part of the Northern Region. In her presentation of self, however, she feels that she is able to 'connect with people… [because] I know the cultural behaviour, I know how to behave, as a woman, in the culture and so on.' She is not seen to be "one of them" nor does she seek to be so, but she instead goes out of her way to stress her understanding of – and respect and affinity for – her constituents and their culture:

> 'I get on with the people. I'm not fluent in the language but I get the gestures. I dance the *vimbuza* [Tumbuka traditional dance]… They also say, "she's hard, but she loves us"… There's no barrier between us – between the people and me. There isn't… And they respect the fact I understand Tumbuka well enough' (Kouwenhoven 2016).

From many of the examples above it is possible to see how there are myriad non-monetary ways for politicians to communicate empathy in their day-to-day behaviour. Politicians I observed also made significant play of presenting themselves as an indomitable fighter and fearless spokesperson for local concerns and complaints – be that the need for an upgraded

hospital (Constituency Observation 1 (Katsonga) 2016) in the constituency, the need for a tarmacked road through the constituency (Kouwenhoven 2016), or (as mentioned above) perceived unfair treatment of the district by a major NGO (Constituency Observation 2 (Kadzamira) 2016).

Politicians' overwhelming emphasis as far as this aspect of their presentation of self is concerned, however, is the "requirement" to display generosity through "gift-giving," broadly defined, in their communities and constituencies. Generosity is key: 'across Africa the politician who fails to demonstrate an appropriate measure of generosity is likely to be castigated as selfish and to be punished on polling day' (Nugent 2007, 257). A well-established anthropological literature has long stressed the high expectations and constant pressures upon wealthier members of African communities to redistribute to less wealthy members of the group (for instance Geschiere and Gugler 1998; Smith 2004; Smith 2010; for efforts by political science to take seriously such realities, see Hyden and Williams 1994; Chabal and Daloz 1999; and above all Schatzberg 2001). Clearly such sociocultural expectations have very much bled into what African voters expect of their MPs and MP-candidates – as we shall see in chapters to follow, '[t]his logic has been transposed to the political setting and the role of an MP' (Lindberg 2010, 126). However, merely as wealthier members of communities, many future politicians have been involved in redistributive activities for years if not decades before any serious thoughts of running for political office (Constituency Observation 5 (Chinthu-Phiri) 2017; Chakwera 2017). A number of interviewees insisted that they acquired a favourable reputation in their communities long before they had even considered an entry into politics, through success in local business or a local NGO and on-the-side personal charitable activity. It was this long-established reputation, often, that led them to be "called" into politics. Politicians are social as well as political beings, and as such are embedded in redistributive social norms, expectations, and obligations long before they enter politics.

Redistributive expectations are nevertheless felt most acutely in the political sphere, and campaigning politicians are painfully aware of their importance. So-called "development projects" are their major genre of activity in this respect. For MPs these are a major aspect of constituency work, through their deployment of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) and much else besides – and shall be discussed in detail in the next chapter. For MP-candidates, however, such projects are also a hugely important aspect of their campaigning for office – and generally begin in earnest several years prior to an election. Around three years in advance of her victory in Mchinji West in 2009, for example, Theresa Mwale launched projects with women in the constituency such as tailoring and farming. She insists that when she first launched such programmes, she was not yet sure if she would run for office. Having subsequently determined to do so, however, she also launched adult literacy classes in the constituency:

> 'They didn't know I was campaigning, but I just said, "we need adult literacy here!" and in different areas I started that. And during the [official, "short"] campaign I emphasized [this] and many of them remembered that, "oh, she came with this [adult literacy] class, it is helping us!"' (T. Mwale 2017).

It is also notable here that the candidate used such projects to target a particular sub-set of voters (in this case women) amongst whom she particularly sought support and votes (T. Mwale 2017).

Victor Musowa (Mulanje Bale, 2014-) also did a lot of projects in the constituency as a would-be candidate in order to build an empathetic and generous reputation. Like Theresa Mwale, political considerations clearly figured here in terms of precisely who and what was targeted with such projects. Musowa, an unusually young candidate, acknowledges that he sought to specifically target the youth vote:

> 'I used to support a lot of youth groups before being a Member of Parliament. I used to sponsor small football trophies in the constituency, especially youth groups… [I opened] a youth centre… I built a small building that is like a library and then there's a football pitch. I've always donated footballs there, I've always donated books, collected free books from the library here in Lilongwe and transport them to my village. So that made the youth trust me to say "he might be a good leader," and that ended up [with] a lot of youth joining my campaign' (Musowa 2016).

Esther Jolobala (Machinga East, 2014-) likewise began projects such as maintaining small bridges and boreholes in Machinga East, beginning in January 2011 in preparation for the May 2014 election. She spent most of her salary as an accountant on this – 'whatever I was getting, I was using it to assist the people with a meaningful project' – and would visit the constituency from the city most weekends (Jolobala 2016). Starting early, as a number of would-be challengers to incumbents acknowledged, can allow them to exploit an oft-cited period soon after an election in which the incumbent MP retreats from the constituency in order to recoup from the losses of the last campaign and begin accumulating for the next one. At such a time a challenger can find themselves considerably more active in the constituency than the incumbent MP.

A distinction is always drawn (by politicians and many others) between "development projects" (club goods benefiting particular groups of constituents that are held to contribute towards "development") and "handouts" (private goods – usually cash or equivalents – given directly to individuals or small groups). This is a vital distinction as far as politicians are concerned, and one to which we shall return in future chapters. As much of the discussion and quotes above

have indicated, however, the provision of handouts by politicians to voter-constituents is a fairly fundamental feature of election campaigns in Malawi, and a very important matter for political candidates to consider and to manage – never more so than in the throes of the ("short") election campaign. As far as most politicians are concerned, handouts are something that voters simply expect, a regrettable but inescapable aspect of political life:

> 'It is a very expensive business [because] there's a handout type of campaign in the constituencies… People can change their mind because they have been given money. They can be influenced on who to vote for. So it becomes expensive… Every [campaign event} that you have, by the end of the day you have to give money. So you cannot just go, speak, and go. It's not like that. You need to speak and at least make some donations to say, "oh I'm going to donate to the women MWK20,000, to the men MWK50,000," stuff like that. So that… carries a lot of weight in political rallies' (Musowa 2016).

As Lobin Lowe (Lilongwe Central, 2009-) says simply, 'each time you meet people, they expect something' (Lowe 2017).

It is crucial to note that such activity is *not* "vote-buying" – *pace* many of my interviewees (including MPs themselves) and much journalistic commentary (for instance The East African 2018; Lunguzi 2016; Constituency Observation 1 (Katsonga) 2016; for an academic analysis see Schaffer 2007). These interactions may involve an "exchange" of material goods, but they are not primarily *material* exchanges. They are, on the contrary, overwhelmingly symbolic *performances* – part of a presentation of self, and loaded with normative significance.[36] If they are "clientelistic", they are so in a semiotic rather than an instrumental-material sense, whereby – as Englund (2002a, 177) states of a Blantyre by-election he observed – a politician 'has to gain his or her credentials locally, through [distributive] *acts that disclose the politician as an embodiment of the constituents' welfare*' (my emphasis.) Nugent (2001, 407, 409) talks of 'transforming money into votes' as an 'act of electoral transubstantiation' whereby 'resources have to be translated into some kind of moral authority' and symbolic capital (also Nugent 2007).

Politicians know, of course, that this is not simple "vote-buying." Boniface Kadzamira (Ntchisi North, 2014-19), for example, who was mentioned above stopping his car to greet an elderly woman and give her MWK200, does not think that he is buying her vote for MWK200. He does

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[36] We are talking primarily here about handouts given in public, to the public. The money and gifts given to chiefs, party notables and so on, often behind closed doors, are a grey area. Such activities have much more of a directly instrumental, vote-buying (or at least "support-buying") quality, although even here it is very clear from interviewees that there are no neat guarantees here. While some chiefs, in other words, will simply sell their endorsement to the highest bidder, many will not.

it, rather, to demonstrate the kind of person he is – generous, empathetic, benevolent, humble, and so on – and the handout is a key part of that demonstration. It is symbolic, not instrumental. The ostentatious gift-giving by politicians to voters during a campaign is above all a presentation of one's qualities as a human being – and aims to demonstrate to the electorate that one is or would make a suitable (and suitably generous) Member of Parliament. It is for this reason that there is no neat correlation at all between the spending of money and the winning of votes. As Musowa (2016) notes:

> 'I was very lucky that I think… the community wanted me most, and I didn't have that much… I would get little money, I would put in my fuel… I would be on a motorbike… So I had a very easy, cheaper mode of campaign. But my opponents spent quite a lot of money. Some spent more than MWK20 million.'

Whilst having more money to employ in pursuit of a generous and empathetic presentation of self is doubtless helpful, candidates require 'a balanced portfolio' (Nugent 2007, 259) of appeal(s) to voters. The amount of money one has or spends is far from being determinative – as the myriad rich and spendthrift candidates defeated by far less financially-endowed contenders attests. Moreover, as a number of scholars (Cheeseman et al 2021, 252; Nugent 2007, 255; Roelofs 2019b, 416) have pointed out and as many of my interviewees happily acknowledged, extensive handing out of money can actively backfire and can certainly be contested and cast in a negative light (for instance as *attempts* at bribery/vote-buying to compensate for a lack of popular local appeal.) Despite being hugely outspent by several of his opponents, Victor Musowa won convincingly – and as an independent.

We should, finally, note that there are a small but significant minority of campaigning politicians who seek to take a particularly firm stand against handouts. We shall return to fully explore these and related attitudes in future chapters but suffice it to say here that these self-consciously "modernising" MPs and candidates see handouts not merely as a burden but as actively corrupt, corrupting, and *anti*-developmental. Even they, however – who bemoan the so-called "culture of handouts" so vociferously – must generally admit to having to make some uncomfortable compromises with it, at very least during the "short" campaign:

> 'Initially I started with [saying] no, nothing to be given at all. Eventually I had to start saying ok I'm going to give a nod to the giving, but let the giving be towards something developmental [like a teacher's house, iron sheets etc.]' (Nyalonje 2016).

Agnes Nyalonje (Mzimba North, 2014-19) concluded that in order to change anything, including the culture of handouts, she had first to win; and to win, she had to make some

accommodation with this "culture" of which she is such a vociferous and vocal critic (Nyalonje 2016).

The expectation and pressure for handouts (especially during the short campaign), on the account of all interviewees, is simply overwhelming – from voters, certainly, who have allegedly come to associate any campaigning by politicians with the provision of material handouts to such an extent that the latter is considered essential for the former to even take place; but also from one's own campaign team, from whom there is a near-limitless pressure to disburse resources for purposes of campaigning and appealing to voters and influential figures in the constituency such as chiefs – as well as doubtless for some personal benefit. In the face of such constant pressure:

> 'Every day [of the election campaign] the question [I asked myself] was, "Do I want this or not??"… Because I didn't want to have the feeling that I was buying votes' (Kouwenhoven 2016).

Kouwenhoven eventually settled on a balance with which she was content – T-shirts and *chitenjes* would be extensively distributed, but otherwise "no handouts!" for individuals, 'but only organisations: schools, CBOs [community-based organisations], churches' and so on:

> 'because when in 2012 my first campaign director… advised [me] to go and see the chiefs, I was also told to give them MWK500 each, you see. I said, "lets limit the meetings"… but the campaign team had pushed me into a structure where there were 14 zones in the constituency, every zone 15 members, and every zone had an average of eight areas with ten members! So there were thousands of people, and of course they wanted T-shirts for everybody, all those thousands of people!' (Kouwenhoven 2016).

This is a fairly typical tale both of how compromises generally have to be made with handouts culture, even when the candidate deeply disapproves of it, and of how the campaign team are (for perfectly understandable reasons) at the forefront, above and beyond even voters themselves, of placing pressure on candidates in this respect.

As far as this compromise with what he considers a "corrupt" system is concerned, George Nnensa (Balaka South, 2014-19) paints a stark picture, of eventually embracing what he essentially regards as the "corruption" of voters, and of himself along with them:

> 'I took part in elections in 2004. I didn't win – I can say simply because the people in the villages expected you to give handouts, but I wanted to say, "I have come up with a message and this is what I want to do for you – I am not going to give you handouts, because if I do, when I go to Parliament I [will] want to get back my money!" It didn't work out because they said I was stingy… So when I came back in 2009, I said, "ok, now I have come here to corrupt you!" Literally!

> "I've got the money, I will do it." I really splashed money, I did projects and all that. I even put [on] a three-tonne pick-up [truck] to take people from my village to town… I bought about 600 bags of maize… So that is what helped me to get into Parliament' (Nnensa 2017).

Politicians, in sum, understand the display of empathy and generosity to be critical. While presenting that "I understand your situation and I care about it" is not solely about being generous with money – many interviewees stress, as we have seen, the importance of being generous with one's time and with oneself – material gift-giving is nevertheless fundamental and unquestionably of preeminent concern for candidates and incumbents themselves. What Nugent (2007, 256) observes for Ghana applies equally in Malawi – voters at election time (but also beyond) 'expect to be showered with gifts as evidence that the candidate genuinely does have local interests at heart.'[37]

QUALIFICATION – "I am qualified to be your MP"

In increasingly democratic-egalitarian political cultures, and in a global age of populism, we are ever-more accustomed to anti-"elite," anti-"establishment," anti-politician discourses and political projects (as discussed in the thesis Introduction). Anti-politician narratives are certainly ubiquitous in contemporary Malawian media and popular debates, and doubtless also have huge popular traction – hence the very active and self-conscious concern on the part of politicians to counteract them by demonstrating *proximity* to one's electorate in presentations of self that emphasise "I am one of you" and "I understand your situation and I care about it." In one of representative democracy's many paradoxes (on which see for instance Runciman 2007; Crewe 2015), however, voters typically also seek someone who is, in certain respects at least, very *un*ordinary as their representative. The job of MP, the work of a political representative, after all, is one of elevated and *special* status, requiring of its occupants and aspirants a presentation of *specialness* of some kind. As Jean-Pascal Daloz (2009, 285–86) emphasises, representatives thereby seek to balance proximity with *eminence* in their presentations of self to constituents – and it is very largely through a display of this eminence, and not ordinariness, that one demonstrates that one is "qualified" to be a representative.

How, then, do candidates display qualification and relative "specialness" for the job of a representative? The first point to make here concerns the reputational importance of family and of politics "running in families." In any society, but perhaps especially one in which such

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[37] The Political Parties Act 2018, which came into effect after fieldwork had been completed, has now banned "handouts" by candidates in their efforts to attract support. Early indications are that this has been widely ignored at least as far as the 2019 election and the many months that preceded it are concerned, but no doubt further research is required.

fundamental sociocultural importance is placed upon family, a candidate's family lineage and connections can serve as a useful functional shortcut as candidates "inherit" the pre-established profile and reputation of a family member or members in politics. Building a political profile and reputation is a very considerable undertaking – especially given the challenges of political communication in a Malawian constituency – and family connections and reputation can prove a helpful fast-track in this respect.

A large proportion of my interviewees had family members of earlier generations in politics, and often acknowledged the campaigning and electoral advantages of this as they saw them. Juliana Lunguzi (Dedza East, 2014-19), for instance, acknowledges that she was largely a stranger in her constituency when she came to run as a candidate, but that she won her party primary and then the election overall on the back of her father's reputation, which was very heavily emphasised during her campaign by her campaign team in particular (Constituency Observation 3 (Lunguzi) 2016).[38] Her family lineage helped greatly, by her own admission, to introduce and to legitimise an otherwise unfamiliar candidate.

It was noted in a previous chapter that a family lineage in politics might give a sense of belonging in, and of being qualified for, political life to candidates themselves. Malawian voters may or may not share this view but Malawian politicians certainly think that they do. Many interviewees stressed the capacity to inherit some of the reputation and standing of relatives in politics in their own and other cases – the most common and high-profile example being the then-incumbent president Arthur Peter Mutharika, whose victory in 2014 was widely seen as a "proxy vote" on the part of the Malawian public for his brother, the very popular late President Bingu wa Mutharika.

One long-term observer of Malawian politics argues for the importance of this dynastic legitimacy in bestowing a sense of qualification for office:

> 'There is… this element of people now believing that our politics is running in the blood. There are families that have produced an MP before, and their children, because of the legacy that [for example] their father left, [they inherit this]… Because people reflect back and are able to say, "from a list of these MPs that we've had, this one left this legacy, this one left this legacy [and so on]"… And they weigh those legacies on the scale and find which one had more advantage to the constituency. And [then] they offer it to the family to say, "whoever would be willing to stand from that family, let them stand. They have our votes"…. It means any child, any descendant, could come and… make a claim to

[38] Lunguzi's father is the late MacWilliam Lunguzi, a former Inspector-General of Police and hugely prominent local son, a one-time favourite of Kamuzu Banda. (He died in a suspicious car accident in 1996 in the midst of bitter wrangles for dominance inside the opposition Malawi Congress Party.)

> say, "my uncle left [a lot]. If there has been any meaningful development in this area, it is all because of my uncle. And I know what other things he planned for this constituency, which nobody else knows. I would be the only person to actualise those." So they get a clean vote and get into the House. But some of those will end up not doing anything!' (Anon Expert 12 2017).

Grain Malunga (Chikwawa North, 2009-14), meanwhile, speaks as a veteran campaigner. He argues that a family lineage in politics is a hugely valuable asset, indeed can be one of the best substitutes for money in terms of getting taken seriously by the electorate as someone potentially qualified to be an MP:

> 'It's not easy… it's not easy. Unless your name or your family is very popular to the people in that area, then they tend to back you… because you have grown into the community, they know how you relate with the local people. Then you are at an advantage. But just to go in and nobody knows you, even if you have good ideas or you know where to get development programs, or you are a good lobbyist. If you don't connect with the people at local level, it's a very difficult thing' (Malunga 2016).

It should also be noted that whilst family connections are the most common and the most prized in terms of communicating a sense of qualification, other connections personal and professional are also often useful both practically and presentationally. Emily Chinthu-Phiri (Nkhata Bay South, 2014-19) was for many years the secretary to Aleke Banda, former Minister and illustrious local son. Beatrice Mwale (Kasungu North, 2014-19) was likewise secretary to Chakufwa Chihana, revered trade unionist and "father of Malawian democracy." In these and other cases, MPs acknowledged that their start in politics came in large part from their connections to these highly prominent individuals, and that they made use of these connections where possible both for logistical convenience and to communicate messages about and thereby legitimise themselves.

The preeminent concern of candidates when it comes to demonstrating their qualification for political office, however, is to demonstrate – over and above the willingness and generosity to *share* resources – the capacity to source resources in the first place so that they might be distributed. This requirement candidates invariably tie to the *in*capacity of the state (and/or, to a lesser extent, a more or less vibrant capitalist economy) to adequately provide for even the basic needs of the population in myriad ways, and to do so at all without skilled "facilitation." They are, as MPs, at the receiving end of the glaring and acute 'capacity deficit' of the Malawian state (Corbett 2015, 53):

> 'It is, it is… very unsustainable. When I don't have anything, I will tell them I don't have anything. But sometimes I see the need, [for example] somebody dying because there is no transport to the hospital… It's very hard for me to say I don't have anything. [But] *government* is supposed to provide for them, is supposed to provide medicine. They're supposed to have well-equipped machinery for the clinics, but it's not there. We're supposed to have staff – qualified medical assistants – [but] they are not there…' (Chinthu-Phiri 2016).

In this case, Emily Chinthu-Phiri (Nkhata Bay South, 2014-19) was obliged, in the absence of state capacity to provide remotely adequate basic healthcare, to call upon her own networks and contacts – and eventually 'we put money together and completed [a small local] hospital' (Chinthu-Phiri 2016). In the absence of state provision, MPs invariably describe constituents looking to *them* to function as a one-(wo)man mini-state; they inevitably fall very far short, but try to do whatever they can nonetheless (see next chapter on constituency service).

In terms of how this translates specifically into how one *campaigns* for this role: as one MP says, voters (as well as key figures in local politics such as chiefs and local party members) want to 'see you at least give them something… *to show them that you can*' (my emphasis) (Kadzamira 2015). Englund (2002, 177) stresses that success in local commerce is frequently a prerequisite for political prominence, and it is certainly the case that MPs are on average considerably wealthier than most Malawians. Ostentatious displays of personal wealth are one thing – stressed by the likes of Chabal and Daloz (1999, 42–43); however at least as important (or compensating, in the case of those who are not hugely wealthy) is to demonstrate, regardless of one's personal wealth, one's *capacity to source resources* from outside and to bring them to the constituency – be that from domestic sources such as the central state and/or, no less prominently, from international sources such as charitable donors and well-wishers.

Emily Chinthu-Phiri, for example, is not personally hugely wealthy, but makes considerable play in her presentation of self of her close contact with various foreign donors in the USA and Scandinavia, and her membership for instance of Rotary International, which she likes to stress connects her to networks and sources of potential resources both domestic and international (Chinthu-Phiri 2016; Constituency Observation 5 (Chinthu-Phiri) 2017). Another interviewee describes the messaging of his challenger:

> 'When he retired from his international [role] and came back home, he decided to stand for office… He said [to voters], "look here, for over 20 years, even though I am a Malawian, but I was earning money in dollars and pounds and euros, so [now]… I have just come with too many euros in my pockets which I don't know what to do with… So I would like to share [them] with you! This

> poor boy here, your MP, he has got nothing – just a few kwachas… This man said, "I am a rich man. All of you, I will finish your poverty!"' (Anon MP, 2016).

At least as important, however – at least as far as his incumbent opponent was concerned – was his second message:

> 'He used to tell people that he had worked for international organisations, he had established a lot of international relations[hips], that it was going to be very easy for him to develop the constituency because the people that he had met… would be there to help him develop the constituency – like building dams… construction of schools, and so many things: irrigation works, water supply. So I mean, even if I was a voter, I would definitely be taken up by [those] kind of promises' (Anon MP, 2016).

The challenger did, indeed, win the election.

Where possible, actions speak louder than words when it comes to a challenger seeking to demonstrate their capacity to source resources as compared with an absent or low-performing incumbent. Lifred Nawena (Thyolo Thava, 2009-14), for instance, was able – thanks to his personal networks and connections – to facilitate people's interactions with certain critical branches of the state rather better than the incumbent MP was:

> 'I used to assist them to get fertilizers. I had very good contact with people who manned the fertilizer program, the people who organised for the delivery of the fertilizers… [So] we had an incumbent MP, but [here was] an ordinary man… organising those things instead, when [they] ought to have been organized by the MP. So people liked me I think' (Nawena 2017).

These were fertilizers, it should be noted, to which these people were nominally entitled, as part of President Bingu wa Mutharika's signature Fertilizer Input Subsidy Program (FISP.) The challenger Nawena is not, then, handing out personal gifts but rather facilitating an interaction with the (to some extent weak and malfunctioning) state in order to secure constituents' entitlements – and doing so, at least in this instance, with more effect than the incumbent MP. Few scenarios could be better placed to push home the message that all aspirants, on some level, are seeking to project – "if this is what I can do for you when I'm not even the MP, just think what I can do if you elect me!" As Nawena (2017) says simply, 'I think they felt if I could do a few things while an ordinary [person], how [about] if they were to make me their MP?' To a very large extent, then, the presentation of self here is less about personal wealth than about access to, and capacity to source, resources from outside that are or can be deployed in the service of the constituency. As Juliana Lunguzi (Dedza East, 2014-19) says, the primary role of an MP is to be a 'facilitator of development' rather than a personal benefactor to the constituency.

In terms of the subtler and less direct elements of presenting oneself as "qualified" in this respect, the insights of postcolonial theory are unquestionably well taken. In their modes of dress, their means of transport, their connections, their knowledge and expertise, and much else besides, MPs and MP-candidates invariably demonstrate and embody an affinity with "Western" ways of doing, living and being. As former academic Jesse Kabwila (Salima North West, 2014-19) acknowledges, for instance, 'being educated helped me a lot because I think when they hear "*Doctor*" Kabwila they are like, "ok, she must know what she is doing"' (Kabwila 2016). So embedded in Malawi, indeed, are conceptions of the political system and of the presence of even moderate amounts of wealth with 'westernity' (Asante 2009), that presentations of wealth and/or of access to wealth, on the one hand, and of "Western-ness" on the other are intimately and inevitably tied together. A display of westernity is thus a ubiquitous part of any politician's presentation of their qualification for political office. This is without any necessarily conscious effort on their part: basic things such as the wearing of formal Western dress such as a suit and tie, or the fluent speaking of English – both of these are literal, formal requirements for any Malawian to take a seat in Parliament, and go some way already to communicating the candidate's 'westernity' to their voters. Such attributes communicate to constituents the politician's possession (in overt contrast to most of those constituents) of the deemed-to-be-required knowledge, skills, and contacts to operate outside the constituency as a bringer of development *to* the constituency. This applies in relation to the opaque and distant realm of the central state and government, certainly – but also to other sources of resources both domestic and international.[39]

Reformist, self-consciously "modernising" MPs, who deplore presentations of self that involve the likes of handouts and the spreading around of personal money, are certainly at least as involved as others in presentations of westernity, but could be said to add or at least to strongly emphasise a specific extra element: their very self-conscious presentation of, and emphasis upon, their *expertise* in matters of "D/development" and their single-minded focus on "developing" their constituencies. These are emphatically emphasised and expressed in detailed development manifestos, multiple-point development plans and so on, typically communicated fluent in the language and jargon of contemporary Development Studies and the Development industry (Lunguzi (Campaign Ad) 2014; Lunguzi 2016; Nyalonje 2016).[40]

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[39] My own presence alongside MPs in their constituencies was itself acknowledged as a useful resource by several. Thanking one of my participants for letting me accompany her, she acknowledged that "if anything, people will think I've brought them money because I've brought a white guy" (Fieldnotes, 2016).

[40] These "modernising" politicians are akin to those whom others have categorised as exhibiting a 'progressive' style – reliant on 'expertise, foresight and technocratic capacity' (Cheeseman et al 2021, 229; see also Roelofs 2019).

What is particularly striking about such MPs is how, with their laser-like focus on technocratic development programmes for the constituency and their self-consciously fresh-faced, vigorous, "modern" political style, they self-consciously and explicitly stress their qualification for the job precisely in terms of their (at least self-perceived) *difference* and their *distance*. Distance, that is, from the alleged prevailing political culture of "handouts", petty politicking, corruption, and non-development – such MPs are typically new to politics and of a younger generation. Distance, moreover, from the norms, expectations and even "culture" of voters themselves, which are seen to have given rise to (or at very least facilitated) this political culture. Their sense of their own qualification, in other words, and their presentation to voters and constituents of this qualification, is precisely in being so distant – not, of course, from the "*interests*" of their constituents, but rather from the prevailing norms and culture of politics in which they implicate those constituents as well as the politicians, and through which voters are seen to act in certain respects *against* their own long-term interests. As argued in Chapter 2, reformist-modernisers such as Juliana Lunguzi (Dedza East, 2014-19) and Agnes Nyalonje (Mzimba North, 2014-19) came into politics in large part motivated by dismay at extant politicians and the prevailing way of doing politics, and a desire to be part of a 'change process' in this respect (Lunguzi 2016; also Constituency Observation 3 (Lunguzi) 2016; Nyalonje 2016). How voters understand and relate to politics and politicians is by no means exempt from these politicians' felt need for very significant change (see for instance Chapter 6 on their staunch defiance of voters' expectations regarding handouts.). Lunguzi's presentation of self, for example, therefore aims simultaneously to lean into her local credentials as a daughter of the constituency and her abiding love and respect for the area, its people and its culture; yet also to say, in not so many words, that in crucial respects "I am *not* one of you" in that I have brought a new and better way of doing politics which you will find unusual and which, at first, you may dislike – but which is ultimately, and unusually, 'focused on development, not politics' and is rooted in a more or less academic understanding/knowledge of D/development (Constituency Observation 3 (Lunguzi) 2016; Lunguzi 2016; Lunguzi (Campaign Ad) 2014). Another MP similarly suggests that, 'I'm seen as an educator' in this respect – in how, essentially, to do politics "properly" so as to facilitate development – an image she embraces and cultivates (Kouwenhoven 2016). (I shall return to and expand upon these attitudes and themes in chapters that follow, above all the concluding one.)

Conclusion

Primaries, on the account of many MPs, are so corrupted that they may often verge on being purely material contests, conducted in the currency of money and connections to the party hierarchy, as well as, perhaps, periodic violence. General elections and wider campaigning, however, are decidedly *not* like that. Despite the long-standing emphasis in mainstream

approaches to African politics upon the materiality of relationships between politicians and the public, in fact Malawian MPs experience being a politician very differently – their campaigning is profoundly concerned to genuinely appeal to voters' sensibilities, to present themselves in a positive light as a good person and good candidate, rather than simply to bribe or to intimidate those voters.

Of course, money *is* a key issue and concern, and has been a prominent theme throughout this chapter. Running for office takes money – more money than most Malawians have, which constitutes a significant barrier to entry into politics. The financial burdens of campaigning are acute, and for many current and aspirant politicians investing in them is a considerable financial gamble and risk. Money, in short, matters. But it is a means to an end, not an end in itself. What also emerges from the examples above, after all, is how much more there is than money to campaigning, and to presenting oneself to the electorate as a good candidate for elected office. As one MP puts it, what matters *is* money, but 'money *plus*' – plus 'your attributes, your character' and the like (Kadzamira 2015). There is plenty of space for myriad other, and deeper, political ties and dimensions of political loyalty. Money 'plays a role for you to win,' but is far from the be all and end all – confirmed not least by the fact that 'we have seen a lot of people with [the most] money losing' (Kadzamira 2015). Even the extensive amounts of gift-giving and handouts that characterise politicians' campaigns and campaigning are, moreover, themselves generally serving a primarily symbolic and presentational function – making a display of the candidate's attributes as a human being – rather than a purely material-instrumental one. Malawian general elections have a mass franchise and a secret ballot – this is not "vote-buying."

In fact, the deployment of huge amounts of money in a campaign, a number of interviewees suggested, is often used by "strangers" (i.e. candidates who are not well known and/or not particularly liked or respected locally) in a frequently futile attempt to "compensate" for their lack of social embeddedness (Chabunya 2015; Anon Expert 12 2017). Such candidates are typically characterised as having "imposed" themselves upon the constituency – as opposed to those who, by contrast, have been "called" by (parts of) the community to stand for office (Mwenifumbo 2017; see here Scott 1972, 105–9 on the inverse relationship between affective ties and financial inducements under clientelist conditions.) As veteran Patricia Kaliati (Mulanje West, 1999-2019) says simply of her first campaign, 'I didn't have to spend that much [because] they knew me already' (Kaliati 2016). While "strangers" can generally get lots of people to attend their rallies and willingly take their money, cautionary tales abound (not least amongst MPs themselves) of such candidates vastly outspending opponents and showering the constituency with money, only to be trounced in the election by poorer but more locally popular competitors. As Hornsby (1989, 285) noted likewise of 1980s Kenya, 'there is a tendency in many areas to prefer the poorer local man to the rich stranger.'

There is, in short, more to winning elections in Malawi than money, just as there is across African electoral democracies (Cheeseman et al 2021). Indeed, it was suggested by a number of interviewees that this is increasingly the case, as the Malawi electorate allegedly becomes more and more adept at "playing" electoral democracy to their maximum advantage (Constituency Observation 2 (Kadzamira) 2016; Malunga 2016). They are becoming, it is suggested, ever more expert at extracting the maximum of resources from any and all politicians seeking their votes, whilst being simultaneously less and less inclined to let such transactions influence their actual vote in any way, being free as they are to vote for whomever they damned well please regardless of who gave them what in the campaign. A former Vice President of Zambia, indeed, once openly advocated this as the "Don't *kubeba*!" (Don't tell them!) strategy (G. Scott 2019; Fisher 2020a) – although a number of my interviewees expressed dismay at such insolence. One of my interviewees is more generous, however: the Malawian people 'are slowly learning and getting used [to democracy] – they are realising that they are in charge, they can call the shots' (Anon Expert 4 2017).

Despite the lazy caricature propagated indirectly in some scholarship – and very directly in Malawi itself in media and popular commentary, and indeed by some politicians in their less generous moments – it is clear that Malawian voters are not, in fact, motivated to vote for candidates simply on the basis of who provides the most handouts. The work of campaigning, the job of a campaigning politician, is considerably more complicated than that – and those who succeed in politics understand this. As one observer puts it:

> 'in Malawi I think, aside from being generous [with money], if you are generous with your time, you can go a long way. So if you are sitting there right in the constituency, you are there to listen to people's problems, you are there to go and be at the district executive committees, and speak up on behalf of people… If you are there to console people at funerals, if you are there to party with them at weddings – that's more valuable than if you are just coming one time in a year, and distribute a whole bunch of money, and expect to win votes!' (Chabunya 2015).

One veteran politician is particularly emphatic:

> 'It doesn't matter how much money you have – if you are not connecting with the people at grassroots level, they [will] look at you as a stranger still. Because now I think democracy is now getting roots, because people now [think]… "lets eat his money. If we don't eat his money, if he gets into Parliament, we will never see him again because he will want to get his money back"… But if you are connected with the people, you belong to those people – [and material inducements] do not really count' (Malunga 2016).

Chapter 5: Constituency servant and "facilitator of development"

'[The] job of an MP, the traditional or classical terms of reference that an MP is expected to fulfil, are different from the expectations of the [Malawian] people.'

(Chigona 2016)

Introduction: On Constituency Service

Malawian MPs know – in accordance with standard parliamentary theory and praxis exported across the globe not least by colonisation – that they are supposed to have three roles: those of legislating, of oversight (of government) and of representation (of their constituents in Parliament) (Barkan 2009, 7; see also Salih 2005; Norton 2013; Crewe 2015). All have attended their initial training and induction and can happily recite these three functions by rote – not infrequently with a wry smile. Their amusement relates to the fact that, whilst the vast majority accept that on paper they are indeed Members of *Parliament* and that their formal constitutional functions relate to work at the political centre, they are in lived reality obliged to be vastly more preoccupied with their (unofficial, informal) constituency service function – whatever the National Assembly's Standing Orders, or even the Constitution might say.

Constituency service has long been recognised as an empirical reality of a parliamentarian's work in many modern democracies – especially those in which legislators are also charged with representing distinct territorial constituencies (Norris 1997; Norton 2013, 219–39; Norton and Wood 1993). It remains, however, somewhat marginal as a focus of concern even for those who study directly the working lives of politicians (for instance Crewe 2015). In African contexts, the pre-eminent importance of constituency service in the lives of MPs was long ago highlighted by Joel Barkan's (1979; 1984) trailblazing work on Kenyan MPs in the Kenyatta and Moi eras. It was an aspect too of Malawian MPs' work in the one-party state – not least as a consequence of ongoing competitive parliamentary elections, through which constituents' preferences and demands had somewhat to be taken into account (Anon Expert 12 2017; Barkan 1979). Following the re-emergence of free elections and voter choice across the continent in the 1990s, constituency service is now recognised as a significant feature of contemporary democratic politics across Africa – albeit one rarely studied in-depth, nor considered from the point of view of politicians on what we might reasonably call "the receiving end" (Lindberg 2010 is something of an exception in the case of Ghana.) Much of the concern is on the knock-on parliamentary effects of MPs' focus on their constituencies (Barkan 2009).

The lack of attention paid to the actualities of constituency service itself, however, is particularly odd given that African contexts are hardly unique in respect of the centrality of constituency service in MPs' lives. Indeed, considered on a global scale, it seems fair to describe the focus on the parliamentary aspects of a Member of Parliament's job as decidedly Eurocentric (see Crewe 2021).

This chapter and the next therefore explore the precise nature and character of constituency service as it is experienced and performed by MPs in contemporary Malawi. By constituency service is meant all those constituent-/constituency-facing activities wherein MPs (personally or through proxies) deliver services directly to individual constituents or groups of constituents. This is distinct from their parliamentary-facing work, and indeed from all or most aspects of representation at least as it is commonly understood.

What emerges most clearly from the work of Barkan, Lindberg and others is that the high importance and priority given to constituency work by MPs is held to be overwhelmingly demand-driven: a perspective very much endorsed in my own interviews with MPs and non-MPs in Malawi. Regardless of their personal views of what a parliamentarian is and is not supposed to be (see Chapter 7), my interviewees were unanimously clear that their constituents had clear ideas of their own on this subject – and that these dramatically altered MPs' behaviour, shaping profoundly the character of their working lives. This does not mean that MPs respond to their constituents' expectations in identical ways, nor that any acquiesce entirely to everything their constituents' demand. However, for most MPs it is no exaggeration to say that it is their parliamentary functions that often appear to them marginal to their main job of constituency service.

Voter-constituents, the vast majority of my interviewees maintain, do not follow, are not interested in, and do not understand MPs' parliamentary roles, functions or activities. As far as constituents are concerned, says Frank Mwenifumbo (Karonga Central, 1999-2009; 2014-19):

> '[For them] the role of legislating is very minimal… People don't know that… the core duty of the Member of Parliament is to make good laws, good laws which will entail good development. People don't know that. People think that we have to do something physical… Legislation is something that is not tangible, it's intangible. [But] people think that for you to be a good MP, [you have to] do tangible things, physical things – which is not [right]' (Mwenifumbo 2017).

Rabson Shaba (Mzimba South East, 2004-19) says likewise:

> 'When we come to Parliament, we have to speak for them, and this is something which very few people understand. They… look at us as project facilitators,

> somebody who has to bring development: schools, bridges, clinics and all those things' (R. C. Shaba 2016).

Jacqueline Kouwenhoven (Rumphi West, 2014-19), indeed, echoes most others in insisting that constituents don't stop there:

> 'people in the constituency, they really expect an MP not only to bring development, but to solve *all* their problems' (Kouwenhoven 2016).[41]

MPs, moreover, do not appear to be imagining this. Surveys of constituent opinion in Malawi (and indeed in many other African settings) have consistently demonstrated a localist orientation amongst voters and a strong and consistent preference for MPs to prioritise constituency-focused work over nationally-oriented parliamentary work (Barkan and Mattes 2014, 5; see also Lindberg 2010 who sets this out clearly in the case of Ghana) – 90% of voters (and 70% of MPs) surveyed for the African Legislatures Project prioritise their constituency/linkage activities such as representation and constituency service over their strictly parliamentary, horizontal accountability roles of oversight and legislating (Mattes and Mozaffar 2016, 208). Of course, such features can in part be understood as a product of the electoral/political system: single-member districts create greater incentives than proportional systems for the cultivation of personal linkages between voters and MPs that underpin a localist emphasis (Cheeseman et al 2021, 13; Mattes and Mozaffar 2016, 210). This cannot be all, however: not all single-member systems demonstrate anything close to the overwhelming localist preferences of Malawian voters. Such findings, therefore, connect also with an enormously broader (and vaguer) corpus of scholarship concerned, at a macro level, with the role of "culture" in our understandings and interpretations of African politics – and especially with arguments for a conceptualisation of "neopatrimonialism" as coming "from below" (Chabal and Daloz 1999; 2006; Schatzberg 1993; 2001).

Myriad objections can and have been raised to this understanding of politics in Africa (see for example Bryceson 2000; Meagher 2006), and it is true that the likes of Chabal and Daloz (1999), in particular, are guilty of considerable over-generalisation and of obscuring the reality of – not to mention possibilities for – myriad forms of politics in Africa (programmatic, populist, and so on) that do not fit the neopatrimonial stereotype. Regardless of such merited objections, however – and regardless also, for that matter, of our personal ontological commitments as researchers – what is important here is simply to note that Malawian MPs endorse the perspective of *Africa Works* wholeheartedly (Chabal and Daloz 1999). In the course of my 74

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[41] These quotes also point towards the ubiquitous view (amongst MPs and many other observers) that constituents are fundamentally *mistaken* about the "proper" role of a Member of Parliament and, more widely still, about how to do politics "properly" or "correctly." This is a critical issue, explored fully in Chapter 7.

interviews with them, current and former MPs were universally adamant that their constituents – as a consequence at least of their "mindset" (and, very often, of their "culture" too) and the understandings and behaviours arising from these – expect and demand constituency service above all else. Its centrality in their own lives is thus a demand-driven, people-pleasing response – or at least grudging acquiescence – in the light of electoral, political, and indeed psychological-cultural "reality." However much we may (or may not) take issue with this understanding, there is no doubt that it *is* their understanding – not so much prevailing as unanimous.[42] It is in this context that Alekeni Menyani (Dedza North West, 2009-19) speaks for many when he says simply that, the moment you stick to the official roles of a Member of Parliament and do not prioritise constituency service, 'in Malawi… then you are finished!' (Menyani 2016).[43]

Acknowledging and responding to what they see as the political "facts of life" in their constituencies and about their constituents is something that all MPs do. They do not do so, however, in identical ways; far from it, indeed – Menyani's pragmatic resignation is but one point on a broad spectrum of possible responses that I observed. A study of MPs' constituency service, therefore, is in very large part a study of the similarities and variations in MPs' responses to the expectations and demands of their constituents as they see them.

I first and foremost find that MPs divide constituency service into two fuzzy but fundamentally distinct major categories – there is the MP as "facilitator of development" in the constituency on the one hand, and there is the MP as purveyor of "handouts" on the other. I argue that –

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[42] It is also the understanding of the vast majority of my non-MP interviewees in civil society, media, academia, and the like across the Malawian public sphere. It may be fair to suggest that this wholesale endorsement of "neopatrimonialism-as-culture" is in part a function of the country context here: amongst its neighbours, Malawi tends to be stereotyped as comparatively rural, traditional, and patrimonial, and there is doubtless something to that stereotype.

[43] I am personally inclined to doubt that MPs (alongside ex-MPs, observers, and myriad others across the body politic) are operating under a mass delusion about what their constituents "really" want and expect of them – always allowing, of course, that preferences and expectations themselves do not emerge in a vacuum and are often strikingly malleable in response to changes in circumstances. (Many MPs acknowledged poverty, for instance, as a causal factor in its own right as well as in creating the prevailing political culture in the first place. None, however, thus concluded that culture was merely epiphenomenal.) This being said, some work from the African Legislatures Project (Barkan et al. 2010; Barkan and Mattes 2014; Mattes and Mozaffar 2016) has partially endorsed the "mistake" view, challenging the prevailing finding that constituency service is the priority of African voters. In the countries they surveyed, including Malawi, they found representation to be still-more prized by voters than constituency service – albeit constituency service remained highly prized, and they confirmed that legislating and parliamentary oversight came very low on voters' lists of priorities (Barkan et al. 2010, 10). The authors conclude that MPs across Africa 'mistakenly' prioritise constituency service over representation (Barkan and Mattes 2014, 1). It is certainly a subject worthy of further research – although I must acknowledge, having spent some mere weeks with MPs in their constituencies and seen the scale and relentlessness of the demands they face, that if they are "mistaken" in their belief that their constituents prioritise constituency service activities, it is at very least an eminently forgivable mistake!

although there are significant differences in terms of how MPs approach their "development" role – the first of these is unanimously accepted and near-unanimously embraced by MPs. It is the subject of the latter half of this chapter. The approach of MPs to demands for, and expectations of, handouts is enormously more varied, however – and is the subject of Chapter 6. First, however, I explore the nature of the constituency system in Malawi and the basic practicalities of the relationships MPs have with their constituencies – including the place and importance of their constituency teams, who are critical actors not least for the MP themselves, but also in constituency politics generally.

Constituencies in Malawi and MPs in their constituencies

In broad accordance with the Westminster electoral tradition, Malawi elects MPs to the National Assembly for a (fixed) term of five years on a first-past-the-post basis from single-member, geographically-demarcated constituencies numbering 193 in the 2014-19 parliament. Externally to their constituency, therefore, MPs are the single representative of "their" small portion of the country – and in the parliamentary chamber are identified by their constituency rather than their person.

The first post-Kamuzu parliament – elected in 1994 – had 177 members; this was raised to 193 for the 1999 elections. It has remained at 193 until now, despite Malawi's population approximately doubling in the interim. Constituencies, moreover, vary enormously in size, and in terms not just of area – which is to be expected but does have implications for MPs who are, for example, seeking to serve a large rural constituency with a number of far-flung settlements impossible to reach by road (Constituency Observation 5 (Chinthu-Phiri) 2017) – but crucially also in relation to population.

As Wahman and Chapman (2015) have clearly demonstrated, malapportionment in terms of electoral districts is enormous and longstanding. It is also getting worse, given that Malawi has not significantly adjusted constituency boundaries since 1998 – in clear breach of the Constitution (which mandates a full review every five years), and during which time urban centres have significantly swelled relative to rural areas, albeit less so than in many African countries (Wahman and Chapman 2015, 57).[44] In 2014, urban constituencies were 71% larger

[44] The reasons for the lack of a boundary review are complex and multi-faceted. There have clearly been major logistical and financial challenges for the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC), constitutionally charged with conducting it. It is also fair to note, however, that the current boundaries have, since 1998, generally favoured the various (Southern-based) governing parties at the expense of the (Central-based) opposition MCP. There is also considerable evidence of generalised "rural bias" in electoral apportionment across many African democracies (Wahman and Chapman 2015; see also Boone and Wahman 2015). MEC announced a comprehensive constituency and ward boundary review in May 2021 (Malawi24 2021).

than the national average, for instance, and a constituency in the Central Region was on average 37% larger than one in the Northern Region (Wahman and Chapman 2015, 61). In 2014 the largest constituency was Lilongwe City Centre with no less than 126,996 registered voters, whilst the smallest was Likoma Islands with just 6,933 registered voters (Wahman and Chapman 2015, 59). It is hard to disagree with Wahman and Chapman (2015, 52) that '[s]uch wide discrepancies clearly violate the principle of "one person one vote."' The Constituency Development Fund which helps to fund MP constituency projects (see below) is, moreover, fixed in per-constituency amount regardless of the population size of each constituency. For MPs, therefore, the burden of their constituency workload can vary enormously – even exponentially – depending on the size of their constituency.

But perhaps we are getting ahead of ourselves. Perhaps MPs do not, in truth, bother much to visit their constituencies at all. It is, after all, one of the predominant narratives circulating in the Malawian body politic that upon their (re-)election MPs typically "run away" to Lilongwe, scarcely to be seen in their constituency again until the next election campaign (Fieldnotes, 2015-17). This narrative is, moreover, oft repeated amongst, and propagated by, key civil society groups/actors with a long-standing conflictual and fraught relationship with politicians. Several representatives of the National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE), for example, suggested to me that 'if they [visit at all], maybe it's once in every six months' (Anon Expert 2 2017) or even that, after being elected, it is typical for an MP to wait several years before visiting their constituency, and that some literally never visit at all (Monjeza 2017). Such narratives fit into a wider one about MPs lacking any genuine concern or dedication to their job or to their constituents.

It is impossible to determine the exact frequency of MPs visits to their constituencies. Nonetheless I asked each MP or ex-MP I interviewed how often they typically visited their constituencies: the average response estimated *once every few weeks*, whilst most acknowledged that the frequency of their visits could vary significantly depending on the parliamentary schedule and their place in the electoral cycle. Self-reporting can be unreliable, but this loose approximation tallied with my own observations having spent almost two years amongst MPs – and indeed with those of other well-placed third-party observers amongst my interviewees.[45] Several well-informed local observers in one Southern district, for example, estimated that local MPs visited their constituencies probably 'every few weeks' – and certainly

[45] Those in NICE, indeed, tended towards a profoundly cynical view of politicians (both specifically and in general) that was not for the most part matched even amongst interviewees in other civil society organisations or indeed the media – and which may say more about the persistent mutual hostility between the NICE organisation, on the one hand, and MPs, on the other, than it does about politicians' actual behaviour or attentiveness to their constituencies.

left 'not months' between visits. This concurs with the testimony of MPs themselves (aside from that handful who live primarily in their constituencies anyway) – with those in a Lilongwe seat or nearby typically claiming to visit more often, such as 'every weekend' (J. A. Banda 2017) or even 'five days out of seven' (Kajawa 2016), whilst those in far-flung areas of the extreme North or South might visit considerably less.

Beyond the dependably intoxicating attraction of anti-politician narratives, Nasrin Pillane (Balaka West, 2009-14) highlights an additional factor that surely contributes towards a widespread and serious underestimation of MPs' dedication to constituency work, not least among constituents themselves:

> 'So you think, "ok maybe twice a month I can have a little rally." But then… Balaka West is really a big constituency… So… if I had a meeting [in one part], people [in the other parts] do not know that I had a meeting there… So by the time I wangle my way here and wangle my way back, these people are complaining six months down that, "she doesn't come!"' (Pillane 2017).

Likewise Emily Chinthu-Phiri (Nkhata Bay South, 2014-19) is known to be a highly conscientious MP who actually lives most of the time in her constituency. Favouring small meetings village by village, however, she estimates that she can visit each and every village in her constituency – of which there are hundreds – just twice during her term of office (Constituency Observation 5 (Chinthu-Phiri) 2017). These logistical issues notwithstanding, however, it is hard not to conclude that the yawning gap between popular narratives about politicians' attentiveness to their constituencies and the reality is primarily a function of the self-perpetuating nature of these narratives themselves. Anti-politician narratives are hegemonic in Malawi – and, for whatever (understandable) reasons, in a way that generally transcends the mere facts.[46]

The character of MPs' visits "home" vary widely, but typically mix professional and personal tasks. Juliana Lunguzi (Dedza East, 2014-19), for example, on a one-day visit to her constituency from her base in Lilongwe, visited a small farm she owns in her constituency to see how it is being managed by those she employs to do so. She also visited her family home to discuss strategy for constituency work going forward, as well as to visit relatives, eat and rest after a long day travelling around the constituency (Constituency Observation 3 (Lunguzi)

[46] None of this is to say, of course, that there are no MPs who seriously neglect their constituencies – the parliamentarian who lived in the United States throughout his single parliamentary term has already been mentioned, for instance (in Chapter 2). The point is that many observers (both inside and outside of the Malawian political system) are politically and psychologically inclined to elevate such exceptional cases as if they were somehow representative or the norm – a cynical pose that verges on the absurd.

2016). Boniface Kadzamira (Lilongwe City Centre, 2004-09; Ntchisi North, 2014-19), meanwhile, at the end of a long day of meetings and rallies in Ntchisi North – and before returning to Lilongwe by car late at night – visited his family house in the constituency to check on the progress of the extensive renovations he is funding, to pay the builders their next instalment, and to catch up with his relative who is supervising the project in his absence (Constituency Observation 2 (Kadzamira) 2016). Davies Katsonga (Mwanza Central, 1999-2009; 2014-19) similarly visited his elderly aunt and her family home in order to eat lunch and rest. He also took time from a 3-day trip to his constituency to attend the Mwanza District Court as plaintiff in a dispute with a constituent over property (Constituency Observation 1 (Katsonga) 2016).

Even to view all of these and myriad other examples as wholly personal tasks, however, may be inappropriate. Family members, for example, are very likely to act as key advisers to the MP, and few family confabs that I witnessed strayed for too long from some discussion of politics and strategy. An MP's private residence, moreover, typically doubles as an ad-hoc constituency office (even in cases where the MP or their party has a separate office for this purpose) where MPs, whether they like it or not, are typically obliged to run at least some informal "surgeries" for their constituents. MPs' business and commercial activities, moreover, are also not neatly separated from their constituency work – not least because such enterprises invariably help to fund their constituency service. For MPs, in short, the lines between the public and the private are extremely fuzzy – hardly surprising in the case of any elected politician given that their public-political role and functions are in large part embodied in them *as a person* – but doubtless more acutely felt by MPs in Malawi than in the UK, for example.

The majority of the days in constituencies that I spent with these and with other MPs were, however, dominated by unambiguously constituency service-related work. In sharp contrast to so many popular and media narratives, constituency service clearly kept many of the MPs I knew and observed extremely busy. Typical activities during constituency visits included holding rallies and smaller community/village gatherings to address and to meet with constituents; attending District Council meetings (of which MPs, controversially, are voting members); visiting development projects to inspect progress, to make payments etc; attending funerals; meeting with chiefs, councillors, and one's constituency team; and more besides.

The ways in which these contacts are managed varies. Boniface Kadzamira, for example, favours large rallies with audiences of several hundred. Bringing his battered loudspeaker all the way from Lilongwe with him, he arrives to watch a match in the cross-constituency football league that he has established for young men across Ntchisi North. A member of his team provides fast-paced commentary for the crowd. The match over, the microphone is handed to the MP who then addresses the captive audience of hundreds of villagers assembled,

applauding the discipline of the players and discussing his work in the constituency and in Parliament on behalf of his constituents (Constituency Observation 2 (Kadzamira) 2016).[47]

Emily Chinthu-Phiri (Nkhata Bay South, 2014-19), on the other hand, prefers to meet smaller groups, village by village, as mentioned above. When at home in the constituency (which, unusually, is her primary residence), she visits perhaps three or four villages per week, and in 2017 when I joined her hoped to have visited almost every village in her constituency by the time of the 2019 election (Constituency Observation 5 (Chinthu-Phiri) 2017). This is in addition, of course, to monitoring projects, holding and attending numerous meetings, and of course attending funerals. MPs generally worked hard to avoid stumbling upon funerals in the course of their travels – going so far as to seek out intelligence of what routes and roads one might best avoid that day, and even manoeuvring a swift about-turn upon the sight of a tell-tale palm branch on the road ahead – if and only if certain that their car had not yet been seen (Fieldnotes, 2016-17). For an MP to be seen passing a funeral without stopping their vehicle, spending 20-30 minutes mourning/paying respects to the family, and donating some money would, all MPs agreed, be political and reputational suicide. It was typical, therefore, in my observations with MPs in their constituencies, to visit and otherwise stumble upon two or three funerals in an average day.

Another activity occupying many MPs is visiting local governmental/utility/agency etc offices in order to intervene on behalf of their constituents, applying personal pressure and the status of their office in order to try to unblock administrative delays or secure better treatment for constituents in terms of service provision. As he is passing it in the car, former minister and Speaker of Parliament Davies Katsonga (Mwanza Central, 1999-2009; 2014-19) pops in for five minutes to the Mwanza District ESCOM (Electricity Supply Company of Malawi) office just to ensure that their plans for extending power lines to certain parts of his constituency are on track (and to keep pressure upon them in this respect) (Constituency Observation 1 (Katsonga) 2016). Emily Chinthu-Phiri, meanwhile, has heard in one of her village meetings concerns from the local Village Development Committee (VDC) about the conduct of the wider Area Development Committee (ADC) and the District Agriculture Development Officer (DADO) in relation to donor funding for agricultural projects – the village and the VDC are keen to apply, but are not being adequately communicated with, and have not been told of an upcoming deadline to submit proposals within the coming few weeks. Some days later, the MP collects

[47] Kadzamira was unusual amongst those MPs I observed and interviewed in that he did like to spend a significant portion of his constituency speeches discussing his hard work in Parliament on behalf of his constituents. As discussed in the thesis Introduction, such explanation/justification of parliamentary activity – a huge plank of Fenno's conception of home styles in the USA – scarcely featured in the home styles of most Malawian MPs. Most acknowledged this, and accounted for it on the grounds that their constituents neither cared about nor understood the work of Parliament.

the VDC Chair and we pay a surprise visit to the DADO's office where in the course of a one-hour meeting she diplomatically suggests mistakes and oversights have been made (as opposed, for instance, to any sustained incompetence or malfeasance) but appeals for improved communication and for a whole set of related "issues" to be ironed out. The subtext, of course, of this superficially jolly but edgy meeting, is for the MP to put elements of the local bureaucracy on notice that she has an eye on them, and to bring the weight of her office and platform to bear on ensuring that present "errors" are corrected and avoided in future (Constituency Observation 5 (Chinthu-Phiri) 2017).

One final role of note concerns an informal role in conflict mediation (highlighted also by Lindberg 2010, 123-4 in the case of Ghana). Katsonga's Personal Assistant communicates to him an ongoing conflict between a group of local youths, who are riding motorcycles locally without the required licences, and the local police who the youths feel target them for bribes as a result. Katsonga holds a half-hour meeting by the roadside with the youth, who communicate their concerns at length. He says he cannot condone their breaking of the law (and upbraids one of his councillors, also in attendance, for what he sees as equivocating and playing to the gallery in this respect), though nor does he approve of the police extorting money from them. He tells them not to ride vehicles without licenses, and otherwise says that the only thing he can do is to ask the police to better communicate the rules to them, by printing and putting up posters locally explaining said rules. He subsequently drops into the police station and secures a commitment to do exactly this (Constituency Observation 1 (Katsonga) 2016).

In general what emerges most clearly from observing MPs' constituency work is that most days are long and busy – and that no day is identical, or indeed predictable. When an MP is in their constituency, even more than when they are not in their constituency, they are fielding calls and demands on their time and resources constantly – on the phone, by email and whatsapp, and in person as they drive (or are driven) around, encountering individuals, groups and scenarios making an endless stream of demands and requests upon their time, their counsel and above all, it must be said, their wallets (see next chapter on handouts). MPs ubiquitously talk of needing to "run away" from constituents, and indeed there is a reason why, as discussed in Chapter 2, the vast majority of MPs stop living in their constituencies upon being elected to office. MPs talk with feeling about how, 'the pressure [from constituents] is just so huge' (Msowoya 2017) and that they need to save money in order to visit their constituencies as it can be a very expensive few days (see also next chapter.)

For all the talk of stress and difficulties, it is also clear however – as far as their personal feelings about constituency visits are concerned – that most MPs simultaneously greatly value the chance to 'connect to the people,' a phrase I heard often in relation to visiting the constituency (for example Constituency Observation 2 (Kadzamira) 2016). It is a revealing turn of phrase,

and seems to speak to a recognisable psychology more widely amongst Malawians living in urban areas: not solely of MPs seeking to stay "in touch" and "connected" to their constituents so as to better represent them (although this *is* highly prized), but also of urbanites generally who consider rural life somehow more "real" and "authentic," and who thus maintain and greatly value at least periodic connecting to life beyond the city – to a "traditional" way of life to which they have sentimental attachment but from which they feel and acknowledge considerable deracination (see Geschiere and Gugler 1998). For all the difficult and negative characterisations that MPs make of their constituents, it is always worth noting this sentimental, faintly melancholic dimension in their attitudes.[48]

The constituency team

All of an MP's constituency service work is facilitated by their constituency "people" or "team" on the ground. The formal hierarchy of these teams is typically very loose and variable across time and circumstance, and varies considerably from MP to MP. By way of example, however, Boniface Kadzamira's (Ntchisi North, 2014-19) appears to be reasonably typical. He has approximately 200 of 'my people,' as he calls them, across the constituency (Constituency Observation 2 (Kadzamira) 2016). This structure has a core team at the top with whom he is in daily contact, including a Chairman, some deputies and a few other advisors. Below this inner circle spreads an elaborate hierarchical network arranged according to geography – the constituency is divided into areas, which are in turn divided into zones, in turn into villages. His network thereby ultimately reaches all the way down to village and even street level (Constituency Observation 2 (Kadzamira) 2016). It is, however, at these lower levels clearly a loose and ad hoc arrangement – Kadzamira acknowledges that he does not know many of these people, and that they are often connected to him only at several removes, having been "recruited" by other members of the network subordinate to the MP himself. Those at grassroots level are tasked both with feeding information, requests, concerns, feedback and the like up into the network and ultimately back to the MP; and also with acting as an advocate, mouthpiece and organiser for the MP within their particular village or area – a dual role that, as Cloutier and Thomas (2019, 2) suggest, places those who "work" for MPs at a 'representational nexus' between MPs and constituents.

At the time of my interviews and observations with him (2015-16), Kadzamira was an independent MP. It is clear, however, that upon re-joining the MCP in 2017 he (in common

[48] Such attitudes perhaps have particular resonance in Malawi as they were very much present and embodied in the person of Kamuzu Banda, an arch-conservative who wished to discipline and "modernise" Malawi and Malawians, but only in accordance with (his particular vision of) "African traditions" and, to quote the title of his book, *Our African Way of Life* (C. Young and Banda 1946).

with many others I knew whose party-political status had changed) did not much alter the structure of his constituency team or network – and certainly not at the most senior, inner levels. This is because teams are largely or overwhelmingly *personal* structures, especially at the core – and this is no less true for MPs who are members of a political party and thus also connected with a constituency-level party operation. An MP's team *may* be, to a greater or lesser extent, contiguous with local party structures – and is more likely to be so in the case of those (comparatively rare) MPs who have entered politics, won an election, and continuously served in Parliament all within one party. It remains the case regardless, however, that MPs quickly end up working with a core inner team that is first and foremost loyal to them personally rather than to their party. It is overwhelmingly MPs, after all, who fund their constituency teams. If an MP finds themselves – as many do for instance upon their first election to Parliament – with an inner circle of local party stalwarts whose primary loyalty they feel is not to them personally, they will invariably either replace those people formally or else (often the preferred option) simply bypass them and work through informal shadow structures of their own people instead.

Beatrice Mwale (Kasungu North, 2014-19), for instance, played a key role in establishing the constituency structures of the People's Party (PP) in her constituency following Joyce Banda's founding of the party in 2011. Similarly to Kadzamira, the highly elaborate structure she describes includes a constituency committee presided over by a constituency governor, with deputy governors for each of four zones into which the constituency has been divided – each of these, in turn, has its own committee, women's wing, youth wing, and further committees extending down to the level of one or a few villages (B. Mwale 2016). Even for a party stalwart, however – who played a significant role in establishing these very structures – her actual (informal) core team of trusted confidants and advisors revolves mostly around her Personal Assistant and to some extent her family – and is largely separate from the party hierarchy proper (Constituency Observation 4 (Mwale) 2016).

Juliana Lunguzi (Dedza East, 2014-19), meanwhile, describes her party's constituency structures and the people in them as 'a nuisance' whom she works hard to avoid and to bypass as much as possible (Constituency Observation 3 (Lunguzi) 2016). She places her trust in herself, a small team of associates and family members, as well as local collaborators with whom she finds it helpful to work on particular projects (see below, for instance, on her collaboration with Mua Mission). Otherwise, she says, 'it's too easy to be held to ransom, to do things you don't want to do' by party people who in her view simply want 'a piece of the cake' (Constituency Observation 3 (Lunguzi) 2016). Lunguzi's attitude is similar to that of Agnes Nyalonje (Mzimba North, 2014-19), who says that her biggest problem in respect of building a team has been 'to find one or two people that are *reasonably* reliable [with whom to work] – and I'm saying

"reasonably" because in Malawi these days, stealing starts from the top all the way to the bottom' (Nyalonje 2016).

One typically finds, then, that MPs' inner teams are "staffed" by relatives and other long-term personal, professional, and political associates of the MP. Juliana Lunguzi's Personal Assistant, for instance, is a distant cousin. Emily Chinthu-Phiri's (Nkhata Bay South, 2014-19) adult son, meanwhile, is at her side throughout my week with her in the constituency. He drives her everywhere, accompanies her to meetings, runs errands for her, and is a constant source of advice and encouragement political and otherwise. Aside from family members, others upon whom MPs most rely in the constituency were most frequently described to me as (very) early allies and associates back from when the MP was just beginning in politics. Victor Musowa (Mulanje Bale, 2014-) describes his Personal Assistant thus:

> 'He used to be a friend to my late dad and he knew my family that way, he knew my mum. So when I wanted to start politics he came forward very early' (Musowa 2016).

Esther Jolobala (Machinga East, 2014-) describes her close advisors as people who, when she was first entering the political arena, 'were not supporting the then-sitting Member of Parliament. And they opted to support me. So… we formed structures' (Jolobala 2016).

These are, then, often "political people" in the constituency who had once been attached to one or more previous MPs, candidates and/or local parties before coming forward to offer their services and experience to the new candidate. Musowa's PA, for instance, had once 'helped my uncle to become a councillor' (Musowa 2016). Many of those I met in MP's constituency teams had likewise previously been a confidant of at least one (and often more) former MP(s) or candidate(s), and/or had a past as a local party organiser either from the one-party era or subsequently. Their personal relationship with – and perceived loyalty to – the current MP now, however, eclipsed any formal party or other role they may once have held. One MP's Personal Assistant, for example – a former local MCP official during the Kamuzu era – came many years later, and through various personal connections, to be introduced to the future (very much non-MCP) candidate at a time when running for office was merely a vague idea. He strongly encouraged and helped convince the candidate to run (the "call" to politics as discussed in Chapter 2) and has been at her side ever since as full-time secretary, constituency representative, advisor, and all-purpose aide de camp (Fieldnotes, 2016).

It is not least because MPs' teams are so personal to them, in fact, that there are often such high stakes and high tensions in constituency-level politics. Even at primary level, rival candidates may ostensibly be of the same party but a whole different set of local political actors potentially stand to benefit depending on which candidate is chosen. Likewise, when an independent MP (re)joins a political party, this is such a frequent occurrence (especially after an

election and as the new parliament is first meeting) that in Parliament it may scarcely raise an eyebrow. In the MP's constituency, by contrast, it is invariably a fraught and precarious business. Even in the event that it represents a return for the MP to their "mother party," the pleasure of the party leadership in Lilongwe is unlikely to be replicated at constituency level, where the party most likely has already-established structures and activists – defeated by this same incumbent at the last election – and who now, to compound the injury, stand to be usurped by the MP's own structures and lieutenants as the representatives and functionaries of their party at local level.

MPs in this situation typically talked of treading with care, trying to blend structures together and cast no-one out; most also reported nevertheless facing bitter resistance and unresolved divisions even years later (Jolobala 2016). It is not uncommon for intra- and inter-party tensions (to the extent that these can meaningfully be differentiated) at constituency level to spill over into localised violence (see for example Seeberg et al 2018; Reeder and Seeberg 2018). An admittedly extreme case came in 2013-14 when the political battle between People's Party primary rivals – and subsequent general election rivals – Frank Mwenifumbo and Cornelius Mwalwanda in Karonga Central escalated into serious violence, with sufficient loss of life and property that the area became nationally notorious as "Benghazi." Most localised political violence is considerably less extreme. It is, however, a frequent occurrence – especially as primary and general elections approach – and indicative of the very high stakes of constituency-level politics within each constituency itself.

We might ask, however, precisely why the stakes are so high for these local actors: what they stand to gain from a position on a politician's local team such that they guard such a position with extreme jealousy, and what so often induces in them a degree of performative dedication and loyalty to "my Honourable" (to quote one I observed) that it can often border on the quease-inducingly unctuous (Fieldnotes, 2016). Team members are not, after all, on a payroll or bound by a contract of employment of any kind. They are legally speaking unpaid "volunteers". In reality, however, all acknowledge that they invariably receive informal wages in the form of ad-hoc donations from the MP of cash, goods and services – and a set of general privileges that few Malawians of their background, class and status (especially in rural areas) can dream of accessing. Even the most hardline of reformist, "anti-handouts" MPs (see next chapter) acknowledged a need to give something to their close team – at the very least 'in order to motivate them' (Nyalonje 2016).

This is not to mention, moreover, the highly elevated status and clout that their proximity to the MP gives them in local society. My evening spent in the company of a Personal Assistant in rural Central Region was an eye-opening one, as this man was greeted and saluted by all whom we encountered in the small trading centre nearby where he lived. He effortlessly persuaded a

restauranteur to stay open beyond closing time in order to prepare us a meal for which he was not expected to pay, before heading to the local bar to receive complimentary beer and to generally hold court and direct conversation amongst his fellow patrons, friends and neighbours throughout the evening (Fieldnotes, 2016). As one observer notes, to be in their position is highly 'prestigious. It has status in this society' (Chigona 2016).

From the MP's perspective, however – what do teams do for them? Put simply, MPs' constituency structures and team are there to perform functions vital to their constituency work. They are 'very, very important structures. You can't do without them. If they are weak, you are also weak. If they are gone, you are also gone [politically and electorally speaking]' (R. C. Banda 2016).

They act, first and foremost, as the MP's eyes and ears on the ground, ready to tell them as soon as something happens in the constituency that they need to know about (a prominent death, for example, or developments regarding their constituency projects) (Constituency Observation 2 (Kadzamira) 2016). Moreover they also, as one MP puts it, 'sieve' the information which reaches them – an essential function if the MP is not to be entirely overwhelmed (Musowa 2016). MPs are typically in daily, sometimes near-hourly, contact with members of their constituency team. The core team and wider network down to the grassroots is also frequently employed to arrange meetings and rallies in particular areas and villages according to the MP's instructions (Kachikho 2016).

As was mentioned above the team are also, moreover, messengers for the MP at the grassroots, in villages and local areas. This is why MPs are typically concerned to have in their networks those who are influential, well-respected and perhaps in (formal or informal) positions of community leadership already. Emily Chinthu-Phiri, for instance, considers the endorsement and collaboration of a man we meet in the village adjacent to where she is building a small technical skills college – the pride and joy of her projects – to be hugely valuable, if not essential, to its success. He does not and never has held a position of formal leadership in the village (as a chief, for instance) but, she says, 'when he says something, people follow.' 'It's just natural,' she says – he is a 'very, very influential man' in the village and wider area (Constituency Observation 5 (Chinthu-Phiri) 2017).

Having such persons as representatives of the MP at the grassroots can, MPs hope, lend them legitimacy by proxy, and be useful in cultivating and solidifying electoral and political support. They often include, indeed, Village Headmen or more elevated chiefs, who may form unofficial alliances – of varying degrees of closeness and explicitness – with an incumbent MP or, on the other hand, with a current or future rival. It is one of the worst-kept secrets in Malawian

politics that the laws forbidding chiefly structures from any active, partisan involvement in the "modern" political system of rival parties and democratic elections is honoured far more in the breach than in the observance – and no less so vice versa (Eggen 2011, 313).

Finally, senior members of their constituency teams can act as delegates for MPs in their constituencies – a vital function given the impossible number of demands and requests made for the MP's attention and presence locally. Beatrice Mwale (Kasungu North, 2014-19), for instance, relies enormously on her Personal Assistant, 'who is staying in the office full-time, receiving complaints from the people all the time' (B. Mwale 2016). Moreover, she typically delegates to him her attendance at the monthly ADC meetings in the constituency, where he:

> 'narrates all whatever I am doing in the constituency, [and records] all those problems that the [VDCs] have brought to the ADC – to say we need this, we need this, we need that. And himself the Personal Assistant reports the progress on other projects that we are doing' (B. Mwale 2016).

In Mwale's case, meanwhile, her political party structures are quite separate, and she typically restricts them to 'arranging meetings', rallies and the like on her and her party's behalf (B. Mwale 2016).

Essential as they are, however, teams typically present significant problems and dangers for MPs and their political interests. Many of these are recognised by the more far-sighted of incumbents, however the most effusive on this topic were typically (and tellingly) former MPs who had faced often abject defeat at the ballot box and who spoke with the bitter clarity of hindsight (B. Kaunda 2017; Anon MP2 2017).

In any local setting, as argued above, being a member of an MP's inner circle of confidants and advisors is a highly lucrative and sought-after role. It follows, therefore, that team members have not necessarily sought out and cultivated their proximity to the MP on a solely altruistic or public-spirited basis – like everyone else, they have interests of their own.[49] What is more, those interests need not always perfectly align with the political interests of their boss, and the testimony of many (especially former) MPs points to serious concerns regarding the extent to which the advice of those in their inner circle or wider network can ever be trusted or relied upon to serve the politician over themselves.

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[49] One local civil society actor, no fan of MPs themselves, actually describes those who surround MPs as being considerably worse – indeed as corrupt, self-serving 'bouncers' (thugs) (Monjeza 2017). This seems an unduly harsh assessment but is not an uncommon one.

The most common complaint from (former) politicians, indeed, was that their team purposely gave them a wildly optimistic and distorted picture of their local popularity and political/re-election prospects. Most former MPs whom I interviewed (despite the 60%+ turnover rate of MPs in Malawi) reported being astonished at their defeat – even when that defeat was, as it often was, truly enormous or, as one put it, '*Total!* And *miserable!*' (Anon MP2 2017). The reason for this astonishment, if not for their defeat itself, was clearly their (over-)reliance on their team to sieve appropriate information, to perform duties and functions on their behalf, and above all to give them an accurate (as opposed to self-serving) portrait of their standing in the constituency and what might constitute a sensible or realistic strategy for re-election. One MP acknowledges that, two years since his election, he has no real idea any longer of his standing in the constituency or in what areas he has or lacks support – he is ever-more reliant on his team for information in this respect (Lally 2016). A former minister admits:

> 'Before I became a politician, I used to ask myself, "Why is it that these politicians can't see what is around them? Why is it that they can't see that things are not the way they are [saying they are]? When I became a politician, especially after I lost, I realised that one of the biggest obstacles to you seeing what is around you [as an MP] are the *people* who surround you. No politician wants to hear bad news. And [your] people… realize that you are happy when they say, "Don't worry sir you are going to win! Don't worry *bwana* you are going to win!" Those people always say that, even when they know they're two-timing [and double-dealing] you. When they know [even] *they* are not going to vote for you! So that blinds you. That blinds you' (A. Shaba 2017).

Lifred Nawena (Thyolo Thava, 2009-14) similarly insists that one of the greatest political problems in Malawi is that politicians and leaders at all levels sooner or later end up surrounded by people who cannot or will not tell them the truth about realities on the ground, from which politicians are inclined to become ever-more separated and distant. Of former President Bingu wa Mutharika he says that he eventually surrounded himself with people 'who were simply too ready to clap hands for him. And when it came to difficult times, they had nothing to say' – but he believes the same is invariably true on a smaller scale in the case of MPs at constituency level (Nawena 2017). He quotes Arthur Schlesinger: 'irreverence irritates leaders but is their salvation,' and considers Malawian politicians to experience far too little irreverence in their constituencies (Nawena 2017).

Relatedly, tales abound of team members re-evaluating their positions – especially in the run-up to elections and if they feel their MP is likely to lose – and actively switching sides as they chase ongoing influence and opportunities with other candidates. Indeed Anna Kachikho (Phalombe North, 2004-20) acknowledges:

> 'I don't tell people [who] my key people [are] because I don't trust anybody! (*laughs*) Because if I tell you [who] my key people are… tomorrow you [could] just go [and give] handouts to them [and then I would]… find that they are not there, they are gone! (*laughs*)' (Kachikho 2016).

Such a concern certainly seems to say something about Hon Kachikho's faith and trust in her constituency team! There are, moreover, plenty of cautionary tales circulating amongst MPs of close confidants being "poached" by a rival without their knowledge and acting as a spy for the enemy camp (Fieldnotes, 2015-17).

It is because of these and myriad other possibilities of betrayal, of course, that family members are so often so much favoured and prominent in MPs' constituency teams – on the principle that, in situations where total trustworthiness is highly prized but also hard to come by, nothing binds like blood. Even this, however, is no guarantee. When I join one MP in March 2017 for a week in her constituency, it is almost three years since her election to Parliament and she is still touring all villages in her constituency in order to 'thank them,' as she puts it, for electing her. With her on these daily trips around the constituency she usually brings her elder, sixty-something brother – who in the campaign of 2013-14, by his own admission, defected to the camp of her main opponent (and long-standing constituency rival and bitter enemy) in exchange for money and promised rewards. He thus spent the campaign alongside her opponent, bad-mouthing his sister at rallies up and down the constituency, and using his insider knowledge as a member of the family against her. Having won despite her brother's best efforts, she now takes him to her village meetings where, in an act of somewhat enforced repentance, he makes a now-familiar speech cheerfully confessing to his betrayal and foolishness, as well as his now-deep contrition – especially given what a wonderful MP his sister has turned out to be (Fieldnotes, 2017). For all that the overall thrust of this thesis aims to paint a somewhat redeeming portrait of (Malawian and African) politics and politicians – it would be ridiculous to deny that politics can be a very dirty and duplicitous business. To view it solely in such terms – or, even worse, to see African politics as peculiarly pathological in this respect – is, I argue, a very fundamental error. It is true, however, that the political arena is typically a low-trust, high-stakes environment – crowded with opportunities for back-stabbing and deceit – in which people, including even family members, are perfectly capable of revealing the very worst of themselves.[50]

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[50] Davies and Mark Katsonga – brothers and long-standing, bitter political opponents – are a more high-profile case of inter-family political conflict. Both have led rival parties (Davies the Chaka Cha Pfuko (CCP), Mark the People's Progressive Movement (PPM)) competing for support primarily in their Mwanza-Neno base in the southwest, and the brothers ran against each other in the 2014 presidential campaign.

To conclude on this issue, a constituency team and network of lieutenants is clearly essential for any MP. They are crucial in their campaigning efforts prior to being elected, and then subsequently in the running of their constituency operation. No MP can operate without them. They come, however, with certain perils. The fact that a majority of the former MPs I spoke to reported being genuinely astonished at a catastrophic re-election defeat is genuinely striking.[51] It speaks, it seems clear, to how removed MPs can become from their constituents and their real concerns and opinions; and how often they come instead to rely upon "middle-men" with a considerable tendency (knowingly or indeed unknowingly) to mis-represent reality and tell the MP far too much of what they want to hear – and of what they want them to hear. From the perspective of team members, after all, keeping their MP happy and relaxed about their constituency work and popularity will tend to safeguard their own privileged position(s) for as long as possible, and give them ongoing access to the politician's resources, including the opportunity to divert those resources in ways of which they approve. Many former MPs end up concluding, too late, that over-reliance upon – and misplaced trust in – their constituency lieutenants ended up bringing their political careers to a premature end (A. Shaba 2017; B. Kaunda 2017; Anon MP2 2017).

This chapter has thus far argued, contrary to many of the narratives about politicians that circulate not least in the domestic public sphere, that constituency work is of major concern to the vast majority of MPs, consuming a very large proportion of their (in fact very busy) working lives and requiring them to establish large and ordered constituency teams which present both political resources and threats. The priority given to their constituencies, moreover, primarily reflects MPs' unanimous view that constituency service is the preeminent priority of their constituents, vastly surpassing in importance anything they might ever do in the National Assembly.

The remainder of this chapter as well as the next are concerned with what precisely constitutes this constituency service. MPs themselves invariably talk in terms of two fundamental categories: on the one hand, they talk of being a "facilitator of development"; and, on the other, of being a provider of "handouts."[52] It is a distinction that MPs – although not necessarily their constituents – see very clearly, and rests less upon the type or scale of

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[51] Those less astonished, moreover, were typically those who had made independent, scientific attempts to actually measure constituent opinion – by means of surveys and the like – and had not relied on their team's reassurances on the matter (Njawala 2017).

[52] Not all their constituency service falls into these two categories – we have already mentioned an occasional conflict mediation role, as well as intervening on constituents' behalf with local and national agencies to secure improved service delivery. The overwhelming majority, however, they do see as falling into these two categories.

resources that they might distribute than upon their attitude towards that distribution. While much of the scholarly discussion around this topic (Lindberg 2010, 132; Erdmann and Engel 2007, 106–8; Hyden 2010, 6–7) is concerned to focus on whether MPs and others are distributing public/club goods vs private goods – in order to draw distinctions between good and bad versions of "clientelism", "patronage", "neopatrimonialism" and the like – for MPs themselves the key distinction is between those goods they consider "developmental" (primarily collective goods such as upgrades to physical infrastructure, but also individual goods such as educational scholarships) and those which they consider, for reasons explored fully in the next chapter, distinctly *non-* or actively *anti*-developmental (primarily cash handouts to individuals with no specific purpose or conditions attached.) I turn now to the first of these categories.

The facilitator of development

The Constituency Development Fund

It was detailed in Chapter 4 how campaigning aspirants for office are expected by voter-constituents to promote and to facilitate "development" in the constituency. These demands and expectations do not of course disappear with incumbency. On the contrary, incumbent MPs are widely seen as – and expected to assume the mantle of – 'chief development officer for the area' (Dimba 2016; see also Barkan and Mattes 2014; Lindberg 2010) ("Development," it must be noted, has a very particular and highly delimited meaning in this context – primarily low-level upgrades to physical, economic and to some extent human infrastructure (such as school blocks, small bridges, scholarships, money to establish a youth group and so on). There are of course more expansive or complex ways by which "development" – even by an MP in their constituency – might theoretically be conceived. In contemporary Malawi, however, *this* is what "development" means – and thus also what I mean when using the term throughout this chapter.)

This unofficial role as "chief development officer" has to a large extent become official with the introduction, in 2006-7, of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF). The CDF is an annual sum of public money given to constituencies for the specific purpose of funding development projects. Its introduction in Malawi mirrored similar processes in a number of African countries around the same time: following the lead of forerunner Zambia, which introduced a CDF in the mid-1990s, but especially of Kenya when it did so in 2003 (see Barkan and Mattes 2014). Contemporary Kenyan CDFs, however, amount on average to well over one million US dollars

per annum (Romero 2009)[53]; Malawi's are of a vastly smaller order. Upon its introduction MPs each received MWK 3m per annum (approximately US$ 21,000 in 2007 terms). While headline figures in Malawian kwacha rose each year, the CDF in fact shrank over the first decade or so in real (US dollar) terms: for instance, MWK 7m in 2013 (approximately US$ 16,500); MWK 10m in 2017 (approximately US$ 14,000)). In recent years, the CDF has risen considerably (to MWK 30m in 2020 (approximately US$ 40,000); and an upcoming rise to no less than MWK 40m (approximately US$ 52,000) was announced in Parliament in September 2020 (Nyasa Times 2020b)). Compared with CDFs in the likes of Kenya, however, the Malawian version remains very small beer indeed.[54]

Technically speaking, moreover, the CDF is not "for" the MP, but is rather a fund for the *constituency* – given to District Councils – and the MP is tasked with having input into its management but not with controlling it unilaterally (see Mabveka 2014). Such technicalities, however, are widely disregarded: in practice, the CDF is overwhelmingly overseen by MPs, and this appears to be widely understood as the natural order of things by constituents, other local political actors, and by MPs themselves. One close observer at local level says that, from the outset, constituents and MPs alike understood the CDF to be MPs' 'pocket money' (Anon Expert 6 2017) – it is "theirs," and whilst some may manage it collaboratively and/or take a hands-off approach, that is ultimately a choice for them to make.

The general view amongst my MP interviewees was, indeed, that they clearly controlled and had final say over the CDF. Lucius Banda (Balaka North 2004-06; 2014-19), in fact, describes approvingly of the Fund as 'basically the MP's pocket money to do developments' (L. Banda 2017). Esther Jolobala, likewise, sees it thus:

> 'The CDF is easy to manage… That Fund is for Members of Parliament and the community to initiate projects, we call it "community-driven projects"… The only money as Members of Parliament we are [officially given] to use in our constituencies in terms of development, it's the Constituency Development Fund. And we are answerable for that… It is assigned to the Member of Parliament, [and so we] have to make sure that CDF is being used properly' (Jolobala 2016).

Peter Dimba's (Lilongwe South, 2014-) attitude is similarly indicative: he describes himself as spending the CDF as he sees fit, and then reporting to the local ADCs at the end of each year on

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[53] See Kenyan government website https://ngcdf.go.ke/allocations/

[54] These MWK-USD conversions are approximate, based on exchange rates as at 10 January in their respective years, as listed at https://www.xe.com/currencytables. The exception is the last, calculated at exchange rates current on Wednesday 9 December 2020 at https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter.

how he has spent it – in order, in theory at least, to be held to account for his choices and actions (Dimba 2016).

Notwithstanding their view that they (should and generally do) have the final say on how the CDF is spent, however, most MPs do also stress that they consider it good governance practice to consult with – and take input from – a range of constituency actors including ADCs/VDCs, chiefs, and local religious and civil society organisations (Adams 2016; Kouwenhoven 2016; Lunguzi 2016). One interviewee, indeed, also acknowledges that local committees of his political party have significant input (Belekanyama 2016). The place of ward councillors in such consultations varies widely (MP-councillor relationships are addressed below) but suffice it to say here that councillors' input on how the CDF might be spent is generally, at best, subordinate and advisory – and is certainly, in all cases, subject to the MP's sanction or veto. As former minister Patricia Kaliati (Mulanje West, 1999-2019) reasons, being fond of a Schatzbergian (2001) metaphor, the MP is the overseer, 'like the father,' in charge of the development of the constituency (Kaliati 2016).

Regardless of how collaboratively it is managed, however, what is it that MPs typically do with the CDF? As the name suggests, it is designed to be used for "development" in the constituency – and so typical projects include the building/upgrade of school blocks and rooves, teachers' houses, small footbridges, police units, small clinics and the like; as well as other infrastructural activities such as the creation and repair of boreholes and the grading of small roads.[55] Most MPs prefer to spread their CDF thin across the constituency – a footbridge in one place, a school block in another etc; or providing desks and chairs for all schools across their constituency. Some, on the other hand, prefer to invest it all in just one or two top-priority projects, such as a larger bridge, or even a small stadium (Constituency Observation 1 (Katsonga) 2016; Constituency Observation 5 (Chinthu-Phiri) 2017).

Regardless of how it is spent, however, there is no getting around the fact that the Malawian CDF remains a small amount of money compared with many CDFs elsewhere, and that it is difficult – even if every kwacha were to be spent perfectly – for an MP to make very much of a mark with it. Looking somewhat enviously at colleagues in other countries, Agnes Nyalonje (Mzimba North, 2014-19) bemoans that constituents demand the likes of roads and road bridges from their MPs when the reality is that such projects require hundreds of millions of

[55] For the likes of teachers' houses or a local police unit, a typical arrangement is that if the MP constructs the building, then the relevant ministry in Lilongwe commits to providing the teachers or police to fill it.

kwacha (Nyalonje 2016). The CDF is thus 'a drop in the ocean' and MPs are, in her view and many others', perennially destined to disappoint their constituents (Nyalonje 2016).

Nevertheless, the CDF is highly prized and valued by MPs. It provides them with (some) fixed financial muscle and political capital in their constituencies, and thus too in their ongoing battles with an often-considerable number of local actors with an eye on their job come the next election. One of the few moments when Parliament in plenary really comes alive – and indeed comes together with one voice – to put pressure on government is when the budget allocation for the CDF is being discussed (Parliamentary Observations, 2016-17). For a fairly weak and ineffectual legislature, Malawian MPs have been strikingly successful in recent years at securing ever-greater CDF funding from government(s), and Malawi's CDF is beginning to look somewhat less paltry in comparison with most others than it once did.[56]

Funding above and beyond the CDF: "My own pocket"

The CDF remains, however, a generally small proportion of the money MPs spend in the course of their constituency service activities. For all MPs it is a welcome start, but a mere start is what it is: their constituents demand and expect more, and – even if they are resigned to inevitably disappointing them because of what they see as unrealistic expectations – MPs do feel obliged to go considerably above and beyond the CDF.

They are thus involved in spending considerable amounts of their personal – and otherwise privately-sourced – resources on constituency service. In some cases, this will involve the putting to use of their personal networks and contacts. Several MPs I observed, for instance, had friends in the Malawi Police Service who were able to secure interviews for a small number of their young constituents each year to join the service. Once interviewed, at least one of these MPs (an opposition member) would typically speak to the relevant minister, asking for their help in ensuring that their constituents were ultimately recruited – and typically found ministers willing and even keen to help (Constituency Observation 2 (Kadzamira) 2016).

While this example involves little if any expenditure on the part of the MP, the same cannot be said for a great many of their constituency service activities – including some extremely

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[56] It should be noted that in addition to the CDF, MPs may also have some access to other government development funds such as the Local Development Fund (LDF) and the District Development Fund (DDF). Especially since the decentralisation reforms of 2014, however, such funds are primarily the province of local councils, their civil servants and ward councillors (Pondani 2016). Any access for MPs to these funding streams therefore tends to depend heavily on the political and personal relationships that MPs have with these actors and institutions. From the testimony of my MP interviewees, the extent of their involvement tends most often to be limited to requests for their opinion on where money might best be spent, which are often ignored in any case. Many MPs consider such funds 'lost' to them (Anon MP, 2016).

commonplace projects undertaken by almost all MPs, but which it is not permitted to fund from the CDF. Most MPs to whom I spoke, for example, had a scholarship scheme to personally fund anywhere between 5-50 students through secondary school or technical training – often making use of contacts and friendships in education to secure favourable rates and the like (Constituency Observation 1 (Katsonga) 2016; Constituency Observation 3 (Lunguzi) 2016).

Many MPs have also established football leagues amongst "the youth" (by which is typically meant young men) in their constituency. Dr Jesse Kabwila (Salima North West, 2014-19), to take just one of many examples, has the 'Dr Jesse Kabwila League and Trophy' in Salima North West:

> 'That is from my own pocket. It costs me a lot, but the youth in my area are really hit by HIV threats. I had to engage them on something that will take them [away] from alcohol, from sex. And then I needed them also, to engage them in helping their communities. For example, the two teams that played in the finals, they are going to be roofing a house of a blind woman who needs her house roofed… Malawi Congress Party passionately believes in "nothing for us without us"' (Kabwila 2016).

(The disciplining element – and the desire to cultivate "discipline" in either sub-sections of, or the general, population of constituents – is clear in what Kabwila says, and in myriad other statements by MPs about their constituency service work. Chapter 7 deals with this directly.)

It is also one of the perks of their job that MPs have access to car loans, and the right to import two vehicles per term into Malawi duty-free (thus typically halving the cost of any vehicle.) Many MPs make use of this by importing one vehicle for their personal use, and another for use in the constituency as an ambulance and/or minibus. Aisha Adams' (Mangochi Nkungulu, 2014-) main self-funded constituency projects in her first years as an MP, for example, were school fees for 50 girls and boys each year, and the donation of an ambulance to the constituency. Peter Dimba (Lilongwe South, 2014-), meanwhile, bought two ambulances soon after winning his seat in 2014 – one for each ward in his constituency.

Needless to say – and notwithstanding certain perks of office that facilitate their affordability – such privately financed constituency service activities typically require significant amounts of money:

> 'If as a Member of Parliament you are not engaged in some other, you know, commercial ventures to supplement the income you get [from] Parliament, then you will be finished… Because it's not much that we get from Parliament, and… much of it also has to work in the constituency. And you have your own family to take care of, you have future investments also to make sure that you save for the rainy day in the future. So the only way out is to make sure that you also

> have some businesses and… [that] is probably what has actually kept me afloat to date' (Dimba 2016).

Many MPs testified to their businesses suffering or even dying as they divert resources from them towards constituency service activities. It is, indeed, a commonplace for *former* MPs to talk with great feeling about the parlous state of their personal finances – especially in that majority of cases where the sudden loss of an MP's salary and perks has come on the back of an expensive (and ultimately doomed) election campaign (Constituency Observation 2 (Kadzamira) 2016; Anon MP2 2017; Nyasa Times 2015b).

Given that the vast majority of MPs do not have the resources to fund all of their additional constituency service activities simply from their personal assets, this means that a very high premium is placed upon being able to source and to secure resources for the constituency. This was argued in Chapter 4 to be fundamental to the self-presentation of candidates; it is perhaps still more fundamental in the case of incumbents, and thus the furious hunting and brokering for resources for constituency developments is a major aspect of the day-to-day life of an MP. This is true of the most conscientious MPs most of all, for this is an arena in which the demands and needs of constituents *always* vastly outstrip the capacity of MPs to service or meet those demands. For many MPs the gap between the needs they see and their (in)capacity to deal with them to any remotely adequate extent is a source of profound guilt, pain, and existential frustration. By no means mutually exclusively from this, it can also breed frustration, resentment, and anger at constituents themselves (see Chapter 7).

Funding from government

MPs conduct this constant quest and scramble for resources in myriad directions. In the first place, there is the central government. MPs are, after all, naturally in close physical and political proximity to it and it is a fundamental part of their job to lobby it on their constituents' behalf. The Malawian government is also the dominant actor in the Malawian economy (see Clapham 1985, 40). Government therefore looms large in MPs' conceptions of how and where to source resources for their constituencies.[57]

My participants, however, had varying experiences of government's receptiveness to their demands and requests. In the context of the 2014-19 Parliament (during which a DPP-UDF administration was in office throughout) a number of opposition MCP and PP MPs, as we might

[57] Performatively pleading with ministers for resources for their constituency during ministerial Question Time constitutes a very large proportion of what MPs do in Parliament itself, albeit the vast majority acknowledge it as an entirely fruitless exercise at least as far as its overt purpose (persuading ministers to direct resources to one's constituency) is concerned (see below.)

anticipate, felt that they and their constituencies were discriminated against in terms of access to, and bestowal of, government funds – and specifically *because* they were an opposition MP. Peter Dimba (Lilongwe South, 2014-), for example, suggested:

> 'in Africa and in Malawi… if you are from opposition, you are regarded as an enemy of the government, the executive. And obviously that does have an impact in terms of your bargaining power, when you are trying to bargain for some development in your constituency directly from government. And so you will find ministers and even senior government officials may not be comfortable to develop your area because they think by developing your area… then they are in a way helping you to come back, to win again [at the next election]. And so that is a big, big challenge' (Dimba 2016).

Malani Mtonga (Karonga South, 2014-19) similarly argued that, as a Northern Region MP, 'we are being side-lined. More developments are going to our friends in the Southern region, and especially… where DPP is strong' (Mtonga 2016).

Such perspectives fit, indeed, with long-standing theories of politics in Africa, and indeed elsewhere – that in relatively weak institutional environments which cannot adequately enforce behaviour to the contrary, incumbent governments and parties will use their incumbency to unfairly favour their own partisan interest and/or to disadvantage opposition forces (see for example Médard 1982; Clapham 1985). Many Malawian MPs, however, shed doubt on this received wisdom: suggesting various combinations of enlightened partisan self-interest and of genuine principle to account for why the DPP-UDF 2014-19 government, at least, tended *not* to behave in this way. Indeed, the most generous view of government, on this point if no other, found many unlikely defenders amongst opposition MPs. Even the likes of Dimba and Mtonga, quoted above, gladly acknowledged that both the CDF and the subsequent decentralisation reforms of 2014 had ringfenced certain funding streams away from political control, and delegated others to the control of local councils (Dimba 2016; Mtonga 2016). All MPs, for example, whether in government or in opposition, receive the same CDF funding and are subject to the same rules regarding how it is spent. No MPs interviewed reported any attempts by government to interfere in these processes. Many of Dimba's and Mtonga's colleagues on the opposition benches, however, went considerably further: arguing forcefully that, behind-the-scenes, most ministers were considerably less partisan and prone to politicking – and considerably more reasonable and respectful of opposition MPs' right to fair access to government resources – than their public performances, especially in the bear-pit of the parliamentary chamber, would often suggest.

MCP MP Sam Kawale (Dowa North East, 2014-), for instance, feels he receives a fair hearing when lobbying ministers:

> 'I am an *MP*. Although I belong to MCP, but I also have people from other political parties who voted for me, so I am representing everyone in that constituency… [I can say to ministers], "if you deny the constituency, even your people will also suffer. So let's put political parties outside this office, let's talk development. You and I, we are government, we are supposed to represent the people." That's why if I am going to [a minister's] office, I don't put on a badge!' (this refers to the MCP pin that almost all of its MPs attach to their lapels or dresses when attending Parliament) (Kawale 2016).

Although some ministers are better than others, he finds the majority reasonable and receptive to such arguments – as do many more of his colleagues:

> 'They are in the driving seat, so what you do is you go in their offices and you talk to them in the ministry, you know. Unlike asking them in the chamber. Because [when] you ask them in the chamber, it's like you are downgrading them, you know. Like if you are saying, "there are very few schools in my area!" – no minister would be happy to be talked to that way [in public], you know. It's better to be quiet [in Parliament], but meet him as a minister in his office and say, "my friend, I have this problem."… And they *will* act – will act promptly, you know' (Themu 2016).

Alekeni Menyani (Dedza North West, 2009-19), an outspoken opposition MP in the parliamentary chamber and no friend of the DPP-UDF government nevertheless acknowledges that:

> 'These ministers, you know… are people who have held very high positions… in universities, teaching, some have been CEOs of very big companies… [So] when the government knows that you stand for some kind of principle, they can sort of disagree with you, but as a matter of principle they will also respect you because they… know that you stand for a particular principle that you cannot just throw away' (Menyani 2016).

And finally – what is former MP Lifred Nawena's (Thyolo Thava, 2009-14) view of the idea that Malawian governments simply select for patronage those projects which will benefit them politically and electorally? Even of his long-standing nemesis President Peter Mutharika's administration he says simply that 'politicians are not like that! They are not like that': they *do* have genuine respect for fairness norms, and for the right of opposition MPs and voters to a (reasonably) fair slice of the national cake – even when this is not in their rational-choice, partisan interest (Nawena 2017).

The view we find in such testimony, moreover, of Parliament as a place for performative politicking and partisanship – whilst respectful and more public-interested conversations and negotiations between adults, and across party lines, can go on quietly behind the scenes – was

close to unanimous amongst my MP interviewees (and ministers) of all parties.[58] PP MP Godfrey Munkhondya (Chitipa Wenya, 2009-19), for instance, argues that when you really want something, speaking to the minister and ministry personally and privately is vastly preferable to raising questions in Parliament. 'That's all for show': for partisan politicking, and impressing your party leadership and pleasing the whips – it's not how you actually get anything or meaningfully negotiate with government on behalf of your constituents (Munkhondya 2017).

MPs from DPP and UDF, moreover, also near-unanimously endorsed the view that *this* government – similarly to Bingu wa Mutharika's previous DPP administration, but unlike Bakili Muluzi's UDF or Joyce Banda's PP governments, in their view (Thomson 2016; Mpaweni 2016) – did not practice favouritism towards their own MPs when it came to constituency development resources. Ironically, most of these MPs tended to note this with genuine bitterness – expressing the view that as loyal and compliant backbenchers and supporters of the government, the least they might expect is a little preferential treatment for themselves and their constituents when the government to whom they are so loyal gets to handing out development resources and constituency projects:

> 'in terms of benefits, I don't think I as a Member of Parliament I would say I have anything to show that I have benefited out of this coalition. In terms of development, I haven't seen any meaningful development in my constituency… I don't think really [that]… I'm able to show something that, as a government MP, this is what I've benefited' (Lally 2016).

A long-standing government MP and former Minister concurs:

> 'it varies from government to government because I remember in the past when in UDF [under Muluzi government], the government used to give us [government MPs] some [extra] projects like boreholes. But I can tell you that since I joined *this* government, I haven't been given any developmental project in my constituency' (Anon MP9 2016).

Yaumi Mpaweni (Balaka Central East, 2009-19) acknowledges that 'you can [still] score political mileage if you stand on the podium and say that working with government gives you more [resources].'[59] In his experience, however, 'in reality it doesn't matter… In reality the

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[58] The idea of private maturity yet public immaturity on the part of politicians may seem counterintuitive, although it has long been said also in relation to Prime Minister's Questions in the UK House of Commons (Crewe 2015, 64).

[59] Government itself, ironically enough, often feeds this view in public discourse and especially in parliament – teasing opposition MPs that their constituents are made to suffer because they as MPs remain in the opposition (Parliamentary Observations, 2015-17). Menyani, however, is one of many opposition MPs who consider this simply to be 'playing games' – relevant and potent as a discourse, no doubt, but not in fact reflective of how (this) government actually prioritises projects (Menyani 2016).

development we get is equal, regardless of whether we are in government or not' (Mpaweni 2016). Another (DPP) MP agrees – 'people look at you differently' because you are in government, he says, but 'you have the same privileges' (Anon MP5 2017).

The data is unavailable by which one might confirm such impressions. Several vital qualifications exist to them in any case – not least that by common consent what may have been true of this DPP-UDF government was *not* true of previous administrations. It is a striking finding, however – worthy of further research – that the prevailing view of government favouritism may be highly overblown, that government(s) in Malawi may have internalised a public-interest/non-partisan fairness norm that opposition MPs, of all people, are amongst the few to witness up-close; and because, of all things, government in private is actually more reasonable, more responsible, and less partisan than it frequently is in public, and especially in Parliament.

Beyond government

Government in 2014-19, however – regardless of its good faith, favouritism, or anything else – was nowhere near capable of satisfying all the constituency demands of any MP. This is especially true in a time of unprepossessing economic performance. All MPs therefore must look beyond the public realm and, as already suggested above, seek to mobilise all manner of personal contacts and networks – old and new, past and present – for constituency service resources. As Lilian Patel (Mangochi South, 1994-2009; 2014-) describes it, she is constantly 'speaking in Parliament, speaking to ministers, [appealing to the] District Assembly, going up and down, knocking doors' everywhere in order to source resources for the constituency (L. Patel 2015).

Personal and professional contacts in the likes of government, the Malawi Police (as mentioned), in industry, in education, in media and so on are tapped for the jobs and opportunities they might provide, the favourable treatment they might bestow, and the resources they might donate to the MP's constituency and constituents. MPs I interviewed had sourced everything – from scholarships to apprenticeships, from schoolbooks to footballs – from exactly such contacts. Of those I observed, it seemed that many hours per week were spent tracking down "old friends," making "new friends," making calls, asking (occasionally begging) for favours, doing deals, and arranging the donations thus secured – not to mention typically accumulating yet more names and numbers, from those already tapped, of those yet to be so. For Sam Kawale (Dowa North East, 2014-), for instance:

> 'Firstly there is family, there are friends. Then there are people who just like what I am doing – some I know, some I don't know. They just come and say, "we

> will come and support you" – either [as a one-off or on a regular basis] (Kawale 2016).

In addition to such directly personal contacts and sources, NGOs, INGOs, IGOs, development agencies and private enterprises are all regular targets for MPs to approach for funds. Merely in relation to her manifesto pledge to have women travel lesser distances to bring water to their homes, for example, Anna Kachikho (Phalombe North, 2004-20) lists her "sponsors":

> 'I have friends, Indian friends, I could go to and ask them for assistance.[60] Some could give me five boreholes. I went to [INGO] Concern Universal, I asked for assistance, they gave me eight boreholes. I went to Irish Aid to ask for boreholes, they gave me five of them… Right now I've got another company… they [have] promised also to give about ten boreholes' (Kachikho 2016).

The role of NGOs, development agencies etc in these matters does, inevitably, suck them into politics and political discourse. One MP I observed complains to me, but also to audiences of his constituents and local chiefs, about unfair treatment from several NGOs and IGOs in relation to his district and their alleged favouritism towards other areas. He makes much of this in his constituency speeches – expressing outrage, naturally, and pledging to fight tooth-and-nail against such allegedly shoddy treatment (Fieldnotes, 2016).

Emily Chinthu-Phiri (Nkhata Bay South, 2014-19), by way of another example, is very regularly writing applications for grants to the likes of UNDP, the US Ambassador's Fund and many more. The vast majority, she knows, are frankly fruitless – but she has done this since before she was an MP, as a local social worker, and occasionally she might get a little something she can use in the constituency (Chinthu-Phiri 2016; Constituency Observation 5 (Chinthu-Phiri) 2017).

Peter Dimba (Lilongwe South, 2014-), meanwhile, has obtained funding for a health centre from a combination of such sources. He is also, at the time of our interview, hoping to push forward with a 'massive project' of electrification: JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) is electrifying Dzalanyama Forest Reserve in his constituency for tourism purposes, and he has 'helped to negotiate' with them and with the Department of Energy for the power lines to detour through most of the major trading centres in the constituency before arriving at Dzalanyama (Dimba 2016). In this way – by negotiating and organising partnerships with outside organisations and the like – MPs can attach themselves to exponentially larger projects than they could ever hope to source by themselves. This allows them to be a part (however peripheral) of truly significant development(s) in their constituency; and, of course, to claim

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[60] By this is meant Malawians of South Asian descent, a sizable population in urban centres who have a significant presence in business, particularly in retail and wholesaling.

credit for them – in ways, typically, that greatly exaggerate their own role, and downplay those of comparatively faceless, distant ministries, agencies and charities.

Perhaps, in fact, they do not even need to be involved at all:

> 'I was lucky… because the very same year I won, government decided to have a water project, drilling of boreholes, which came [to] my area. So it looked like it had come from me! And… at that particular time government decided to start building village roads and village bridges. So it looked like it had [also] come from me, because of my initiative!' (A. Shaba 2017).

Abbie Shaba (Mzimba East, 2004-14) is speaking here of the relative boom years of the first Bingu wa Mutharika administration. It is the flipside of this logic, however, that led so many MPs, of all parties, to bemoan the effect of the poor state of the economy and of government finances during my 2015-17 fieldwork. These macro-level economic factors seriously restricted the projects, developments, and services being provided by government in their constituencies and they knew – regardless of their party, regardless of their blamelessness for the poor state of the Malawian economy – that this would reflect badly on them as the incumbent MP, and that they personally were likely to pay a political/electoral price for it. Former minister and MP Shaba goes so far as to suggest that most of an MP's success (or otherwise) is down to sheer luck, because it is ultimately determined by factors (and benefactors) very far beyond their control.

This is but a tiny sample of MPs' efforts to source resources for their constituencies. Peter Dimba encapsulates the prevailing attitude:

> 'as a Member of Parliament I have… taken the initiative to make sure that I actually attract donors to my constituency – because I know that through their financing, their donations, that my constituency can actually develop, [and] not just depend on government… [How?]… It's by knocking on their doors! (*laughs*) Knocking their doors, making – *pleading*, you know – your case with them, and convincing them' (Dimba 2016).[61]

Selling oneself abroad

MPs are, therefore, heavily involved in selling themselves not just to their constituent-voters but also to potential donors and collaborators on constituency development projects – including to government itself. This particular form of campaigning work is not, moreover,

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[61] I myself, as a UK-based researcher, was periodically sought out for possible donations or revenue streams by my participants. In each case I did plead a lack of means, but also made clear that my role as a researcher was not compatible with any such activities.

limited to actors in the national/domestic sphere alone – far from it. A number of my participants spoke of international sponsorship for their constituency work from "well-wishers" in the United States in particular, but also Europe and elsewhere. Beyond the family, friends, and well-wishers he mentions above, Sam Kawale (a notably well-connected and high-spending MP) continues:

> 'Then we have international friends outside Malawi. So they also come alongside. They are individuals, they are churches, and a few [are] … trust[s]. They come alongside and help' (Kawale 2016).

Kawale is one of a number of MPs who acknowledged, as evangelical Christians in particular, highly lucrative links to wealthy church donors in the United States – in Kawale's case through E-3 Worldwide and Rick Warren's Purpose Driven Church Movement.[62] Several former (cabinet) ministers, moreover, were also not shy to acknowledge that they had made use of international and governmental contacts that they had made in their former life as a minister – both, it should be said, to facilitate some subsequent business or post-politics job-hunting of their own, but also to secure resources for their constituencies.

Aside from those mobilising international religious links and connections in the service of fund-raising, or pre-established political connections abroad, also of particular note in this respect are those who sell their credentials as liberal-democratic, development-focused, modernising-reformist African politicians for fundraising purposes in the global North. Joel Barkan (2009a, 17–19), in the first significant academic analysis of post-Third Wave African parliaments, argued that a small but critical mass of exactly such reformist MPs can significantly improve the performance of their parliaments, and by extension improve governance and deepen democracy, in their respective countries. Reformist Malawian MPs may not have read Barkan, but they absolutely understand the appeal of exactly this message to potential governmental and non-governmental donors in Europe and the United States.

Sam Kawale is exactly one such MP – and one of a number who find their religious and developmentalist credentials dovetail perfectly for certain audiences in the United States' evangelical movement. Emily Chinthu-Phiri, meanwhile, is similarly "modernising" and development-minded. Through long-standing personal and professional connections, she has secured a partnership with a consortium of donors in Norway, who are impressed with her and have funded a number of significant developments in her constituency (Constituency Observation 5 (Chinthu-Phiri) 2017). Her membership of Rotary International has also facilitated some useful and lucrative connections.

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[62] See https://e3worldwide.org/ and https://pd.church/

Juliana Lunguzi (Dedza East, 2014-19), however, is perhaps the clearest example. A crusading reformer within and beyond Parliament, she has a significant online presence on social media, and is frequently invited to speak at international and inter-governmental conferences – just two of many ways in which she has built a significant profile and network of contacts amongst 'well-wishers' in the global North (Lunguzi 2016; Constituency Observation 3 (Lunguzi) 2016). She acknowledges that her high-profile as a vocal reformer and "new type of African politician" has attracted considerable funding from 'donors and well-wishers' – both in support of her constituency-service work, and indeed of her political campaigning as she seeks to stay and to advance in politics. She talks, albeit vaguely, of receiving 'five million kwacha here, one million kwacha there' from such sources – highly significant sums in Malawi for a mere opposition MP (Constituency Observation 3 (Lunguzi) 2016).

There are clear parallels in terms of what MPs are doing here with Jean-Francois Bayart's (2000) concept of "extraversion" at the sovereign-state level. If, as he suggested, Senegal's most important export in the 1990s was its democratic credentials to foreign donors, then the same might well be said of Juliana Lunguzi, who carefully and consciously exports her image and reputation as a D/development-minded moderniser to Northern actors and institutions in no small part so as to source and to secure resources. In doing so, such MPs implicitly and often explicitly draw a sharp contrast between themselves and "other" Malawian/African politicians – not generally, as a category, held in the highest regard in Northern governmental/developmental/philanthropic circles (Constituency Observation 3 (Lunguzi) 2016; Kawale 2016; Nyalonje 2016).

The black box of constituency funding

Exactly how money and other resources are sourced by MPs, however – as well as where and how exactly they come to be disbursed – are something of a black box. There is, in practice, scarcely any more transparency in these matters than there is concerning candidates' campaign funding (see Chapter 4). Local councils are mandated to monitor the spending of CDF funds specifically; however they often lack the capacity and indeed the will to do so to any remotely adequate extent (Mabveka 2014; Action Aid 2017). As far as any funding not sourced directly from government is concerned, this is treated largely as the personal finances and arrangements of a private individual, rather than the interests and assets of a public officer. An Office of the Director of Public Officer's Declarations (ODPOD) – with which MPs, amongst others, are legally required to declare their significant assets and private interests – was established in 2014 but it lacks the powers, the personnel, or the resources to adequately perform its functions or to enforce compliance. It is certainly not involved in any monitoring or oversight of MPs' day-by-day constituency funding and spending (Tukula 2016).

The result, therefore, is to all intents and purposes a free-for-all: there is no reliable record either of where MPs get their (constituency) money from, nor of how they spend it. Indeed, of the MPs I joined in their constituencies and/or with whom I discussed their expenditure in depth, small amounts of cash and other resources were so frequently being distributed that MPs themselves could typically offer only very vague and rough estimates of what they might spend or have spent on a typical or particular day in the constituency. They made no attempt to keep a precise accounting even for their own benefit, never mind for any overseeing third party – indeed one MP suggested he avoids doing so because he would find it too depressing and dispiriting to tally up precisely how much money he loses in this way (Anon MP5 2017)! Some, moreover, scoffed at the idea of being monitored by the local council, whom they considered some or other combination of incompetent, corrupt and/or hostile. This was, perhaps ironically, the prevailing attitude especially amongst the most devotedly reformist of MPs – who prided themselves on doing development and politics "properly," yet tended to furiously resist any pre-established mechanisms of oversight or accountability on the grounds that these were themselves corrupt, and that they interfered with (or even endangered) their hard-won, development-focused work on behalf of their constituents.[63]

Due to the opacity regarding the sources and beneficiaries of their constituency funds, reports and rumours naturally abound of problematic relationships, dubious decisions, conflicts of interest, self-dealing and, indeed, out-and-out theft and corruption in relation to MPs' constituency work (Monjeza 2017; Mwalubunju 2017). One prominent civil society actor says simply that corruption in relation to constituency funding is 'very common' [Anon Expert, 2017], another that the entire CDF mechanism may have elaborate procedures on paper but is, in practice, 'an accountability-free zone' (Anon Expert 6 2017). Many MPs agree, at least in relation to their colleagues; one even goes so far as to say that 'most of us as MPs – I am including myself – have used CDF funds to enrich ourselves' [Anon MP, 2017].

It is certainly commonly said of MPs, in the wider body politic and popular discourse, that they skim off constituency projects for their own benefit, and channel projects and works to their own companies or those of close family, friends, and associates. Evidence suggests that the rumours and allegations that surround MPs and the CDF are perhaps well-founded in a sizable minority of cases, albeit it is wholly unreasonable to tar all with this brush: a government audit conducted in 2016, for instance, suggested that 20 legislators (of 193) ought to be investigated

[63] Further confusion arises from there very rarely being any neat and tidy delineation of exactly what funds go where. Many of an MP's endeavours are likely to involve a complex mixture of funding, with somewhat larger projects perhaps being funded from a combination of a portion of the CDF, and also of the LDF/DDF in collaboration with the local council (see next section), as well as from private contacts, sponsors and "well-wishers."

for the unaccounted-for disappearance of a total MWK80 million (US$ 115,000) of CDF funds, and cited myriad other more minor irregularities and abuses, by MPs and others, in relation to the CDF (Sangala 2016; Malawi24 2017; Chimjeka 2017).

Working and competing with other constituency actors: the constant contest for credit

An apparently small but telling detail – that betrays much of what is at stake for MPs as they operate and facilitate development(s) in their constituencies – is their tendency when speaking to claim ownership of all projects that they are involved in: they are "my" projects, things that "I" am doing, that "I" am funding, and so on. They do this not only in interviews and conversations with me – they do it also in Parliament and in the media; in the constituency, and whenever addressing their constituents (Fieldnotes, 2015-17). It is typically, however, a misleading characterisation: no MP is an island, and nor is (or can be) their constituency work an entirely solo enterprise, solely in their hands and those of their personal team. Some doubtless wish they could operate in this way, but even they will find themselves sooner or later having to deal with other local actors and institutions in the constituency, and in some sort of collaboration with others – be that on a particular project/issue, or on a more consistent and long-term basis.

The partnerships, alliances, and networks that MPs form to get things done in their constituencies are often temporary and makeshift according to circumstances and the particular project, and often combine a complex mix of formal and informal, shorter- and longer-term relationships**.** There are, however, relationships with three particular sets of actors that are of particular note in terms of MPs' constituency development work – in ascending order of conflictual possibilities these are their relationships with civil society organisations, with chiefs and finally with councillors. I address each in turn.

Civil Society

The first are those collaborations in which a local NGO, church or equivalent civil society organisation will not merely donate money but actively collaborate with the MP on a particular project or projects. These alliances may of course encounter friction but are generally speaking for mutual benefit, and certainly for the benefit of the MP. They range from transitory and cursory associations (an NGO agreeing to build some boreholes in the constituency, for instance, will typically at least consult with the MP as to their location, if only as a matter of courtesy) all the way to long-lasting and deep partnerships on one or more long-term constituency projects.

Juliana Lunguzi (Dedza East, 2014-19), for example, when I visit in 2016 is enjoying a fruitful collaboration between herself and Mua Mission.[64] She and the head priest at Mua, Father Philip, are working closely together to deliver various projects to a local village near the lakeshore that is far from any road and has long been ill-served by amenities. Together they are building a new school block and teachers' houses, for which the Mission will eventually supply the teachers. According to Lunguzi, the Mission is providing the majority of the funding and much supervision of the project – her CDF and some other personal funding supplement this, as do her profile and developmental wherewithal (Constituency Observation 3 (Lunguzi) 2016).

It is a collaboration that Lunguzi clearly finds fruitful – her relationship with Father Philip is strong and the developments are being delivered to the village without complications or corruption. It also does not hurt that Mua Mission is a significant voice both locally and nationally, especially amongst her fellow Catholics – and a voice that can be heard singing her praises at every opportunity (Constituency Observation 3 (Lunguzi) 2016). Above all, as mentioned above, such alliances allow MPs to be involved in – and associated with – more and bigger constituency projects than they could ever hope to mobilise on their own. Even in the Lunguzi-Mua relationship of close working and mutual respect, it is fair to describe the MP as the decidedly junior partner – given the extremely limited powers and resources available to most Malawian MPs. MPs not fortunate enough to forge an alliance like this one, in fact, often find themselves in the position of merely being consulted on local projects out of protocol, and/or of trying their hardest to attach themselves to projects that they have in fact very little to do with – in the hope of securing some credit/political capital from them regardless.

Chiefs

Unlike their typical dealings with civil society organisations, MPs' relationships with chiefs and councillors are unavoidable and persistent. However these relationships may evolve, they do not start as transitory alliances of mutual convenience; they emerge from the fact that MPs, chiefs and (especially) councillors have at least adjacent – and often heavily overlapping – political mandates over a given geographical area. This typically obligates at least some sort of mutual consultation if not collaboration, and indeed there are many cases of MPs working hand-in-glove with at least some of their constituency's chiefs and councillors – to the extent

[64] Mua Mission is the oldest Roman Catholic missionary settlement in Malawi, established in 1902 by the White Fathers, a Catholic society of apostolic life. The mission in turn established the KuNgoni Centre of Culture and Art, a major museum, cultural and educational centre. Herself a devout Catholic, Lunguzi's family home abuts the Mua complex, however the Mission is a major presence across all of her constituency, and not solely amongst Roman Catholic families or communities (for background on Mua see Stuart-Mogg 1999).

that some MPs list their councillors, and even the occasional chief, as part of their personal team. At the same time, this political proximity easily gives rise also to competition and conflict: MPs, chiefs and councillors are all local political figures who to some extent compete for control of local resources, for credit for local development projects, and for popularity at local level.

There is considerably less direct overlap between MPs' and chiefs' (formal and informal) mandates and spheres of influence/activity than is the case between MPs and councillors. As a result, MPs' relationships and dealings with chiefs are typically less intimate and less (potentially) conflictual. This said, chiefs are highly significant political players in any Malawian constituency and – notwithstanding their distinct bases of ('primordial' vs 'civic') public authority in Ekehian terms (Ekeh 1975) – there is inevitable overlap with MPs constituency work, and competition for credit and political space (Chinsinga 2006).[65] Explaining her difficult relationship with her local T/A, one MP acknowledges the essence of the problem – 'she wants the limelight… and so do I!' [Anon MP, 2016].

What is more, chiefs and MPs *do* get involved in each other's political spheres: MPs tend to work more closely with some chiefs than with others, and to favour some chiefs over others; chiefs also involve themselves in party politics and parliamentary elections. This is true of chiefs at all levels, from the humble Village Headman to T/As and Senior Chiefs – and regardless of the fact that, formally speaking, chiefs and MPs sit on distinct sides of a "traditional"-"modern" bifurcation of rule, with the line separating these spheres not supposed to be crossed (see Eggen 2011). Perhaps the most striking indication of the extent to which this line *is* breached, however, came from MCP MPs in rural Central Region, where the MCP has long been profoundly embedded in local life – not just in terms of elected politicians but also local civil servants, the Nkhoma Synod of the CCAP church, traditional Chewa *nyau* societies, and indeed chiefs**.** Several MCP MPs from this region indicated that some chiefs at the Traditional Authority (T/A) level were not just "members" (i.e. long-standing supporters and partisans) of the MCP, but were also intimately involved in, and heavily consulted about, a great deal of their constituency work as MPs (for instance Belekanyama 2016). Although this extent of collaboration and integration in each other's work is unusual, the same basic pattern is echoed

[65] Unlike many post-colonial African states, Malawi never had a left-inclined or "modernising" nationalist government that sought – not least for ideological reasons – to curb or sweep away the powers of chiefs in pursuit of modernity and political/cultural as well as economic "development." On the contrary, arch-conservative Kamuzu Banda bolstered and formalised the powers of chiefs over local communities and absorbed them as a fundamental component of his regime (Eggen 2011, 317–19). This intimate relationship between state and Traditional Authorities continues to this day, and Malawi consistently emerges as at or near the top of Africa-wide league tables measuring the strength and importance of traditional leaders in the everyday governance of local communities (Logan 2013, 362–63).

elsewhere: 'the relationship is good. And I think [me] being UDF, most of the chiefs also are UDF, that's an added advantage,' suggests Aisha Adams (Mangochi Nkungulu, 2014-), in a sentiment echoed across the country by MPs in the heartland seats of all parties (Adams 2016). A shared party affiliation, however, is no guarantee of a good political relationship. Inter-personal dynamics and priorities often play a far larger part in rendering some chiefs easier to work with than others.

In sum, the political landscape upon which all MPs gaze is one in which some chiefs are seen to be active, reliable supporters whilst others are considerably cooler, and perhaps active supporters of other, rival contenders for the MP's crown. In the vast majority of cases, however, MPs and chiefs at all levels work to have a cordial and professional relationship – notwithstanding, as with councillors, occasional high-profile and spectacular fallouts. Chiefs are, after all, in many respects complementary to MPs in terms of their local work and functions rather than in direct rivalry; and are in any case highly significant political players at local level whom MPs find it is generally prudent to cultivate.

This cultivation is not generally, however, a matter of simple vote-brokering, as is often imagined: Kayuni (2015) has demonstrated that traditional leaders' still-much-vaunted capacity to direct their subjects' voting decisions in (especially rural) Malawi appears in fact to be extremely limited – especially in any direct, didactic sense. While some MPs, on the contrary, maintained that at least some of their chiefs *did* have this level of influence – as does Professor Chinsinga (2015) – most agreed that chiefs were relevant less as direct *vote*-brokers per se than as "political brokers" more generally (Lunguzi 2016). They were more important and influential, in other words, in influencing MPs' capacity to deliver for, communicate with, and sell themselves to, constituents – rather than in simply telling constituents what to do and how to think (Baldwin 2013 finds a similar dynamic in Zambia).

Felix Njawala (Blantyre Kabula, 2009-14), for instance, argues that, even in his highly urban constituency, no MP could do anything without chiefs – not least because they control access to, and use of, land (Njawala 2017). Sam Kawale, from a rural seat, argues similarly:

> 'I have to. I have to make sure that I am working with [chiefs] because if I don't work with them, then development won't happen on the ground because they are the ones who are… in the village[s] every day. So they are the ones who are monitoring everything that is happening, [and] they are the ones who are going to give me the accurate picture of what is happening in the villages' (Kawale 2016).

Similarly, a number of participants pointed to the powers of chiefs to either permit and facilitate – or else refuse permission and thwart – MPs' political meetings in their areas, and their opportunities therefore to meet and to address their own constituents. An influential and

powerful chief, if so minded, can go so far as to deny less influential, up-and-coming MPs or candidates the political space to do their politics, to wage their political battle(s) and to build a political base and profile (Chinsinga 2015).

On the other hand, however, MPs with a profile and support base of their own can doubtless be more relaxed, especially when facing local traditional leaders who are unpopular with their constituents. One MP, indeed, acknowledges that he is 'not too popular with chiefs' and has made a (political) virtue of this because, in his account, 'I stopped them from stealing' resources meant for their own people – and, he insists, the people (voters) know it. 'About 20% of [my chiefs] are good,' he insists – for the rest he has few qualms about 'siding with the people' against their chiefs as and when required (Anon MP5 2017). Even this MP, however, finds it generally prudent not to actively seek out conflict.

Likewise, the MP mentioned above with a poor relationship with her equally limelight-hungry T/A is keen not to fall out seriously with her – on the grounds that this would simply be unnecessary conflict that she (the MP) does not need and is not interested in (Anon MP, 2016). She would, in fact, like to secure the T/A's political support come the next election – the T/A has influence, and she would like her on side. The T/A 'had a terrible relationship with the previous MP,' and the current incumbent is keen to avoid that. She ultimately feels, however, that when it comes to chiefs, 'people overestimate their importance' in terms of shaping constituents' voting patterns: her T/A actively campaigned with the governing party candidate in 2014, and yet my participant (an opposition candidate) won the election handily (Anon MP, 2016).

Councillors

It is MPs' relationships with (ward) councillors, however, that are typically the most conflictual and problematic: both sets of actors are politicians in the "modern" civic public sphere, both are directly elected at local level, and both are typically attached to a political party.[66] Both

[66] Councillors were reintroduced as a fundamental component of the 2014 decentralisation reforms, and much to most MPs' chagrin: they had been present throughout the 1990s but had been allowed to fade away after 2004, when elections for councillors simply stopped being held and their role became absorbed by MPs. Under the 2014 reforms, each parliamentary constituency is split into two wards, each of which elects one councillor, on a first-past-the-post basis, to serve on the District Council. There are thus two councillors per constituency, and per MP. The exception to this is in those urban/peri-urban areas officially designated as cities or municipalities for local government purposes, and run by a City or Municipal Council led by a Mayor. In these (Lilongwe City, Blantyre City, Mzuzu City, Zomba City, Mangochi Municipality, Kasungu Municipality and Luchenza Municipality), there are many more wards per constituency than two (perhaps reflecting the representation deficit in urban areas, although this remains unaddressed at the parliamentary level): Mzuzu City and Zomba City, for example, currently have 15 and 11 wards (and councillors) respectively, but just one MP each.

have, moreover, highly overlapping mandates and responsibilities – at least in practice. Since the 2014 decentralisation reforms, the reinstated councillors have been formally tasked with the primary responsibility for "development" (in the delimited sense we have used throughout this chapter) in their wards. MPs are supposed to have little to do with development, and instead to concentrate on their parliamentary functions and – as far as local politics is concerned – their role as a member of the local council and oversight of the CDF.

As one civil society activist reluctantly acknowledges, however, no matter how wise this division of labour might be in theory, 'it's nonsense to people', and no MP can possibly adhere to it (Anon Expert 5 2017). Sam Kawale (Dowa North East, 2014-), for example, is heavily involved in development projects in his constituency, but like most MPs considers this ultimately to be "wrong," imposed upon him by the (mis-)understandings of his constituents (see Chapter 7 for a full exploration of this unanimous attitude):

> 'I understand a little about… what the job of an MP is. But my understanding was different from the people in the constituency. Mine was of more… it's a *legislative* role that I have to play… People in the constituency, they look at it differently, they look at the role of the MP as someone who is to be on the ground, to do all the development work. Unfortunately, the previous MPs in Malawi have tarnished the image of an MP because they have ended up doing things that are out of their job description… All that is because in the past, we had no councillors. Everything was being done by the MP – the role of the councillor is pretty much development role, and ours is a legislative role. [But] the MPs were doing both roles. Now it's becoming difficult for MPs to separate themselves from the role of councillors… [and moreover] they look at a councillor as a threat to their position' (Kawale 2016).

Such testimony confirms what was argued in this chapter's introduction: that constituents above all expect and demand constituency service from their MPs – which here means, to a very large extent, constituency "development(s)." The CDF, indeed, is a formal acknowledgement of this reality. As Kawale points out, moreover, between their demise in 2004 and reintroduction in 2014, MPs had absorbed in councillors' absence their formal developmental role and responsibilities – a situation with which the vast majority of MPs, for all their grousing, were satisfied.[67] It made them the unambiguous and unrivalled 'Chief Development Officer,' as Peter Dimba (2016) puts it, in their constituency – a valuable position

[67] Kawale's suggestion that MPs are associated with constituency service and development work solely because of the absence of councillors for ten years, however, seems implausible – given the similar experiences of what we might call "mandate-creep" for MPs in many other settings in Africa and beyond (Barkan 2009b); as well as the experiences of Malawian MPs *before* councillors disappeared, during which time they were far from restricted to a legislative role. Most MPs, indeed, differ from Kawale, offering a considerably more cultural(ist) account of the mandate-creep they experience (see Chapter 7).

given the priorities and expectations of voters. As Dimba says, he knows very well that he is "supposed" to be a legislator and leave development mostly to councillors. As far as he and the vast majority of his MP colleagues are concerned, however, for as long as an MP is 'connected' to their constituency and the electoral system maintains the constituency link, they simply *will* be held accountable for development – and thus have no choice but to respond to this expectation. As he puts it, 100 laws could be passed by Parliament saying that MPs are legislators and not development agents – but 'in real life, the constituency will still be [piling pressure] on you – begging, you know, and tying development to you' (Dimba 2016). This is why – as one MP acknowledges – councillors have returned but 'we are still doing their jobs' (Constituency Observation 3 (Lunguzi) 2016).

In sum, then, the real-world mandates of councillors and of constituency MPs – as determined by so-called 'practical norms' on the ground (de Herdt and de Sardan 2015) – are so overlapping as to be almost identical. They are 'rivals in doing things for constituents,' as one MP suggests (Constituency Observation 2 (Kadzamira) 2016). Moreover, the near-unanimous suspicion on the part of MPs is that 'councillors want to stand as Members of Parliament,' and that consequently they are rivals not just in doing things for constituents, but for the crown of MP itself (Munkhondya 2017). One of the crucial ways in which this rivalry manifests is in a typically fierce contest for credit for the bringing of development projects to the constituency – including not just a tallying of what are unambiguously "the MP's projects" against "the councillor's projects," but inevitably also tugs-of-war over credit for that large proportion of projects that are, to a greater or lesser extent, collaborations. Peter Dimba, for instance, relates an indicative story:

> 'I have had challenges with my councillors. I think the challenges emanate from the fact that… some of the councillors have ambitions of becoming Member of Parliament so they would want to boast before the people [that] they are doing more developments than the Member of Parliament…
>
> Last year I crossed paths with one of my councillors. We were maintaining a police unit in my constituency using District Development Fund. It was actually myself during the council meeting that proposed that we should maintain this place because it was in a dilapidated state. So together with the Area Development Committee, we chose the maintenance of that police unit as one of the projects under DDF, and I told the councillor to be monitoring the work… And I remember during that month Parliament was sitting here, so most of the times I was here [in Parliament] and the councillor was on the ground. And he started telling the people around that it was him who was maintaining the police unit, you know, so that he gains cheap political mileage. And then some party members were calling me to say, "ah, we are hearing that it is the councillor who is doing all this work." And I told them, "the money does not come from his

> pocket neither does it come from the MP's pocket. It comes from [the] council, it's government's money, and it's taxpayers' money – it's *your* money. So just leave him."
>
> But then you know what happened, when the maintenance was finished, he organized chiefs in the constituency for an opening function and he never told me about that – in my absence, you know, just to prove a point to the chiefs [and the people] that it was him in charge. So one of the chiefs called me alerting me about the meeting, it was actually Sunday morning so that I [wouldn't] come because it's church time. But I still managed to, you know, attend the meeting – and I found them seated there with him in front. It was bad. I was angry, and I told him point blank… "you must *never* do this again!" (Dimba 2016).

As Patrick Themu (Dedza South, 2014-19) succinctly states the basic problem – when it comes to constituency projects, 'everybody wants to say, "It's me! It's me who has done it!"' (Themu 2016). There is a constant contest to take credit for, to gain legitimacy from, local developments and projects – and one that is typically most fierce between MPs and councillors.

MPs' nervousness regarding this contest is underlined by their awareness that councillors, as Dimba's remarks above hinted, have some inherent advantages in this contest for local popular recognition and support. Councillors, for instance, are invariably on the ground in the constituency, amongst their constituents, all or most of the time; MPs, on the other hand, do not typically live in their constituencies and in any case have responsibilities in Parliament that keep them away – but for which, they are all agreed, they receive very little compensating credit or attention at local level. MPs' work and attentions also have to stretch across at least double the area and population of a councillor – and vastly more in urban areas. As long-serving minister Patricia Kaliati (Mulanje West, 1999-2019) says of councillors, 'they have lots of opportunities to market themselves' (Kaliati 2016), and to bad-mouth MPs, in their absence, in the hope of replacing them at the next election. Councillors are ideally placed, after all, to demonstrate potential and dedication as a politician, at the same time as not having a record as MP to defend, and still being able to promise the moon to constituents if only they could obtain the clout and resources (allegedly) available to an MP. It is easy, especially as a hard-working local councillor, to tap into the popular and populist anti-politician narrative of absentee MPs who forget their constituents immediately upon their election – and to pitch oneself, implicitly or explicitly, as a preferable alternative.

MPs are doubtless right to be nervous – re-election rates do not favour them, and a number of then-councillors did indeed replace incumbent MPs in the 1999 and 2004 elections. MPs have thus collectively sought to sabotage, or at least hamper, councillors in various ways – for example by ensuring that, by law, they receive only allowances and not salaries; and by

installing themselves as full voting members of local councils. The donor-led decentralisation reforms that re-established councillors were certainly not MPs' idea – and the late veteran Harry Thomson (Chikwawa North, 1994-2004; 2014-19) remarks wryly that, in respect of councillors, 'we thought they were a necessary evil but [it turns out]… they are an unnecessary evil' (Thomson 2016).

MP-councillor conflicts are frequent – and the more spectacular examples are a staple in domestic media coverage of politics (for instance Nyasa Times 2015a; 2017). It is also a prominent theme in academic and development-industry discussions of contemporary Malawian politics, especially in relation to the fate of the 2014 decentralisation reforms (M. K. Hussein 2017; Tambulasi 2009). Almost all of my interviewees acknowledged at least some tension and suspicion in their relationships with councillors (including even those with whom they work closely and are personally close), but MPs generally try to deal with these tensions in a way they consider "professional." Most accept the value in working together with councillors and coordinating on development work. They also conclude that working with and alongside councillors, inevitably as the senior partner, is generally in their political self-interest (and the best way to assuage their anxieties around councillors' political manoeuvrings) if – and it is a big if – this can be made to work.

When we consider the place of councillors in MPs' consultations around the aforementioned CDF, for instance, we can see universal tensions but varied ways of dealing with these – not to mention highly variable ultimate outcomes, dependent not least on the complexities and interplay of individual relationships and political power. Some MPs reported working closely with councillors to decide on projects together, others consulted them but at arms' length, whilst still others jealously guarded the CDF from any input from councillors whatsoever. Typical, however – at least as an opening gambit – is the stance of Godfrey Munkhondya (Chitipa Wenya, 2009-19). It can be 'a tussle,' he acknowledges, but:

> 'In my constituency, I called [the councillors]. I told them, "you know this is called *Constituency* Development Fund, and there cannot be two or three people controlling one fund, there must always be one person. And this being *Constituency* Development Fund, I am in charge. But as for the projects [I will fund], I cannot decide [that] on my own. We have to decide as a group or as a community' (Munkhondya 2017).

Like many other MPs, Munkhondya thus seeks the input of councillors on CDF-allocation decisions – how seriously this is sought or acted upon I am unable to say definitively, although this too clearly varies. He is clear, however, about who is ultimately in control of, and accountable for, the Fund.

Such a stance was by far the most common I found amongst interviewees. In many cases, indeed – in matters CDF-related and more generally – MPs worked very closely with at least one of their councillors and considered them part of their core team and inner circle of advisors. In some cases, this stretched even to presenting the councillor's own work and profile as an extension of their own: MPs and councillors had often run together in the 2014 tripartite elections under the same party label or as part of the same informal "slate" (in the case of independent candidates) and continued to present themselves as a united political front.[68] Such early, once-convenient alliances were very far from being a guarantee of ongoing unity after an election or during the course of a term, however; nor, indeed, did early rivalry prevent a subsequently healthy professional and personal relationship. I spoke to a number of MPs in 2016-17 who now had considerably better relationships with one of their councillors from a rival party than they had with their other councillor from their own party and with whom they had run for office just a few years previously.

One MP, meanwhile, ran alongside his two councillors under the same party label in the 2014 election, and considers that both owe their election to him and to his patronage. By 2016, however, he had become highly suspicious of one of these councillors, considering him 'arrogant' and with naked ambitions of his own. The other, meanwhile, he considers appropriately 'respectful' and relies on as if he were any other subordinate in his core constituency team (Anon MP, 2016.) This said, however, the MP does continue to work closely with *both* men – they often accompany him around the constituency when he visits, and are each involved in strategic discussions regarding the MP's work. The MP and his wayward councillor have had cross words in the past, but the MP greatly prefers to keep things superficially friendly and to avoid overt conflict (Fieldnotes, 2016). 'Keep your friends close, and your enemies closer,' he wryly explains (Anon MP, 2016).

In some cases, however, this proves impossible – and political rivalries have poisoned personal and political relationships to the point of open antagonism and turf warfare between the MP and at least one of their councillors (Nyasa Times 2017). Not all MPs who entirely freeze out

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[68] Several MPs reported that they were not in fact asked by some councillor-candidates to form an alliance – but simply found certain candidates during the campaign publicly presenting themselves as their allies (Kouwenhoven 2016; Constituency Observation 3 (Lunguzi) 2016). Others, however, pro-actively embraced running on a slate – 'I took [two councillor-candidates] along on my campaign trail. They were with me all the way. I would say [to voters], "if you want to make a good suit in this constituency, vote for my [party] president [as Malawi President], vote for me as your MP, and please vote for this one for this ward, and this one for [the other] ward… So we made a kind of company, we made a union. It's from there that we built a relationship until today' (L. Banda 2017). (A "suit" is the popular term locally for a slate – candidates talk of encouraging voters not to split their ticket in a bi- or tri-partite election by telling them to "make a good suit" – with each component part (or vote for president, MP and councillor) matching the others.) One MP also reported an excellent relationship with his councillors up to now, not least because he had personally helped finance their campaigns for office alongside his own (Kalua 2016).

their councillors do so on the basis of electoral-political rivalry, however; nor have all such relationships dissolved into open conflict. Some MPs – notably those who consider themselves reformist-modernisers as discussed above – see themselves as islands of order, competence, and honesty in a sea of financial and political dysfunction and corruption at local level. Considering their councillors ineffectual at best – and actively corrupt at worst – they are pleased, indeed proud, to acknowledge that they jealously guard their own exclusive power and control over certain monies, on the basis not of personal rivalries or concern for their own position, but rather out of concern for good governance, and to ensure that funds are spent in ways they consider proper. Such attitudes, ironically enough, tend to render reformist-modernisers – vocal advocates of "doing democracy properly" – hostile to very much oversight or the exercise of formal accountability mechanisms when it comes to themselves. One MP, for instance, takes as little to do with the local council and with her own ward councillors as she possibly can. In a swing seat, they belong to her party, and she has civil interactions with them when their paths inevitably cross, but she otherwise considers them fundamentally incompetent, self-serving, and corrupt. She consults carefully and meaningfully with ADCs and certain civil society organisations whom she considers trustworthy; but she safeguards the CDF from all others in order to ensure that it, at least, will go where it should and bring benefit to her constituents. Most of the rest of local funding and monies – over which the council and councillors have greater control – she considers 'lost' to her, and therefore ultimately lost to her constituents also (Anon MP, 2016).

In summary, it is not to ignore those instances of MP-councillor relationships that have broken down to the point of outright acrimony and mutual sabotage to note that such cases are in fact far from the norm that much popular and media commentary in Malawi would have us believe. The vast majority of relationships between these crucial sets of actors at local level undoubtedly have inherent tensions but are far from irredeemably dysfunctional and broken; on the contrary, most MPs try hard to work well with their councillors (or, at the very least, ignore them civilly) – calculating not least that this is in their political self-interest, and certainly hugely preferable to the alternative of degrading mutual sabotage. What is more, it seems clear that the character and quality of these relationships typically depends on the specific and individual inter-personal dynamics of each case. It is doubtless true that there are certain factors that tend more towards conflict (such as being in different parties), but I encountered sufficient cases of the precise opposite to conclude that generalisation in these matters is highly unsafe. Yaumi Mpaweni's (Balaka Central East, 2009-19) account, finally, well illustrates some of these complexities, as well as how relationships can change over time:

> 'Both councillors from my constituency, we come from the same party. But one councillor… was supporting the other candidate who [competed] with me in the primaries. So after winning the primary, I stood as UDF [candidate] but he was

> still supporting that candidate who lost… [who was standing as] an independent candidate. But… he lost, and I won [the MP race]; [and meanwhile] the councillor, he won. So there is a conflict already there, but I said that the campaign is over and that we need to work hand in hand, let's work together. So, that one, with me, we are working together.
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> The *other* councillor was coming from the same area that I come from, he was with me and I even supported him during the campaign. After the elections, he won, I also won, and we [were] working together. But he is the Chairman of the District Council. Now he wants to go further by becoming a Member of Parliament... So you see – the one who was against me during the primaries is working with me properly, but the one who I was with and supported during the campaign has turned his back and wants to fight with me. I said, "feel free, if you want to compete with me, we will meet in the primaries," but he seems like he is moving underground, working up and down, coaxing party members so that maybe they can support him to become MP… That's what politics is all about!' (Mpaweni 2016).

Conclusion: On politicians doing "development"

This chapter has begun exploring MPs' relationships with their constituencies. After considering some foundational, practical aspects of these relationships – such as how often they visit, what activities they typically do there on a day-to-day basis, and the nature of their personal constituency team – I have argued that MPs themselves talk in terms of their constituency service being divided, for the most part, between two distinct roles: the *facilitator of development*, and the *provider of handouts*. In their role as a development agent, I have argued that MPs see CDF funding as merely a start – and that the vast majority of MPs also seek to source resources from elsewhere to be used for constituency development(s). MPs' constituency work (and their development work in particular) also brings them into contact, collaboration and sometimes conflict with a range of other political actors at local level – not the least of whom are chiefs and, above all, councillors. I conclude with some reflections on a wider point, however – what, in fact, does it mean to have politicians doing "development" in their constituencies in the first place? Does it "work"?

In pursuing their development projects and their facilitator of development role, MPs often pursue particular themes. Agnes Nyalonje (Mzimba North, 2014-19), for instance, has a particular interest in education (as of 2021, she is Minister of Education in the Tonse Alliance government) and 'all [my] CDF is going to go to education' (Nyalonje 2016). Similarly, former nurse-midwife Juliana Lunguzi (Dedza East, 2014-19) has a focus on healthcare and maternal health, and many female MPs prioritise the empowerment of women and girls in their projects.

A regular theme in all MPs' constituency projects – running in tandem with all others – is the cultivation of "discipline" (see Chapter 7).

This pursuit of pet themes and projects, however, points to some of the problems of entrusting the role of "Chief Development Officer" for the constituency not to a technocrat but to an elected politician. Indulging their personal enthusiasms – however well-meaning – is the least of it: although clearly questions can be and are asked by some (not least some constituents, as Nyalonje (2016) acknowledges) about whether education, for example, *should* be the sole focus of the CDF in Mzimba North when so many other pressing needs are ignored. The point is the capacity of the MP, in practice, to decide near-unilaterally where and how the CDF will be spent – and according to their own priorities, whims and, of course, political interests – rather than being based on any collective and/or technocratic assessment of actual need. Many acknowledged the politics in their decisions about where to target CDF and other projects, with most arguing (as in campaigning, see Chapter 4) that they sought to balance consolidating their existing support base in the constituency by targeting projects at them, as well as reaching out to sceptical but "get-able" voters by targeting resources at them also (Constituency Observation 1 (Katsonga) 2016; Mwenifumbo 2017) Quite apart from any democratic concerns, however, there are serious questions about the extent to which MP-led development actually works at all. Does it do what it sets out to do? Does it bring "development(s)" (even in a limited sense) to local communities?

The Malawian landscape is littered with half-built, half-looted clinics, community centres and the like that have never been completed – or, if they ever were, have now fallen into disrepair through neglect and lack of use (Fieldnotes, 2015-17). National governments of all stripes – and doubtless donors too – bear responsibility for many of these, but many others are what remains of a local (typically former) MP's "development" works, and of the public funds that went into them from the CDF and other mechanisms. One MP, for instance, half-built a sports stadium, to be named after himself, with his CDF and other monies during his final term. Never completed, several years later it lies in rubble, an eyesore periodically looted for anything of value (Anon Expert 6 2017). The problem is not only with grandiose vanity projects, however. Another MP was in the midst of building a much-wanted police unit (station) for a rural village when his re-election bid failed. Despite the merits of the project, and the resources and time already sunk into it, the project lay abandoned and semi-constructed for five years until he managed to win back his seat and restart it (Anon Expert 6 2017). Doubtless had he not won back his seat, it would remain abandoned to this day.

The problem, of course, is that CDF and many other projects become associated and entwined with the MP themselves: they are "*his/her* projects." A new MP, therefore, not only doubtless has their own whims and priorities, but above all has to establish projects that are "*theirs*"– and

has no political interest in completing or sustaining projects associated with their predecessor.[69] On the contrary, in many cases these relationships are exceptionally bitter and hostile, and what better way to symbolise your predecessor's (and very possibly future rival's) failings and failure in office than to leave their half-built and/or never-used projects to moulder into the landscape – a perfect visual representation of their inadequacy, and of the presence of a new regime in charge?[70]

A number of those MPs whom I joined in their constituencies pointed to the decaying projects of predecessors as we passed them and bemoaned either the wasteful extravagance and vanity, as they saw it, that had ever led to their initiation, or simply the failure of the projects as they lay abandoned. Even as they despaired of the sheer waste of this situation, however, they had to acknowledge that they themselves did not want to pick up any of these projects, even those they acknowledged may have merit. They had their own priorities, yes, but also wanted to establish *their* projects and *their* legacy (Constituency Observation 1 (Katsonga) 2016; Constituency Observation 2 (Kadzamira) 2016; Constituency Observation 5 (Chinthu-Phiri) 2017). Agnes Nyalonje is the exception that proves the rule – her priority is education, and she *is* picking up a number of projects (school blocks, teachers' houses etc) left incomplete by her predecessors. She admits, however, that this is highly unusual, that many of her colleagues in Parliament and allies in the constituency think she is 'crazy' to do so, and that in the end she considers it to be in the developmental interests of her constituency but very much against her own political interests:

> 'The people themselves they reinforce it because it has been a symbiotic relationship between politicians and the communities, leading each other along the wrong pathway. Like you come in as an MP, they warn you that: "Yeah so now you are in, we expect you to do major developments. We don't expect you to finish what other people started." So what that means is that then you have

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[69] The desire to establish "their" projects also appears to lead to a strong bias for *physical* infrastructure, for 'something that stands' (Anon Expert 12 2017) – rather than less visible things such as scholarship schemes or the like.

[70] In some cases, just as MP-councillor relationships can descend into mutual sabotage that only damages the developmental efforts of both, the same can happen between former, current, and aspirant MPs where their political battle extends into the active destruction of each other's development goals and projects. Several MPs reported "thugs" allied to predecessors and/or aspirants actively damaging buildings and other physical infrastructure with which they were associated (Fieldnotes, 2016-17). In one case, a bitter battle raged between an incumbent MP and their predecessor, now a powerful cabinet minister. The incumbent managed to get a phone tower built to bring mobile phone signal to a particular area, and arranged with a road contractor – contracted by government to build a major road nearby – to add a short feeder road from the new road to the phone tower, so that the tower could be accessed and used. The contractor agreed but, it is alleged and circulated locally, once the MP's rival the minister heard about this he called the contractor and threatened to remove the whole contract from them if they built the feeder road (Anon Expert 6 2017). They did not build it, and several years later the tower stands unused for want of a short feeder road.

> houses for teachers that are not completed, but which represents resources from taxpayers. You take pride in saying, "I'm going to start my own, and not finish so-and-so's," because when people… give credit I want to be known to be the one that built that house, not the one who could only manage to complete a house that another person started, [and] which is actually said to be "so-and-so's house" – totally misunderstanding the fact that, with few exceptions, generally what people say is "so-and-so's house" is a house built maybe from Constituency Development Fund [or the like]…. [I cannot] stand in front of them and pretend that "I have built this," when it's actually *our* money – their money, my money, and the money for all Malawians' (Nyalonje 2016).

Nyalonje did not, however, stand for a second term.

This political logic, in short, clashes with developmental goals and interests – and tends to win out. Given the sheer rate of turnover amongst MPs (in 2009 only a quarter retained their seats (O'Neil et al 2016, 23)), it is a particularly acute problem, and particularly destructive of MPs' capacity to meaningfully facilitate and contribute towards medium- or long-term "development" in their constituencies. Because development is wrapped up with partisan party and personal politics, 'when one brings development, there is conflict' (Anon Expert 5 2017). While it has become commonplace, therefore, to express scepticism regarding the existence of "technocratic" decisions as distinct from partisan or political ones, the Malawian situation is a useful example of the value of the basic idea. It clearly demonstrates the drawbacks of having politicians personally driving "development(s)" without strong firewalls erected between their role as public servants and representatives of an entire constituency, on the one hand, and, on the other, their role as partisan political figures – with their own political/electoral interests – whose interests may often fail to dovetail with any fair-minded assessment of the wider public/constituency interest.[71]

I turn now to consider the second major category into which MPs compartmentalise their constituency work – handouts. Unlike their role as a facilitator of constituency development – one which is universally accepted and near-unanimously embraced, even by those who otherwise seek to modernise/Westernise Malawian politics – attitudes towards constituent demands for/expectations of handouts are a different matter. There is vastly more variation and contestation amongst MPs regarding how they can and ought to respond to this most controversial of issues.

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[71] A particularly egregious example of what can happen when development becomes so closely tied to the ups and down of partisan politics occurred in 2013, when former Foreign Minister Professor Etta Banda summarily "took back" iron sheets she had donated as school rooves to a Junior School in her Nkhata Bay South constituency – without warning and whilst children were learning in the classrooms – on the grounds that some local people had not supported her changing party from DPP to then-governing PP at a recent meeting (Nyasa Times 2013b).

Chapter 6: The "Culture of Handouts" and the Presentation of Role

Introduction

I meet Honourable Boniface Kadzamira MP (Lilongwe City Centre, 2004-09; Ntchisi North, 2014-19) at a little after 8am on a Saturday morning in March 2016. We meet at the Lilongwe City Centre branch of a major commercial bank, where the MP has me wait in his old, battered-up red Mercedes saloon while he goes into the bank. Around 20 minutes later he emerges with a large shopping bag full of brown envelopes and hurries to the driver's seat, where he gets in and locks the car from the inside. He opens the cavernous glovebox, emptied for the purpose, and begins to decant the contents of the envelopes into it, discarding upwards of a dozen brown packages on the floor of the car as he does so. It takes a number of minutes before the glovebox is entirely packed with crisp MWK100 and MWK200 bills, bundled into multiples of twenty with thick strips of sticky-backed paper. Not all the bundles can fit, but when the glovebox at last cannot take any more, he places the shopping bag and its remaining contents under his seat. "That's 300,000 kwacha," he tells me (US$370).[72] And smiles: "there will be nothing left by the end of tomorrow, you will see!" He is right about that. He makes a telephone call to his wife to confirm his return the following night, probably around midnight. He starts the engine, reverses out of the car park, and we head north out of the city. We are off to the constituency.

Lindberg (2010) argues that in Ghana the institution of Member of Parliament is to a large extent regularised and institutionalised in Ghanaian society. The job comes, in other words, with a set of established expectations and roles that are widely understood in, and upheld by, the wider society. I argue that the same is true of Malawi, and in that spirit, I detailed in Chapter 5 the "facilitator of development" aspect of MPs' home styles as a role very largely demand-driven – that is, a function of what Malawian constituents expect of their MPs, rather than of what MPs on their own believe their job to be. Mechanisms such as the CDF may have formalised MPs' constituency development role, but these were merely an acknowledgement of – and response to – pre-existing realities on the ground as determined by the demands and expectations of constituents at least as their politicians experience them. Most MPs, remembering their induction training, "understand" that strictly speaking they are not

[72] All currency conversions in this chapter are from: www.xe.com/currencytables

"supposed" to be constituency development agents, and that their constituents are mistaken to think otherwise (Pillane 2017). Crucially, however, MPs unanimously accept this role, and the vast majority actively embrace it.[73]

"Handouts," however, are a very different matter. These are reasonably small-scale gifts of cash or equivalents, given to individuals or small groups of constituents for their private purposes, and – crucially – funded from the MP's own pocket and private funds (the use of public funds such as the CDF is forbidden for handouts purposes). A handouts culture is widely recognised in the African democracy literature, but it is widely assumed that politicians, as "Big Men," control and benefit from the system (Cammack 2007). This chapter offers a contrary view of MPs as victims of a political system and culture driven by demand – even more than development projects, the expectations MPs face in relation to handouts are seen to be socially-imposed. Constituents, MPs are unanimously agreed, expect and demand of their MPs to give handouts – and do so constantly.[74] No MPs embrace *this* role, however – at least in terms of their personal attitudes towards it. All disapprove of their constituents' demand(s) for handouts. All think it, and them, "wrong" on some level.

This chapter, based on multiple interviews and observations of/with incumbent MPs as they visited their constituencies in 2016-17, argues that MPs are nonetheless faced with a choice: these demands exist, they are (by MPs' own accounts) enormous, and they must decide how to respond to them. In responding, all MPs are first and foremost defensive, in that they are reacting to something that they do not like, and that they know they must control and (de)limit, at least if they are not to be bankrupted within weeks. I place MPs' reactions on a spectrum: between a wholly defensive, "role-taking" position which makes no attempt to take issue with constituents' demands but merely attempts to protect oneself from them; and, on the other hand, a response that turns defence into offence, that challenges constituents' demands and expectations of the MP and tries actively to re-make them – thus a "role-making" position. In this way, I argue, Malawian MPs are involved in a "*presentation of role*" to their constituents – a performance of their own role as they see it (or at least seek to establish it), and by extension of the "proper" role generally of an MP in their constituency. This presentation may be in large part inadvertent or entirely self-conscious. In either case, however, it represents a

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[73] Two of my interviewees did express active discontent at their development role, insisting this should not really be the job of a parliamentarian (Kalua 2016; Majawa 2016). They acknowledged accepting the role, however, not least through the CDF.

[74] In Migdalian (1988) terms, a "weak" state's attempt to define an MP's "proper" role has simply crumbled in the face of a "strong" society's alternative understanding. Lindberg (2010, 10) sees this understanding as a consequence of 'the traditional institution of a "family head" [being] grafted onto the formal institution of the MP,' however there are also less culturalist explanatory possibilities such as simply widespread material poverty and pressing, immediate need.

fundamental component of Malawian MPs' home styles. Presentations of role include tactics, at the role-taking end, of: physical distancing; compromising and drawing "red lines"; the establishment of structures and/or club goods to rationalise and bureaucratise the distribution of resources; and finally the political targeting of resources. Tactics at the role-making end include an educative approach which wholly rejects handouts alongside dedicated efforts to "do being" an MP that are firmly embedded in notions of D/development aggressively opposed to the "culture of handouts."

In highlighting the importance of MPs' presentations of role, I go beyond Lindberg (2010) to show how "bottom-up," socially imposed roles are always contested, sometimes vociferously, by MPs themselves – and in ways potentially leading, so MPs hope at least, to their long-term evolution over time. The chapter proceeds by first considering the handout demands that MPs see themselves as experiencing, and the emotional and psychological stress they unanimously report in consequence. I then turn to the presentations of role that they make as a result.

"It's really hell": MPs' experiences of handout-demands

In Chapter 4 I discussed the demands for, and burden of, handouts during election campaigns – of long queues of voters outside candidates' houses, of constant demands made on their personal resources, and so on. These demands and burdens do not disappear after the election is won. In the view of one former minister, in fact:

> 'When you are an MP, it's even worse [than when you are a candidate]. They come and tell you, "you are in this position because of us. These are our votes, so you have to give us [handouts]. We've come here to ask for this assistance – we gave you a vote!"' (T. Mwale 2017).

This logic makes particular sense if, as many MPs report, most constituents also see becoming an MP as a gateway to untold wealth and riches – something about which MPs consider their constituents profoundly mistaken (T. Mwale 2017; B. Kaunda 2017).

Like the Ghanaian MPs in Lindberg's (2010, 123) study, my participants agreed almost unanimously that the *primary* thing for which they were held accountable by constituents was "handouts" (see also Barkan and Mattes 2014). Many expressed despairingly the view that constituents actively preferred handouts to development (see next chapter.) Certainly, it was in relation to handouts that MPs reported feeling the maximum pressure from their constituents on a rolling, day-by-day basis.

Interviewees reported regular requests for everything from (money for or actual) food and transport, coffins, school fees, hospital bills, salt, soap, and even a desperate plea from a

polygamous husband for the money to buy a *chitenje* (wrap) for his new wife (J. A. Banda 2017). Alongside these individual requests, it is also taken as given that at any quasi-formal meeting an MP might arrange or be invited to address, he or she is expected to distribute a significant sum of money, typically in the region of MWK50,000 (US$65) (Adams 2016). All my visits involved MPs, when driving or being driven anywhere in their constituencies, being recognised (the car alone draws attention on most rural roads) and being incessantly called to stop and give money. These requests are frequently ignored or met with a polite wave, but this is harder to do when the car is stopped or they have left its confines – the demands (some cheeky, some heartfelt; some coupled with mild abuse, most with performances of supplication and prostration) are near-constant (Fieldnotes, 2016-17).

After a few days at her home in the constituency, Emily Chinthu-Phiri (Nkhata Bay South, 2014-19) started to receive a number of visitors at her house each day. She explained that it had taken a few days for word to get around that she was in the constituency, but that now 'everyone knows' and she could expect a steady stream of constituents each and every day until she left for Lilongwe (Constituency Observation 5 (Chinthu-Phiri) 2017). Several MPs became so used to having queues of constituents arriving at their house even before sunrise in order to see them and request money that the MP would provide breakfast and tea for their constituents' hours-long wait (Pillane 2017; J. A. Banda 2017). As 2014-19 Speaker of Parliament Richard Msowoya (Karonga Nyungwe, 2004-09; 2014-19) puts it:

> 'Every time MPs wake up, they will find a long queue of people waiting to meet them at their home. Every time they go to a church they find [the] church has a list of things that need to be done, and once churches know an MP is around, each and every church… [seeks] to raise money from the MP, and you are expected to give. And you cannot just give [a little]! You have to give a certain amount [commensurate with your position]… as a Member of Parliament' (Msowoya 2017).

Some MPs and experts, moreover, suggested that there had been significant "handouts inflation" in terms of what constituents expect and demand in this respect from 1994 up to now (see also Chapter 4) (Anon MP10 2017; Chinsinga 2015). Several urban MPs, moreover, suggested that demands for handouts were worse in urban than in rural areas (A. Sangala 2016; Njawala 2017), although one MP who has represented constituencies in both said he found no significant difference in this respect (Kadzamira 2015). Several participants also pointed to differences between Malawian regions in terms of handout demands, although there was disagreement about the nature of those differences. I am unable to adjudicate on any of these matters here, although there was widespread agreement that MPs in the Central Region were able to spend considerably less on handouts (and indeed on campaigning) than those in the

South and East – whose voters, MPs from across the country agreed, were particularly demanding and expectant of handouts (Mpaweni 2016; Lally 2016; Kabwila 2016).

This situation – of MPs as "walking ATMs", "one-man/-woman NGOs" etc. – has long been recognised by students of politics in Africa and indeed beyond (Barkan 1979; 1984; 1995; 2009b). This analysis is shared in Malawi, not just amongst MPs but in the wider political/civil society/media landscape, with the common identification of a "culture of handouts" which has taken deep root in political life and political culture since the democratic transition in the early 1990s. Politicians, including MPs, are often figured in such accounts as the masters and main beneficiaries of a corrupt political culture. In Malawi, however, MPs are abundantly clear that they did not choose and do not approve of this system, and it is far from clear that they in any sense control or benefit from these arrangements. Handout expectations and demands remain, however, absolutely central facts of their lives, working and otherwise (see also Lindberg 2010, 123).

The pressures of the culture of handouts are felt by MPs not just in relation to political or electoral concerns, but also in social and personal terms. They are genuinely difficult emotionally and psychologically for most MPs to deal with, as politicians seek to balance concern to protect their own finances against the often-desperate demands of very needy people. After spending a lot of time in the constituency, says one MP:

> 'Your head can't work properly. Psychologically, you will be affected. So most of the times… Members of Parliament who stays with those people for long time in the constituency, he or she ends up fighting or quarrelling with those people in the constituency… They believe Members of Parliament they have money all the time. And when you say you don't have money… they don't believe it. So when you stay with them for one week, you [have to] keep on telling them, "I don't have money, I don't have money, I can't support you on this, I can't support you on this"' (Mtonga 2016).

> '[It] kills you. Because everybody after winning expects that you are going to come at their doorstep and give them something, and then they realise that it is not possible, and you also realise that it is not possible, so you try and just be an MP, to do the job you are required to do. But the pressure is just so huge' (Msowoya 2017).

> 'You become a funeral undertaker, a wedding organizer, everything is on you. So it's really hell' (L. Banda 2017).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, no MPs whom I spoke to were able to account precisely for how much they spent in their constituencies – the ad-hoc, infinitely variable nature of these expenses make this difficult. One MP estimates, however, that:

> 'Sometimes when you are lucky, you may spend maybe… MWK50,000 [US$65]. That means you have not moved around the constituency… Maybe you have just gone there for a meeting, one meeting. But if it is two meetings, three meetings, then it is expensive. Apart from that, people will [also] be coming [to you] individually, and more especially this time when there is hunger. They will come, "we want food, we want what what." So sometimes I spend maybe MWK200,000 [US$250] one trip… When I spend MWK50,000, that trip I'm very very lucky' (Adams 2016).

Another says that for each week he spends in the constituency, he spends between MWK200,000 and MWK300,000 (US$370) (Mpaweni 2016), while still another estimates spending 'about MWK300,000' during merely his latest two-day visit to the constituency (Musowa 2016). Boniface Kadzamira's glovebox of MWK300,000, meanwhile, was indeed empty by the time we drove out of his constituency the following evening. Although some had admittedly been spent on some house renovations of his own, he easily spent between MWK150,000 and MWK200,000 on handouts within those 36 hours.

Given the sums involved, and the sheer pressure, it is unsurprising if:

> 'You are a bit jittery to go and visit your constituency, because people are used, anytime they see you in the constituency, they [see] money. The moment you are in the constituency, they know you are here, "let us go and present our problems!" And the problems range from family problems, education problems, transport problems, health problems. So when they see you they see the answer for every domestic problem and it becomes very difficult for MPs to connect, or frequently go to their constituencies, because they know that the moment I go to the constituency, every day this is what people are going to ask me to do. When I was representing Lilongwe City Centre, I was staying in the constituency. I never moved an inch until five years elapsed. But I tell you, yes it was an experience because I was attending to people's problems every day. By 5AM, you have got ten to fifteen people around your house, every day, seven days a week' (Kadzamira 2015).

Nasrin Pillane (Balaka West, 2009-14) sums up the general sentiment:

> 'Everywhere you go, people are asking you for money! So you never improve in your life. Because at the end of the day, it's also a job that has to take care of you – you know, yes it's for the people, but it also has to take care of you' (Pillane 2017).

Even Juliana Lunguzi (Dedza East, 2014-19), who sets herself so firmly against handouts (see below), still acknowledges that 'the expectations from constituents are so stressful!' (Constituency Observation 3 (Lunguzi) 2016). All of my participants spoke of constituent demands as exerting a considerable psychological and emotional toll upon them (see Weinberg 2012). The exasperated wife of another MP, he tells me, 'says my phone is like a switchboard' and is worried about the state of family finances and the quality of family life given how much time and money he spends dealing with constituents' demands. It's not his job, he says, to provide handouts but 'the people think the MP is the answer to every problem' (Anon MP5 2017).

Not least of the stresses and pressures are financial. Many MPs claim to lose money in politics, and handouts – the constant and unending pressure to use their private resources to provide for constituents' personal needs – are invariably cited as the major reason why:

> 'It's very hard. You have to work extra. As a musician, I go do shows and I take that money and use it to put fuel in the vehicle that carries dead bodies every single day. So to some extent I fund my MP-ship from other sources because the salary we get here is not enough to cater for all that' (L. Banda 2017).

Little wonder, then, that MPs talk and joke, but talk and joke with feeling, about their constituents as persecutors; it is in fact a besieged, defensive, verging-on-frightened stance that the vast majority of MPs offer as a characterisation of their relationship with their constituents. One MP told me that he was very much looking forward to an upcoming Easter weekend, as he would go to the lake for a few days, switch off his phone, and finally 'get away from the constituents!' (Constituency Observation 2 (Kadzamira) 2016).

The presentation of role

A constant theme, because it is a constant dilemma, that runs through the lives and work of politicians – and therefore also throughout writing about politicians – is the extent of their own agency. Politicians, in myriad contexts, are endlessly wrestling with, and calculating about, the extent to which they have to be "role-takers" and acquiesce to "the way things are (normally) done"; and the extent to which they can be "role-makers," actually re-making the way their jobs are done in accordance with their personal preferences and beliefs. Politicians, in this respect, live out the classic structure/agency problem. It is a subject of often deep and profound reflection – including moral and spiritual reflection – for politicians as they make decisions about their own behaviour. In Malawi, most of this moral wrestling is about the kind of constituency MP they will be.

Besieged as they feel they are by bottom-up expectations and pressures upon them, I argue that MPs defensively exercise a "presentation of role" as a fundamental aspect of their home styles. This is, it should be noted, primarily a response to unsustainable demands for handouts, but not exclusively so – MPs in practice also must deal with excess demand upon their CDF or other development resources, as well as more demand for their time/presence/counsel etc than they feel they can or are willing to provide. The presentation of role constitutes, in essence, that suite of tactics that *all* MPs employ as defence mechanism(s) against this excess demand. However inadvertent or self-conscious it may be (and it is generally somewhere between the two), MPs thereby project to constituents an image of what they see (or at least seek to establish) as the "proper" role of an MP – specifically in relation to the limits and scope of constituency service in general and of handout-demands above all. For the MPs I observed, interviewed, and encountered, establishing such limits was a very conscious concern and a major preoccupation. Indeed, it was one of the central preoccupations of their working lives. MPs were concerned, in other words, not just with their own legitimation as human beings in the eyes of their constituents (as reflected in their presentation of self) but also to (re-)shape and (de-)limit – sometimes fundamentally, often far less so – the terrain upon which their legitimation does and does not take place.

If presentations of role constitute a suite of tactics however, before tactics there is strategy: I argue that, in the broadest terms, MPs respond to demands for handouts on a spectrum – from "role-taking" acceptance of these demands, on the one hand, to "role-making" rejection of them on the other. Although some very clearly fall much closer to one pole than the other, all real-life presentations of role fall somewhere between these poles. In what follows I discuss attitudes about, and tactics for, first "role-taking" and then "role-making." These responses are separated heuristically for purposes of analysis, but we are dealing here with a spectrum rather than distinct "types." All MPs in practice employ a mixture of multiple tactics – albeit that for the majority their overall strategy errs more towards role-taking than -making.

Role-taking

The provision of handouts is a default expectation upon MPs. The position of MP in contemporary Malawi, all are agreed, comes with a set of expectations and accountability-pressures attached, and handouts are at or near the top (Lindberg 2010; Barkan and Mattes 2014). To "role-*take*" in this context, therefore, is to acquiesce to the expectation and demand for handouts, and MPs typically adopt a resigned, philosophical attitude to their constituents' demands and expectations of them.

Role-takers, like role-makers, see their constituents' handout-demands as "wrong" on some level – a result of a mass misunderstanding on the part of the Malawian public:

> 'They expect me, if a person dies, I should buy a coffin. If I don't, they say, "ooooh no that guy doesn't care about us" – but is that a function of a parliamentarian?? No!... That's not our function, I know that… [But] that's the understanding of our employers' (Dzonzi 2016).

> 'the understanding of what exactly is a Member of Parliament is not understood… They don't realise that the Member of Parliament is actually the one that makes the laws and is in Parliament, they don't understand that bit. For them it's, "you bring development here and you take care of us and anything [that] goes wrong"… You know it's just absolutely everything it's on the head of [the] Member of Parliament' (Pillane 2017).

Moreover, also like role-makers, most role-takers are agreed that participating in the "culture of handouts" is also wrong *morally* – seen to be emblematic of so much that is bad and corrupted about Malawi's politics, as well as considered actively *anti*-developmental and fostering of dependency (I will explore such attitudes more fully below and in the next chapter.) Many discuss giving handouts in confessional terms – 'I am guilty!' says Aaron Sangala (2016); Frank Mwenifumbo talks of himself as 'a culprit' in this respect (2017); a number speak of being 'ashamed' that they give handouts and of having to admit this to me (Katsonga 2015; Kadzamira 2015). Most take the view, however, that these are the basic facts of (political) life – facts that they are powerless to challenge without committing political suicide.

Alekeni Menyani (Dedza North West, 2009-19), for instance, accepts that constituents' demands must be moderated in some way, however in the end accepts them as a fact, to which MPs must acquiesce if they are not to alienate their constituents:

> 'These are some of the most difficult [decisions], you know, that you must make – that you must balance between popularity [and doing the right thing]… But in politics, it seems… we must always keep the people happy and clapping hands for you, so…' (Menyani 2016).

A former MP bemoans the fact that, as far as he and many others are concerned, acquiescing at least somewhat to handouts-demands is quite simply a prerequisite for being able to do anything else or to be taken seriously at all as a local MP:

> 'For you to continue being relevant, really, you must somehow meet their expectations as their MP, and some of those expectations are quite outrageous. They are really outside the definition of your work. But… you simply can't help it but to share the little that you have. They literally congregate at your residence, at your house, once they hear you have come, with a range of problems and [most] of those problems are just very personal… It's about school fees for their kids, it's about money to go to the hospital, it's about transport money, it's about not having enough to eat. A range of problems and you cannot just wish

> them away or… just tell them, "look that's none of my business." As I said, when you have something little to share, you end up doing it. That was my experience' (Anon MP10 2017).

Whilst not every MP agrees that (at least some) acquiescence to handouts is a prerequisite for any and all credibility with constituents, it is very much the prevailing view. Grain Malunga (Chikwawa North, 2009-14) sums up neatly the reasoning that so many arrive at as they weigh their beliefs about what an MP should (ideally) do against the demands and expectations of their constituents for handouts:

> 'If you do what *you* think is right, that's not what the people think about it. They will definitely boot you out of [the] political system! (*laughs*).' (Malunga 2016).

Presentations of role towards this end of the spectrum reflect this resigned acceptance, and primarily involve the adoption of a range of tactics designed to restrict and to control – to impose order and limits upon – the demands made upon their person and their personal finances by their constituents' demands. None of these tactics is mutually exclusive. All involve MPs in a besieged, defensive stance against their constituents, as they seek to erect barriers against what they perceive to be an otherwise unstoppable and unending tsunami of demands.

Physical distancing

Perhaps the most emphatic of these tactics is the decision of the vast majority of MPs, following hot on the heels of their election, to move away from or otherwise not live in their constituencies. Although many did not have their main home in their constituencies prior to entering politics, the vast majority will have moved there on at least a semi-permanent basis many months, if not years, prior to their election for campaigning purposes. All but a handful of the current and former MPs to whom I spoke then moved away from their constituencies soon after being elected: either returning to their long-term home in one of the major cities, or else establishing such a home. Precise data is unavailable but the rough estimates of several observers (Chinsinga 2015; R. Phiri 2017) tally with my own – that fewer than 10% of incumbent MPs actually live in their constituencies on a long-term or permanent basis. As Aaron Sangala, veteran MP (2004-19) for, and one-time resident of, Blantyre Malabada acknowledges:

> 'I had to run away, I will be honest. Because when I was in the constituency, the first group would come [to my house] at 5.30 in the morning, and the last one, if I am lucky, will be 9.30 [at night]' (A. Sangala 2016).

Richard Msowoya (Karonga Nyungwe, 2004-09; 2014-19) echoes this sentiment. Regarding the pressures upon MPs to provide handouts, he says:

> 'That pressure sends away the MPs from the constituency… Many of them basically go through a real, real relocation exercise to try and avoid that pressure' (Msowoya 2017).

Theresa Mwale (Mchinji West, 2009-14), meanwhile, was delighted with an instant elevation into government, and not just for the power and perks of ministerial office:

> 'For me I was lucky because immediately I was elected, I was [made a] minister, so I didn't have to stay there [in the constituency], and I had a good excuse. I would go there maybe a Saturday and come back on a Sunday. I had a very good excuse to say, "I've got to be in the office!"' (T. Mwale 2017).

Former MP George Nnensa (Balaka South, 2009-14) summarises the general logic thus:

> 'probably 90% of the MPs don't stay in their constituencies, they live in town or away from home because if you stay there, they will be harassing you, really *(laughs)*. Every funeral, anybody who is sick, they want you to attend to that. I noticed that the MPs that were living in the constituencies, when we came [to Parliament] for a meeting, if [the authorities] didn't give us the allowance on the first day, probably they will not have money for lunch because they have spent all their money, or [else] not enough fuel to drive back to their homes. So that's the situation I saw when the MPs were [living] in the villages. And most of [those] today, probably they are very poor, they don't even have a car now – because they spent their money on the constituency' (Nnensa 2017).

It is precisely to escape this fate that so many MPs "run away." Having to attend Parliament in Lilongwe, which sits merely four months per year, may provide a useful excuse for a move but is not the reason for it: Southern Region MPs, in any case, tend to move to Blantyre and Northern Region MPs to Mzuzu. Most telling are those MPs for Blantyre or Lilongwe seats who move across town – or, it has been known, relocate wholesale to the other city in order to escape their constituents (Fieldnotes, 2016-17).[75]

A logical extension of this physical avoidance tactic in terms of residence is that MPs also restrict the amount of time that they spend visiting or otherwise physically inside their constituencies. Boniface Kadzamira (Ntchisi North 2014-19), for instance, slept in a motel outside of his constituency on the night before his intended visit, and only informed anyone he was coming when he called his constituency governor over breakfast. Within minutes his

[75] MPs living outside of Lilongwe can claim accommodation expenses in order to attend Parliament when it is sitting. Those without a house of their own in the city appear typically to stay with relatives, or have a long-term arrangement with a local lodge (Fieldnotes, 2015-17).

phone did indeed resemble the proverbial switchboard and he thereafter fielded calls and texts throughout the day. He explained that he generally keeps his plans to visit quiet until they are imminent, because when he is known to be visiting his constituency every chief, member of his team etc. wants to meet him, or for him to visit their area – they want money, he says, 'though they try to disguise' (Constituency Observation 2 (Kadzamira) 2016).

As discussed in the previous chapter, popular talk about MPs deserting their constituencies for years seems for the most part to have little basis in fact. All MPs acknowledged, however, that visiting one's constituency is an expensive business (emotionally as well as financially), and one not undertaken lightly. Many acknowledged that they often simply could not visit, or could not visit as often as they would like, because they lacked sufficient funds. One former MP insists that he went to his constituency 'as often as I could,' but that 'believe me it's very expensive to transact as a Member of Parliament' (Anon MP10 2017).[76]

MPs strategize, therefore, about when to time their constituency visits and most intensive constituency work. Many acknowledged that, immediately following their election, they tended to avoid their constituencies for a lengthy period in order to recoup financially and psychologically after the rigours of the election campaign. They also tended to increase the frequency of visits steadily over the course of their parliamentary term as the next election slowly approached, eventually moving to the constituency full-time in the final months prior to an election (Fieldnotes, 2015-17). Visits also, naturally enough, tend to coincide with periods in which an MP's finances are in the black. When they are shading more towards the red, MPs stay away:

> 'So most of the times what we do is, when we know that now I'm ready to be [financially] buffeted, you go there ready to be beaten, ready to be squeezed. So that time, you make sure you stand, and you provide. When you know that you are done [financially], you back off… You can't stay in the constituency' (Mtonga 2016).

There is, furthermore, an at-times carefully strategized, and at other times ad hoc, tactic of deliberate avoidance exercised when one is in the constituency itself, and whether one lives there or not. I discussed in the last chapter the efforts MPs go to to avoid stumbling upon funerals in the course of their travelling around the constituency (Fieldnotes, 2016-17). In general, moreover, MPs in their constituencies discussed carefully with their team about how

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[76] At one point during my fieldwork, I asked a certain MP if I might join him on his next visit to his constituency. Courteous and friendly to a fault, he expressed delight at the prospect but then talked awkwardly about the difficulties of visiting, the expense involved, and so on. It took me a little time to realise that he was trying to communicate, and with a certain amount of embarrassment, that he literally could not afford to visit his constituency at present or in the immediate future (Fieldnotes, 2016).

to travel around their constituency in ways that would avoid spontaneous encounters with large numbers of constituents – or with particular chiefs or other notables whom one has budgeted neither the time nor money to see that day – by taking less travelled routes and the like. Some such encounters are inevitable, but the MP's goal is to minimise them. The thinking appears to be that, when it comes to those one has not specifically arranged and budgeted to see, it is better not to have been seen at all – and for people not to know one had ever been in the constituency – than it is to be seen passing through without stopping and "doing some giving" (Anon MP, 2016; Fieldnotes, 2016-17). One MP I accompanied purposely delayed by more than an hour beginning his long journey home from the constituency in order to wait for darkness, so that he and his car could pass swiftly through a busy trading centre *en route* out of the constituency without being identified (Fieldnotes, 2016). Physically avoiding constituents, then, is a basic but nonetheless ubiquitous and effective tactic by which MPs limit demands upon themselves.

Given these realities, at least as MPs relate them, it is not hard to see why MPs might avoid visiting their constituencies and avoid interacting with their constituents generally. Nor, of course, is it hard to see why constituents often in acute poverty would make such demands, and indeed rush to do so especially if the MP is only irregularly in the constituency. Nevertheless, this dynamic has profound effects on MP-constituency linkages and representation. I asked one MP about if and how she consults her constituents for their views so that she can represent them in Parliament. She replied:

> 'It is very difficult, not easy. Sometimes, to be frank with you, I don't go and consult them. Sometimes maybe I just phone some few people. Because [when] I go there, I gather them [for a meeting], then I should have a budget for that… If I want to source some information from them, the information is not free. Though the information will help them, it is not free for me to get that information. I have to give them transport, I have to give them drinks. Nothing is for free these days. Even the chiefs… you can ask him, "I am going to Parliament, what am I supposed to say there?... what are your thoughts on this [or that] bill?"… That is not free. I have to pay for that. That is becoming very expensive to me, and it is something that is barring me from meeting my people frequently' (Adams 2016).

It is a striking characterisation when an MP suggests that she feels she has to pay her constituents in order to allow her to represent them, but it is a sentiment shared by many. Lucius Banda (Balaka North, 2004-06; 2014-19) acknowledges that:

> 'It's pathetic, because there are times you really want to meet people… There are times you just want to see them, sing, and dance. But you start thinking that

> at the end of the day, they will need some MWK200 [each] (US$0.25), I've got to give money. Then you just cancel it and sit home. It's pathetic' (L. Banda 2017).

Equally as striking are those several MPs who acknowledged that they often preferred to only meet their own constituents with civil society organisations such as the National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE) in tow and available to hide behind – because NICE could offer them protection from constituents' rapacious demands. Aisha Adams (Mangochi Nkungulu, 2014-) explains why she favours such meetings:

> 'They [constituents] will tell them [NICE] that, "She is not helping us… She is not giving us food, she is not giving us soap. You see we are very poor, and this woman is not helping us!"… [NICE then] are the ones who can explain well to them what are the duties of the Member of Parliament. But for *me* to explain [that] to them, they will [just] say, "Look at her! [Before, in the campaign] she said she will help us, now she is saying it's not her duty. We will not vote for her next time!' (Adams 2016).

On the account of a number of MPs, in fact, as well as several of its own representatives, NICE does frequently offer itself to MPs on exactly this protective basis in a bid to get MPs to engage and work with it at local level:

> 'Sometimes, even those that are in leadership, they may feel sometimes that… they are being misunderstood by the community. As civic educators [at NICE] we can come in… If MPs feel that it's not clear, then we go to the masses [and explain that the] MP, his role is not like that. The role of the MP is A, B, C, D… [but] not individual handouts' (Anon Expert 5 2017).

"Compromising" and drawing lines

Sooner or later, however, constituents must be faced, and when they are most MPs talk in terms of finding "compromise" – between themselves and their constituents, and between themselves and their anti-handouts principles – in a way that allows constituents to get some of what they want and demand, but in a way that also allows the MP not to be rendered bankrupt, mad, or both:

> 'At some point… some compromise has to be reached… You are a person that is either running a business or doing other economic activities. And for [constituents] to understand that you are making gains financially because you are engaging in other forms of economic activities, it's very difficult… So you just have to compromise and get to a point where you apply human heart and say, "I can help where I can" – and it's up to you as a businessperson to calculate how much you can spend versus your input. If you manage properly… you know

> where you can compromise, where you can be involved [and] you can do your part' (Kunkuyu 2017).

Given the vast gulf, as they unanimously see it, between the demands they face and their ability and willingness to meet those demands, striking this balance to the remotest satisfaction of constituents is far from easy (and one that most MPs may not be managing, at least if turnover rates are any indication). Doing so requires a considerable measure of political skill. Success in this respect, moreover, is likely to depend heavily on the success or otherwise of the MP's presentation of self as an honest, down-to-earth "one of us" (see Chapter 4) with whom one can thereby reason, negotiate, and reach a fair compromise.

Veteran MP and former minister Patricia Kaliati (Mulanje West, 2009-19) is famed for her enduring popularity and rapport with her constituents. She was described to me by several observers and colleagues as a 'consummate politician' at constituency level (Fieldnotes, 2015-17). Discussing her home style, she says that 'you have to become one of them' through the way the MP dresses, speaks and behaves. She is also, however, not merely one of them but also their MP, with a set of special and specific roles and expectations attached, and to this extent describes her 'secret' to constituency success and popularity as 'being understanding, supportive, open' with people – but above all '*straight*[forward]' (Kaliati 2016). She insists, she says, on being honest and telling the truth to constituents about what she can do, what she will try to do, and what she cannot do – and is sure to keep to promises. 'If I say I don't have [anything] today, but will have tomorrow,' she makes sure that she does indeed have something tomorrow (Kaliati 2016).

Kaliati (2016) also describes her communication with constituents in pedagogic terms: 'you do have to civic educate them,' she says. This includes periodically lecturing or explaining to constituents the "proper" role of an MP (see below), but above all, in her case, the drawing and communication of (clear or otherwise) "lines" between what she considers an acceptable or reasonable demand/expectation upon her, and what she considers unacceptable or unreasonable. Such lines are a recurring theme in the presentations of role of any MP remotely acquiescing to constituents' handout-demands.

Another MP knew, for instance, that some MPs promise to 'probably be buying… coffins for whoever has passed on' in the constituency:

> 'But I told them from the word go, to say "sorry… [but] I will not. Because there are so many funerals, and if we buy for funerals, is that development?? It's not development. What *I* will be doing is development. Yes, I can assist during funerals, but not like taking [responsibility for] the whole process of getting everything for the funeral, no' (Anon MP7 2016).

Former minister Anna Kachikho (Phalombe North, 2004-20) also stresses the need she feels to reason with, even plead with, constituents to understand her position and to be "reasonable" – including, indeed, about coffins:

> 'But if they come to you [and say], "I want a coffin" [then] you [will] buy a coffin, tomorrow [another] coffin, two coffins, five coffins. No. I just said, "I'll buy a coffin [for] a chief" – a chief who has passed [away] and we work[ed] with him. That one, when he dies, we give a coffin and a bag of maize… Some, you know, [they say] "oh no, you know, we need motorcycles!" I bring them on the round table, I ask them, "Are you serious?? I should buy you a motorbike, for *one* person?? How about the rest?!"… So we discuss like that, and at the end of the day we understand each other' (Kachikho 2016).

As these examples indicate, in addition to a negotiation of sorts between constituents' expectations and the MP's own capacity, there is typically also a disciplining aspect in the balances and "compromises" that MPs strike with their constituents. Demands are typically restricted according to certain criteria that are in accordance with, and seek to uphold, a particular vision of "development" – one that stresses (fetishizes?) the need to encourage "self-reliance" and the concept of "a hand up, not a handout."

Ubiquitous are "compromises" that require – in exchange for the MP's "assistance"– that "the community" or individuals/groups within it must also "pull their weight." For instance, Lilian Patel (Mangochi South, 1994-2009; 2014-) agrees, though only in part, to a request from a particular village to deliver its fertilizer: she will hire one truck and transport that portion of fertilizer which is designated for the elderly; in return, however, the community itself will have to arrange to transport the rest (L. Patel 2015). Kachikho (2016) tells her constituents, '"we are going to have a clinic here – please mould bricks and bring sand, and [then] I'll come [back]."'

The variations are myriad, however such ("hand up") ways of operating are ubiquitous and widespread. Indeed, great virtue is made of them by all MPs precisely for their disciplining effects, over and above any practical/financial advantages for the MP themselves. Lilian Patel (2015) speaks for every MP when she says that, '[of course] there are [some] people who are just lazy. Instead of working, they want to [rely on] the MP. Those, I just ignore them completely.' This emphasis on the encouragement of "self-reliance" and the need to cultivate "self- and collective discipline" goes far beyond buzzwords. They are, on the contrary, genuinely venerated and essentially uncontested ideas amongst MPs concerning their constituents and, in particular, what their own relationship with their constituents ought to be. This is a theme that shall be explored fully in the next chapter.

Do these efforts by MPs to impose order and limitations on the demands they face actually work, however? I am unable here to answer this definitively, however it is notable that many MPs claim that, over the course of their tenure as MP, constituents do indeed come to "learn," at least to some extent, where MPs' boundaries are, where lines are drawn, and where some requests are unreasonable or fruitless to make. Lifred Nawena (Thyolo Thava, 2009-14) insists in relation to constituents that 'you can train them' to make fewer demands and have lower expectations of MPs (Nawena 2017). Clement Mlombwa (Dedza South West, 2009-) likewise says:

> 'The best I do is to make them understand that there are some things I can manage and there are others that I cannot manage to do… So I will try to make them understand that I've got limits: "This is my money I'm using, I'm using my money which I'm supposed to be using with my family." So in that way they will tend to understand eventually. At first it [is] very difficult because the demands are just so enormous. But then with the lapse of time people will understand you better [and] they will ask for [smaller] things' (Mlombwa 2017).

Indeed, even those few who remain living in their constituencies do not quite confirm the apocalyptic vision of such a decision painted by so many of their "runaway" colleagues. They report that, after some considerable time at least, constituents do come to "learn" boundaries and limitations:

> 'on the positive side, if you stay in the constituency, they get used to you. And if you have no money, you… [tell them]… what you earn. So probably the first year they will harass you, afterwards you [can] tell them that "I don't have money," because you are living in the village with them, [and] they know what you are earning and all that' (Nnensa 2017).

Talk in these terms demonstrates that MPs are engaged in a conscious "presentation of role" in their constituencies, even if they don't use that exact language – a presentation of role, moreover, that they hope and to some extent anticipate will have a genuine (behavioural and perhaps educational) impact upon their constituents. The act of doing any job, it is true, inevitably involves some sort of public performance of how the occupant does the job or thinks it should be done. This is particularly true of politicians/political representatives, anywhere, given how public-facing and performative their job is. In the case of Malawian MPs, however, the presentation of role unfailingly becomes a calculated and deliberate aspect of their home style.

Structures and collective goods

One MP says that her constituents began "learning" about her boundaries by means of '*Structures*! Structures, and… a bit of shouting! *(laughs)*' (Anon MP, 2016). This points towards another tactic by which MPs seek to order and delimit the demands made upon them – by establishing formal or quasi-formal structures, procedures, or services through which demands can be initially processed and assessed by somewhat standardised and depersonalised means. There are strong echoes here, on a micro-level, of various accounts of the origins of the modern state in terms of the regularisation of criminal/patrimonial structures in order to share benefits and to rationalise/discipline claim-making in a more sustainable way (Weber et al 1964; Tilly 1975). There are several varieties of Malawian MPs' tactics in this respect.

Firstly, some MPs (or, perhaps more precisely, their parties) have the financial means to establish constituency offices – which in Malawi are always partisan, party-political offices. Through their party's office, however, MPs can nevertheless conduct their work and insist that all demands are channelled. (From my admittedly informal observations it appeared that governing-party (DPP/UDF) MPs generally had a constituency office. Opposition MPs whose parties had offices established in the constituency were rarer, especially outside of those parties' regional strongholds.) One DPP MP describes the effect on their work of an office thus:

> 'The pressure [for handouts] is there, but not on daily basis. First of all, when I won in 2009, I established an office. Before that, during the campaign, the office was at [my] home. But after the elections, I established an office. There is a person who mans that office. So, any issues, they [constituents] have to go through that office. The only people who I accept at home are the chiefs… and the faith groups, and the elderly… But the youth and everybody else, they have to go through the office, because it's [the] office of a Member of Parliament and it has to be recognised as such. So, that establishment of an office helped me' (Anon MP3 2017).

When this MP says that it is 'the office of a Member of Parliament,' it should be stressed, this is not strictly true – it is clearly and visibly a party-political office, likely funded in large part by the party itself, and invariably painted garishly in its colours and symbols. For MPs, such an office can provide a highly valued barrier between themselves and the demands of their constituents. Its use, however, is a very visible manifestation of the difficulties in maintaining a remotely adequate firewall between an MP's position as a partisan political figure and their role as a representative and servant of their entire body of constituents regardless of party. Any such firewall typically relies on the ongoing commitment of the MP themselves to shun partisanship, typically in the name of technocratic Development.

Beyond offices, MPs also establish standardised funding streams:

> 'How do I deal with [the demands]?... I've got a system, which is like a revolving fund for patients – sorting out their bills, medical bills, and to crown it all, when they die, the whole funeral program. You have to do it. From buying the coffins to transport, and everything that goes with it, because the vigil requires that people eat, drink tea and all that. So I find it easier myself to just have a mechanism, a budget for this… As it is now, [when] a funeral happens, they know where to get money, they know how to do it, they just report [back] to me' (A. Sangala 2016)

For veteran MP Aaron Sangala (Blantyre Malabada, 2004-19) this is 'a system that works' (A. Sangala 2016). All of this is his personal money, but its distribution has been *de*personalised, indeed, to the extent that it does not require his presence in order to access the funds, and he is involved only to the extent of being a general retrospective overseer.

In a similar vein, MPs often establish various services that constituents can access to some extent *en masse*, and crucially also in the MP's absence. I discussed in the previous chapter the use that many MPs make of their allowance to import two motor vehicles into the country duty-free: one for them, and another for the constituency for use as an ambulance/minibus etc. Such initiatives are themselves a by-product of the huge demands MPs face for medical and other transport, and a clear attempt by them to rationalise such demands:

> 'I had bought a 3-ton lorry. So it was there full-time instead of me, because they didn't really want *me*, they wanted the assistance… It was transporting people, carrying bricks, carrying sand, carrying funerals, all that' (A. Shaba 2017).

Further variations abound. In Nasrin Pillane's (Balaka West, 2009-14) case, for instance:

> 'I had a maize mill permanently installed. Because what [would] happen if I gave them maize… [is that] then they gonna ask for money to take the maize to the maize mill. So actually I got a maize mill so I could grind their maize into flour, and just give them the flour so that they don't give me headache [about giving] them money to go and get the maize ground' (Pillane 2017).

What we see in these and many other possible examples are instances of the pressure to provide individual cash handouts (which Malawian MPs consider positively *anti*-developmental) in large part leading to the provision of "developmental" collective goods of which MPs broadly approve – such as public transport, scholarship schemes and the like (and as were discussed in Chapter 5). As Lindberg (2010, 133) observes of Ghana:

> 'since the ordinary citizens in their constituencies primarily hold them accountable for delivery of private goods in the form of personal assistance, cash, social favours, and income-generating activities, MPs spend most of their time and resources on producing these goods. But since this is a very costly

> strategy… MPs also try to accommodate some of these pressures by providing narrow club goods in the form of assistance to villages and townships.'

George Nnensa (Balaka South, 2009-14), indeed, saw this as politically as well as financially and ethically sensible, not least because giving to some will always risk alienating others outraged that some have received whilst they have not:

> 'My view is that I don't want to give things to individuals, I would rather do projects that will help a lot more people. I mean a bridge [for example]: everybody will go whether you're a Muslim, a Catholic, [from] different tribes; [also] a hospital or a clinic, that will help everybody. So those are the things that I would like to look at, rather than give money to individuals… [because] if you give to one, you lose the rest… That's our culture… [And] if you do [give] to individuals, make sure that nobody knows!' (Nnensa 2017).

While Lindberg (2010) appears tempted to read such instances of collective good provision as exercises in proto- welfare-state-building, however, we perhaps oughtn't to get too carried away. In Malawi, at least, MPs generally operate on a very small scale and their activities in these areas are unlikely to touch the majority of their constituents (hundreds of thousands of people in many cases) in any more than a very small and tangential way: in the case of such self-funded projects, we are talking here of sums amounting on average to only a few thousand dollars per annum, as opposed to tens of thousands per annum provided by the CDF, and the vastly greater resources available to a line ministry. What is more, these are activities funded not by a public entity but by a private individual with political interests – and when MPs cease to be MPs, they take these services with them.

Establishing systems, structures, and procedures is a common but not a simple task for MPs, given that there are very few permanent structures in place at local level for MPs *qua* MPs, or that might outlast any particular incumbent. Incumbents typically establish their own structures, unique to them, that disappear when they leave office, requiring their successor to build their own structures from scratch. MPs thus typically build from what they have – their campaign operation and its personnel, for instance, as well as pre-existing personal and professional networks. Occasionally a new MP will have a pre-existing set of structures and procedures that can be quickly re-tooled and re-purposed to accommodate their new role – Jacqueline Kouwenhoven (Rumphi West, 2014-19) acknowledges that she had a considerable advantage in this respect because she had founded and run an NGO in her constituency for over a decade prior to becoming the area's MP. She was thereby able to use structures, systems and personnel already established – 'most MPs don't have that' (Kouwenhoven 2016).

That all MPs seek to build something, however, is an acknowledgement of the appeal of having structures at constituency level: they erect a welcome – indeed an essential – barrier/firebreak

between the MP and the enormous expectations and demands placed upon their person (and personal resources) by constituents. All new MPs quickly discover that such a barrier is vital practically, financially, and not least psychologically. It is telling that for many MPs, and especially those without access to a political-party office in the constituency, the establishment of a non-partisan constituency office, funded by Parliament for the use of a Member of Parliament *qua* Member of Parliament (as in Zambia, for example), was their single biggest wish in terms of how the job might change and evolve in coming years (for instance Kadzamira 2015; Munkhondya 2017).

Political targeting of resources

Last but not least in our consideration of the tactics that MPs employ for the purpose of limiting and ordering the demands placed upon them is – predictably enough despite their official function as an apolitical, technocratic functionary in respect of constituency "development" – the targeting of the scarce resources they own or over which they have control in accordance with political-electoral considerations of their own. This certainly includes demands for handouts/private goods, but by no means exclusively – it is also a means by which MPs strategize about how and where to target the scarce resources of the CDF and other "development" resources (see Chapter 5.)

Just as disciplining narratives and tactics (considered above) deal with scarcity by drawing lines between the deserving and the undeserving poor, so MPs – being political figures with political and electoral interests – are also likely to draw lines on the basis of which groups and individuals are likely to be most valuable politically for them to target with resources, and which less so. Most acknowledged that they specially targeted their own team in the constituency, and often key party supporters more widely:

> 'My [biggest] supporters in the constituency are the party supporters, because you put them first, to make sure those people [are] happy, because you need them most…. Those are the readily available votes, your party supporters. So make sure that they shouldn't be very worried by giving them the charity that you can manage, supporting their children in their education [and so on]. If there is any charity that you can source from somewhere, make sure that you give them [first] so that they should be happy for you to be elected again' (Mpaweni 2016).

On a wider scale, MPs strategize differently about when and how much to reach out to areas that didn't vote for them vs how much they should secure their existing support base, and so on. Similarly to what we saw in Chapter 4 on campaigning (this is, after all, very much constituency service as "long campaigning"), some seem to favour consolidating their base by

targeting resources preferentially at pre-existing supporters; most talked of being more inclined to reach beyond their "side" in order to try to gain support elsewhere.

It is impossible to adequately generalise, however, given that such considerations are not just unique to each MP and to each constituency, but to each (long) campaign race and the particular stages and progress of it. One meeting between an MP and his constituency team that I was able to observe, in which they discussed where to target the MP's time and some of his personal resources in the coming months ahead, involved complex calculations not only about which were the villages and areas in which he may or may not have support; but also the nature of the MP's relationships with local chiefs and faith leaders; the ethnic and religious makeup of particular areas and how these related to the MP's own; as well as constantly weighing up who the MP's main challengers were likely to be, and how their political-electoral strengths and weaknesses might interact with the MP's own (Fieldnotes, 2016).

Role-making and civic educating

Most MPs take the view of Victor Musowa (Mulanje Bale, 2014-). They feel their constituents to be mistaken in their expectations and demands upon an MP, and consider the "culture of handouts" to be morally wrong and socially harmful. However, 'if I go to teach them this, I will not… [be re-elected as] a Member of Parliament again' (Musowa 2016). They become "culprits," in other words, because they conclude they have no (real) choice. Their presentation of role is built on phlegmatic resignation and strategic management of what is treated as an inevitability.

A small minority of MPs, however, take a different attitude. Approximately ten of my 74 MP interviewees expressed the view, to a greater or lesser extent, that the culture of handouts is *so* morally and socially destructive that MPs must not collaborate or compromise with it. Although small in number, this group included high-profile and outspoken politicians such as Juliana Lunguzi (Dedza East, 2014-19) and Agnes Nyalonje (Mzimba North, 2014-19) who are positively evangelical on the subject, and who have made opposition to handouts central to their personal-political brand and their mission to do, and be seen to do, politics differently:

> 'It's wrong… it's very wrong… It has become the culture, that's why it's so sad… On our [MP] whatsapp chats and so on, it's almost a competition. Somebody goes and buys an ambulance, they put it there, and the rest of us feel inadequate. And I'm thinking, "that's not how it should be!"' (Nyalonje 2016).

These MPs condemn handouts in vociferous terms. Moreover, the concerns and dismay that they express do not stem from frustration at the extent of constituents' expectations and demands, nor from bemoaning the difficulties of managing these. They are an expression of a

sincere belief, of a moral conviction: that this "culture of handouts" – the expectation and provision of handouts from politicians to the citizenry – is so deeply and profoundly *wrong* as to be unconscionable. A "hand out rather than a hand up," it is seen to foster a toxic and anti-developmental "dependency culture" that has done nothing less than ruin the promise of democracy itself in Malawi (see next chapter.)

For MPs at this end of the attitudinal spectrum, this translates into a considerably more direct, (self-)conscious, and generally didactic presentation of role. These MPs reject the popular understanding of what their role as an MP involves (at least as it relates to the crucial matter of handout-demands) and pro-actively and explicitly set themselves against it, seeking to radically change both what MPs do and, crucially, what they are expected to do by their constituents. These MPs perceive themselves as on a mission to reform their constituents and their 'faulty thinking' about MPs and handouts which they see as fundamentally anti-developmental, damaging, and wrong (Anon MP, 2016).

In the language of classic representation theory, this amounts to a (high-) "trusteeship" position, where the MP acts in accordance with *her* conception of her constituents' interests – one which is not just different from her constituents' conceptions of the same but is in many respects in direct opposition to it. Constituents are in need, therefore, of "tough love." As one MP says of how she hopes her constituents think of her: 'that she is hard, but she loves us' (Kouwenhoven 2016). While, since Burke (1774), theorists of representation have tended to view the delegate-trustee spectrum in terms of politicians' behaviour in *parliament*, when considered in terms of constituency work the role-making pole translates into an explicitly *educative* function for MPs. "Civic education" – the training of the population in the ways and means of (liberal-)democratic citizenship – is a ubiquitous buzzword in Malawi but is most associated with the work of various civil society organisations such as the National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE.) MPs, however, to the extent that they lean towards this position, explicitly and proudly take on the role of "(civic) educators," "teaching" their constituents about democracy and how it is "supposed" to work. Alekeni Menyani (Dedza North West, 2009-19) talks of:

> 'helping people understand… what would be best for them – just like you do with your own child to teach them to suffer a little bit for the better good that will come after' (Menyani 2016).

Various tactics are deployed.

Training by lecturing

The first tactic includes taking the educative ”teaching” function literally and simply lecturing constituents about what an MP is, and is not, “supposed” to do and to be:

> ‘There are a lot of MPs who interpret their job as being Father Christmas, Mother Christmas – and I don’t believe that’s my job! In fact I react violently to that… That’s why… for me, all my interaction… with my constituents includes a significant percentage of civic education… What is leadership? What is being an MP? What is the job of an MP?’ (Nyalonje 2016).

Many MPs talk in similar terms of their role in teaching their constituents about the proper role and functions of an MP. Kamlepo Kalua (Rumphi East, 2014-) insists simply that constituents accept fewer handouts ‘when you teach them, when you civic-educate them’:

> ‘You see you have to tell them that the role of an MP is not for handouts. It’s maybe for legislation, it’s for representation in Parliament on issues of national interest… Like if the budget is not properly scrutinised, is not properly debated, they are at the receiving end of [bad governance]. So I have to explain [that] I have to be present in Parliament. I [shouldn’t]… say “I’m the funeral undertaker,” “I am the welfare manager”… “I am your pastor.” No! You tell them that, “I’m a Member of *Parliament*”’ (Kalua 2016).

In the discussion above of role-making, there were also examples of MPs directly appealing to their constituents face-to-face. It is crucial to note the difference, however. Those above were describing processes of “compromising” and reasoning with constituents in which the emphasis was very much on their own capacities as MP and the limits thereof. Here, however, we see examples of entreaties to constituents that go far beyond an appeal to “be reasonable” and cut them some slack. They amount instead to political (re-)education, an appeal to constituents to transform their understandings so that we all might “do democracy properly.”

Training and disciplining by doing and being

Aside from simply verbally instructing their constituents on how they should do democracy and citizenship properly, those MPs who are really serious will take their civic education efforts to the next level by being and behaving as the kind of MP they approve of. Such MPs doubtless do this as a matter of personal conviction. They are also clear, however, that they “do being an MP” “properly” precisely in order that their constituents shall see and experience them doing being an MP properly. In this way, MPs hope to ‘train’ constituents in the same way those above insisted was possible in terms of restricting and delimiting handout-demands – only now their attempts at “training” are more fundamental and hugely more ambitious (Nawena 2017). They seek to teach constituents, by their own admission, a wholly new way of relating to MPs –

and do so, moreover, by disciplining them into doing so by insisting upon interacting with their constituents only in the "proper" manner. They do being, in other words, the kind of MP that they wish to be held accountable for being. It is entirely self-conscious, and literal role-presenting, behaviour.

How, then, do MPs seek to "walk the talk" and do being an MP properly? The first and most important thing is simple conceptually if considerably harder, as MPs tell it, in practice: 'I don't do handouts' (Lunguzi 2016; Nyalonje 2016). This requires a measure of political bravery, self-sacrifice, and commitment to the cause that many politicians, as we have seen throughout the testimony in this chapter, are prepared to admit that they lack. Those who shun handouts are clear that in order to do so they have to be committed and steadfast – and that, in fact, their commitment to spurning handouts must exceed their desire to become and remain an MP:

> 'We need someone who can tell people that handouts are bad... No matter how unpopular that decision may be, but we need someone who can be bold enough to do that. Whether he wins the next election or not, that has to be presented in a very clear manner' (Njawala 2017).

For these MPs, however, there is more to do than simply not give handouts – there is also a positive presentation (by means, again, of a demonstration) of the kind of activities that an MP *should*, in their understanding, actively do. The contours of such understandings are revealing. A very few interviewees insisted that they were first and foremost *parliamentarians*. Not only does Kamlepo Kalua (quoted above), for instance, react against handouts; he aims, he says, to tell constituents that it is councillors, not he, who are 'there for day-to-day development [tasks]' (Kalua 2016). He subscribes, of course, to "development" as the ultimate goal for all politics and for all in politics, but considers that his contribution to this effort should properly be in Parliament (Kalua 2016; also Majawa 2016). As discussed in Chapter 5, Kalua's understanding here is indeed an accurate description of the formal position. As also set out in that chapter, however, it is exceptionally rare for an MP to reject the role of the constituency's "Chief Development Officer" even discursively, and only two of my interviewees came close to doing so (Kalua 2016; Majawa 2016). Even they, however, acknowledged that in practice they did play a significant role in constituency development activities, not least because of the CDF.

For most role-taking MPs, on the contrary, they reject handouts so emphatically precisely *in the name of their development role*. Handouts are not condemned and criticised because MPs are "really" supposed to be parliamentarians, in other words, but because the culture of handouts is seen to be so anti-developmental, and so at odds with MPs' strenuous development efforts in the constituency (Lunguzi 2016; Nyalonje 2016). Such modernising/reformist MPs, therefore, do tend to take their parliamentary role seriously, but could not be farther from rejecting the constituency development role and embracing instead a parliamentary understanding of their

job. On the contrary, they typically stress particularly strongly in their presentations of role their status as an expert in D/development, and pitch their anti-handouts stance as an outgrowth of their relentless, laser-like focus upon 'development, development, development' in and for the constituency (Constituency Observation 3 (Lunguzi) 2016). Juliana Lunguzi (Dedza East, 2014-19), for instance, produced videos for her campaign stressing her status as a "modern," educated woman with myriad ideas for improving health, education etc in the constituency, and an expertise in Development (Lunguzi (Campaign Ad) 2014). She produced a detailed personal manifesto outlining these plans. Whilst visiting her constituency and meeting constituents she not only doesn't give handouts, but talks constantly of ideas for development, her multi-point, detailed Development Plans and Strategies, and her work with government and other agencies to bring development(s) to the constituency. She is very active on social media such as Twitter and Facebook, where she discusses issues with constituents (and others) and 'shares ideas for the development of Dedza East' (Constituency Observation 3 (Lunguzi) 2016). She embraces her role as a parliamentarian and Chair of the Parliamentary Health Committee, using these platforms also to stress her single-track focus on developmental matters at both the constituency and national levels (Lunguzi 2016; Constituency Observation 3 (Lunguzi) 2016).

As may be clear from this description, there are wider things being stressed here even than being a tribune of D/development. Such MPs also typify and embody an aspiration towards liberal-modernity – they are "pro-democracy," yes, but perhaps pro- "doing democracy/politics *properly*" first and foremost. It was not merely an Agenda for Development that Felix Njawala (Blantyre Kabula, 2009-14) offered his constituents, after all, but an Agenda for *Change* that suggested a still-more-wholesale transformation (Njawala 2017). Lunguzi, meanwhile, distributes newspapers in her constituency to spread literacy and news about what is happening in Parliament (Constituency Observation 3 (Lunguzi) 2016). A telling incident also occurs when she begins a meeting in a rural lakeshore village in her constituency, and is thanked by their Village Headman for building them a new school block. In her own response, she thanks the village for their warm welcome, but makes a point of stressing that the school block was built by *government* money, through the CDF and other mechanisms, and is decidedly not a personal gift (and this from an opposition MP and fervent critic of the incumbent government) (Constituency Observation 3 (Lunguzi) 2016). Lunguzi's commitment to the inculcation of Weberian public/private boundaries here is striking – most MPs are keen to emphasise these when it comes to claims on their personal finances, but become notably less worried about them when it comes to claiming credit for constituency developments, where they are generally happy to refer to "my projects" even in relation to CDF-funded infrastructure and the like, as if all such projects were powered by their personal generosity (see Chapter 5). Lunguzi's self-denying behaviour here reflects her strong commitment to the civic education of Malawians in order to effect the "modernisation" of Malawian politics.

A further facet of this aspiration is a desire on the part of MPs to educate constituents about Parliament's work and their own work within it (Constituency Observation 2 (Kadzamira) 2016). As discussed in the thesis Introduction, most MPs acknowledge spending little time discussing their parliamentary work in their constituencies on the grounds that their constituents neither understand nor care. Those who are particularly active parliamentarians such as Lunguzi and Boniface Kadzamira, however, do make a point during their meetings and rallies of acting as messengers for what's going on in Parliament and what they are doing there for the constituency (Kadzamira 2015; Lunguzi 2016). 'It's educational,' says Kadzamira (Constituency Observation 2 (Kadzamira) 2016). Collins Kajawa (Lilongwe Mpenu Nkhoma, 2014-) similarly says that after each session of Parliament, 'I have to do a briefing to my community' in the form of a public meeting to tell them what has transpired. Raphael Mhone (Nkhata Bay Central, 2014-19), a lawyer and diligent scrutiniser of legislation in parliament, does the same and explains his reasoning thus:

> 'So what I am trying to do is also in a way to educate my constituency back home that this is the job you put me here for. And some of them have now started appreciating' (Mhone 2017).

No MP does this because they think it is an easy way to appeal to their constituents. Those who do it anyway, however, do it because they think it is the right thing to do, and because it reflects the way they feel they *ought* to be held accountable by their constituents.

Success?: MPs' perceptions

I am unable to comment on the success or otherwise of these efforts at transforming/re-making the role of MP from what constituents are held typically to expect, but the views of MPs on their efficacy are revealing in themselves. As above in respect of their capacity to reach "compromises" with their constituents, many MPs pointed towards an openness to persuasion and reasoning in respect of handouts on the part of their constituents *en masse*:

> 'People were expecting handouts. But… [I refused, and] sometimes people will come to appreciate that it's not really the handouts that will help. So I took advantage of the [argument] that "for the last 20 years, you have been demanding handouts, and can you tell me whether these handouts have really worked or not??"' (R. C. Banda 2016).[77]

[77] The question designed to be rhetorical, of course. Chimwendo Banda, like every Malawian MP, sees the culture of handouts as clearly having not improved Malawians' lives or delivered meaningful development, and hopes his constituents will find this as obvious as he does.

The difference with the examples above, however, is that the persuasion and reasoning here are very different, relating to the (allegedly) anti-developmental qualities of handouts and an express desire to focus on what an MP should instead be doing for their constituency – rather than being a mere personal plea from the MP for leniency in reference to their personal finances, and a more realistic assessment of their capacity to meet constituents' handout-demands. Justin Majawa (Mangochi South West, 2014-19) insists that his campaign of 'civic campaigning people and letting people know' what an MP is really supposed to do has mostly worked:

> 'not each and every Jim and Jack understands it, but the majority they, you know, wanted to see change, and so it was the young people that I worked with that I coached and trained and I told them what it means to do development. It's not about running the home errands of people!' (Majawa 2016).

These are, of course, simply MPs' subjective assessments of whether their civic education efforts in relation to handouts actually "work" and meet with the approval of constituents. (It may be worth noting, in terms of the electoral fate of some of the role-making MPs I have discussed, that Agnes Nyalonje did not stand again in 2019, while Lunguzi, Kadzamira and Majawa went down to significant or enormous defeats. Richard Chimwendo Banda (Dowa East, 2014-) (quoted above), however, did win re-election comfortably, which suggests that a no-handouts stance at least need not necessarily spell electoral suicide, as so many MPs insist. It is clearly a subject worthy of considerable further research.)

Role-taking vs -making: finding and striking a balance

Most MPs that I observed, interviewed, and encountered clearly employed, in their real-world presentations of role, a judicious mix of role-taking and role-making tactics and elements. None were entirely at either pole – "role-takers," as has been argued, clearly must erect barriers and limitations to constituents' demands if only as a matter of personal survival; even evangelical "role-makers" and arch-denouncers of handouts, on the other hand, acknowledged an occasional 'nod to the giving' (Nyalonje 2016) in order to "show willing," and to gain some credibility and trust amongst constituents in the hope of attracting an audience willing to listen to their anti-handouts message (Lunguzi 2016). Even such crusaders, moreover, acknowledge limits upon their willingness to embrace constant confrontation on the issue, and prize greatly *not* living in their constituencies, for example.

Of the MPs I knew, a large majority clearly leaned towards the "role-taking" end of the spectrum, expressing a more or less resigned and pessimistic attitude about their potential to effect any significant change in the attitudes, expectations and demands of their constituents towards handouts and the role of an MP generally. Alekeni Menyani (quoted above) talks

about how he wrestles to 'balance popularity… and helping people understand also what would be best for them' but he is clear that, in the end, 'in politics… [you] must always keep the people happy and clapping hands for you' and so he dare not challenge his constituents and their demands too much (Menyani 2016).

Given the predominance of such a view, most MPs stressed above all their need to avoid or "run away" from their constituents. They also, however, typically embraced at least some lecturing of their constituents about development, the proper role of an MP, and the wrongness of handouts. One (by no means crusading) MP I observed gathered an entire village together to discuss the status of his efforts to bring a development project to the area. As is standard, he also passed money to the Village Headman to be distributed amongst them, pleading soft-heartedness and generosity, whilst lecturing them sternly that he shouldn't be doing this and that handouts are wrong (Constituency Observation 1 (Katsonga) 2016). Stern lecturing, indeed, appears to be the predominant way that MPs and the wider political class and state address the mass of the Malawian public (as discussed in the next chapter) – and is a standard, comes-natural component of any MP's presentation of role.

Boniface Kadzamira, meanwhile, had abandoned attempts to convince constituents that handouts were anti-developmental, adopting instead a strategy of avoidance alongside reaching "compromise" and pleading for reasonableness. He was, however, a particularly active parliamentarian and insisted upon discussing at length, during any rally/meeting of his constituents, what had been happening in Parliament and what he had been doing there, always attempting to relate this to their own lives and concerns (Constituency Observation 2 (Kadzamira) 2016). Each presentation of role, in short, is particular in its precise combination of role-taking and role-making elements.

One former minister's description of her approach to handouts is, however, a good representation of how most of my participants attempted to strike a balance between role-taking and role-making. She stresses the merits of friendly persuasion over lecturing and finger-wagging. She gives a little to show willing and to gain an audience, all the more so that constituents can hopefully then be reasoned with and persuaded about the inefficacy of handouts, as well as her own limitations:

> 'Now what I do, whenever I am conducting a meeting, I take something very little. As a rural area, most of the people are very poor. I just take small packs of salt… After discussing with them or talking to them, I call the chiefs and give

> them small amount [of money] "for soap," and then the [constituents], I give them packs of salt, so that they shouldn't go and ask salt from their friends.[78]
>
> But in addition to this, we have also some other challenges whereby people expect that whenever they have a problem in their house, the MP should come and solve that problem. Now, as a person who comes from a rural area, you can't just tell them [bluntly], "no, no, no, I shouldn't do this!" You tell them little by little, you take them step by step, you say "yes, I am your Member of Parliament, there is no way I can solve everyone's problems for his house, that's impossible. What if you ask me to construct a well somewhere… [or] a small bridge?" So little by little they are able to understand you, and believe that yeah… when we talk about development in the constituency, we should do something that can benefit the community, not an individual.
>
> But it takes… courage to stand up and tell them. At the moment you tell them for the first time, they will say, "Ah! Then we made a mistake to elect you as a Member of Parliament!" But as you keep on talking to them in a friendly way, they start understanding you… But still the handouts are still there – you can be giving them, but not regularly' (Anon MP9 2016).

With its judicious combination of persuasion regarding the inefficacy of handouts over "developmental" (i.e. collective) goods, and appeals for understanding that no MP can possibly meet all of their constituents' demands; but also the distribution of some handouts to certain key actors such as chiefs, as well as periodically to constituents *en masse* in order to "show willing" – with all of these elements combined, the presentation of role that this MP describes is typical of the majority of the MPs I encountered. They are not on a mission to do politics completely differently nor to radically reform their constituents – but they consider constituents' expectations and demands to be mistaken and the culture of handouts to be wrong. They also, naturally enough, are obliged in any case to try to (de)limit the demands placed upon themselves.

The most striking exception is, as I have argued, a small group of MPs who *are* on such a mission, who express an avowedly "pro-development" (and liberal-modernising) vision of how to do politics properly and of how politics should properly be done – and are determined to give effect to this as much as they possibly can. It is a peculiarly determined MP who stands resolutely in the face of the constant demands and expectations of needy constituents, meeting demands for help and handouts with "civic education." None of these MPs are under any

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[78] Donating money "for soap" is a popular euphemism for giving a small but not insignificant amount of money to someone in exchange for something not always clearly defined (such as political support.) MPs talk frequently about giving chiefs, constituents or others "something for soap"; one is often invited to do likewise, for instance, by policepersons seeking bribes. "Fanta money" serves a similar linguistic purpose.

illusions that their crusade is simple or easy, nor indeed that it does not come weighted with considerable political risk:

> 'I react violently [against giving handouts]… So much so that if I'm not going to come back in 2019, it will be because [of that]' (Nyalonje 2016).

Nyalonje is, however, entirely resigned to this fact:

> 'much as I would like to come back, I don't want to come back for the wrong reasons… If by the time I'm ejected from being MP, I have managed to get at least maybe 20-25% of the people on the ground thinking differently, then I have achieved my goal' (Nyalonje 2016).

(As mentioned above, Nyalonje ultimately did not stand for Parliament in 2019. Having left the PP to join Chilima's emergent UTM in 2018, however, she was appointed Minister of Education in the new MCP-UTM Cabinet in July 2020.) Juliana Lunguzi was similarly somewhat resigned to her eventual defeat in 2019:

> 'For me, I don't [do handouts], and that limits my chances of coming back in 2019… But I feel I always tell them I work extra hard to help the community – here in Parliament to push things for Dedza East and the council to follow up. If people can't appreciate that, [then] I don't think they will ever appreciate. So I have resigned [myself] to say whether I make it or not, it doesn't matter' (Lunguzi 2016).

Felix Njawala (Blantyre Kabula, 2009-14), meanwhile, knew that he would lose his bid for re-election:

> 'They did not like this agenda of us promoting "no handouts" in the constituency. But it was OK. We said, "fine, lets move on, no change, let's not compromise, let's move on. By the end of the day people will understand. It's a process that will take time but at least we [started] it"' (Njawala 2017).

As for whether he would be interested in standing again in 2019, at the time of our interview he was not yet convinced his former constituents were up to it:

> 'Do I see myself going back? I haven't made a decision yet: I'm still struggling [with it], because I'm trying to weigh whether people are ready. Because my main objective is to, you know, serve people who are ready to change, but I'm saying "*are* they ready to change?" They are coming to me now saying "ok we want you back" so the question I ask them is, "Are you people ready to change? Because… *I* will not change, right? I will not change, my principles will be the same. So if I come it will be the same thing: full of development, no handouts. So are you people ready to change, really??" So, I'm still, you know… still trying to figure it out' (Njawala 2017).

Njawala eventually did stand as UTM candidate in Blantyre Kabula in 2019 but was defeated.

Conclusion

For MPs in Malawi – from their own account at least of their constituents' demands and expectations – it is no exaggeration to say that their parliamentary function is considered marginal at best, and that it is constituency service that is front and centre of their job requirements. This is demand-driven, it comes "from below." As one veteran observer of Malawi's politics wryly remarks, 'in this country, the constituents have not restricted the MPs to law-making!' (Anon Expert 12 2017).

In turn, I have argued, constituency service takes two broad forms. The first, discussed in Chapter 5, is an MP's role as a facilitator of constituency development. Overwhelmingly, this is a role embraced by Malawian MPs: taken by many, indeed, to be their primary function as an MP. This reflects, doubtless, the entirely hegemonic discourse that elevates "development" as the totalising telos of all politics and political activity in Malawi, and indeed so much public activity of any kind. The introduction of the CDF can be seen as an overdue recognition by the state of a reality about the role of an MP in Malawi that was already firmly established in and by the wider society.

The second role "imposed" – certainly at least upheld – by society upon MPs bears a familial resemblance to the first but is ultimately best considered distinct from it, not least because MPs unfailingly do so. This is the expectation and demand for private goods from MPs, referred to universally as "handouts," and MPs' responses to this expectation are considerably more varied and complex. I have argued that MPs respond to handout-demands on a "presentation of role" spectrum and that all in practice fall somewhere between two poles. Most lean towards a "role-taking" position that accepts handout-demands as inevitable and prioritises tactics to avoid facing too many and having to refuse too often, alongside appeals to the reasonableness of, and striking "compromises" with, constituents. Some, however, err more towards a strident and principled anti-handouts stance, culminating in a very few MPs who reject handout demands (almost) entirely, and whose central mission in politics is to (civic) educate constituents about how politics should properly be done, and how they as constituents should properly relate to and behave towards politicians.

Inevitably such a change-agenda as this involves MPs in a very (pro-)active, explicit, and self-conscious presentation of role. *All* MPs, however, make a presentation of role as part of their home styles. They have no choice: none can be wholly passive in the face of the demands their constituents place upon them. To a significant degree, therefore, *all* MPs' home styles are *not* solely about legitimising themselves in the eyes of constituents, as Fenno (2003) would have it.

Because containing a presentation of role in addition to a presentation of self, MPs' home styles also include a concern to (civic-) educate constituents in order to (re-)shape – and in some cases to fundamentally transform – the very terrain upon which their legitimation does and does not take place.

Finally, it is important to emphasise again that the general attitude amongst *all* MPs is that constituents are "making a mistake" about the proper role of an MP, and that the "culture of handouts" is morally wrong. This reflects a still-wider sentiment amongst MPs that the Malawian public has somehow misunderstood and corrupted democracy as a whole. It is to elaborate upon and further explore such understandings that I turn in the concluding chapter.

Chapter 7: "A Gun in the Hands of a Kid": Democracy, Discipline and Demo-pessimism

'When liberty becomes license, dictatorship is near'

(Will Durant)

"That's democracy for you!"

Leaving Parliament by car in the company of an MP at an early stage of my fieldwork, my companion noticed a young man urinating against a tree just a little back from the roadside outside the parliamentary estate. He pointed the young man out, shook his head, and said to me wearily, 'that's democracy for you!' (Fieldnotes, 2015).

I puzzled, frankly, over this statement. All the more so as similar sentiments were being expressed to me with striking regularity – wherein many behaviours of which my politician participants and interviewees faintly or more seriously disapproved on broadly socially conservative grounds (from corruption to homosexuality, from teenage pregnancy to male dreadlocks, and so on) were laid at the door of "democracy." What is more, I noticed that such arguments were not simply a private matter between my interviewees and myself in the relative privacy of our interviews. They were also widely reflected in public debate and discourse – in the way that the state and its politicians would often talk about, and to, its own citizens. Ministers and MPs are regularly to be found – in Parliament, in newspapers, in official government communications, and in face-to-face interactions with the public – railing against the inadequacies of their audience, that is their constituents and/or Malawians in general: their "ignorance" of political processes and/or the law (Daily Times 2018; Nyasa Times 2013c), their "harmful" cultural practices (Pondani 2016), their "tribalism," their lack of patriotism, their lack of an adequate work ethic, and so on.

Indeed, much of the most visible work of the Malawian state (and, for that matter, of its donor partners) involves entreaties and disciplining "nudges" of very little subtlety aimed at "improving," "civilising," and "bringing discipline to" the behaviour of the Malawian people (Malawi24 2018). During the Peter Mutharika administration, for instance, billboards across the country were adorned with a giant image of the President commanding Malawians to remember "PATRIOTISM. INTEGRITY. HARDWORK.", or to "Dump Waste in Designated Facilities!"; others entreated the populace, "Let's Beautify Malawi!", by embracing First Lady Gertrude Mutharika's initiative to build sculptures and flowerbeds into prominent Lilongwe

roundabouts (Fieldnotes, 2015-17). Malawians' bodily functions, moreover, worry not only my MP friend above but are also officially under government and donor microscopes by means of the long-running "Open Defecation Free Malawi" campaign – much of which in practice constitutes not so much the investment in infrastructure that would allow people to make more hygienic choices in the interest of public health, but rather the lecturing of rural Malawians about their undisciplined and uncivilised toilet habits, and the faintly comic fanfare that surrounds periodic announcements that another tranche of local chiefs have been incentivised to declare their areas as "Open Defecation Free Zones" (see Taulo et al. 2018; Msiska 2019).

Kamuzu may have gone, in short, and electoral competition may have arrived, but the Malawian state continues to talk to its people with a conspicuous lack of respect, and disdain for what it perceives to be their everyday habits and "mindsets." Presidents, ministers, and MPs alike – and the most conscientious and public-spirited of them most of all – see it as a fundamental part of their job and role in society to educate and discipline the population into better habits and mindsets. It is 'the state as boss,' as Henry Chingaipe (2017) puts it – and it has long outlived the tetchy and finger-wagging dictator.

MPs are by no means exceptions in this respect. Few whom I joined in their constituencies did not cajole, lecture, and periodically harangue groups of their own constituents on many subjects – not least (as discussed in Chapter 6) on the "proper" role and responsibilities of an MP themselves. A great many MPs are proud to say that no theme informs their constituency work and projects (see Chapter 5) so much as the bringing of "discipline." Constituency projects that provide things to people always, it seems, must be accompanied by disciplinary/self-reliance measures – lest constituents think they are getting something for nothing and sink into indolence and dependency:

> 'It's the whole idea of, you know, making them understand that [although they] look to government for help, but I believe people… [should] still attain skills, based on learning and other things, and that there should be a way of unlocking their potential… for self-reliance. So… I go there to motivate them to actually understand that they have a natural potential, which can help them to do something [themselves] so that they are contributing to the country' (Kajawa 2016).

A standard technique, mentioned in Chapter 6, is to provide funding for a project, but require local people to make the bricks, or build the school block, or construct the clinic etc. (Anon MP2 2017; Nyalonje 2016; Kabwila 2016). Similar ideas, and conditionalities, surround the Dr Jesse Kabwila Football League and trophy in Salima North West (2014-19), mentioned in Chapter 5, which aims to get 'the youth' away 'from alcohol, from… sex' by engaging 'them in helping their communities,' such as 'roofing [the] house of a blind woman' (Kabwila 2016). Disciplining

sexual behaviour, indeed, is a common theme. One former minister runs a scholarship scheme putting teenage girl students through school. The deal is, however, that should one of them become pregnant, the MP will remove funding from the entire cohort (Anon MP3 2017).

As a result of their presentation of role, MPs end up in a starkly Janus-faced position – simultaneously selling themselves to their constituents whilst also constantly disciplining them, talking to them like a finger-wagging "boss" or, at best, like a stern Schatzbergian parent (Schatzberg 1993; 2001). Some are doubtless smoother and more polite than others about doing this, and about managing to combine these two roles – but the fact remains that MPs (and frequently the most conscientious most of all) are frequently in a quasi-hostile stance *vis-à-vis* their constituents, behaving in a domineering and high-handed manner that appears, at least, to be distinctly unendearing.

MPs' reflections on their experiences

These striking features of contemporary Malawian politics, I argue, are the culmination and result of the experiences outlined across this thesis. Throughout, I have sought to provide something of a 'guided grand tour' (Leech 2002, 667) for the reader of MPs' working lives (at least in relation to their constituencies) as they themselves see them. Having first given an account of MPs' motivations in politics – and found them to be a complex mix, but with public- (and above all constituency-) service motivations very much present – the thesis has gone on to explore:

- Their choice of a political party – which MPs see as being largely determined by the ethnoregional loyalties of voters.
- Their experiences of primary election campaigning and contests – which MPs see as largely corrupted by those running the contests, but which nonetheless involve significant spending on handouts in order to win voter support, to transport voters to the primary election venue, to provide food and drink for voters whilst at the venue, and so on.
- Their experiences of general election campaigning and contestation – which likewise feature a significant amount of spending on voters, and a "presentation of self" which heavily involves presenting themselves to constituents as a generous benefactor with access to considerable amounts of money. All consider campaigning to take place overwhelmingly on *voters'* terms. Most resent and/or disapprove of the things they feel they must do in order to win over voters.

Continuing through the thesis, the chapters (5 and 6) explicitly focused on the constituency service of sitting parliamentarians foregrounded the extent to which MPs feel that their role as constituency MPs is very much *imposed* upon them; or, at least, that the public have a very strong and established set of norms and expectations concerning MPs that MPs must either

conform to – and negotiate the inevitable disappointment that follows from not being able to meet everyone's expectations, all of the time – or else emphatically and explicitly set themselves against. MPs do embrace the imposed role of facilitator of development – even if most think, strictly speaking, that it arises from a misunderstanding (wilful or otherwise) on the part of the public. By contrast, MPs differ widely in their responses to handout-demands, with some very explicitly contesting and rejecting those expectations. Regardless of how they respond, however, *all* are clear that those expectations are there, they are real, and they are very, very strong. They come from below, from constituents themselves, and – even if politicians past may have fostered and encouraged those expectations – for MPs now they are simply part of the political reality they must live in and deal with. The resulting combination of avoidance and confrontation is arguably *the* fundamental and defining characteristic of MPs' general attitude and stance towards their constituents. They see the public as persecutors; themselves as their victims.

These, in sum, are MPs' experiences of their constituency work and life. What do they amount to? What lessons can be drawn from them as a whole? For MPs, one fundamental answer to such questions is clear: they amount to nothing less than a condemnation of their constituents' understanding of what democracy is, and of how it is "supposed" to work. They amount, in short, to a greater or lesser conviction on the part of MPs that democracy is simply not working in contemporary Malawi – and because of Malawians themselves. Handout expectations are certainly "Exhibit A" in this respect, but they are merely the most egregious example. MPs' experiences across the board, and as laid out in cumulative chapters of this thesis, have brought them to this view. This concluding chapter thus seeks to step back, with MPs, in order to explore – given those experiences – what conclusions they have reached about how democracy works (or otherwise) in contemporary Malawi.

It is vital to stress, as befits the overall approach of the thesis, that these are not *my* conclusions about Malawian democracy; they are *MPs'* conclusions – or at least my interpretation of those conclusions based on hundreds of hours of conversation with them.[79] The goal in this final chapter is first and foremost to unpack and explore these conclusions in their own terms – to explore and "explain" them in relation to the narratives of work detailed throughout this thesis – as well as offering, at the close, some thoughts on what such indigenous pessimism about the workings of democracy might say and mean for Malawi going forward. The experiences and viewpoints of MPs – not neutral observers, admittedly – suggest that those content to blame the selfishness and malfeasance of politicians for the problems of Malawian politics are simultaneously overly cynical about politicians and their motivations (as I argued in Chapter 2)

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[79] Hay (2011, 167) has usefully defined the work of the interpretivist as 'interpreting interpretations.'

yet naïve overall about Malawi's problems. MPs are, to a greater or lesser extent, emphatic and clear: *we* are not the problem; the problem is the public. We do not have to like such viewpoints to consider them worth exploring – and on their own terms.

On Malawian MPs' political thoughts as political thought

Before beginning this exploration, a few further comments may be required regarding my emphasis and approach when studying the (political) thoughts of Malawian MPs.

There is, no doubt, a vulgar Marxian anti-interpretivism that regards ideas and ideology as self-conscious fronts/figleaves for – or at least entirely derivative of – material interests. This is a pure 'hermeneutics of suspicion' (Ricoeur 2008) when it comes to the study of the ruling class's ideas, which are not at all to be taken seriously on their own terms but rather to be seen as discourses – as techniques of rule, (self-)serving the interests of power. A considerably more sophisticated and post-modern approach does not seek to reduce thought crudely in this way. Approaches emphasising post-/neo-colonial (for instance Mudimbe 2020) and/or neoliberal governmentality dynamics (for instance Hilgers 2012) have theories that to a greater or lesser extent "explain" how elites and many other people think, whilst still allowing that these thoughts are a reflection of sincere, honestly-held mindsets and beliefs on the part of those who hold them – not reducible to, or at least not in a simplistic way, a figleaf for material interest(s).

My concern, however, remains two-fold. The first is that "explaining" human thought is, to put it mildly, a hugely complex endeavour and perhaps ultimately an impossible one. Efforts to do so will always reduce and will always simplify. Secondly, "explaining" thought inevitably tends towards explaining it *away*. It de-centres and abstracts away from the thoughts themselves and the people who think them; it moves us away from taking those thoughts seriously, and on their own terms. It is, arguably, a move that is made in relation to African politicians more than many other subjects, including politicians elsewhere. It can, moreover, be a particularly tempting one when we are ourselves uncomfortable with or disapproving of the content of those thoughts.

I am not, of course, "against" explanation. As an interpretivist, however, I consider explanatory why-questions to be but one type of important analytical question, and second-order behind what-questions. In other words, postcolonialism and neoliberalism, for instance, may have much to say as regards why Malawian MPs think as they do. This is nonetheless no reason to be reductionist about human thought or thinking. Political thought anywhere and at any time is never so simple that it can be reduced in this way – least of all when Malawian MPs' thinking about democracy and how it is (or is not) working in contemporary Malawi is after all reflective

of years if not decades of grounded personal experience of being a politician and of doing democracy at the grassroots. In part, then, I make a plea for the value of knowledge(s) based on or rooted in (at least in part) real-world, practical experience(s); as well as seeking to root "explanation" in narratives rather than in the analysis of "objective" variables (Bevir 2006). For all of these reasons, I argue that MPs' political thought deserves to be taken seriously, on its own terms, *as political thought* – at least for a few moments before we leap to "explain" it (away.)

This chapter concludes the thesis, therefore, by exploring how MPs reflect on the experiences outlined in prior chapters, and how they understand their own personal experiences (or, as many see it, predicament) upon the broader canvas of Malawi's, and indeed Africa's, ongoing experiment with democratic politics. It asks firstly what and how MPs think about "democracy" (at least as that word has come to be understood and experienced in contemporary Malawi.) It finds them strikingly pessimistic and often scathing about democracy's appropriateness for contemporary Malawian society as they see and understand it. It thus asks secondly how what I will call their "demo-pessimism" is constructed, and how it coheres as a system of thought. How can it come logically to be said of a young man relieving himself against a tree that, "that's democracy for you"?

Although the primary material from which I draw is from my interviews, this is because it was in interviews that I was able to fully explore these themes with MPs, rather than because they are not also an aspect of public discourse. On the contrary, little if any of what MPs said to me they were not also willing to say in public – and regularly did so. What is more, not all my informants think identically on these matters – some are more outspoken on the subject than others, some more pessimistic and despairing than others. Nevertheless, I *did* find these arguments to be basically omnipresent. As a result, this chapter focuses overwhelmingly on commonality rather than variation in order to make an initial sketch of the contours of Malawian MPs' demo-pessimism; this is not, however, to suggest that all MPs think identically, nor than an exploration of differences of emphasis and detail might not yield interesting results. Indeed, the arguments I am outlining in this chapter are very far from being confined to politicians alone – I encountered them directly and regularly in interviews and observations with/of civil society actors, journalists, academics, civil servants, and the wider, generally urban, professional middle-classes amongst whom I formed friendships and spent much of my leisure time. The political thinking of MPs, then, is a particularly crucial and important site of such thought, but they are in another sense also merely a "case study."

Such views are, after all, primarily informed not least by 25+ years of dismal economic performance punctuated by periodic acute crises, shortages, and mass hunger.[80] In the minds of politicians (and many more Malawians besides), "democracy" is profoundly associated with this economic decline, as well as with all manner of inter-connected, allegedly rampant ills of contemporary society from crime and corruption to public urination – and above all with a lack (and loss) of "*discipline*." Democracy is associated with freedom, yes, but it is bad freedom, *freedom as licence*, because it is not seen to be accompanied by the discipline required to live responsibly under conditions of liberty. In a society lacking this innate discipline (at least to sufficient degree), discipline must instead be imposed, from above, by strong leadership. In post-Kamuzu Malawi, however, MPs argue that Malawians have mostly had neither, and so the polity and society have lacked direction, and have descended, to a significant degree, into disorder, dysfunction and "indiscipline."

Strands of Demo-Pessimism

Development vs democracy

There are various prominent strands of MPs' thinking about democracy in contemporary Malawi and how and why it is (not) working. Although the major focus – of MPs and of this chapter – concerns a sociocultural argument around discipline, it should also be noted that I did encounter a less cultural, primarily political-economic argument sceptical of democracy that also had significant traction amongst some MPs.

These were essentially economic-developmentalist arguments against democracy, strongly reminiscent of arguments in favour of the one-party state made by academics and intellectual-practitioners such as Julius Nyerere in the 1950s and 1960s (see for example Coleman and Rosberg 1964; see also Finer 1967; Young 1993; Young 2002). The argument, in brief, is that Malawi's absolute priority is economic development, and that there is no time for the self-indulgent luxury of democracy – for the luxury of politics, in fact. "You can't eat democracy," or "you can't eat freedoms," as many were fond of saying in response to the Muluzi years of political liberalisation with economic collapse (Muula and Chanika 2004). The problem of poverty and development is seen to be a *technical*, apolitical one – experts and specialists know what needs to be done, the question is how to get their prescriptions and reforms implemented. And here is where strong, autocratic leadership comes in – be that because the leader himself is a development expert (as Bingu wa Mutharika was, for instance) or because

[80] The period approximately 2004-09 is a marked exception – and a very telling one (see below.)

they are committed to implementing the advice and prescriptions they have been given by such experts. Either way, however, "democracy" can only get in the way, placing barriers and delays in the way of 'do[ing] what's needed' (Malunga 2016) if not thwarting such efforts altogether. Many MPs, especially but not exclusively those in the then-government, bemoaned a tendency to 'just criticise, unnecessary criticism' on the part of the opposition – who are concerned to oppose and thwart government not because it is the right thing to do, but because it is their job in this system to do the government down and to seek to replace them (Chiumia 2016; Kaliati 2016). Alexander Kusamba Dzonzi (Dowa West, 2014-19), a former Shadow Cabinet Finance Minister, reflects a widespread sentiment:

> 'Actually, unfortunately, I feel that Malawians were lied to. Hugely. The proponents of multiparty democracy I believe now had no clue about what politics is all about, even about what they were talking about. Because since we embraced multiparty, each and every sector of our economy has been going down… Why? Because of multipartyism. Too much democracy. Everything – there must be majority, there must be discussions… Even [when experts agree on what needs to be done] – but no, we need to consult! And time is going on… We do more *politics* than management, economics, or administration – so these other sectors are suffering' (Dzonzi 2016).

Politics and democracy, then, are not merely a waste of valuable time – they are actively destructive of (leader-led/leader-driven) economic development.[81]

Democracy is not to be ruled out some day, when Malawians are "ready." But, as many of my interviewees saw it, Malawi has got the sequencing wrong: democracy must come *after* economic development; there were no "human rights" and very little democracy during the UK's industrial revolution, they reason (Anon MP10 2017). If a road or factory is judged to be required by those who know best, the proper role of politics is simply to facilitate a situation where it *is* built, and as quickly as possible – without worrying about whose feelings might be hurt, or having to consult, or put out to tender, or negotiate, or compromise, or generally divert

[81] This is a sentiment far from unique to MPs. Here is a senior civil society actor who works professionally on safeguarding and improving Malawian democracy: 'Yes we had a one-party state with dictatorial tendencies. But to some extent I think there were certain values that were pursued… I think the leaders of that time they tried as much as possible to advance the common good. We were able at least by the time the Malawi Congress Party was [leaving] office, we were able [to say], even to this day there are certain infrastructural public projects and public amenities that really reflect that these people somehow had that interest of the common public good. But from 1994 to date… one sees a major drive towards sectional or personal benefit from the political process… It's now more competitive, and you have to put in a lot of money if you are to secure a seat… Therefore once you are elected the first thing is "let me recover what I have invested…" [and] representing people's interests, pursuing public interest, [become] secondary. What is first is: *me*!' (Anon Expert, 2016).

any attention or energy whatsoever away from the urgent task of economic development (Anon MP10 2017).

Here, then, are strands of a straightforwardly political-economic argument made in relation to democracy's (un)suitability in contemporary Malawi. For MPs, however, democracy has allegedly done far, far more to damage Malawi's economy – and society – than this. Its primary deleterious effects, it is overwhelmingly held, are *a)* in the unleashing of tendencies rooted in the *culture*, the "mindset(s)" and the cognitive orientations of Malawians themselves, now given free rein through the mechanisms of democracy and in the absence of an authoritarian leadership. Such a regime did at least, it is felt, impose much-needed "*discipline*" upon such tendencies. Furthermore, democracy has also *b)* further exacerbated these tendencies over time, and further eroded discipline at all levels of society. All of which, in sum and in turn, is held to have inflicted huge damage on Malawi's economic performance, and indeed on its wider social, cultural, and political health.

It is this sociocultural argument around discipline that is overwhelmingly prevalent in MPs' assessments of democracy and expressions of demo-pessimism. It in turn has multiple strands and components – and interviewees stressed differing aspects – but there is widespread agreement on the basic contours. I proceed now, for the remainder of this section, with *a)* – that is the perceived characteristics of Malawians that democracy has allegedly unleashed. These are then brought together with the arguments of *b)* in the next section.

Tribalism

The argument that multiparty politics in ethnically divided societies leads naturally to divisive "tribalized" politics, and thus to the entrenchment of damaging, potentially destructive, ethnic divisions is a very long-standing one, and was a key plank in the aforementioned arguments for the one-party state that found such favour as many African countries were gaining their independence. Many Malawian MPs feel that such arguments have essentially been vindicated by the experiences of many African countries following the "third wave" of democratization (for scholarly reflections upon, and (qualified) support for, such points of view see Snyder 2000; Mansfield and Snyder 2007; Young 2002). They emphatically include in this pessimistic assessment the experiences of Malawi itself, albeit MPs are pleased to acknowledge that it is not in the same league as the likes of Rwanda or Kenya in this respect (on Malawi's ethnoregionalised politics and identities see Kaspin 1995; Posner 2004; Vail and White 1989).

For many, including passionate reformist-moderniser Agnes Nyalonje (Mzimba North 2014-19), multiparty politics exacerbates divisions – by permitting and encouraging Malawians to indulge what she sees as their innate ethnic particularisms:

> '[Multiparty politics involves] sort of setting one against the other. And… the parties have a very regional tone and very tribal tone, and so on. So… this parliamentary system in a way works to our negative side as a people because… it allows us to take our regional, tribal whatever, and to… formalise them and say, "it's OK, we are not doing this because we are [being tribal, it's because] we are a party!" But when you look at the party, what is the party [really]?? So it normalises that which should not be normalised' (Nyalonje 2016).

Such arguments are typically rooted, like many others discussed in this chapter, in social evolutionist thinking and modernisation theory: that Malawi and Malawians are not yet "ready" for democracy and require to "modernise" or "mature," on a whole host of economic, political, social, and cultural metrics/fronts before they will be so. As with the economic-developmentalist argument discussed above, the reasoning here is essentially a (long-term) sequencing issue – with a diminution of particularistic ethnic identities and an augmentation of a unifying national identity now also being alleged to be required (and acquired) before democracy can properly function. As former minister Grain Malunga (Chikwawa North, 2009-14) sees it:

> 'in the Western world… you are one ethnic group [within individual countries]. So democracy there works. Here, democracy doesn't really work. If I come from [the] majority ethnic group, I am likely to be in leadership for a long time… It's the way people think… If you are seen to be coming from a minority group… it doesn't matter whether you are talking sense or not… because they will look for one of *them* to lead them. It doesn't matter how stupid that person is *(laughs)*… So it's about ethnicity. These are the complications that we have in Africa!' (Malunga 2016).

The Evil of Ignorance

MPs frequently cite alleged "ignorance" and "lack of understanding" – on the part of the population in general and of their constituents in particular – of the very basics of how politics and government work and/or are supposed to work. 'Ignorance,' says one, 'is a huge issue' (Anon MP1 2017) – a statement and sentiment echoed by any and all of my interviewees, as

well as ceaselessly in government initiatives and statements, in the media, in donor development projects and so on.[82]

One way in which constituents' "ignorance" manifests, for instance, is in the way – as many MPs and others see it – that so many voters will come to believe the wildest of campaign promises, and tend to have entirely unrealistic expectations of what they as MPs can possibly achieve in office. Voters, in short, are far too easy to lie to:

> 'There is a lot of lies that goes on during the campaign. People promise their constituents, "if you elect me, I will do this, that, that…" For instance my [successor]… would tell the electorate, "I have already found money to put lines of electricity in this area, you will have electricity!" Is this something an MP can do??... She promised she was going to buy 3-tonne trucks for each Village Headman – but because people are ignorant, they believed her. Now they have been waiting for their vehicles, they have been waiting for ESCOM to [install] electricity lines – which [are] things [that] cannot be done! So we [politicians] are largely to blame because we say a lot of nonsense during the campaign' (Nawena 2017).

Concomitantly, however, voters are deemed to be far too harsh and unforgiving of an MP who may have worked hard, but who has inevitably failed to deliver the moon:

> 'The democracy we are in, we are at a tender age of democracy, we have not yet matured in democracy… When you are a new Member of Parliament… you promise a number of things, because you don't know what actually happens on the ground. Now when you make those promises… [but] do not do those things, people in the villages… will never believe you [again]. As a result, they lose hope in you, and they leave you [as supporters]… [Moreover] if you do a comparative analysis with our surrounding countries, we are the [lowest] paid Members of Parliament… we get very little. [But] people in the villages expect that you can just be giving out handouts [all the time.].. Sometimes I [scarcely] have a kwacha in my pocket, but when you go home these people would want you to be giving them everything. As a result you have problems' (Namachekecha-Phiri 2017).

MPs, therefore, see high turnover rates and the incumbency disadvantage as (partly) indicative of constituent ignorance – of the alleged gulf between what voters expect of an incumbent and

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[82] Although some, and not least donors of course, often find it preferable to talk euphemistically about the need for "civic education." The work of the highly prominent National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE), however – a quasi-governmental agency funded almost entirely by the European Union – is clearly one of very significant change to the ways in which Malawians think and relate to the political system, in the hope that they might thereby learn to do politics "properly."

what it is realistic for any Malawian MP to actually deliver in five years; alongside a simultaneous inclination to believe the outlandish promises of any challenger.

As these quotes highlight, moreover, such argumentation is not necessarily about letting MPs off the hook morally speaking. On the contrary, the problem for democracy is ultimately seen to be that constituents are gullible and poorly informed, thereby allowing nefarious politicians to lie to them and *to be believed*. As Alexander Dzonzi says, in Malawi today 'there is too much democracy without knowledge' (Dzonzi 2016).

Parliamentary effects

This alleged lack of awareness or understanding of the very basics of how politics operates is seen to have enormous knock-on effects at the level of MPs' parliamentary behaviour and performance – effects that are in turn seen to contribute greatly to the weakness of Parliament and to what many, MPs included, consider the triviality and unsavoury, juvenile bickering of so many of its proceedings (on which see also Dulani and van Donge 2005).

Joyce Azizi Banda (Lilongwe Mpenu Nkhoma, 2009-14) speaks for many MPs when she says that constituents 'listen, but don't follow' Parliament (J. A. Banda 2017). It is on this basis, many acknowledged, that in plenary they prioritise empty namechecking of chiefs and other notables – and the use of so-called ministerial "question time" solely for futile, performative pleading for named fantasy projects in their constituencies – over more substantive parliamentary duties (Parliamentary Observations, 2015-17). When a chief or an area is name-checked, it is unanimously agreed, this will reach local ears (not least those of said chief) and word-of-mouth will spread that our MP was mentioning us in Parliament. When it comes to their core parliamentary functions of legislating and oversight, however, there is near-equal unanimity amongst MPs that constituents neither understand nor care:

> 'As a parliamentarian, I have got many roles… [But] that does not concern much my people in my constituency – because for them they don't know this job, because of education levels. They don't know. When I'm here [in Parliament]… they say, "why is it that she is just moving around? She always goes to Lilongwe!"' (B. Mwale 2016).

> 'Well, they don't know about policies. To them, they don't understand what a policy is… They don't understand that a Member of Parliament is there to make laws. They don't understand that. What they know is: a Member of Parliament is there for *them (laughs).* So, unless the mindset of people is changed in the rural areas, the Member of Parliament… in Malawi will never be free, because of the level of poverty in the rural areas' (Chinthu-Phiri 2016).

(It is important to note here how this MP slips between blaming "mindsets" and blaming poverty levels. While the former is most frequently deployed in talking of these matters, MPs (especially when pressed) are far from being simplistically culturalist – mindsets *are* understood to have come from somewhere, and to be rooted ultimately in the material fact of acute poverty. There is nevertheless seen now to be a hegemonic mindset or culture that *has* developed over an extended period, that *is* the proximate cause of most of these problems, and that *does* have its own, independent effects on constituents' behaviour. Regarding "culture," "mindsets" and the like, MPs are neither cultural essentialists nor reductionist materialists, but are sensible enough to fall between the two extremes.)

In terms of what this means for MPs when in Parliament, one former minister says simply that, during his ten years in Parliament, 'we had some illiterates, and [some] highly qualified surgeons – but all of [them ended] up just making noise' (A. Shaba 2017). The brightest and best parliamentarians, in other words – who may otherwise have something of real value to contribute to parliamentary debate and political life through their skills and expertise – instead end up wasted by the system and the need to appeal to voters. Political – and above all electoral – incentives do not encourage diligent parliamentary work but rather namechecking, name-calling of the other side (much appreciated, allegedly, by one's own party whips and leadership) and the obsequious begging of ministers. It's a show, a theatre:

> 'When you look at the parliamentary session, the TV is watching you, the radio is… listening to you…. So in parliament you make sure that people in your constituency should know that you are there in Parliament representing them. Sometimes you stand there and confront others just to make sure that… [your constituents] know that you are doing your job…. But when we come out [of the chamber, that is when] we deal with real issues, and we have more time [in committee, private meetings etc.]' (Mpaweni 2016).
>
> 'I think the chamber is more or less like an arena, a stadium – in which our supporters want to see us, you know, put up a grand fight. But when we go to committees, you find that people sober up and become technical (Menyani 2016).

Although any observation of the Malawian Parliament in plenary will, broadly speaking, confirm a very great deal of 'just making noise' (A. Shaba 2017), this assessment is in reality a little too bleak. There are, in fact, a small but vocal minority of MPs who do take their parliamentary duties seriously, often bringing their professional skills and background to bear upon law-making and holding government to account. In the 2014-19 Parliament, for example, opposition MPs Juliana Lunguzi (Dedza East, 2014-19) and Agnes Nyalonje regularly made policy speeches of considerable substance, especially in their specialist areas of health and education respectively. Prominent lawyer-turned-MP Raphael Mhone (Nkhata Bay Central, 2014-19),

meanwhile, specialised in line-by-line scrutiny of legislation – often putting down myriad personal amendments and working with ministers behind the scenes to improve legislation in relation to everything from bad grammar to substantive policy amendments. All such MPs acknowledged, however, that they had little if any political or electoral incentive to pursue such work – with the possible minor exception of impressing their (opposition) party whips and leadership, though none set much store even by that – and that they did this out of a sense of personal interest and duty (Lunguzi 2016; Mhone 2017; Nyalonje 2016). As for government MPs, meanwhile, they were clear that their job was to say as little as possible except in passionate and angry defence of government in response to opposition criticism or attacks. Aside from this – and of course the ritual namechecking of areas/chiefs and the begging of ministers for constituency resources – very few backbench government MPs otherwise spoke in plenary at all, or took any parliamentary initiative of any kind (Parliamentary Observations, 2015-17).

Short-termism and the preference for handouts

A very frequent further accusation levelled at and about constituents is that they are "short-termist" in their thinking – one of the key effects of which is that they prioritise cash handouts over development (projects), and forget or disregard so much of what MPs achieve even at the level of constituency-service:

> 'So they won't see that oh I've actually built ten schools – they are not gonna see that. Like I built clinics in all the areas where women had to walk long distances, people were giving birth in maize fields because they couldn't get to the nearest hospital… They never saw that. They never saw that they don't have to walk 37 kilometres [any longer] to the nearest hospital…. So people don't see these things. They still want you just to come and have a rally and give them 100 kwacha – that's what they see. That's what I've noticed: that no matter how much you try, you can even turn [the constituency] into New York!... That's what I have seen' (Pillane 2017).

In accounting for this, MPs typically echoed Maslow's (1943) theory of a hierarchy of human needs: acknowledging that the long-term psychological and cultural effects of acute material poverty and subsistence precarity would indeed most likely be a prevailing culture and "mindset" that anxiously prioritised short-term, bankable gains and relief over longer-term "investment" and a promise of deferred gratification – not least when such promises come from those who have so often broken their promises and commitments to Malawians in the past. Once again, then, MPs are not blind to the (material) circumstances in which culture and mindsets have been formed; but nevertheless bemoan and despair of the fact that what it means for them – and for the health of Malawian politics – in the here and now is that

constituents (allegedly) disregard or "forget" so much of what they do and what they achieve (even at the level of constituency service not to mention in Parliament or for the country as a whole) and reward instead those politicians who simply distribute cash handouts rather than focusing on building longer-term, sustainable development projects.[83]

Malawians vote badly

With all of these alleged elements taken together – constituents' tribalism, their comprehensive unawareness of political processes and of how politics operates, their short-term thinking and prioritisation of handouts over development – MPs conclude, in sum, that Malawians' criteria for assessing candidates for office are faulty, irrational and otherwise not as they should be. Malawians are therefore seen, by their own politicians, to be highly prone to elect the "wrong" people (albeit generally not in their own case!) and/or (*very* often in their own case) to oblige good, public-spirited candidates to do many "bad" things of which they disapprove in order to have any hope of either initially gaining, or of subsequently retaining, elected office.

One of the biggest of these bad things, for example, is the distribution of handouts both as candidate and as incumbent MP. As argued in a previous chapter, this is now seen by most MPs and candidates to be a fundamental part of the job – one foisted upon them by voter-constituents. In this respect, the institution of Member of Parliament in democratic Malawi is one that has bedded down locally and come to be understood and accepted by the population; but one which has also become deeply imbued with informal norms and expectations in the course of its coming into contact with material and sociocultural realities on the ground (echoing Lindberg 2010). Critically, however – and as Lindberg does not explore – this is a "hybridisation" which the vast majority of Malawian MPs emphatically regard as a *mistake* on the part of the people:

> 'That's not our role! It's not our duty to give people money, materials. That's not part of our job. But I think these people do not know what's the meaning of "MP." What is an MP supposed to do?... They should know – who is an MP?; what is she supposed to do?... [Otherwise] I think MPs in Malawi will be in trouble forever' (Adams 2016).

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[83] Meanwhile a local civil society actor concurs: 'People are very poor, so even if [their MP] performs badly now, [if] close to the elections they get maybe MWK200 (US$0.25) [from them] or maybe they get a packet of sugar, they forget everything and maybe elect the same person. That's the problem we have, people forget' (Anon Expert 2 2017). Citing a local MP whom she does not rate highly but who comfortably won re-election: 'I'm sure he had money for campaigning. Yeah so he could give handouts, so the people just get carried away by that' (Anon Expert 2 2017).

The proper job and role of an MP, in fact, is merely one of many "mistakes" that Malawian voters have been able, by virtue of the new democratic dispensation, to force into the political system that deviate profoundly from how many MPs consider politics as a whole, and their own job/role in particular, are "supposed" to be and to work. Taken all together, many MPs have sincerely come to despair of these "mistakes" and misunderstandings, and to regard them less as "hybridisations" than as indictments of Malawi's democratic experiment itself. As Agnes Nyalonje (2016) puts it, Malawians want 'Mercedes-Benz politics' but keep voting 'for Volkswagen Beetles.' Kusamba Dzonzi (2016), meanwhile, is typically direct:

> 'So what I see as democracy having done to us is that it has put inferior, popular people to rule us… If a fool is popular somewhere, what do you expect?'

As a result, Malawians may complain about the state of their politics, or the substandard behaviour of their politicians, but in the view of many MPs and some others, 'at the moment, Malawians have no right to be outraged' (Nyalonje 2016). Because, quite simply – and however inadvertently – Malawians ultimately vote for the wrong people, and they vote for bad politics.

> 'Malawians want you to be rich to a be a President. They want you to give them handouts… So we can't have a good leader!' (L. Banda 2017).

Democracy elevates bad leaders, and makes even the good ones a bit worse.

In some cases, the gulf between MPs and their constituents in terms of what is and is not seen to be good politics is clearly yawning and fully out in the open – particularly in the case of those MPs standing firm on a no-compromise, anti-handouts platform. One such MP, indeed, who lost re-election in 2014, insisted to me that many of his (urban Blantyre) constituents insisted to his face that they wanted to vote for him because of all of his excellent development projects, but that they simply could not bring themselves to do so because he refused on principle to distribute cash handouts – and that just as that was a red-line on principle for him, so too it was for them from the opposite direction (Njawala, 2017). Doubtless, in this particular instance, this is a somewhat simplified and self-serving perspective on what happened, voiced by an ex-MP deeply disappointed to lose his seat. But these arguments and characterisations of constituents extend far beyond sour grapes: they were voiced to me by long-lasting and incumbent politicians as well as short-lived former ones, and they found support far beyond the political class itself into the media, civil society and so on.

They are also, as I have suggested above, very much reflected in the way that the Malawian government, its ministers, and its donor partners conceive of, talk to, and "see" the Malawian people (see Scott 1998 on *Seeing Like a State*). Nowhere is this more in evidence than in the unremitting insistence, across vast swathes of policy and activity, upon the urgent need for "civic education" of the population. Indeed, the tendency of some MPs to simply cry for farther

and deeper civic education in response to any problem, as if it were some sort of cure-all for all of Malawi's political ills and of their frustrations, often appeared intellectually convenient to the point of ludicrousness.[84] Many of these same MPs clearly know and understand this deep down: they acknowledge that their constituents' ways of relating to politicians and the political system, for instance, make sense to (and for) *them*, given their horizons and conditions of life (Chinthu-Phiri 2016; Kawale 2016).

Nevertheless, and regardless of whether they sympathise with the "mistake" or not, whether they view it with benign condescension or seething frustration, it remains the case that the vast majority of MPs to a very considerable extent believe that their constituents and the wider public do not see, do not understand, and/or at very least lack the self-discipline to act in, their own long-term interests and those of the country – especially when this involves a sacrifice of immediate (and no doubt genuinely pressing) short-term fulfilment. Indeed, the public's immediate preferences and behaviours in relation to politics and who or what they do/don't support are to a large extent held to be working actively *against* those long-term interests.

Handouts are clearly enormously tempting in the here-and-now, for instance, but are unsustainable, corrupting of politics, and fostering of dependency. Voting for one's co-ethnics and "home" party may make perfect intuitive sense right now, especially when everyone else seems to be doing it – but that is a collective action problem, and ethnic voting ultimately fosters division and does not facilitate the election of those best-qualified to run government well and on behalf of the entire nation. And so on. The public cannot, in short, be trusted to know and/or to act in accordance with their own long-term best interests and those of the country as a whole. It is, in essence, an extreme "trusteeship" position in terms of representational roles (see Chapter 6). Democracy gives Malawians too much of what they want, and not enough of what they need.

Demo-pessimism and Discipline

How exactly, however, can this be so? How do such arguments work and make sense to MPs? The crucial element operating at the root of these claims is "*discipline*." Specifically, two obviously interconnected but nonetheless distinct claims regarding discipline and its

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[84] The things for which I encountered "civic education" being cited as a solution ranged from doing democracy "properly," evaluating candidates "properly" etc. all the way to everyday and structural sexism, to the rights of children and sexual minorities, to the propensity for localised election-related violence, and to the importance of fiscal discipline. Such responses do make a certain sense, of course, if one really does believe (or at least is seeking to suggest for purposes of convenience) that whole value systems and ways of life are merely an unfortunate misunderstanding.

relationship to democracy are at work within these arguments and are central to their "making sense locally."

Discipline and Democracy 1 – What the culture does to democracy

The first of these is an account of why Malawians' political culture is unsuitable or at very least sub-optimal for democracy to adequately function: given the perceived characteristics of Malawian voters outlined in the previous section, democracy is seen instead to become distorted, and actively destructive of the national interest. There is a lack of countervailing personal or collective (self-)discipline within the society itself to at least restrain these characteristics. Democracy cannot, in short, "work properly."

Given these characteristics, moreover, and the lack of endogenous restraint upon them, Malawians require discipline to be imposed from "outside" – by above all the political leadership (see conclusion). The problem, however, is that democracy – whilst not of course rendering impossible a stern, disciplinarian leadership – does nevertheless tend in the opposite direction: the people are in charge – and politicians, keen to be popular and be re-elected, will tend towards prioritising giving voters what they want rather than what they need. A case in point is the way in which, as emphasised across several previous chapters, Malawians have succeeded in imposing their own ("wrong") understanding of what an MP should be onto the institution itself.

As a result, therefore, a public whose characteristics are such that it is unsuited for democracy are nonetheless given (far too much) free rein, and the result tends towards irresponsibility, disorder, and dysfunction. Freedom without sufficient discipline or restraint unleashes potentially destructive behaviours, passions, and energies, at the same time as leaving a people and polity fundamentally lacking in any productive sense of direction or unified common purpose:

> 'We had this "democracy" [under Kamuzu]. There were elections; only the president was [for] life – the Members of Parliament, [and] the councillors, were elected every five years. What the current democracy has done is to wrongly or falsefully (*sic*) tell people that you are "empowered," when they have no clue about what that means. And they believe, "now we have the power we can [just] put somebody in office and dismiss him" – without even knowing why you should put that person in office, why you should get him or her out, why do you put that one [in office], and not that one? They are simply excited! So they have actually put a lot of people in office… people without a clue on how to run this country! [And] the price we are paying is security breakdown, education levels down, agriculture – we can't feed ourselves as a people, that's the most shameful thing… [So] yeah, they are very free – but they do that without proper

> information… *It's a gun in the hand of a kid*: he doesn't know that thing kills, and when he plays [with] it carelessly, he is going to kill people. So we have been given something [(democracy)] that is good – but not in our hands, not at this age. That's why there is all this mess' (Dzonzi 2016).

In a similar vein, the late former Vice President Justin Malewezi argues that Chichewa has no word for, nor concept of, "rights" – and thus, as rights-talk really took off in the 1990s, the concept became literally and figuratively translated into the vernacular as *ufulu*: freedom(s) (Malewezi 2016). It is exactly the collapsing of the concepts of democracy and rights into *ufulu* – and the alleged failure of Malawians to adequately understand and recognise the difference between (political) freedom, on the one hand, and licence, on the other – that MPs cite as being at the root of so many of the myriad failings and shortcomings of multiparty democracy in contemporary Malawi. As they see it, there is a lack of innate *discipline* in the culture itself that would delineate a clear distinction between rights and freedoms, and which would thereby allow democratic rights to be exercised responsibly. "Democracy," it is argued, has come to be understood as licence. And Malawian MPs are united in the view that this is a very serious problem, damaging Malawi and the best interests of Malawians.

As the long quote from Dzonzi immediately above makes clear, MPs (and others) making such arguments are in many respects talking about their constituents but *not* about themselves. Class, therefore, is unquestionably an important divide in the formation of these arguments and viewpoints: constituents – and especially rural Malawians – are undoubtedly being "othered" in myriad ways by those largely outside of their own communities and everyday experiences such as the political elite.

Kamuzu Banda, indeed, was entirely unabashed and explicit in his view that Malawians, subsistence peasants as they were, required strong, authoritarian leadership – and that multiparty democracy was alien to 'our African way of life,' to quote the title of his philosophical book (Young and Banda 1946). This view of Malawians being unready to rule themselves did not, of course, extend to himself as an educated, "civilised" Malawian physician. On the contrary, in fact: Malawians ought to be ruled by one of their own (Kamuzu was, to this extent at least, an African nationalist) – one who was simultaneously *of* the society, and yet also in myriad ways a complete outsider to it (see below) and who thereby *was* qualified to rule in a way that the vast majority of the population were not.

To see these simply as othering discourses – as about MPs talking about (most) other Malawians, but never themselves – is not wholly accurate, however. It is worth noting, for instance, that even the outspoken Hon Dzonzi – never afraid of expressing his views about the public in blunt and forceful terms –nevertheless says of democracy that, '*we* have been given

something that is good – but not in *our* hands, not at this [*our*] age' (Dzonzi 2016, my emphasis). He, and many other interviewees, were scathing in their assessment of the qualities and capacities of their fellow parliamentarians: 'most of them do not understand even the role of Parliament' (Kawale 2016). It was not uncommon in my interviews for reference to be made to a wider Malawian (indeed African) culture which unites the politician with their constituents – albeit the rural voter will almost inevitably be seen to be far "deeper" in that culture than they themselves are (Kadzamira 2015). As George Nnensa (Balaka South, 2009-14) suggests, for instance, regarding MPs' periodically aggressive and childish behaviour in Parliament:

> 'Maybe we [MPs] go beyond our freedom as well – we abuse the freedom, we [just] say what we want in Parliament. But you should understand that we were boxed in [under Kamuzu] – now we've found new freedom, we are bound to go over the limits [in using] that freedom' (Nnensa 2017).

Even he and his fellow MPs, in other words, might – like their constituents – get somewhat drunk on freedom and lack the discipline to adequately rein themselves in.

While elites looking at the masses with disdain is, then, clearly a major element of this story, it is not the entirety. Elites do at times acknowledge a "Malawian culture" and include themselves amongst those who are in some sense "unready" for democracy, not least in their frequently disdainful and dismissive remarks about Parliament and their parliamentary colleagues. As Agnes Nyalonje says above about democracy in relation to tribalism, 'it works to *our* negative side as a people' (Nyalonje 2016, my emphasis).

Discipline and Democracy 2 – What democracy does to the culture

The second broad claim being made within these arguments is closely related but distinct – and in many ways more prevalent. It is that not only is democracy allegedly failing to work properly *because* of long-standing mindsets/culture; but that democracy has, moreover, actively *changed* mindsets/culture – and fostered serious further "indiscipline" in its own right. Over time, in other words, democracy and the ever-deeper entrenchment of a new discursive governance regime that stresses "freedom," "rights," and the like, have worsened the indiscipline of Malawians and furthered the debasement and corruption of their political culture. Lacking in sufficient self- and collective discipline for democracy in the first place, democracy has served to erode discipline further. Of particular concern to MPs in this respect is the emergence and ever-deeper entrenchment of what they see as a rampant, out-of-control "dependency culture." Of all the manifestations of burgeoning indiscipline, this erosion of self-

reliance is the most cited, and widely seen to be the most serious, the most shameful and the most damaging and destructive.[85]

As MPs describe it, they experience this phenomenon particularly in terms of constituents looking to them to do things for them – things that, as far as the MP is concerned, it is very far from being an MP's job to do or to provide. This is the "culture of handouts" discussed in the previous chapter, and as argued tales of MP woe in this respect abounded in my interviews – of literally ceaseless requests for school fees, for transport costs, for funeral expenses and so on. Any time spent out and about in their constituency, as I observed many times at first hand, indeed becomes a running of the gauntlet for an MP – and it is little wonder that they tend to move even the shortest distances in the relative protection of a car, or even to wait for nightfall before driving through a township in the hope that constituents will not see them (Fieldnotes, 2016). Some MPs even talked of being made ill, or of colleagues being driven to an early grave, by the sheer, endless pressure from their constituents (Pillane 2017; Anon MP2 2017).

My MP interviewees were of the view that these job-specific experiences of theirs were indicative of the far wider issue of the setting in of a dependency culture across society since 1993, wherein citizens expect things to be handed to them and done for them rather than having the self-discipline and moral fibre to do them for themselves. What is more, those citizens now have huge power to continually indulge and entrench this mindset – by virtue of being voters, who can choose politicians and policies that pander to their indiscipline and dependency, and to sack those who/which do not. Handouts are seen by MPs and many others as emblematic of – as the ultimate expression of – dependency.[86]

There is, moreover, remarkable consensus amongst MPs that chief culprit here and indulger-in-chief was the country's first post-Kamuzu president, Bakili Muluzi:

> 'What went on in Dr. Banda's time is… they collected [money], more or less under duress. Because if Dr. Banda was making an appearance in an area, then the party functionaries would be all-out to solicit contributions, which they would say is a "token of appreciation" for the visit – it's culturally embedded [here that this is how one treats a guest]… [Muluzi noticed] that these monies were being extracted from these people under duress, [and that] therefore he must undo that. And to undo that meant to *give* handouts instead' (Anon Expert 12 2017).

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[85] This argument is especially prevalent across the entire Malawian public square, and amongst my interviewees was at least as likely to be voiced by a civil society actor or public intellectual as it was by an MP.

[86] Malawian MPs would not approve of the latest trends in Development thinking suggesting "just give money to the poor"!

As Muluzi presented it, *this* was "democracy" – the people were now in charge, and *they* received the gifts. Muluzi 'unfortunately… introduced the culture of handouts' (A. Sangala 2016). 'At a rally, he [couldn't] leave the rally without giving out money to the people [there]' (Mpaweni 2016). But now 'people still have that mentality… it is becoming very difficult' (Mpaweni 2016). 'You might as well say "no money, no votes!"' (A. Sangala 2016).

Democracy in Malawi, it seems to be the view, would likely have led this way anyway sooner or later, but Muluzi was a crucial enabler and encourager of this trend – and of the erosion of self-reliance and self-discipline, pride, and dignity amongst the people. Democracy was new to Malawians, says one former MP and minister – and Muluzi 'taught us democracy badly' (Anon MP10 2017). Now, says another former MP and minister, Theresa Mwale (Mchinji West, 2009-14):

> '[There is] this expectation where people say, "we gave you a vote therefore all my problems, you have got to solve." And there's no way an MP can solve problems of every household… There is no money! But this is what they want. They want the MP to stay at home so that they can go to [your] house whenever they want, find the MP, and shoulder the MP with all the problems: "my child has been chased from school, I have no school fees", MP must give; "I need [a] uniform," the MP must give; "I have a patient in the hospital," MP must give… "I have a funeral", MP must buy a coffin; "oh I have a patient in the hospital and has just died" – [send] an ambulance or hire a vehicle. That's what they want their MP to do' (T. Mwale 2017).

Muluzi is far from solely to blame, however. All governments and all politicians (including many now expressing these views) are considered to have been and to continue to be complicit. Some, indeed, are inclined even to see government programmes such as the Fertiliser Input Subsidy Programme (FISP, which supplies subsidised inputs to subsistence farmers) as both symptomatic of, and contributing towards, the same problem of dependency and the erosion of self-discipline and self-reliance:

> 'We have messed up our democratic systems because we are now doing the responsibility of families, you see? Looking after the sick, you know, [making] the funeral arrangements, and even feeding families. You know, this country, during one-party rule, families were able to feed themselves at least 9 months of the year – now it's only 3 to 4 months. People have become lazy… Any small food shortage, government takes the responsibility to mobilize food and feed these guys. And that also has become campaign material right away, from day one… Because we have made people lazy. Very few people are hardworking… It has made our people very lazy. Very, very lazy' (Malunga 2016).

At the constituency level so too at the national level – democracy has embedded and entrenched a dependency culture amongst the population, and obliged politicians at all levels to feed this dependency further and further in order to win votes.[87]

Theresa Mwale (2017) therefore bemoans the fact that various projects she set up with constituents as part of her constituency-service work proved unsustainable because, as she sees it, of poverty and dependency syndrome. As she tells it, more in sadness than in anger, those she sought to support simply did not invest the resources she provided into the designated projects, but instead spent all the money at once, sometimes on other things entirely, and repeatedly expected the MP to step in and pick up the pieces (T. Mwale 2017). Another MP speaks for many when she says that 'constituents treat MPs very unfairly' (Anon MP, 2017).

Meanwhile one former MP who was forced into decades of exile by Kamuzu Banda for his pro-democracy political activities nevertheless bemoans the loss, amongst other things, of Kamuzu's policy of annual Youth Week, during which "youth" were obliged to work on compulsory community-service projects in their communities. One of the problems that has set in since the coming of "multiparty," he insists, is that 'people are not willing to give their labour free of charge' for the greater good (Anon MP10 2017). That a figure of this politician's background can be as critical of Malawian democracy as he is – and even in direct comparison with the preceding dictatorship he so despised and fought against – is truly an indication of how widespread these feelings are. These were sentiments expressed to me across the political spectrum and to all intents and purposes ubiquitous; they were very far from being confined to the MCP old guard, for instance, from whom they might arguably have been expected.

As mentioned, the alleged entrenchment of a dependency culture is merely the most prominent manifestation of the rash of indiscipline that has purportedly emerged and snowballed since the arrival of democracy. Other major aspects oft cited by my interviewees include:

- *Economic languishing* – an extension of the political economy developmentalist argument discussed above: that argument is seen to relate to discipline/culture concerns because Malawi is now seen to fundamentally lack discipline at the very top (see conclusion). As a result, there is seen to have been (with one important exception

[87] A local civil society actor agrees that 'handouts are making people lazy' (Anon Expert 5 2017). Another says that there is now 'a bad mentality,' with people behaving 'like a baby that just needs to be fed' (Anon Expert 6 2017).

– see below) persistent rudderlessness and apathy in relation to driving economic development where there ought to have been vision, drive and discipline.

- *Petty and major corruption* – closely connected with the first, corruption is seen to be a rot that has infested every inch of society and state from the lowest level bureaucrat or police officer, all the way to the very top of the political and bureaucratic elite (as so clearly laid bare in the revelations and ongoing fallout from the Cashgate scandal (see Zimmerman 2015)). This is also seen to ultimately result from a fundamental lack of discipline any longer imposed from the top: 'a fish rots from the head,' as a number of MPs are fond of saying (Fieldnotes, 2015-17).
- *Crime and law-abidingness more generally* – wherein "freedom" has most literally been translated as the licence to do what one wants even to the extent of committing crime; and where adequate, punitive law enforcement is seen to be fatally hobbled both by concerns about "human rights" as well as, above all, its own dearth of internal discipline and rampant corruption.
- *General social mores and values* – wherein "democracy" has come to mean the freedom for youth, for instance, to simply do as they wish and to be as selfish as they please, to disrespect their parents, to smoke *chamba* (cannabis) and to drink alcohol to excess, to have sex education in the classroom and sex itself (presumably) outside of it, even to "practice" homosexuality and push for gay rights. All of these ill-disciplined acts are seen, in their turn, to be responsible for a variety of perceived social ills such as the decline of public-spiritedness, the erosion of "traditional" and "family" values, for an epidemic of teenage pregnancy and, of course, for far too many young men unashamedly peeing in the street.[88]
- *Corrosion of national feeling and patriotic loyalty* – wherein Malawians, now free to vote and to form political parties as they please, have "predictably" fractured into ethnoregional partisanship and "tribalized" politics, thereby rupturing national-spiritedness and cohesiveness, and risking reducing the Malawian state and polity to little more than a central cake from which various sub-national (and actually socially meaningful) groups compete for as large a slice for themselves as they can (see Ekeh 1975 on the civic vs "primordial" publics.) Whilst even the most pessimistic of my participants did not think Malawi was quite at this point yet, many were sincerely of the

[88] There is undoubtedly a large element here (although it is far from as simple as this) of an older generation disapproving of (even demonising?) "the youth." This is hardly an unfamiliar theme in gerontocratic African politics generally, nor in Malawian politics in particular: Kamuzu Banda made much of returning to Malawi in 1958 after 42 years of absence in order to take over, as an older man, from "my boys" who had actually established and run the independence movement thus far; he was also known for patronising his fellow nationalist leaders such as Nkrumah, Kaunda and Nyerere – younger and vastly more radical than he – in a similar fashion.

view that democracy risked the very project of Malawian nationalism itself, and even the continuance of Malawi as a coherent national-state.

- This latter, indeed, feeds finally into a less precise but palpable sense amongst my interviewees of the all-round *corrosion of public and civic life* itself: the decline of financial and moral rectitude, the degeneration of standards, of public-spiritedness, of a unifying national project, and of hope and optimism for a better tomorrow for their country; and thus also of an attendant debasement of politics itself, and the miserable retreat of so many of their fellow politicians into – in allegedly large part – the grubby pursuit merely of their own private or factional interests (Fieldnotes, 2015-17).

And so, as my MP friend said, 'that's democracy for you!' (Fieldnotes, 2015). Certainly, it is a sorry and expansive litany indeed – but while I am distilling myriad strands of argument here, and do not wish to suggest that any conversation about democracy with a Malawian MP always has this degree of internal coherence and cumulative force, these are nonetheless no exaggeration of the views I encountered. Some MPs can indeed, when on a roll, become decidedly gothic on the subject.

It is clear, finally, from much of the above that, on this point particularly, MPs' are very far from simply othering their constituents and exempting themselves and the wider political class from the corrupting influence of democracy. On the contrary, many of the conversations I had with MPs on the corrosive powers of "multiparty" ended in bitter expressions of loathing not for the public nor, for the most part, for themselves as an individual, but rather for the wider political class. It is this group who are typically held to be ultimately responsible for this situation – as a result of abdicating (too many of) their educative, leadership responsibilities and settling instead for comparatively easy pandering to voters in order to enjoy the private perks and privileges of political office and achieve precisely nothing for the public good. As President Chakwera said in his inaugural address, since the end of the Kamuzu era Malawi politics has been derailed by the 'greed and corruption' primarily of the political and bureaucratic class (Chakwera 2020). All are debased, but politicians most of all as they (ought to?) know better.

And so for all that this thesis has sought to mount some measure of defence of Malawian politicians, the fact remains that few are harsher about Malawian politicians than Malawian politicians themselves – especially when it comes to stepping back and reflecting on ultimate responsibility for the allegedly sorry state of Malawi's politics, economy, and society today:

> 'We have lied to our people that we would empower them. Yes, they believed that they would stop fearing us, but I can tell you that today our people are more disillusioned than ever, and we still trample them… We [politicians] don't even

> care whether we deliver or we don't, and that's the most pathetic [thing] – because now that's the moral, internal moral decay, for us politicians. Slowly we are dying. Whether you are performing or you are not performing, that's ok! That was not the case [under Kamuzu Banda]' (Dzonzi 2016).

Parameters

Prior to concluding with some consideration of where all of this leaves MPs in terms of their proposed solutions to how democracy is (not) working in Malawi, it is worth returning to the parameters of this discussion, and to how it may or may not apply beyond Malawian MPs. The first thing to note is that the national preoccupation with "discipline" – and the felt need amongst public figures to extol its virtues loudly and constantly to the masses – extends back at least as far as the Kamuzu era, when the stern *Ngwazi* spent much of his time loudly admonishing and lecturing Malawians about the need for discipline.

This is very far from being, moreover, a politician-only phenomenon. As mentioned in the chapter introduction and several footnotes throughout the text, not only do these arguments and viewpoints – in broad outline, and notwithstanding significant differences of emphasis – appear to be essentially ubiquitous amongst MPs, but they also found scarcely less support amongst the wider professional classes whom I interviewed and amongst whom I spent much of my time: be they civil society actors, journalists, intellectuals or, ironically enough, pro-democracy activists.[89] 'The voters are really a problem, if I can put it like that' says one senior civil society actor (Anon Expert 14 2016).

What is more, nor are such viewpoints and arguments kept private and quiet, the whispered snobberies of Lilongwe elites heard only at exclusive dinner parties or in interviews with a passing PhD student. On the contrary, they are a prominent feature of public discourse, commonplaces in the pronouncements of governments; in the public statements and debates of politicians; in the justifications surrounding the many "civic education" projects supported by government, donors, and civil society alike; in journalistic/intellectual commentary; as well as in much citizen/popular political talk at least as I encountered it. They have long been a prominent feature of how the state – but not only the state – talks to the Malawian people.[90]

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[89] This latter group typically squared the apparent contradiction by stressing, even more ferociously than most, the need for "civic education" of the population. Indeed, since the coming of electoral politics, the so-called "pro-democracy" contingent of Malawian civil society has been mostly concerned with civic education – to equip Malawians, now that they have it, to actually do democracy properly.

[90] And it is always worth noting that, although Malawian MPs may be accused of unusually bracing frankness or bluntness in their characterisation(s) of Malawians and their aptitude for democracy, many Northern and international donor actors and organisations (and perhaps even supportive academics) in the "development"

The extent to which such concerns and understandings have been absorbed and taken up by the wider population is far beyond my scope here but is obviously a subject extremely worthy of further research. Recent work by the anthropologist Daniel Wroe (2020) on "rememberings" of the Kamuzu era in the rural Central Region do suggest, however, that a large proportion of the public may also have absorbed or accepted much of these arguments, not least to explain the myriad woes and disappointments of post-1994 life. Wroe's participants cite a rash of indiscipline specifically amongst the post-Kamuzu *political* class, but also apportion no small amount of self-blame. 'Kamuzu told us we would trample each other,' says one villager regarding Malawi's suitability for multiparty democracy, with Wroe (2020, 260) suggesting that Kamuzu's unending tendency to noisily blame people's hardships on the people themselves has been very much absorbed into popular understandings that question their own capacity for full democratic citizenship.

Moving away from internal (domestic) parameters to consider the possible external parameters of this discussion (in other words the extent to which it might have application beyond Malawi's borders), it must be said that for a Malawianist it can be hard to escape the shadow of Kamuzu in this matter. Even amongst the conservative African nationalists, no other leader leaned on his arch-disciplinarian credentials to such an extent, to such a degree, and for such an extended period of time. "Discipline" was itself one of the sacred "four pillars" of the Banda regime, the other three being "Loyalty," "Obedience," and "Unity" – at least two and a half of which essentially also mean "Discipline." MCP MPs in particular are still likely to cite the four pillars with approval in any discussion of the contemporary dearth of discipline, and they remain the official guiding principles of the Malawi Congress Party. Looking from within Malawi itself, in sum, it can be hard not to see the contemporary fixation on discipline as a legacy of the Kamuzu years, and thus as very particular to Malawi. Many MPs and others amongst my interviewees themselves explicitly drew such links; and certainly it might be suggested that the Kamuzu legacy could account for the huge scale of the concern in Malawi, the sheer prominence it affords in public discourse, and the striking bluntness with which it is often expressed.

Look beyond Malawi to politics across Africa, however, and it is quickly evident that these themes/issues are very far from Malawi-specific, and clearly speak to political concerns that stretch across much of the continent, and no doubt beyond. "Discipline" has been, and remains, a political and cultural buzzword in many countries: it has been an explicit theme in a number of authoritarian leaderships, such as those of John Magafuli of Tanzania and Paul

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arena are clearly also concerned about Malawians' capacity to do democracy properly. How else is one to understand the vast numbers of "civic education" campaigns on all manner of issues to which the Malawian public are regularly subjected by coalitions of government, "domestic" civil society, and (international) donors, but invariably funded by the latter?

Kagame of Rwanda, to name but two (see for instance Paget 2020). It is not new, or post-third wave, as a concern either – the military regime of Major-General Muhammadu Buhari in Nigeria ran a mass mobilisation War Against Indiscipline campaign in 1984-5 (see Agbaje and Adisa 1988). If the BBC's *Africa Today* podcast is any guide, "discipline" comes up a lot and, as in Malawi, is very far from being solely a politicians' concern. Asked to describe what his late friend, musician Joseph Shabalala of Ladysmith Black Mambazo, was like 'as a person,' one contributor has one word in mind: 'Discipline! If you had to use just one word: discipline! Joseph Shabalala was *disciplined*!' (Africa Today, 11 Feb 2020).

On a deeper level, moreover, the concern with discipline clearly speaks to some of the biggest themes and structural features of African politics since at least independence. Two in particular stand out. The first is that, for all that I have stressed that these matters are not as simple as MPs merely "othering" their constituents and exempting themselves as a contributing factor in their own demo-pessimism, precisely such "snobbery" is nevertheless very present, and extremely conspicuous. It is certainly not the whole story, but it *is* a significant part of it. And this is (or at least was) a long-standing theme in the study of African politics: that political, bureaucratic, and intellectual elites – "urbanised" and "Westernised" as they are – have often looked somewhat aghast at the lives, beliefs, and practices of their fellow countrymen and -women, the vast majority of whom (especially in rural or peri-urban areas) live lives so vastly different from their own.

This was a particularly prominent theme within (and within the analysis of) the nationalist movements of the mid-20th century, and in arguments political and intellectual concerning the establishment of one-party states and the need for centralised, authoritarian, development-at-all-costs leadership.[91] No less true of the political and societal elite today than it was 60 or 70 years ago, such a huge gulf between the masses and their leaders does mean that mutual understanding and communication can become difficult, and the potential for "othering" is enormous on both sides. What is more, when education levels, standards of living, even whole ways of life and means of economic existence, are a significant predictor of political/ideological divides – and especially divides about the way the very basics of politics should be organised

[91] Some leaders and movements of the time were able to be more polite (euphemistic?) about such matters than others. A socialist ideology or at least vocabulary, an official philosophical commitment to the equality of man, a "radical" image and uncompromising African nationalist credentials in the face of South African apartheid – all of these went some way to pitching state-sponsored snobbery and condescension (and indeed aggressive, authoritarian "modernisation" plans) as progressive projects of humanistic "liberation" (Samora Machel of neighbouring Mozambique perhaps provides a particularly good example.) Arch-conservative Kamuzu Banda, however, had none of these things to (consciously or otherwise) hide behind. He was instead entirely explicit, unabashed, and forthright in his view that Malawians required strong, authoritarian leadership (specifically from him, as it happens) – and that multiparty democracy was an entirely unsuitable system at least as this stage of their "development."

and operate – the temptation is all the more pronounced for MPs and others to write off the Malawian public as simply ignorant, stupid or plain wrong, and requiring of (re-/"civic") education – rather than having any kind of valid point of view or understanding worthy of consideration and respect.[92]

The second grand theme in African politics to which the concern with discipline most obviously speaks, and of which the first is in many respects a component, is perhaps the grandest of them all: the ceaseless, continent-wide, preeminent concern of African states and politicians with political *order*, and of how to establish and maintain it (or at least a certain vision of it) in the often-unpropitious conditions in which they find themselves. This is, literally, perhaps the oldest theme in the book(s) in terms of African politics (Aristide Zolberg's path-breaking classic on the West African party states is entitled *Creating Political Order* (1966)) but it arguably also remains the preeminent concern of most African states. It is certainly the abiding preoccupation of Malawian MPs, who are faced with exercising public power and a leadership role within, firstly, a weak state in terms of infrastructural and coercive capacity; and, secondly, within a society in which ways of life and thinking amongst their constituents do not "fit" well with the functioning of a modern state. On the contrary, in fact: these cultures appear in many cases to actively thwart the formation of the modes of living and thinking (or 'subjectivities,' in the jargon) that are conducive to the formation and survival of a modern-bureaucratic, legal-rational order. Now, however, politicians find that this preeminent "problem" of political order still very much persists, but has now (somehow) to be managed not in a system of centralised authoritarian control but in a new, "democratic" environment in which Malawians are citizens, with elections and choices and human rights – and the means to see their own choices and preferences translate into who is in political leadership, and what it is that those leaders do when they get there.[93]

Conclusion: Bringing Discipline Back In?

What, then, do MPs think is to be done? What conclusions do they reach regarding how to square the circle of, on the one hand, a democratic system that puts the public in charge and, on the other, a weak state that struggles to project authority over a society fundamentally

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[92] This has, ironically, strong echoes of the bias I have suggested above towards "explaining" (away) the political thoughts of African MPs themselves.

[93] Atieno-Odhiambo wrote insightfully about an "ideology of order" in Kenya's politics, although he meant something quite different from that which I have laid out: the Kenyan/KANU state's justifying ideology for autocracy. He saw this, if not necessarily as a mere figleaf, as at least a very "public-facing" ideology employed in self-serving and cynical ways by the powerful to justify their behaviour. Whilst that is unquestionably one way to understand and analyse the ideas that I have explored in this chapter, I have advocated for a very different understanding of these ideas as political thought.

lacking in – and indeed now seen to be deteriorating in terms of – sufficient "discipline"? We have seen, after all, how MPs are near-unanimous in their huge dissatisfaction with the political status quo, and with how democracy has served and is serving Malawians – both at the constituency level, in terms of their own experiences and role as an MP, but above all on the national scale.

The first thing to say, however, is that – for all the scepticism and frustration and despair amongst MPs about democracy and its effects that I have explored and detailed throughout this chapter – the vast majority of MPs are clearly and explicitly *not* endorsing an abolition of the multiparty system and a return to one-party dictatorship, or indeed dictatorship of any kind.[94] Perhaps one or two of my interviewees came close to such a position, but this remains an extreme view, and scarcely a socially acceptable one in polite society. MPs and all my other interviewees clearly value and support a regime of civil and political rights, with free speech and free and fair elections. They may be (very) "demopessimistic," but this is decidedly *not* the same as being actively, consciously "demo-hostile," and/or in favour of the sweeping away of multiparty politics entirely and its replacement with a dictatorship in the Kamuzu mould. It is after all "indiscipline" that they despise, not democracy *per se*. According to former DPP Minister of Health Peter Kumpalume (Blantyre West, 2014-19):

> 'I do like discipline. I think that people need, if you are going to make progress, you need discipline, you need order… In our stupidity "vote for change" [in 1993] we wanted to change everything – including discipline. We wanted to change *everything*. So the emphasis was on rights, and never responsibility – but democracy, democracy without responsibility is just doom… Under one-party rule there were a lot of rights that were being violated but there was also a lot of discipline because there was punishment if you misbehave. And so we wanted to change, and we wanted to change *everything*, and we didn't care what change [would] do as long as there was change. And so particularly in the civil service there has been a lot of indiscipline – rules and regulations do not mean much because there isn't any punishment at the end of it all' (Kumpalume 2017).

Kamuzu and his regime, however, *are* huge and fundamental reference points, for MPs and for the country at large. Order and discipline may be major concerns evident in political contexts far beyond Malawi's borders, but within those borders the *Ngwazi* – and "rememberings" of 30 years under him – inevitably inform discussions and understandings of the present political system and its failings, not least perhaps in the top-down, leader-centric understandings of how the problem might be corrected. And, in a context of considerable, and perhaps ever-growing, dissatisfaction with the status quo, a great deal of nostalgia for the

[94] 'That is too extreme,' says one MP for whom this seems rather mild, given that Kamuzu Banda forced he and his family into decades of exile for his pro-democracy activities (Anon MP10 2017).

Kamuzu era is unquestionably present – in the political class and amongst my other interviewees, but also in the wider population, as Wroe (2020) clearly documents. The new President Chakwera spoke in his inaugural address of having 'one of the blessings of God that a young Malawian today does not have – the blessing of growing up in a well-governed Malawi' (Chakwera 2020). Asked about this at a recent (July 2021) Chatham House conference, he replied:

> 'Yes I did mention the fact that I was blessed to grow up in a context of Dr. Banda's – our founding father's – first regime. Now sometimes this is what happens: when you go to one extreme – and the extreme at that time was the human rights record that wasn't right – [but] to correct that, we went to the other extreme where even the good policies of Dr. Banda were thrown out. Like they say – "throwing the baby out with the bathwater."… *That's* the things we need to learn from the past – not the dictatorship that would put burdens on people and remove their freedoms… But to say – what still can be done in terms of *discipline*? Sometimes we say, "oh, we would want to be like Singapore, we would want to like, in Africa, like Rwanda" – but nobody wants to pay that price! It cannot be [that people say] "I want this!" and yet you just want to stay lazy… We need to have… discipline' (Chakwera 2021).

As the President makes clear, however, this is nostalgia not for dictatorship but for "discipline." People at all levels of Malawian society, it appears, prioritise the *"re-establishment" of discipline* – and indeed its reestablishment across *all* levels of Malawian society, from the cabinet and Parliament all the way down to the humblest villager. (Patience Mususa (2014) found similar widespread concern and nostalgia for Kaunda at the grassroots in her ethnography of the Zambian Copperbelt: '*There Used To Be Order*.') MPs, as we have seen, attempt to do their part by self-consciously integrating "discipline" into their constituency projects and activities. Many, indeed, are quite evangelical on the subject.[95] All, however, saw this ultimately as tinkering: the real reestablishment of discipline in Malawi must start at the top, with presidential leadership:

> 'People should develop a sense of self-reliance. That can only be achieved if the leadership at the top advances that kind of agenda' (Kunkuyu 2017).

[95] It is telling that a number of MPs both from the governing DPP and the opposition MCP cited as one of the most important reasons they joined their respective parties that *their* party is "the party of discipline" (Kumpalume 2017; R. C. Banda 2016). Both parties also claim this mantle in their public statements and propaganda..

Fundamentally lacking sufficient innate or self-generating discipline within the society itself, national discipline can only be restored by being imposed by an (enlightened) autocratic strongman at the national level.[96]

This strongman would need to be one who is simultaneously *of* the society but in vital ways also "outside" it: able (himself or via experts) to diagnose what needs to change, able ideally to explain this to (or "lead") the people, but above all able and willing to ruthlessly bring discipline upon the population such that they cooperate with, or at least do not get in the way of, his vision and project.[97] That project is, after all, ultimately for the public's own good, and for the good of the country, even if they cannot see so. Absent this "trickling down" of discipline, however, indiscipline and disorder trickle down instead – 'a fish rots from the head' (Anon MP, 2016). It is in this context that even his harshest critics – many with painful personal reasons to despise the dictator – could be remarkably generous about the Kamuzu era. 'At least there was discipline' (Anon MP10 2017).

For my interviewees, however, the leaderships whom they most saw as an actual model or template for Malawi in the 21st century were less Kamuzu Banda and more the likes of the late John Magafuli in neighbouring Tanzania and, above all, the semi-mythic figure of Paul Kagame in Rwanda – not overt dictators who would abolish multiparty politics and all semblance of political rights, in other words, but illiberal, elected authoritarians and arch-disciplinarians who, to put it at its mildest, are more than prepared to sacrifice democratic freedoms in favour of allegedly more pressing matters such as discipline, order, direction, efficiency – and of course, above all, the economic development that is believed in turn to result. "Development," after all, remains the hegemonic political and social concern in Malawi, and the ultimate valence issue. The scarcely less hegemonic belief that discipline will bring/promote development (the "disciplinary dividend," as it were) is absolutely core to its appeal. Kagame is seen to be the ultimate proof of the efficacy of this model in the way he is seen to drive development from the

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[96] This view also puts MPs' belief in "civic education" in the shade, and suggests that their proclaimed faith in the capacity of some NICE sensitisation workshops to facilitate meaningful bottom-up change in the ways people think and live their lives may be somewhat skin deep.

[97] Kamuzu Banda was himself a perfect embodiment of this liminal position. He was around 60 years old by the time he returned to Malawi in 1958, and had lived the vast majority of his adult life outside of the country in Europe and the United States. Upon his return, he required an interpreter to translate from English into his own mother tongue (Chichewa) and refused to speak to Malawians in the vernacular thereafter. In matters of language, clothing, and morals he embraced, and imposed upon Malawi, not merely 'Westernity' (Asante 2009) but the tastes and aesthetics of a late-Victorian English gentleman – and saw it as the role for which he was thereby uniquely qualified to bring discipline to Malawians so that they might survive and thrive in the absence of colonial tutelage. Such was his distance from Malawian society that rumours circulated widely – and remain – that he was not in fact Malawian at all, but rather an African American named Richard Armstrong (Englund 1996, 107).

top and from the centre with a clear direction and vision – ruthlessly pursuing development, and pursuing it ruthlessly if need be (Fieldnotes, 2015-17).

Indeed, and doubtless crucial to how much these arguments are in play in contemporary Malawi, Malawians and their MPs do not even have to look beyond their own borders – or outwith their direct experience – to find something of a model to be emulated. Former President Bingu wa Mutharika (2004-2012) became notorious outside of Malawi for his increasingly erratic and dictatorial behaviour during his second term, especially his violent and bloody suppression of protests in mid-2011, which left a number of protestors dead at the hands of police; as well as, in the same year, his summary expulsion of the British High Commissioner following a leaked diplomatic cable suggesting that the President was increasingly autocratic and sensitive to criticism (on this crisis period see Cammack 2012).

Malawians, however, have decidedly not forgotten Mutharika's *first* term, 2004-9 ("Bingu One" in local parlance), early in which the new president broke with his predecessor Muluzi in favour of an uncompromisingly vigorous anti-corruption drive, and proceeded to ostentatiously clean up and drive efficiency in politics and the civil service by establishing himself as the stern disciplinarian-in-chief, berating poorly performing ministers on live television and turning up unannounced to Capital Hill ministries and other government buildings to sack anyone he found slacking.[98] Above all else – and, crucially, as a direct consequence of such disciplinarianism as far as most people are concerned – he presided over a 4-5 year period of unprecedented economic growth (an average of 7% annual GDP growth between 2004 and 2009, well above the sub-Saharan average (Vandemoortele and Bird 2011)) and popular pro-poor economic policies such as the FISP. Mutharika was rewarded in 2009 with an unprecedented electoral victory, winning a majority in all three regions (even the diehard MCP Centre) such that Malawi's long-standing ethnoregional voting patterns were temporarily, and unprecedentedly, overcome (Ferree and Horowitz 2010). While there is widespread acceptance that success went to his head, and that things deteriorated markedly from the onset of Bingu Two, Malawians *remember* Bingu One (Katsonga 2015). Even after the events of 2011-2, his DPP party continued to thrive and Peter Mutharika comfortably won the presidency in 2014 promising to emulate his late brother. Bingu remains core to DPP branding and identity.

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[98] There are strong echoes, in Mutharika's presentation of himself and legitimacy-claims, both of Paget's (2021, 121) notion of 'elitist plebianism' (wherein Mutharika pitched himself as President in alliance with "the common people" against a middle stratum of bureaucrats and business) as well as Bickerton and Accetti's (2018, 133) concept of "techno-populism," which mixes '"anti-system", "anti-establishment" and "populist" elements with a seemingly irreconcilable "technocratic" discourse that shuns explicit ideological confrontation, insisting instead on the "competent" resolution of practical problems' – such as, in Mutharika's case, "development."

> 'DPP brought order… I remember in 2005-6… people were afraid to receive bribes because the President was strong against this kind of malpractice. That's discipline, you know: people ought to know that there are rules and regulations that ought to be followed or there will be consequences. I am not saying that as a party we have been perfect, but certainly we have gone a bit in the right direction to correct the ills that democracy brought to Malawi' (Kumpalume 2017).[99]

In his ostentatious disciplinarianism and unapologetic illiberalism, Mutharika explicitly channelled Kagame (who visited Malawi as a most-honoured guest during Bingu One, and after whom one of Lilongwe's major thoroughfares was then named) as well as, inevitably, Kamuzu Banda. The then-President, in exile throughout the Banda years and a one-time staunch critic, disowned the de-Kamuzuisation campaigns of the Muluzi administration and instead wrapped himself in Banda's disciplinarian mantle – he un-renamed roads, airports and stadia to once again commemorate him; he built a prominent tower, statue and mausoleum in his honour in Lilongwe City Centre; and in his public pronouncements defended and rehabilitated the late dictator (see for example Chirambo 2008; Chirambo 2010; Wroe 2012). Never supportive of an abolition of multiparty politics, the Bingu model was nonetheless clear – driven, autocratic, and disciplinarian strongman leadership at the centre in the Kagame/Kamuzu mould, with the outward form of a democracy but highly precarious on the substance. Illiberal/electoral authoritarianism, in other words – so long as it is periodically subject to majoritarian approval, and does not become (too) self-serving or needlessly abusive (as it did, in the views of many, in Bingu Two).

In terms of MPs specifically, moreover, what is striking is the extent to which so many in the political class now openly speak with high approval of Bingu One. This is true not just, as one would expect, of long-time DPP loyalists (whose party was founded by Mutharika in 2005) but also of those in other parties. One MCP MP was ardent in his praise and acknowledged that the late president had inspired him to get into politics:

> 'He had a duty… he changed the economic landscape! That guy changed this country from a hunger-stricken country to abundance' (Dzonzi 2016).

It is true even of those, once close to Bingu, who became estranged from the president and whose political careers were summarily ended as a result (Nawena 2017). Even those who

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[99] To the objection that Mutharika's 2009 election victory and enduring popularity might suggest that Malawians *are* in fact capable of recognising and rewarding "good" leadership of which MPs approve, MPs typically drew a distinction between the public's capacity to recognise this retrospectively (which they acknowledged), and a tendency to resist and complain about such leadership (and, without considerable determination on its part, to potentially knock it off-course) in its earlier phases, before its benefits and rewards have arrived. 'They see… but only *after*' (Anon MP, 2016).

remained critical, moreover, tended to acknowledge his achievements and his status as Malawi's finest post-Kamuzu leader: '[voters] saw *integrity* – like during Kamuzu, when politics wasn't about money, it was *integrity*' (Lowe 2017). Most lauded the discipline and vision they felt had been re-established in public administration, in politics, and in the nation as a whole during his tenure – discipline and vision unanimously agreed to have been sorely absent ever since his sudden death in office in April 2012, as subsequent economic decline and the enormous "Cashgate" corruption scandal have come perfectly to symbolise and to (allegedly) demonstrate.

In sum, Malawian MPs – and, it appears, many Malawian non-MPs too – are highly ambivalent about democracy. They do not wish for its wholesale eradication, but their direct experiences of being a politician at the grassroots has not – as it is often seen to do in the likes of the US and UK – given them very much of a folksy appreciation for the merits of popular sovereignty, nor for the humble wisdom of the ordinary voter. On the contrary, it has spurred sentiments such as this one, which is entirely representative:

> '[We need] a massive cultural change. I think the mistake that happened is, when we had Kamuzu in one-party system, he had things set in a certain way. Malawians didn't beg, Malawians fended for themselves. As much as, yes, he was… [we can] talk about how horrible it was, but when you are actually looking at the grassroots – Malawians didn't beg, Malawians had enough food, we didn't have so much hunger and everything. But then when the new regime came, the Bakili Muluzi era, people started begging because they were getting the handouts. Kamuzu never gave the handouts. You know, [Muluzi] started giving handouts and now changed the culture of the people so much' (Pillane 2017).

What is more, on this matter at least MPs appear somewhat representative of the wider Malawian population – intense self-criticism, demo-pessimism, and the felt need for discipline and disciplining are fundamental components of political thought far from unique to the political class. If Tim Kelsall (2014, 3) has reviewed the literature on the vexed question of whether authoritarian or democratic regimes are more conducive to development, and has found the evidence ultimately 'inconclusive,' then Malawian MPs are generally wracked with far fewer doubts. For all that Africa's actual historic experience of authoritarian rule has been developmentally disastrous (perhaps accounting for MPs' still strong and unambiguous support for elections and the opportunities they provide to remove bad leaders), it is nonetheless China, Singapore, Kagame's Rwanda, Magafuli's Tanzania, and of course Bingu's Malawi itself, that appear to be uppermost as models in the minds of MPs – i.e. autocratic, strongman, disciplinarian regimes self-consciously prioritising development over democracy and human rights.

Certainly, this is a subject worthy of further and deeper research – in Malawi and perhaps beyond. But it does obviously raise profound questions about the condition of Malawian democracy – and its longer-term prospects. The extent to which such impulses translate into real-world politics is far from simple and far from certain, but it does at least appear, other things being equal, that Malawi may be fertile ground for another populist authoritarian leadership to be elected through the ballot box in Africa. And unfortunately, what we have seen from elected authoritarians in Malawi before (during Bingu Two), as well as elsewhere, is that given the opportunity such leaders have a marked tendency to exhibit ever-more authoritarianism once in power such that democracy of *any* kind is put in existential jeopardy – and this entirely regardless, incidentally, of whether their supporters and cheerleaders actually wish(ed) to see democratic politics dismantled entirely, as Malawian MPs insist they do not.

For a great many, however, democracy is such a failed experiment that perhaps almost anything would be an improvement, regardless of its attendant excesses. One former cabinet minister, deeply reluctant to give up on democracy entirely, captures a very widespread sentiment when he nevertheless opines that what Malawi needs is a 'one-term technocrat,' immune to democratic pressures and liberated from any need or concern to be popular, in order to 'reset' everything and to 'do what's needed' (Malunga 2016). Another former MP expresses a similar sentiment when he talks about Malawi needing a critical mass of 'about 20 mad MPs' and perhaps '5 mad cabinet ministers' – politicians, in other words, who will defiantly refuse to respond to any of the incentives established by the democratic system, and will instead defy constituents, whips and their own self-interest alike to do the right thing (Nawena 2017). Then, and only then, 'this country will change!' (Nawena 2017).[100] This urge to wipe the slate clean, to somehow suspend politics and start afresh, ran very deep through many of my interviews – and is not, I would suggest, an impulse likely to be healthy for liberal democratic politics. Another MP – principled, thoughtful, and highly critical of Kamuzu – is nonetheless likewise dismayed by what she sees democracy as having done to her rural and impoverished constituents. It has not helped them, she says – on the contrary 'people [now] don't have ownership of the country… they don't have direction' (Anon MP4 2017). Talking in 2017, at least, she is envious of Tanzania under Magafuli – and it's fine if he is 'a dictator,' she says. 'We need direction, and if we can have *that* kind of dictator, then great!' 'We are not yet ready for democracy' (Anon MP4 2017).

[100] A local civil society actor similarly advocates 'a sort of "part-time" dictator' to provide 'strong leadership' that will impose 'serious and necessary reforms' (Anon Expert 6 2017).

Primary Interviews and Observations

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