

RHODES UNIVERSITY  
LIBRARY

Cl. No. TR 04-75

BRN 617264698

# **Gender Discourse and Malawian Rural Communities**

A study of the meaning the people of Traditional Authority Likoswe of  
Chiradzulo make from human rights and gender messages.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the award of the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS**

of

**RHODES UNIVERSITY**

by

**Levi Zeleza Manda**

Supervisor: Prof. Larry Strelitz

November, 2002

TR

04 - 75

### *Abstract*

Contrary to earlier beliefs and media theories such as the hypodermic needle or magic bullet, the audience of public communication is not a passive homogenous mass that easily succumbs to media influence. The audience is active, that is, it makes an effort to interpret media content. Depending on predisposing cultural, political, religious, or economic factors the audience makes different meanings from media texts. Media messages are not wholly controlled by producers, although the producers have their preferred and expected readings.

Using qualitative research techniques associated with ethnographic and cultural studies (notably focus group discussions), this study sought to explore the meanings rural people in Malawi make out of human rights and gender messages broadcast on radio and through music.

Interpreted against Stuart Hall's (1974b) Encoding and Decoding model, the study concludes that while rural communities understand and appreciate the new socio-political discourse, they take a negotiated stance because they have their own doubts and fears. They fear losing their cultural identity. Additionally, men, in particular, negotiate the messages because they fear losing their social power over land, property and family.

### *Acknowledgements*

Although I am singularly responsible for all weaknesses and errors in this thesis, this study has been the result of collective effort. I am immensely indebted to Dr Linda Maepa, my initial supervisor, and Larry Strelitz for accepting to take over the task. I also wish to thank Traditional Authority Likoswe of Chiradzulu district in Malawi for helping me in recruiting the focus groups; all those men and women who walked from all corners of Likosweland to participate in the discussions; my younger brother, Mark, for his logistical assistance before and during the focus group discussions; my employer, the Malawi Institute of Journalism, for allowing me to leave the campus now and again to conduct field research. Finally, I thank my wife, Alice, my children Talasina, Watipaska and Londiyani for their encouragement and for bearing with my absence from home as I put together this thesis.

I hope it was worth the effort.

*Dedication*

This work is dedicated to my parents, Chinguwa Manda and Anasi Ulandawiza Nyamanda, who taught me that ignorance is the worst form of poverty.

*List of illustrations*

*Page*

Figure 2.1 Table showing the distribution of a typical daily Malawian newspaper	29
Figure 4.1 Table showing the organisations to which questionnaires were sent	67
Figure 4.2 Table showing the electronic media to which questionnaires were sent	68
Figure 5.1 Graph showing the extent to which advocacy organisations use media other than radio, tv and newspapers	83
Figure 5.2 Graph showing factors 'responsible' for resistance to human rights and gender	85
Figure 7.1 Table showing similarities and differences between encoders' preferred messages and rural people's understandings	101

<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Dedication	iii
List of illustrations	iv
Contents	v
<i>Chapter 1: Introduction</i>	1
1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 Background to the study	1
1.2. Development and communication	4
1.2.1 Development	5
1.2.2 Development communication	7
1.3 Cultural studies	9
1.4 Goal of the study	10
1.5 Justification of the study	12
1.6 Definition of key terms	13
1.6.1 Rural area	13
1.6.2 Mass media	13
1.6.3 Media consumption	14
1.6.4 Discourse	14
1.6.5 Communication/cultural codes	15
1.6.6 Gender	15
1.7 Organisation of the study	16
<i>Chapter 2: Overview of Malawian society</i>	17
2.0 Introduction	17
2.1 Herbamas and the public sphere	17
2.1.1 Economic, literacy levels and the public sphere	18
2.1.2 Malawian politics and the public sphere	19
2.1.3 Religion and the public sphere	23

2.1.4	Patriarchy and the public sphere	24
2.1.5	Malawian media and the public sphere	26
2.1.5.1	Constitutional provisions	27
2.1.5.2	The print media	28
2.1.5.3	The electronic media	30
2.1.5.4	Economic factors	30
2.1.5.5	Ownership and control of content	31
2.2	Women's rights: from WID to GAD	34
2.3	Human rights advocacy: the case of Women's Voice	35
2.4	Conclusion	37
 <i>Chapter 3: Theoretical context and literature review</i>		 38
3.0	Introduction	38
3.1	Media power, mass society and the passive audience	38
3.2	Communication research in Africa: localising the dominant paradigm	42
3.3	Uses and gratifications theory: the active audience is born	47
3.4.1	Cultural studies and the active audience	49
3.4.2	Semiology: symbolic polysemy	51
3.5	Encoding and decoding media discourse: Parkin, Hall and the disciples	53
3.6	Conclusion	55
 <i>Chapter 4: Methodology</i>		 57
4.0	Introduction	57
4.1	Research paradigms	57
4.2.1	The Positivist paradigm	57
4.2.2	Characteristics of quantitative research	59
4.2.3	The survey	60
4.2.4	The interpretive paradigm	60
4.2.5	Characteristics of qualitative research	61

4.2.6	Ethnography	63
4.2.7	Triangulation	65
4.3	The research process	66
4.3.1	Administering questionnaires	67
4.3.2	Selecting and translating media texts	69
4.3.3	Piloting	70
4.3.4	Recruiting focus groups	71
4.3.5	Sampling techniques	72
4.3.6	My role as moderator	74
4.4	Data analysis techniques	74
4.5	Conclusion	75

*Chapter 5: Research findings: Campaigners' preferred messages* 77

5.0	Introduction	77
5.1	Media content and policy	77
5.2	Media for advocacy	79
5.2.1	Media power to inform	80
5.2.2	Media power to educate	80
5.2.3	Media power to change behaviour and attitudes	81
5.3	Media as an advocate's ally	82
5.4	Other advocacy methods	82
5.5	Factors likely to lead to people's resistance to human rights messages	84
5.6	Audience acceptance of human rights messages	85
5.7	Campaigners' reading of gender	86
5.8	Interpretation of survey findings	87
5.9	Conclusion: encoders preferred messages	88

*Chapter 6: Research findings: the meanings rural people make* 90

6.0	Introduction	90
6.1	The focus groups	90
6.2	Meanings rural people make	92



6.2.1	How they define human rights	92
6.2.2	How they define gender	93
6.2.3	Women's roles	93
6.2.4	Men's roles	93
6.2.5	Why different roles	93
6.2.6	Property inheritance	94
6.2.7	Married women and change of names	95
6.3.1	Interpretation of group discussion findings	95
6.3.2	Social power	97
6.4	Conclusion	97
 <b><i>Chapter 7: Conclusion</i></b>		99
7.0	Introduction	99
7.1	What the study has achieved	99
7.2	Preferred messages vs rural people's interpretations	101
7.3	Why rural people negotiate human rights and gender messages	103
7.4	Generalisation: the need for caution	105
7.5	Recommendations	106
 <b><i>References</i></b>		107
Appendix 1: Questionnaire on the use of the media for human rights advocacy (NGOs)		115
Appendix 2: Questionnaire on the use of the media for human rights advocacy (Electronic Media)		118
Appendix 3: Focus group discussion guide		121
Appendix 4: <i>Jenda</i>		123
Appendix 5: Focus group transcripts		128
Appendix 6: <i>Zasintha Udyo</i>		145
Appendix 7: <i>Kamba Anga Mwala</i>		146
Appendix 8: Graph (media power)		147

## *Chapter 1: Introduction*

Gender activists who sparked a debate on marital rape at a recent meeting in Mangochi, should carefully scrutinise issues before tabling them at any forum. [Otherwise], they risk triggering debates that will only make people question their integrity and put them in bad light. We have our own cultures and traditions. So, we shouldn't allow anyone to import strange ideas from other countries. Gender activists have an obligation to inform and educate and not to disintegrate our social norms. (Saizi Ayipira, *Daily Nation* (Malawi) 12/12/2001)

### *1.0 Introduction*

The above quotation points to the fact that human rights, and gender equality in particular, have become serious and controversial social and political issues in Malawi. It sets the tone of the background to the study, which I discuss in this chapter. Further, in this chapter, I give the justification and explain the goal of the research. I also define the main terms used in the study. Finally, I summarise the study by giving the organisation of the thesis.

### *1.1 Background to the study*

Since Malawi reverted to multiparty politics following the referendum of June 14<sup>21993</sup>, human rights discourse has imposed itself on the political and social agenda. There are over 180 NGOs registered with the Council for Non-governmental Organisations in Malawi (CONGOMA). Of these, 46 are classified as human rights advocates (visit <http://sdnp.org.mw/ngo/ngo-mw-list.html>). However, not all registered human rights

NGOs are equally active. The most active are the Women and Law in Southern Africa (WILSA), Women's Voice, the Civil Liberties Committee (CILIC), the Human Rights Commission, Malawi Centre for Advice on Rights, Education and Research (Carer), the Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR), the Public Affairs Committee (PAC), the media, the churches and the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Human Rights and Democracy (IMCHRD).

These NGOs have since 1994 campaigned for human rights in rural as well as urban areas across the country. The methods of advocacy include interpersonal communication using church and village leaders as opinion leaders, stage and radio/TV drama, public debates (funded mostly by GTZ and USAID), music, and paid for news releases in newspapers. In 1999, the Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation contracted the Malawi Institute of Journalism (MIJ) to conduct a seminar on how human rights NGOs could deal with the media for purposed of advocacy and lobbying. Since the advent of the internet, human rights NGOs have created an online discussion forum for human rights (visit <http://sdnp.org.mw/bill-2000/discussion-forum.html>).

Some of the above organisations have done baseline studies before implementing their advocacy programmes. They have also evaluated their work in stages. The studies give us an insight into the target people's reaction to the messages they get from the advocates. Below I summarise the main findings.

In its baseline study report, Carer concludes that people in villages were indifferent to human rights issues because they associated “democracy, the constitution and human rights with economic problems prevailing in the country, corruption and insecurity” (1996:18). The same report also points out that traditional customs impact negatively on people’s understanding and acceptance of human rights and are a potential source of cultural conflict.

In 1999 the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Human Rights and Democracy (IMCHRD) reached similar conclusions when it conducted a mid-term evaluative field study of its work. In its 2000 evaluative research report, Women’s Voice concluded that traditional beliefs impinged on children and women’s rights. WILSA attributed the failure of women to report domestic violence partly to Malawian culture which “calls on women to endure violence” (2001:4). The Malawi Government (1997; 2000) blames traditional beliefs (mainly patriarchy, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 2) for gender inequality in the areas of education, agriculture and nutrition. Even studies that have little relevance to mainstream human rights advocacy blame traditional customs for rural people’s apparent resistance to family planning (Palamuleni, 1998) and to behavioural change towards HIV/AIDS (Malawi Government, 1999).

Some of the studies cited above recommend the use of the media of mass communication, such as radio alongside doses of interpersonal communication for advocacy purposes after realising that there was “lack of effective dissemination of gender information” (Women’s Voice, 2000:iv). The Malawi Government media strategy for HIV/AIDS prevention

summarises this recommendation when it advocates regulating the media as a way of, *inter alia*,

promoting the development and dissemination of media programmes which encourage positive values and lifestyles for the youth and promoting effective targeting of media programmes and materials to protect boys and girls from exposure to dangerous and counterproductive messages. (1999: 26)

The above discussion leads us to two conclusions. Firstly, the review of evaluative reports indicates there is apparent resistance among rural Malawians to new discourses, be they in the area of human rights, agriculture or gender. Secondly human rights advocates believe in strong media power and its role in development.

In the sections that follow I will expand on these points in the light of cultural studies and development communication theory. I believe these will identify factors that might lead to rural people's resistance to new messages. For the sake of chronological flow, I will briefly discuss development theory and development communication before previewing cultural studies.

## *1.2 Development and communication*

For more than 100 years development experts have seen a role for the media of mass communication. Before I tackle the problematic and controversial concept of development communication, I will discuss development itself.

### *1.2.1 Development*

Economists define development as economic growth (Berger, 1995) that is, the production of more goods than a nation can consume, which leads to the surplus being sold out for the construction of roads, hospitals, schools, etc. According to Rodney (1973), this quantitative economic and infrastructure growth ought to lead to qualitative change in any society. Otherwise, there is no development. Development, Rogers (1975) writes, ought to be a participatory process of social and upward material adjustment for the majority of the people through their gaining greater control over their environment. In short development is, to quote the International Broadcasting Institute (IBI), "the improvement of the well-being of the individual and the betterment of the quality of his or her life" (cited by Moemeka, 1996:3). The IBI definition goes beyond economic growth. It includes the qualitative improvement in human and social values, and the attainment of political self-determination (Inayatullah, 1967 cited by Moemeka, 1996).

The above perspectives of development indicate that development is not an easy concept to define. It depends on the priorities any group of people has. For instance, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, development for Africa meant political self-determination. The priorities have now changed, which explains the demise of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and its replacement with the African Union (AU), the transformation of the Southern African Development Co-ordinating Conference (SADCC) to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the emergence of the New Partnership for Africa's Development

(NEPAD). Having achieved political autonomy, African states are now interested in economic development and modernisation of their infrastructure.

According to Rogers,

Modernisation is the process by which individuals change from a traditional way of life to a more complex, technologically advanced and rapidly changing style of life. (1969 cited by Bin Adnan *et al.*, 1991:8)

Implicit in Rogers' definition is the contention that traditional society is simple, stagnant, and lacks technological advancement. However, one would argue that there is no society that is not complex and stagnant. This explains why modernisation theorists have been criticised for bias and equating Westernisation (with America and Europe as models) with modernisation and development (Bin Adnan *et al.*, 1991). Nevertheless, the terms development and modernisation, despite the latter term's denigrating connotation, ought to be used interchangeably to mean social improvement.

Development communication theory was (and still is in some cases such as Malawi) strongly linked to the process of change for the betterment of society. Western communication experts and their Third World disciples saw a role of mass communication in the process. Below, I briefly discuss development communication.

### 1.2.2 *Development communication*

Hartman *et al.* (1989) contend that the role of the media in development emanated from Golding's (1974) theory of exogenously induced change. Golding writes:

Theorists of exogenously induced change relevant to media theory suggest that static societies are brought to life by outside influences, technical aid, knowledge, resources and financial assistance and by the diffusion of ideas. The strangle-hold of apathy, stoicism, fatalism and simple idleness is held to have gripped the peasantry of the third world until advanced countries produced both the tools and the know-how to coax them into action. (1974: 43 cited by Hartmann *et al.*, 1989: 24)

Since poor people's resignation to fate and their idleness were deemed to be the major causes of underdevelopment in the Third World, Lerner (1958, cited by Hartmann *et al.*, 1989) thought the media's role in development was to promote empathy amongst the people. This means that the media had the responsibility of whetting poor people's desire for better things. Hence, the poor become ambitious and work hard to develop themselves.

The second most prominent contribution to development communication came from Rogers (1962) who theorised that the media were crucial in diffusing critical modernisation information. Rogers had recognised, in the wake of studies that showed that the media were not singularly responsible for changing behaviour (Lazarsfeld, 1944 cited by Hartmann *et al.*,



1989), the need for a two step communication flow. Studies pointed to the need for the combination of mass media and interpersonal communication.

The third most important contribution to development communication came from Schramm (1964) who recognised the need for information to flow to and from the sender and receiver. Schramm's formulation recognised the mass media as information multipliers. Development, according to him, needs a lot of information for people to be informed, educated, and persuaded to accept change.

Although they have been criticised as being top-down linear communications strategies, for their top-heavy bias and for conceiving the audience as generally passive (Hartmann *et al.*, 1989), the above theorisations by the founding fathers of development communication have had a lot of influence on later development communication theorists and practitioners. Hornik (1988) has likened communication's role in development to a low cost loudspeaker. The Malawi government sees the media thus:

Media continues (sic) to influence the youth both positively and negatively. Some media messages are such that they can destroy the minds of the youth. (Malawi Government, 1999:25)

Modern development communication experts propose that communication be seen as a participatory activity, a dialogue between the sender and the receiver, a process that empowers both the developer and the development beneficiaries (Berger, 1995; Anyaegbunam

*et al.*, 1998; Hartmann *et al.*, 1989). This change in approach may have been influenced by cultural studies, to which I now turn to explain why Malawian rural people may resist human rights and gender discourses.

### 1.3 *Cultural studies*

One of the major tenets of cultural studies holds that receivers of media messages are not passive. According to Fiske (1982), who has been criticised for creating a hyperactive audience, the media audience is semiotically armed and decides what to do with the media. The audience questions what comes from the media and sometimes consciously decides to use the message differently from the author's or creator's intention. This is a big departure from the linear transmission model, which development communication experts relied on, which viewed the text as, closed and carrying a univocal meaning, the one meaning intended by the encoder. However, as I explain in Chapter 3, the audience's semiotic freedom is limited by the cultural context (Doucette, 2001).

One of the most outstanding contributions to cultural studies come from Hall (1974b) who, following Parkin (see Morley, 1980) conceives three decoding positions that a person 'reading' a text might take. Firstly, Hall (1974b) believes messages are structured in dominance, that is, they are intended to mean what the message producers and the majority 'naturally' expect. Secondly, the audience might negotiate the meaning of a text, that is, messages are scrutinised and made to fit a situation and finally, the audience might assume an oppositional stance towards the message. As Morley (1989) has noted in a critical postscript to his 'nationwide' study, opposition here means conscious and deliberate disagreement " with

the propositional content of messages" (1989:18). Thus, opposition excludes any unintentional incomprehension or misunderstanding of a text out of ignorance (Morley, 1989).

In sum, Hall's model proposes that depending on the extent to which the audiences share communication codes with the producers of media messages, the audiences share, modify or simply reject and subvert the "ways in which topics have been encoded by the producers" (Morley, 1980: 23). So message initiators need not take it for granted that their target audiences always take in their messages raw.

#### *1.4 Goal of the study*

This study set out to explore how rural people in Malawi interpret media discourses on human rights and gender in particular using Hall's (1974b) encoding/decoding reading strategies. I also wanted to understand why there is apparent misunderstanding of or 'opposition' to the gender equality messages amongst Malawians as manifested in the music cited in Chapter 2 below and the messages they make from the same discourses. I hypothesised that the opposition could be the result of lack of cultural, linguistic, academic or political code-sharing between the gender rights campaigners and the targeted rural communities. As Chimombo and Chimombo (1996) put it, Malawian human rights campaigners have not 'translated' the human rights codes or concepts into a linguistic code that can be understood, accepted, and appropriated by rural communities. Hence, gender equality advocates and their audience in Malawi could be conceptually worlds apart. Therefore decoding, that is, meaning making, does not occur.

My other assumption was that some Malawians are reluctant to accept the messages because they take a negotiated stance. They understand gender equality messages but they see in them attempts by some powerful, patriarchal, foreign culture, assisted by Malawian civil society (who, in Gramsci's theory, are part of the state), to impose its hegemony on their communities.

The third possibility, I advanced, was that the audience of human rights messages interprets the discourses with an oppositional code. The messages are rejected because they are not understood. It is also possible that the messages clash with the audience's long-held cultural beliefs because they are too alien to the target rural communities (Chirwa, 2001).

The final consideration was that the audience resists, opposes or doubts messages because the message sources lack social credibility (Burgoon, 1989). Burgoon expounds the social credibility concept thus:

The persuasive impact of organised...messages on attitude change...is mediated through attributions of credibility. (1989:136)

Stewart and Moss (1991) explain that source credibility is the perception the audience has about the information person; that is, the person who delivers or claims to be the source of the information. Source credibility theory could explain why some Malawians, such as Ayipira (cited at the beginning of this chapter) say that human rights issues, and gender issues in

particular, are not taken seriously by the audience because the majority of the campaigners have dubious social backgrounds.

### 1.5 *Justification of the study*

Fiske observes that the "(cultural studies) tradition developed in Britain in the 1970s was necessarily focused on culture in industrial societies...[because] the assumption was that capitalist societies are divided societies"(1987:254). While this may have been the case then, I contend that the cultural studies tradition applies to all societies. In Western industrial societies the relationships may be mostly along class divisions, but the male-female relationships in most societies is very important. As Doucette puts it, "gender transformation is a cultural struggle" (2001:1) for the definition of women and men. Fiske (1987) admits this importance. He writes that:

The primary axis of division [in Western industrial societies] was originally thought to be class, though gender may now have replaced it as the most significant producer of social difference. (1987:255)

So, insights gained from cultural studies elsewhere, particularly Hall's (1974b) model of encoding and decoding media discourse and the conception of the audience as active can be used to understand why rural Malawians seem to resist mediated messages on gender and human rights. The same insights may also prove helpful to understand the messages the rural people make, if they do so at all.

To the best of my knowledge, mine is the first study that tests Hall's Encoding and Decoding model, in a rural African setting.

### *1.6 Definition of key terms*

I now define what I consider as key and recurring terms of this study. Some are defined in the text. However, the following are defined here so that they are clear from the outset. These include rural area, (mass) media, media consumption, discourse, cultural/communication codes, and gender.

#### *1.6.1 Rural area*

The discussion group members were all recruited from the villages that fall within the jurisdiction of Traditional Authority Likoswe. The discussions were also held at the chief's residence. The area lies outside the Blantyre city boundaries, and that is what makes it rural. Nark (1985) defines a rural area as that area outside the urban boundary whose inhabitants lead an agricultural life. In Malawi, rural communities owe their allegiance to traditional leaders more than they do to political leaders.

#### *1.6.2 Mass media*

By media or mass media I exclude all forms of private correspondence or communication. Thus, I remain with public and privately-owned wide circulation newspapers, magazines, radio stations and television. The term mass media is used here in spite of the controversies about the nature of the audience because media theorists argue that an active audience cannot be called a mass, which according to mass society theorists, entailed a passive and homogenous

audience (Bennett, 1982; McQuail,1994). Mass media here refer to those media that are accessible to the public.

### *1.6.3 Media consumption*

Following Hall (1974b), Storey (1999) defines consumption as the act or process of interpreting or making meaning from media texts. Reading, for example, means getting and appropriating the message and not just uttering the words from a text. To paraphrase Hall, there is media consumption only when meaning has been taken and appropriated by the “decoder”.

### *1.6.4 Discourse*

Hatim and Mason define discourse as "Modes of speaking and writing which involve participants in adopting attitudes towards areas of socio-cultural activity" (1997:240). Discourse is a world-view, a social practice, that people reference in the struggle to make sense of their world. Eco defines discourse as “the general framework of cultural references, ideological, ethical, religious standpoints,...tastes and value systems” (quoted by Moores, 1993: 18). Thus, we talk of political discourse, cultural discourse, linguistic discourse, and human rights discourse (see Fiske, 1987 in Underwood, 2001). Discourse is related to culture in that the latter informs and influences the former.

### 1.6.5 *Communication/cultural codes*

Fiske describes a code as:

A rule governed system of signs whose rules and conventions are shared amongst members of a culture and which is used to generate and circulate meanings in and for that culture. (1987:4)

Thus, the study of signs, semiotics or semiology is important in understanding how messages are interpreted. The codes are learnt through such socialising institutions as churches, mosques, schools and 'passage' rites (Watson, 1998). Codes can either denote, that is, give literal meaning or connote, that is, convey metaphorical meaning. For example, in Chichewa, the word *mwamuna* denotes man or husband. But when applied to a woman the word connotes strength. In short, codes are human constructs because they mean what a particular society wants them to mean.

### 1.6.6 *Gender*

Gender is the social manifestation of males and females. While sex, the anatomical difference between males and females, is biological, gender is a dynamic social or cultural construct (Heywood, 1992; Lopi, 1999). In this study gender is seen as a:

Conceptualisation of the socially and culturally variable relations between women and men - the differentiated roles and order in a given socio-cultural



context, which is distinguished from the biological concept of sex (female/male) determined by birth. (Doucette, 2001:2)

### *1.7 Organisation of the study*

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 summarises the thesis, explains the goal and justification of the study and defines the key terms used in the thesis. Chapter 2 gives a socio-cultural and historical background to the study. Among others, the chapter explains the ethnic composition of Malawian society, gives the economic distribution of the country, and underlines its core beliefs about human relations. Chapter 3 discusses the theoretical issues that inform the study. It discusses development communication theories, cultural studies, semiotics or semiology, and reviews in more detail related studies. Chapter 4 concentrates on methodological issues employed in this study. After discussing the philosophical perspectives that underpin the differences among research paradigms, the chapter explains and justifies the choice of a triangulated research design. Though mostly qualitative, this study used quantitative techniques in trying to determine activists' beliefs in mass media and their preferred messages to their audiences. Chapters 5 and 6 present and interpret results of the research from the message initiators/encoders (Chapter 5) and from the interpreters/decoders (Chapter 6). Chapter 7 forms a general conclusion. It identifies and discusses the similarities and differences between the preferred messages and those made by the audience. It analyses the results in view of Stuart Hall's model of Encoding and Decoding media content.

## *Chapter 2: Overview of Malawian society*

The social aegis under which the message comes, the receiver's social relationship to the sender, the perceived social consequences of accepting it or acting upon it must be put together with an understanding of the symbolic and structural nature of the message, the conditions under which it is received, the abilities of the receiver and his innate and learned responses. (Schramm, 1974:7)

### *2.0 Introduction*

This chapter provides a detailed socio-cultural background to the study. It sketches what Morley (1983) calls a social map, that is, the context in which gender and human rights discourses are practised. I discuss how poverty, illiteracy, religion and cultural beliefs (particularly patriarchy) may combine forces to constrain the evolution of gender. I further argue that despite constitutional provisions for media freedom, Malawian media have not been very helpful in opening up what Habermas (1989) calls the public sphere, the necessary cultural space, to permit society to freely debate crucial issues such as gender equality. Since the concept of the public sphere is key to my discussion, I begin by describing it before examining the Malawian situation.

#### *2.1.0 Habermas and the public sphere*

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989), Habermas elaborates the concept of the public sphere. He conceives it as a place or environment where issues of public interest would be discussed without any hindrance. Summarising Habermas, Baoill (2002)

says the public sphere is characterised by universal access, that is, anybody can have access to the space; by rational debate, that is, any topic can be raised by any participant and it is debated fully until consensus is achieved; and disregard for the status of participants.

The theory of the public sphere resembles the liberal democratic political concept of human rights, which, among other things, gives all citizens equal opportunities, freedom of association and expression, and gender equality. Doucette (2001) argues that the media (newspapers, radio, television and the internet) are a central arena for providing this public sphere or cultural space as he calls it, because they "provide a potentially shared public discourse" (2001:1).

However, as Golding and Murdock (1996) note, Habermas's theorisation is idealistic. In reality, several factors militate against the realisation of the public sphere. These include poverty, illiteracy, political intolerance, media bias, and cultural stereotyping.

In the sections that follow I discuss these constraining factors and relate them to the Malawi situation.

### *2.1.1 Economic, literacy levels and the public sphere*

Compared to her neighbours, Malawi is a small country. It is landlocked and borders Mozambique and Tanzania to the east, Zambia to the west and Mozambique to the south. It has a surface area of 118,484 square kilometres, one third of which is taken up by Lake Malawi. Malawi is a member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the

Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the African Union (AU), and the United Nations Organisation (UNO). Although blessed with rich agricultural soils and fresh water bodies, Malawi, with a population of nearly 10 million people, is one of the poorest countries in the world and beats only Mozambique in the SADC region. It has a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of US\$182 (*Sadcreview*, 2000) and an adult literacy rate of 40%. Out of 1000 live births, 134 children die. The Malawi government (2000) estimates that 60% of Malawians are poor and a Malawian has an average life expectancy of 44 years (see also Benson *et al.*, 2002).

With such poverty and illiteracy, it is almost impossible for Malawians to rationally participate in public debates which are mostly conducted in the media (in English) and require a certain measure of literacy. Above all, to be accessed the media require money (I discuss this issue in more detail in section 2.1.5 below).

### *2.1.2 Malawian politics and the public sphere*

Apart from illiteracy and poverty, Malawians in rural areas find it difficult to effectively participate in the public sphere due to political intolerance. In this sections, I briefly discuss the political history of Malawi. It must be noted that in Malawi politics, religion and cultural customs are so intertwined that it is impossible to discuss one without making reference to others.

Nyasaland, as Malawi was known then, became a British Protectorate in 1891(Pachai,1973). It became independent on 6 July, 1964, and a republic two years later with Hastings Kamuzu

Banda as its first democratically elected president. Just days after independence, Malawi witnessed its first political crisis. Six ministers were dismissed from Banda's cabinet and fled into exile in Zambia, Tanzania, Europe and America. According to Chiume (1982), Muluji *et al.* (1999), and Lijenda (2000), the cabinet crisis was the result of some cabinet ministers' disagreements with Dr Banda over the pace of Africanisation of the Malawian public service, Banda's reluctance to support panafricanism, poor relations with other African states, and the levying of fees in government hospitals. Even worse, Chiume writes, Banda had grandiose expansionist ideas so that Malawi could cover "those areas [that] had belonged to the great Malawi (sic) empire which extended from northern Swaziland to Nairobi in Kenya..." (1982:190). Until the early 1990s, Malawians lived in fear and were information starved as the media were heavily censored.

The Maravi Kingdom comprised ethnic communities that migrated into pre-colonial Malawi in the seventeenth and eighteen-century AD. According to Pachai (1973), these groups came from the present day Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Maravi Kingdom occupied areas from around Lake Malawi to the Luangwa River in Zambia and down to the Mozambique border with Zimbabwe and to Sofala in Mozambique.

Unlike the earlier inhabitants, the Akafula, who are believed to have migrated from areas around Lake Victoria (Chilambo *et al.*, 1995a), the Maravi were tall, cultivated crops, reared cattle and had an elaborate political or administrative system. Today's Chewa, Mang'anja, Tumbuka, and Tonga are all believed to have descended from the Maravi (Pachai, 1973).

The Maravi were and still are matrilineal. Inheritance of property and chieftainship was through the maternal line of the family. This practice still continues in some areas, except among the Tonga and Tumbuka peoples. The Tumbuka and the Tonga are likely to have been influenced by the Lambya and Ngonde ethnic groups that descended from areas around Lakes Victoria and Tanganyika (Pachai, 1973).

Parsons (1993) contends that the most significant factor in the change of gender relationships in Southern Africa was the Ngoni migrants from Zululand. These came to occupy parts of Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique and Tanzania as they conquered the people they found on their way as they fled from Shaka Zulu's wrath.

The Ngoni were patrilineal and believed in a centralised form of administration (Parsons, 1993). They paid dowry to the family of the wife. This tradition is still being practised but in different forms. For instance, among the Ngonde, Lambya, Tonga, Ngoni, Sena and Tumbuka, the suitor pays dowry (*malobolo*) in the form of cattle (or the monetary equivalent) to the parents of the woman he wants to marry. The wife goes to live with the husband's family and she is considered part of the husband's family. Among the matrilineal Chewa, dowry is paid by the prospective husband to the woman's family and it is called *chiongo* (thanks). Among the matrilineal Lomwe, Yao, and Mang'anja the prospective husband does not pay anything. However, he leaves his home to live with his wife's family. There, he is given land to farm and is expected to build a home and give bride service (Parsons, 1993). All these belong to the wife and the husband is considered as part of the wife's extended family. In

some cases, such men have become chiefs or advisors to chiefs. In rural Malawian family the chief is the highest authority.

The Malawi Congress Party (MCP) ruled Malawi as a single monolithic party without any official parliamentary opposition for thirty-one years. Because initially it had the support and respect of the people, the MCP scrapped the bill of rights from its pre-independence manifesto and the resultant constitution and introduced the life presidency in 1971. There was only one radio station, the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) modelled on the BBC. Its aims were, and still are, to educate, entertain, and inform (Chikunkhuzeni, 1999). However, the station was, and still is, the voice of the president and his government. Additionally, Banda took advantage of the patriarchal nature of Malawian society, Christian and Islamic teachings and proclaimed to be the father or guardian (*nkhoswe*) of all women in Malawi. As a result, when, men who antagonised their wives in one way or another, were reported to the *ngwazi*, they were considered political dissidents and sometimes jailed.

Banda's hold on political power started crumbling in 1992 when the Catholic Bishops published a critical pastoral letter, *Living Our Faith*, calling for political change and tolerance. In support for the change proposed by the Catholic Church, several politicians, started agitating for change to a multiparty system of government. Banda reluctantly gave in to calls for a referendum on the type of government Malawians wanted.

In 1993, Malawians voted for a multi-party form of government. Several pressure groups registered as parties. Also, civil society, particularly human rights NGOs formed a front and

campaigns for a new constitution that would include a bill of rights. Civil society thus played a significant role in consolidating democracy and a culture of respect for human dignity.

Malawi is a signatory to, and has ratified, almost all principal international human rights instruments. These include the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, the UN Human Rights Charter, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). However, the Malawi government stands accused of not implementing and enforcing the cited instruments (Article 19, 1999; MHRC, 2001).

It is clear from the above discussion that, for a long time, political repression denied Malawians the chance to discuss issues freely. Additionally, 'traditional village' politics favours men to women. Therefore, it can be concluded that the entire country was a closed society, the antithesis of the Habermasian concept of the public sphere.

### *2.1.3 Religion and the public sphere*

According to Chilambo *et al.* (1995a), the Akafula are believed to have had no organised religion. But, the Maravi peoples believed in one god, called *chiuta, leza or mphanbe*. Elaborate Arabic and Western religions came much later following the Swahili and European traders. The Swahili were trading in both slaves and ivory at Karonga and Nkhota Kota. The Swahili Arabs introduced Islam and traded with the Yao and the Lomwe who had migrated from present day Mozambique (Pachai, 1973). The lakeshore areas from Nkhota Kota to



Mangochi and communities surrounding Zomba mountain are predominantly Islamic and densely populated. The rest of the country is predominantly Christian.

Both Moslems and Christians have been responsible for education in Malawi. It is through the schools and madrassas (or Koranic schools), which Althusser (see Hall, 1977; Fiske, 1987; Underwood, 2001) describes as ideological state apparatuses (ISAs), that patriarchal ideas of God sanctioning gender differences, and women's subservience to men, are taught. Like Christianity, Islam is a patriarchal religion, that is, it favours men (Ahmad, 1983; Qureshi and Moores, 1999). Both Christianity and Islam have had a serious impact on the people of Malawi in terms of gender equality. This religious inculcation is so much part of Malawian life that it is considered part of the country's cultural tradition. It is no wonder that one often hears people saying, "it is written" to justify a cultural practice because they believe everything was handed down by God (see B1d, appendix 5). Thus, both Christianity and Islam have contributed to the constraining of the public sphere.

#### *2.1.4 Patriarchy and the public sphere*

Patriarchy, which Heywood (1992) defines as rule by men, is also reinforced by Malawian cultural beliefs and traditions. Some Malawians (precise statistics unavailable) still undergo customary education. The rites of passage ceremonies, such as *gule wamkulu* (the mask dance performed by graduating boys), *chinamwali* or *jando* (for girls who have attained puberty) and *kulanga* (advising the newly weds), have contributed to the entrenchment and the passing-on of cultural and traditional beliefs, including the subservience of women to men (Chilambo *et al.*, 1995b; Women's Voice, 2000; Malawi Government, 2000).

Traditionally, girls are taught that men are born leaders and that married women, even if they assume leadership roles such as those of village chief or member of parliament must respect and serve their husbands.

Malawian society, patrilineal or matrilineal, has assigned different roles to women and men often based on social stereotypes. Therefore, it expects men and women to behave differently. The cultural stereotypes are well captured in the main song (*Jenda*) and the supporting texts (songs) I chose for this study. For example, in their song, *Zasinthu Udyo* (appendix 6), the Kasambwe Brothers complain that Malawi has changed for the worse because now women are men (leaders) as husbands now cook for their wives who spend their time plaiting their hair. Another musician, Ben Michael, says in his song, *Kamba Anga Mwala* (appendix 7) that gender equality means that now men will be spending time in the kitchen and doing laundry while their wives go drinking or watching soccer. He finds this reversal of roles laughable, if not culturally shocking. The cultural shock vis-à-vis gender equality comes out even more clearly in Overtoun Chimombo's song, *Jenda* (appendix 4). Chimombo says gender roles are pre-determined by God. Women, Chimombo sings, are supposed to pound maize or take it to the mill, dry flour, wash plates, scrub the house floor, etc. It would be embarrassing and wrong for a man to engage in these activities, particularly with children or parents-in-law watching. Men are supposed to go fishing, dig graves and bury the dead, work as night guards, and fell and collect wood.

Chimombo suggests that women should not perform the roles done by men because, if they do so, spirits of Malawi's fore-parents will trouble the country. Referring to the Biblical creation story, Chimombo says just as God first created light, then darkness, He also created man, then woman so that the woman should help him. Many women and men, educated or not, have grown up believing in such stereotypes Chimombo cites in his song. Even though Malawi has decided to mainstream gender in all its ministerial policies (Malawi Governemnt, 2000), the traditional educational institutions are very strong and influential.

It is important to note that Chimombo's list of gender 'dos and don'ts' illustrates the extent to which patriarchy is a dominant ideology in Malawi. What is clear is that Chimombo and his colleagues do not realise that patriarchy is the result of one social group's prejudice over another (Tshimungu, 2000). Over time this prejudice is naturalised and carried over through songs, folk stories and proverbs.

The reaction to gender equality campaigns espoused by Chimombo, Michael, the Kasambwe Brothers and Ayipira (cited at the beginning of Chapter 1), comes mostly from men, which underlines the fact that men feel threatened and this has led to a social battle between men and women. In short, patriarchy is a constraint on the Malawian public sphere.

#### *2.1.5 Malawian media and the public sphere*

In this section I briefly discuss the Malawian media and explain why they fail, despite having constitutional legality, to act as "an important cultural agent [or] an arena for [rational] public discourse [and] to play a part in the symbolic struggle over the definition and status of

women" (Doucette, 2001:1). This is mostly so because in Malawi, the media are mostly politically polarised, unevenly distributed, and too expensive for the poor. I will elaborate on these points in the sections that follow.

#### *2.1.5.1 Constitutional provisions*

Since Malawi reverted to multiparty politics following the 1993 referendum, freedom of expression and association is constitutionally guaranteed. Sections 34 to 37 of the Malawi constitution provide for freedom of conscience and opinion, association, expression, and the media.

Thus, ideally, the Malawian media should have been a typical public sphere where public discourse would have been going on without hindrance. As Melody puts it, "participatory democracy requires a citizenry that is both informed and has a continuing opportunity to be heard in the marketplace of ideas," (1990:18).

However, this cannot be achieved for a number of reasons. Research conducted by the Media Council of Malawi (2002) found that Malawian media are, *inter alia*, male-dominated, politically polarised, and journalists are harassed by politicians. In an article dedicated to Press Freedom day, Namangale (May 3,2002) points out that since 1994 several journalists have been detained by the police or harassed by both the government and opposition parties. Some journalists have lost their jobs at state run media institutions for not siding with it (MISA, 1996).

Recent events point to the thwarting of the constitutional freedoms cited above. The 1930 laws of sedition have been invoked to silence dissent. For example, outspoken reggae musician Evison Matafale was arrested in November 2001 and allegedly beaten to death while in police custody for insulting the president and the government. The letter he allegedly wrote to the president was described as seditious.

During the August 2001 SADC Heads of State summit in Blantyre, Malawi, copies of the *Chronicle* newspaper were confiscated allegedly because the weekly paper had written a negative story about the government (MISA, 2001).

#### 2.1.5.2 *The print media*

In the euphoria of change and the 1994 constitutional provisions, Malawi had three daily newspapers, the *Nation*, the *Monitor*, and the *Daily Times*. The *Monitor* folded soon after the proprietor, Clement Stambuli, joined mainstream politics in 1996. Since then, Malawi has had only two daily newspapers. There are four or so regular weekly newspapers, the *Malawi News* and the *Weekly Nation*, the *Chronicle*, the *UDF News*, the government-funded *Weekly News* and *Boma Lathu*.

Since approximately 60% of Malawians are illiterate and thus cannot read (Malawi Government, 2000), Malawian newspapers are urban based and are published mostly in English. This means that they are elitist and therefore do not cater for the majority. The findings of a readership survey conducted in 1994 by Hall and Ham illustrate this fact. Hall

and Ham (1994) found that a typical daily newspaper, such as the *Daily Times*, had the following distribution pattern:

<i>Urban areas</i>	<i>Figures</i>
Blantyre	4500
Lilongwe	2000
Zomba	300
Mzuzu	300
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>7100</b>
<i>Rural areas</i>	<i>Figures</i>
Southern region	1000
Central region	600
Northern region	300
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>1900</b>
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>9000</b>

*Figure 2.1: Table showing the distribution of a typical daily Malawian newspaper (from: Hall and Ham, 1994: 76)*

Hall and Ham (1994) also indicate that newspapers in Malawi are too expensive for the urban and rural poor. This explains why the newspaper distribution favours urban centres. At the time of Hall and Ham's study, newspapers in Malawi cost K2.00 each. However, today (2002)

the newspaper sells at MK30.00. The rise in the cover price and the libel suits the newspapers have borne, have forced many newspapers to close shop (Article XIX, 2000).

#### *2.1.5.3 The electronic media*

There is one one-channel national television station, TV-Malawi, which has come under criticism not only for its pro-government bias but also for its alleged corrupt recruitment practices. The critics (Manda, 2001) have argued that TV-Malawi lacks transparency in staff recruitment and, unlike the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, established in the 1960s by an act of parliament, TV-Malawi does not have the legal status of a public broadcaster. Like MBC Radio, TV-Malawi covers over 90% of Malawi (Chikunkhuzeni, 1999).

The late 1990s saw the booming of private FM radio stations. The stations have commercial and community broadcasting licences. Commercial private stations include Power 101 FM and Capital FM. The two radio stations, both headquartered in Blantyre, can be received in all major towns in the Southern and Central Regions. There are four private religious radio stations: Transworld radio with two FM stations in Blantyre and Lilongwe, ABC Radio in Lilongwe, Radio Islam in Blantyre and Radio Maria in Mangochi. A UNESCO funded community radio, Dzimwe, is operational in the Monkey Bay area of Mangochi district. The Malawi Institute of Journalism operates a training radio station, MIJ90.3FM, in Blantyre.

#### *2.1.5.4 Economic factors*

Although the radio stations have been categorised as commercial, public (MBC), community, and religious, nearly all of them rely on advertising for survival. Though not reliable as far as

payment is concerned, government is the major advertiser in Malawi. Like other governments in the SADC region, the Malawi government rarely advertises in media deemed hostile to its policies. The *Daily Times* and the *Chronicle* newspapers were once slapped with a ban on government funding. The government later lifted its advertising ban on the *Daily Times* and its sister weekly *Malawi News* since a new pro-government board of directors is in place at Blantyre Newspapers Limited (BNL). The BNL board change has weakened the crusading spirit of the two papers.

Private commercial radios and others rarely get government advertising. This selective advertising policy has had a very serious repercussion on the media industry. Newspapers that do not toe the government line have had to close shop for lack of money.

#### *2.1.5.5 Ownership and content*

The core of Malawian media is owned and its content controlled by the government. For example, the government owns and controls output at the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC Radios 1 & 2), TV-Malawi, *UDF News*, *This is Malawi*, *Boma Lathu*, *Weekly News* among others. Indirectly, the government controls the *Daily Times* and *Malawi News* through the UDF sympathetic board of directors; at the *Nation* through the owner, Aleke Banda, Minister of Agriculture and UDF First vice-president. The *Saturday Post* and the *Sun* are owned by UDF sympathisers and their content is overtly against opposition political parties.

Since the demise of the *Democrat*, *New Vision*, the *New Voice*, the opposition has virtually no voice except for the *Chronicle* newspaper, Capital radio, and MIJ 90.3 FM. Since 1996,



president Muluzi has vowed to protect his image and that of his government against "watchdogs that display symptoms of rabies" (MISA, 1996:104-105).

The above discussion of the Malawian media points to the fact that Malawian media have not provided and cannot provide the necessary cultural space (Doucette, 2001) for them to discuss issues of public interest on behalf of those who do not produce the media. Government-run media are busy with presidential and ministerial coverage while private and commercial media are out to make money. Community media (only one radio-Dzimwe-qualifies because it is run and its programmes produced by the community) are virtually non-existent. Editorial policy at government-run media is influenced by government agenda. The private media are equally compromised editorially by their overt or covert support for the government since the government, as a policy, only advertises in government friendly media (Article XIX, 2000).

Hall's argument about the British media, that they have "colonised the cultural and ideological sphere" (1977:340), is also true about the Malawian situation. He points out that the media are selective in the information they present to the public. If men dominate the media, gender issues can hardly be heard. In this connection, Karim (2002) argues that in Malawi, women have only made it to the front pages when they have done something wrong, or when they are victims, have done the unexpected or are there to pretty up the front page. This treatment of women in the media, Karim (2002) points out, is a result of a tradition that favours male dominance in society, while women, who constitute 52% of the population, are treated as second class members of society. If editors favour politicians' views, then other members of

society have no chance of fully participating in the public sphere. Essentially, the ideals of the public sphere, freedom of expression and democracy suffer.

The denying of government advertising to opposition media coupled with government's ownership of media and direct control of their content is meant to perpetuate the ideology of the ruling elite. Instead of opening up for open, rational social discourse, Malawian media "exist in very close, sympathetic relationship to power and established values." (Hall, <http://thechronicleworld.org>).

The reaction of the *Sun* newspaper to 'rumours' that Mrs Anastasia Msosa was aspiring to be president of Malawi illustrates Hall's point about media bias and demonstrates the role of the media industry in the institutionalisation of such ideology as patriarchy. The *Sun* wrote:

Independent sources said, when interviewed by the *Sun*, that [Justice Anastasia] Msosa's ambition [to run for state president] cannot get her anywhere as the 2004 elections will be tensed and [Malawi] has not reached a stage where a woman can be accepted as a national leader. The whole African continent there is (sic) no female Head of State. (*The Sun*, 29.5- 4/6/2002)

None of the many human rights or women's rights organisations reacted to this statement, which leads one to the conclusion that women, too, are silent proponents of patriarchy, as the focus group discussions (see appendix 5) seem to confirm. Editor of Malawi's *Chronicle* newspaper, Robert Jamieson, agrees with this assertion when he says, "Male journalists often

treat female co-workers as inferior and the difficulty is that many women journalists accept this as normal" (2001:128).

## 2.2 *Women's rights: from WID to GAD*

The return to plural politics encouraged feminists to start campaigning for women's rights in earnest. World-wide, several attempts have been made to promote women's rights. The decade (1975-1985) saw the rise of Women in Development (WID) strategies which were essentially an attempt at integrating and recognising women's contributions to economic and socio-cultural development (Malunda and Mpinganjira, 2002; Doucette, 2001). During this decade, women were seen as an exclusive group that deserved special intervention (Kanjo, 1998). In Malawi, organisations like Chitutuko cha A Mai M'Malawi (CCAM) were a result of the Banda government's attempts to implement international WID programmes. However, because of its overt political nature, CCAM was disdained by many Malawians, including women, as it seemed to duplicate the role of the feared MCP's women's league. Although it is still functioning in some parts of the country, the CCAM collapsed with the political collapse of the MCP. The other notable WID project was the introduction during the last years of the MCP government of the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs.

The new women's organisations have a wider, if not alternative, agenda. They do not exclusively campaign for women's rights but for gender equality, where both sexes should acknowledge each other's roles and importance. This approach or move from WID to Gender and Development (GAD) has seen gender rights campaigners flourish. The Ministry, too, has

changed its name to reflect this new thinking and political discourse. It is now called the Ministry of Gender, Children's Affairs and Community Services.

The feminist movement does not seem to be achieving much in Malawi as the Malawi Government in its National Gender Policy admits: "Despite the WID efforts, gender imbalances still exist in all sectors"(2000:1). Actually, Malawi is one of the two SADC countries with the lowest Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), that is, the extent to which women and men share and participate in national development. South Africa has the highest GEM in the SADC (*Sadcreview*, 2001).

### *2.3 Human rights advocacy: the case of Women's Voice*

In this section, I will briefly discuss a gender rights campaign that Women's Voice mounted between 1994 and 1999 as a case study of the campaigns, the messages, and the methods that Malawian human rights NGOs undertake.

Like most human rights NGOs in Malawi, Women's Voice was founded in 1993 following the national referendum on the type of government Malawians wanted. It was registered in 1994 under the Trustees Incorporation Act as an indigenous non-profit and (politically) non-partisan human rights organisation devoted to the promotion of women (Women's Voice, 2000).

Women's Voice's objectives are to educate women, men and children about their rights; to conduct research into problems affecting women and children and to campaign against laws

that discriminate against women. To achieve the above, the organisation conducts workshops and civic education in the urban and rural areas, and mounts advocacy campaigns (Women's Voice, 2000; see also <http://womensvoice.org.mw>).

The campaign messages are contained in the organisation's objectives. Two of them are:

- a) to educate men so that they accept women as their equals and show men that their negative portrayal of women does not benefit anybody
- b) to educate girls and persuade them that their capabilities and intelligence are not different from those of the boys.

Women's Voice's Research Officer, Veronica Kamanga, says in addition to workshops and media publicity, Women's Voice has established human rights clubs, where men and women discuss human rights issues, in the rural areas of Mchinji, Chiradzulo, Mangochi, Karonga, Ntchisi, and Nkhata Bay districts (Veronica Kamanga, interview 21/11/2001).

When they conducted an evaluative study into perceptions of gender after implementing their programmes for nearly five years, it became apparent that there was resistance to gender discourse. Then Women's Voice conducted a qualitative study, using focus group discussions into rural people's understanding of gender. They found out that "the majority [understood] gender in terms of sharing roles only" (Women's Voice, 2000:iv). Henceforth, Women's Voice decided to use more participatory methods because the media and workshops alone had very little impact (Veronica Kamanga, interview 21/11/2001).

#### 2.4 *Conclusion*

The chapter has attempted to give socio-cultural background of Malawi by underlining its major economic, political, religious, and cultural situation. I have argued that patriarchy is the major ideology that may negatively affect the relationship between men and women because it permeates all facets of life. The same economic, political, religious and literacy situation militate against the Malawian media's possibility of being a public sphere, an arena for public debate. I have shown that for people in the rural areas to understand gender discourse, there is need for them to have access to the radio, television and newspapers. I hope this social background and the theoretical context in the following chapter will help in understanding how the rural people, who comprise 80% of the Malawi population, interpret discourses on human rights and particularly those on gender equality.

### *Chapter 3: Theoretical context*

A good theory explains an event or a behaviour. It brings clarity to an otherwise jumbled situation; it draws order out of chaos. (Griffin, 1999)

#### *3.0 Introduction*

As I hinted in Chapter 1, this chapter is a detailed literature review of the media theories that inform my study. To property situate the study, I review the literature relating to the early beliefs in mass media power, its perceived role in development, and the paradigm shift from a passive mass audience to an active audience as conceptualised by uses and gratification theory, semiotics and cultural studies, whose insights development communication experts seem to ignore, or are oblivious of, in designing media advocacy strategies.

#### *3.1 Media power, mass society theory and the passive audience*

For a long time the media of mass communication were associated with strong effects on the people. The studies, mostly conducted by American psychologists using laboratory stimuli experiments and controls often led to the conclusion that the media had direct influence and effects (positive and negative) on the people. As Bennett (1982) notes, the audience was then theorised as a mass of passive and vulnerable recipients. By the same token, the media were likened to an irresistible hypodermic needle or a magic bullet (McQuail, 1977; Lowery and Defleur, 1987; Berger, 2002). Katz and Lazarsfeld summarise the magic bullet theory of media effects succinctly:

The image of the mass communication process entertained by researchers had been, firstly, one of 'an atomistic mass' of millions of readers, listeners and movie-goers, prepared to receive the message; and secondly...every message was conceived of as a direct and powerful stimulus to action which would elicit immediate response. (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955:16 cited by Morley, 1992:45)

Researchers have often associated the magic bullet theory with mass society theory. Mass theorists believed that industrialisation, urbanisation and modernisation of European and American society in the 17th century led to the breakdown of traditional human relationships. As people migrated to towns in search of employment and other attractions of modernisation a new society of alienated, culturally rootless, undifferentiated and anonymous people who had no relations based on "friendship, kinship and traditional loyalty" (Lowery and DeFleur, 1988:7) developed. Defleur and Dennis (1988) say the rise of mass society was characterised by anomie, impersonality and distrust.

The emergence of the film industry in the 1920s led to especial fears that children would adopt bad manners and anti-social behaviour. In the United States, for example, studies were funded to research such fears. Sociologist Blumer (see Defleur and Dennis, 1988) headed the Payne Fund Studies into the influence of the film industry on children. He concluded that the films had a powerful influence on children as "youngsters impersonated cowboys and Indians, cops, robbers, pirates...every conceivable hero and villain they had seen in films"(1988: 448).



The Payne Fund Studies and one special event in particular, the consequent panic caused by the dramatised version of H.G. Well's, "The War of the Worlds," broadcast on Halloween 1938, seemed to confirm media power on a passive, innocent and vulnerable audience.

Morley (1992) notes that this "pessimistic mass society thesis" was given more weight in the 1930s when members of the Frankfurt School (Adorno, Marcuse and Horkheimer), escaping from Hitler's Germany, relocated to the USA. They posited that capitalism had led to mass society and the rise of fascism and that the media had a "direct and unmediated...impact...on their audiences" (Morley, 1992:42). Marcuse (see Benett, 1982) presented the media as irresistible carriers of prescribed, lobotomising attitudes and habits and promoters of false consciousness. Thus, the Frankfurt School saw the media as purveyors of narcotising ideology.

However, in the 1940s Lazarsfeld and his colleagues published the results of a study of the Erie County voting behaviour, which led the researchers to the conclusion that the media had a negligible influence on the voting behaviour of the people of the Erie County since the pattern of political alignments had not changed much. This conclusion disrupted the image of the mass media as a hypodermic needle or a magic bullet, that is, the notion that the media had direct, immediate and powerful effects on people's behaviour. About fifty years later, Lazarsfeld's findings were also confirmed by Graber (1989), Drew and Weaver, (1991). Graber found that "media influence is greatest in informing people and creating initial attitudes; it is least effective in changing attitudes and ingrained behaviours "(cited by Drew

and Weaver, 1991:29). Lull (1995) reports that American researchers and campaigners admitted that 'safe sex' media campaigns had failed to change people's sexual behaviour.

In short, field research into media effects has always produced different results from empirical, experimental laboratory Stimulus-Response studies influenced by learning theory (Schramm, 1974). Field research has consistently shown the media to have only limited effects. In 1960, after an extensive review of the 'effects' research, Klapper wrote that the media could not have direct effects as there always were predisposing factors. He said the media are not the sole cause of effects (see Kunczik, 1988). Further, Klapper wrote:

Persuasive mass communication functions far more frequently as an agent of reinforcement than as an agent of change. Reinforcement or at least constancy of opinion, is typically found to be the dominant effect.  
(1960, cited by Morley, 1992:48)

Schramm (1974) who, in the 1960s, believed the media were information multipliers, acknowledges that the audience is active and negotiates the messages it confronts. He writes:

The social aegis under which the message comes, the receiver's social relationship to the sender, the perceived social consequences of accepting it or acting upon it must be put together with an understanding of the symbolic and structural nature of the message, the conditions under which it is received, the

abilities of the receiver and his innate and learned responses. (Schramm, 1974:7)

He later admitted that the development communication "experts" had ignored the fact that societies were more complex than conceived earlier and urged his colleagues to revisit their earlier formulations (Schramm, 1976). However, it would appear that African development communication experts have not heeded Schramm's advice for a review of approaches to development communication (I discuss this in section 3.2 below).

Thus, Klapper and Schramm's observations reject the linear model of causality, recognise social influences as important factors, and emphasise the importance of the socio-cultural context of reception. This is important for human rights advocates to know and take into account when planning their media advocacy strategies.

### 3.2 *Communication for development in Africa: localising the dominant paradigm*

The 1960s were a period of decolonisation of much of the third world and of Africa in particular. The new African leaders sought ways of both ensuring national unity, modernisation of infrastructure and human development, that is, the improvement of people's lives (Sadcreview, 2000). During the liberation wars the media were used for propaganda purposes. After political liberation, the new nations needed the media of mass communication to inform, educate, and mobilise people into development action.

International development agencies such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), that geared themselves to help the emerging nations, looked to the writings of Lerner, Pye, Schramm, Rogers and others, who were writing within the sub-field that came to be known as Development Communication. In socialist countries like the former Soviet Union and Communist China, development communication was an offshoot of what Hester, (1987) calls revolutionary journalism.

Early development communication was founded mostly on modernisation and social diffusion theories (Maomeka, 1991; Bin Adnan *et al.*, 1991). Modernisation theory holds that an emerging nation needs to improve its economic output, acquire new technology, build new infrastructure so that its people enjoy higher standards of life than before. Modernisation theorists of the 1950s and 1960s posited that the media would "create an appetite for change through raising a climate for modernisation among members of the public" (Rogers, 1976:49). Pioneer development communication theorists, notably Schramm (1964) advocated that the media would be instrumental in stimulating poor people's desire for modernisation. Schramm declared:

Countries in a hurry cannot afford the luxury of...an inert mass. They require the active and informed co-operation of their village people as well as their city people. The human resources are indispensable. Therefore, they are going to have to speed the flow of information, offer education where it has never been offered before, teach literacy and technical skills very widely.

This is the only way they can rouse and prepare their populace to climb the economic mountains. And the way they can do it and keep the timetable they have in mind is to make full use of modern communication. (1964, cited by Berger, 1995)

One of the development communication theorists, Rogers (see Williams, 1989), says people to whom change is directed go through four stages. Firstly, they acquire knowledge, say about an early maturing maize variety. Then, before making a decision as to whether or not to embrace the new idea, they go through attitudinal evaluation. Thereafter, they decide to adopt or reject the innovation. Finally, the innovation goes through a process of evaluation. If the adopted idea is positive, it is accepted and appropriated. Rogers believes communication spreads information and helps in persuading people into accepting and reinforcing the new ideas.

He acknowledges, however, that not every member of the audience will adopt the new ideas. He says society has early adopters (like those who go to school) and opinion leaders (political, religious, and traditional leaders) and late adopters. Because of their social status and influence, early adopters and opinion leaders are used alongside the media to spread the new ideas. Rogers has been faulted for relying too much on the linear communication stimulus-response transmission model (Williams, 1989) and ignoring the value of two-way communication in development endeavours.

However, it is important to underline, that despite the rise of two-way participatory communication techniques being currently promoted for use in development communication and rights advocacy, Rogers' ideas, beliefs and methods are still being implemented in most parts of the world, including Malawi, for advocacy purposes. The old definitions, theories, and roles of development communication have not been dropped completely because people still believe in strong media and passive audiences. For instance, Hornik (1988) sees the mass media working as a low-cost loudspeaker, as a catalyst, and as a motivator for development action. McClelland (cited by Kunczik, 1988) argues that the media have the responsibility of spreading modern norms in ideological campaigns. Lucas (1999) writes that the mass media have taken over the traditional "role of teacher, preacher and parent" (<http://fao.org/sddirect>). He further says, the media [are] the most powerful and influential tools in modern life. Journalist Hieber (1998), writing about the role of the media in conflict resolution and prevention, says, "although, direct cause and effect has never been proven, Radio Mille Collines of Rwanda has played a role in alerting the international community to the dangers of hate-media (<http://ccrweb.ccr.uct.ac.za/two/>) because the radio station is considered to have fanned the hatred that led to the 1994 internecine massacres in Rwanda.

The power of the media, particularly, new technologies such as satellite television and the internet, is celebrated by Gersham (2001), Poster (1995), and Thornton (1999), among others, who believe the internet can revitalise democracy and free speech because it is cheap, can reach anyone anywhere, anytime and evades censorship. However, as Golding (1996) notes, this is no more than mere wishful thinking, for, in most poor societies, the internet is an elitist

possession. For the more than 80 % poor people in the world (and Malawi, in particular), who can hardly find anything to eat, the internet is beyond reach.

Radio and television are two types of media that African governments rely on for information dissemination and propaganda. Just as they were used for rallying people to political renewal, road, and railway construction projects in the early days of independence, they are today used for political and social development priorities and commitments, including the promotion of governance, human rights and gender issues.

However, the discourses on democracy, development and human rights seem to have been little influenced in practice by the new perspectives such as cultural studies, which have problematised language and culture, and done much work on texts and audiences. The methods of persuasive communication in development discourses, and the research are still based on the S-R model of causality. For instance, when in the 1980s the debate was raging between the dominant research paradigm and the emerging critical discourses, the discussions in *Africa Media Review*, were still focusing on such techniques as Social Marketing, (Isoba, 1991), and *oramedia* (Ugboajah, 1991) to ensure attitude change, which were, in fact, ways of refining the dominant development communication paradigm and adapting it to African conditions.

According to Isoba (1991), social marketing is the employment of advertising and marketing techniques to change people's attitudes and thinking patterns so that they adopt new values and discourses. *Oramedia* is an acronym coined by Ugboajah (1991) to describe traditional

African oral media such as drums, string instruments, folksongs, drama, and dance. Used for development purposes, Ugboajah believes, these media would be appropriate for driving developing African communities into realising their economic and productive capacity.

### *3.3 Uses and gratification theory: the active audience is born*

In the wake of studies that questioned the hypodermic needle or magic bullet theories of media power, media researchers suggested that they start asking what people do with the media (Jensen and Rosengren, 1990) since different members of the audience may interpret media content differently (Morley, 1992). The new approach, called uses and gratifications, marked the departure from the conception of the audience as a mass of passive or inert atomised individuals to seeing them as active users of media content (MacQuail *et al.*, 1972; Watson, 1998).

One of the most outstanding uses and gratifications research work was conducted in 1969 by MacQuail, Blumler and Brown who were, at the time, working at the Centre for Television Research at the University of Leeds. Using survey techniques, their main aim was to:

Make general statements about the range of satisfactions provided by television and the salience of them for different groups, defined in demographic or personality terms. (McQuail *et al.*, 1972: 143)

They concluded that people use the media as a diversion to escape from routine constraints and problems, for emotional release, for educational and surveillance (informational) purposes



such as planning an outing depending on predicted weather conditions. Sometimes, the researchers concluded, the audience uses the media to establish personal relationships. The actors in a soap opera, for instance, are intimately and fanatically followed and their misfortunes become the misfortunes of the fans. Thus, the fans identify themselves with the characters.

This and many other studies in the media uses and gratification tradition recognise the fact that the audience of the media is not passive. Morley (1989) explains that the shift from a passive to an active audience in media studies came about because of the rise of the psychology of personality, which emphasised that differences in personality were responsible for people's idiosyncrasies, including how they use the media. However, as Morley points out later, uses and gratifications theory has its own limits. To this effect, he says:

Clearly, uses and gratifications [theory] does represent a significant advance on effects [or magic bullet] theory, in so far as it opens up the question of differential interpretation. However, it remains severely limited by its insufficiently sociological or cultural perspective, in so far as everything is reduced to the level of individual psychology.  
(1989:17)

It was in attempt to fill the gaps in uses and gratifications theory, that Hall (1974b) and other cultural studies theoreticians, viewed mass communication as a structured activity, largely influenced by socio-cultural context as Schramm (1974), also wrote during the same period.

### 3.4.1 *Cultural studies and the active audience*

Cultural studies is a relatively recent media theory. It is a hybrid of many academic disciplines: hermeneutics, linguistics, semiology, sociology and politics (Storey, 1999).

Cultural studies is the study of culture and its impact on human social power relations. Principally, as Fiske (1987) writes, cultural studies deals with "the generation and circulation of meanings in industrial society" (1987:254). Fiske's definition excludes traditional society. However, I would argue that the insights gained from cultural studies are applicable to the study of meanings in non-industrial societies, where, as I explained in Chapter 1, gender relations are serious social relations. Cultural studies (see Lull, 1999; Hall, 1982; Fiske, 1987) considers the ideological influence critical to the maintenance of the human power relations. Those with cultural capital, as Bourdieu (see Watson, 1998) calls the educated, the rulers and the rich, control such ideological state apparatuses (Fiske, 1987) as the media, education and religious institutions. Through this control, the dominant ideology (ideas, values and acts that influence social behaviour) is spread to other members of society. Thus, the hegemony of the powerful is accepted and adopted as something natural.

It is worth noting that the definition of the state in cultural studies includes both political and civil society. Gramsci (see Bennett *et al.*, 1981) explains that political society comprises apparatuses for forced control such as the central administration, the army, the legal system and prisons while civil society includes "private" non-governmental organisations which rule by seeking an individual's consent or free will.

Hegemonic domination operates subtly and discreetly. Ideology, the public expression of social values, is passed on as the thoughts of the majority. For example, libertarianism is basically a Western, or to be precise, American social value (Huntington, 1997) in which the concept of human rights and competitive politics (multi-party democracy) are both said to be rooted. Since America and its allies are rich and produce textbooks, they pass their ideology on in schools, through the media, and religious institutions to other parts of the world. As such, America now dominates the world. A large proportion of the world considers American products as the best. Coca Cola, Disney, CNN, Fox films and the US currency itself are valuables and products of libertarianism. Thus, libertarianism is seen as the best and the cited products have also become subtle vehicles of American ideology.

Hall (1982), argues that the media do not just reflect or express the ideas of the time, they also legitimate the existing social structure and set the agenda. The media's "major role is consensus formation" (Hall, 1982:64). Thus, media practitioners actively engage in interpreting events, setting the agenda for the public and "providing the categories and frameworks within which members of [a] culture will tend to operate" (Morley, 1989:17). The concept of news values in news selection, editing, the endorsement of political candidates, and the technological brightening up and cropping of pictures, give enough proof as to how much the media are biased towards certain social classes (Hall, 1977).

From an ideological perspective, it follows, that, like experimental media effects studies, cultural studies considers the media as powerful as conveyors of ideology. However, using

insights from uses and gratifications research, cultural studies recognises the power of the audience (see de Certeau, 1990 at <http://cultsock.ndirect.co.uk>). Semiology considers any communication code as polysemic. Below, I expand these two concepts (semiology and polysemy).

### 3.4.2 *Semiology: symbolic polysemy*

Semiology or semiotics is the study of signs or symbols/codes and how they are structured to produce meaning in particular human societies. Leading theorists in semiology include the Swiss linguist, de Saussure, the American philosopher, Peirce, the French cultural commentator, Barthes, and British scholars, Ogden and Richards. These theorists propose the same thesis, that is, that people share meaning through the interpretation of signs. The interpretation is dependent on social cultural circumstances (Storey, 1999; Hall, 1982).

According to de Saussure, the sign is made up of two elements: the signifier (the word on paper, for example) and the signified (the idea or mental concept). The signifier is sometimes called the object (Peirce) or the referent (Ogden and Richards). Volosinov (1973) posits that the meaning of any sign is fundamentally social and hence ideological because it embodies the dominant ideas of the time. People make meaning (signification) by relating the signifier to the signified. Hence, the sign only makes sense in the right cultural context, age and occasion. For example, a sideways shaking of the head means disapproval among Malawians but it symbolises approval in Chinese and Japanese cultures. Therefore, it is right to say that the sign is polysemic (it has many interpretations or meanings). This multi-accentuality of the sign/code (Hall, 1977) means that meaning making is negotiable because people have to assign



meaning to the signs singularly or through a syntagmatic structure of symbols (like words in a sentence).

It is from the concept of sign interpretation or arbitrary meaning assignment to a sign or signs that theorists such as John Fiske (1987) conclude that the audience is active and has semiotic power over the text.

Fiske (1987) describes the pop musician, Madonna, as the "queen of polysemy" because, while being exploited by the pop music industry, she is a feminist who fights for women's rights, a liberated woman who defies restrictions imposed on the expression of female sexuality by patriarchal and religious forces. These and many other attributes make her image polysemic.

Fiske's (1987) interpretation of Madonna's music and image has been criticised by his detractors as creating a hyperactive audience. Even before Fiske's (1987) formulations, Hall (see Morley, 1992) had written that audience power over the text was limited since "there remains a dominant cultural order, though it is neither univocal or uncontested" (Hall, cited by Morley, 1992:52). What Hall means here is that the text is open to different interpretations only to a certain extent because it is structured in dominance, that is, it is influenced by the material and ideological conditions of the time.

Stevenson (1995) finds Fiske's (1987) analysis flawed because, by conceiving the audience as more powerful than the text, Fiske forecloses the debate on the influence of ideology on the audience's interpretation of the text (see Hall, 1982).

In brief then, any text speaks differently to different socially situated readers, who bring the experiences of their situation and the various discourses available to them to bear on the process of making meaning out of the text (Fiske, 1989; Moores, 1993; Storey, 1999). As Berger (1991) declares, nothing has meaning in itself because every code has to be interpreted by an active audience, whose semiotic powers are constrained by the existing social conditions in which it is structured (Hall, 1977). Only when the audience has decoded the text, appropriated its meaning, can media consumption be said to have taken place (Storey, 1999).

### *3.5 Encoding and decoding media content: Parkin, Hall and the disciples*

This study is based on Stuart Hall's seminal essay, Encoding and Decoding in the TV Discourse (1974b). Hall conceives media consumption as a cultural activity in which an individual grapples with meaning making, a process that involves both decoding and encoding a text. Like the encoder (or message initiator), the audience is also involved in meaning production. Hall is not alone in recognising this process. Schramm (1974) came up with a communication model meant to improve on the Shannon and Weaver transmission model. He saw both the message initiator or source and the message target as people who keep switching between encoding and decoding media texts. This is so because they share the "field of experience" (see Watson, 1998:37) or common ground as Brazil *et al.* (1980) term it.

Following Parkin (see Morley, 1989), Hall (1974b) identifies three decoding positions, or reading strategies, that the audience may take vis-à-vis the text. Firstly, the audience may operate within the dominant code in which the text is structured. This is the preferred code or reading, whose meaning, the producers of messages would want and expect the audience to get and accept. The dominant code refers to prevailing political and social values. For example, human rights, equality, free speech, independent justice systems, and free market ideologies constitute the dominant code in plural democracies. Message producers such as human rights campaigners expect their audience to interpret it within this framework. For the audience to interpret the text as the message initiator wants, the audience and the producer need to share codes or what describes Schramm (1974) as field of experience.

Secondly, the audience may interpret the text with a negotiated code. Here, the audience decodes and recognises the code of the dominant hegemony but takes its own social position. To illustrate this position, Hall (1974b) gives the example of workers who generally agree that wage increases cause inflation, but they still insist on their right to strike for better pay. Another example is the 2001 nurses strike in Blantyre, Malawi. Their mother body, the Midwives and Nurses Council told nurses to return to work because, the Council argued, it was unprofessional for nurses to strike for pay. However, the nurses argued that they needed better pay to live better and thus work better. They went on with the strike until they got their pay increment (*Chronicle*, 22/10/01). In this case, the message initiator and the audience partly share the codes (Morley, 1989).

The third and last position that the audience might take is the oppositional code. The audience recognises the preferred code but deliberately takes an alternative or counter-hegemonic interpretation (Hall, 1977). This is tantamount to protesting or completely opposing the intended meaning (Fiske, 1989). Eco (1982), calls the oppositional code subversive or aberrant reading because it deliberately runs counter to the message-source's preferred meaning. It is worth noting, that, while rejection or opposition is deliberate, negotiation is not.

### 3.6 *Conclusion*

Despite the emergence of new discourses such as cultural studies that have attempted to change the research focus vis-à-vis media influence on the audience, policy advocates still believe in strong media effects. This belief is not limited to developing countries. In the West, it has given rise to media projects like civic journalism (<http://pewcenter.org>) and a number of online human rights campaign networks (see for example, <http://hria.net>; <http://hrea.org>) and Sladshot (<http://firstmonday.dk>). Thornton, (1997) and Gersham (<http://ned.org/about/carl>) believe that the internet is an ideal tool for campaigning for human rights and democracy because it is cheap and easy to access, a claim political economists consider a tall order. However, uses and gratification theory and cultural studies, conceive the audience as active and able to disagree with the encoders' intentions. Currently, some development communication experts and rights advocacy groups, have come to appreciate the contributions of uses and gratifications and cultural studies research and develop communications activities such as Participatory Rural Communication Appraisal (see Anyaegbunam *et al.*, 1998) that treat rural people their equals. In Malawi, it is only Women's Voice that employs participatory advocacy methodology.



Hall's (1974a) encoding/decoding model posits that media meaning is passed through frameworks of knowledge, which are themselves structured in dominance, that is, ideological and material circumstances dictate how the audience decodes the texts. So, the messages human rights advocates would prefer the Malawian rural communities to get may be totally different or modified by the audience.

## *Chapter 4:Methodology*

Qualitative research, as a set of interpretive practices, privileges no single methodology over another...[nor] does [it] have a distinct set of methods that are entirely of its own. Qualitative researchers use semiotics, narrative, content, discourse, archival and phonemic analysis...even statistics.... All these research practices “provide insights and knowledge”. (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:3)

### *4.0 Introduction*

As I explained in Chapter 1, this study aimed at understanding the meanings the rural people of TA Likoswe, Chiradzulo in Malawi make from mediated messages on human rights and gender equality. This study falls in the interpretive paradigm and mostly uses qualitative methods. However, for methodological expediency, triangulation, was inevitable. In this chapter, I discuss and justify the research paradigms, methods or techniques that I employed in gathering data. I also describe the sampling procedures and data analysis techniques I used.

### *4.1 Research paradigms*

Kuhn (cited by Schwandt) describes a paradigm as a "disciplinary matrix of commitments, beliefs, values, methods, outlooks... shared across a discipline" (1997:109). This matrix of beliefs reflects or guides the way people conceive and live reality. Additionally, a paradigm "guides the investigator, not only in choices of methods but in ontologically fundamental

ways" (Guba and Lincoln, 1994:105). A research paradigm comprises three key elements: ontology, epistemology and methodology (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).

Ontological questions refer to the nature of reality. For example, positivists believe that phenomena exist independently of the researcher (Bryman, 1988). Epistemology refers to the relation between reality and the researcher. In the case of positivism, researchers believe that knowledge can be grasped if a researcher is neutral. Methodology includes techniques or methods one follows in search of reality. Again, in the case of positivism, the methods are usually quantitative (experimental controls and surveys).

It must be emphasised that research paradigms are beliefs, principles, human constructions of the world. They are traditions researchers follow in doing their work. As human constructions paradigms are not value free (Guba and Denzin, 1994). There are three key paradigms in which research is done. These are: positivism, interpretivism, and critical social science. However, in the following sections, I only discuss positivism and interpretivism because they are the ones relevant to this study.

#### *4.2.1 The positivist paradigm*

Positivism is credited to the father of sociology, the French philosopher, Auguste Comte who described positivism as an objective examination of phenomena and the only way of arriving at knowledge. Comte believed that only through empirical, verifiable, tangible data, could one prove anything. The rest of the methods are deemed supernatural and metaphysical (like religious proof of the existence of God).

As a research paradigm, positivism is associated with the rigours of scientific research sometimes called the Scientific Method. Its core ontological assumptions include the belief that reality exists independently of the observer, it is observable and predictable (Connole, 1990; Leedy, 1989). Thus, phenomena that cannot be observed directly or through experience (deductive reasoning) or indirectly through controlled experiments cannot contribute to the acquisition of knowledge (Bryman, 1988). Its methodology is mostly quantitative.

#### *4.2.2 Characteristics of quantitative research*

As noted above, positivism is associated with quantitative research. Following Bryman, Strelitz (2002), identifies five key characteristics of quantitative research. Firstly, quantitative researchers believe that only those observable phenomena (using the six human senses) can lead to knowledge. Secondly, quantitative researchers believe in inductive reasoning, that is, knowledge is arrived at through accumulation of verified facts. Thirdly, quantitative researchers believe that research findings of genuine research are generalisable, which leads to the formulation of universal laws or theories. Thus, research leads to theory. Fourthly, through deductive reasoning, universal laws can be used to explain individual phenomena. Finally, quantitative researchers mostly use such methods as social surveys and experimental controls in obtaining data.

In sum, one would say positivists believe that there is a 'real' independent reality out there that can be apprehended by an objective, detached, and value free inquirer (Strelitz, 2002).

#### 4.2.3 *The Survey*

The social survey method is one of the most popular quantitative research techniques. Harvey and MacDonald (1993, cited by Strelitz, 2002) point out that with the survey method one collects large amounts of data representative of the population. Further, the survey method, using self-completion questionnaires, is relatively cheap to administer even if the targets are scattered over a large area. Hansen *et al.*, (1998) note that surveys are good at gathering information about beliefs, opinions and attitudes. As I explain in section 4.3.1 below, I used self-completion questionnaires to gather information on human rights advocates beliefs in, and uses of, the media in human rights advocacy. In some cases, the questionnaires contained open-ended questions, which required explanations.

#### 4.2.4 *The interpretive paradigm*

From a philosophical perspective, interpretivism is the anti-thesis of positivism. Unlike positivists, interpretivists believe that reality is relative, constructivist and the researcher can hardly know the ultimate truth. The objective of social research is to understanding the way people think and make meaning. Researchers in this paradigm argue that human behaviour is unpredictable and thus cannot be generalised into universal laws. Leedy admits that "control is much less possible in research concerned with human data and existential variables" (1989:84). Griffin makes the point even more forcefully when he says:

Human behaviour is notoriously unpredictable. While theories often cast their predictions in cause and effect terms, a certain humility on the part of the theorist is advisable. (1991:6)

It was this realisation, that positivist research was asking the wrong questions about human society (Hollaran, 1998), that led to a paradigm shift in the social sciences. Human beings could no longer be taken as research subjects. Rather they ought to be considered as equal partners or participants in the research process as both the researcher and the researched are involved in the process of learning. As Connole (1994) puts it, social science research need not emulate and feel inferior to positivist research practices. Thus, more and more studies are conducted today that approach human social experience from an interpretivist perspective.

#### *4.2.5 Characteristics of qualitative research*

Interpretivist researchers look at reality as a human construction that involves meaning-making or the interpretation of events. Christians and Carey observe that:

Qualitative studies start from the assumption that in studying human society we are examining a creative process whereby people produce and maintain forms of life and society and systems of meaning and value. This creativity is grounded in the ability to build cultural forms from symbols that express this will to live and assert meaning. [Thus] humans live by interpretations. (1992:358 cited by Strelitz, 2002)

Qualitative studies take cognisance of the impact of social context (Moore,1993), that is, cultural influences, religious beliefs, and economic circumstances on the interpretation of events or texts. Qualitative research techniques or methods comprise historical, hermeneutic textual analysis, unstructured or semi-structured face-to-face interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, discourse and qualitative content analysis and case studies (see Strelitz,2002). The aim of these techniques is to collect ideographic data about a community. Thus, qualitative research does not principally intend to create universal laws or to predict anything (Bryman,1988; Mouton,1996) but to generate information about a situation as it is lived by the people in their community. This deep information is used to understand and explain a phenomenon. Pauly underlines this critical departure from quantitative studies thus:

Qualitative researchers do not offer their studies as illustrations of larger, supposedly more substantial theories. The topic of qualitative research is the making of meaning. (1991:11)

The case study, which was one of the main methods of this study, has been dismissed by quantitative researchers as serving only as a problem identification exercise (Pauly, 1991) as it cannot generate generalisable material. However, it would be important to note that the case study method provides internally generalisable data since the instrument is valid for a particular case study. This internal validity means the results of the study are generalisable within a particular community under study. This argument is supported by Maxwell (1992), who writes:

Generalisation in qualitative research usually takes place through the development of a theory that not only makes sense of the particular persons or situations studied, but also shows how the same process, in different situations, can lead to different results. However, when a society is homogenous, which is very rare, the results of a case may be generalised to the entire society, even if it is scattered across thousands of kilometres. (1992:288-291 cited by Strelitz, 2002)

As I argue later (Chapter 7), the case study results can be generalised to any society that shares characteristics with the society under study. To be precise, the results of this study can be generalised to any society that shares social characteristics with the people of Chief Likoswe in Chiradzulo, Malawi.

#### 4.2.6 *Ethnography*

Ethnography is a qualitative research method mostly used in social anthropology. It has been used in television reception analysis (Morley, 1980). Jensen (1991) describes reception analysis as the study of the reception, uses and impact of the media on the audience. It considers "texts and their recipients [as] complementary elements of one inquiry which addresses both the discursive and the social aspects of communication" (Jensen, 1991:135).

Underwood offers the following definition of reception of reception analysis:

Reception analysis [is] research which focuses on the way that individuals make meaning for media messages. Reception analysis has some similarity with



uses and gratification research, but is much more likely to use an ethnographic approach involving in-depth interviews, participant observation, etc. (2001 <http://cultsock.ndirect.co.uk>)

Thus defined, reception analysis fills the deficiencies in traditional content analysis which Berelson (1952, in Hansen *et al.*, 1998) describes as a research technique that involves the systematic, objective, and quantitative analysis of the manifest content of communication. As discussed in Chapter 3 above, communication harbours both latent and manifest content. In semiotics, manifest content is viewed as the denotation (the obvious, banal meaning) of the communication code while latent content is the connotation (hidden) message conveyed by the symbol (Watson, 1998). In addition to studying manifest content, reception analysis studies latent content, a process known as qualitative content analysis (Larsen, 1991). Reception analysis approaches communication consumption holistically since meaning, conveyed through socially accepted codes, is a social and discursive process. Discourse itself is the totality of a particular community's beliefs, actions, and behaviours. As discussed in the foregoing chapter, media content is value laden and it is rarely manifest. As such, only those methods that would help tease out this latent content from media texts (songs in my case) were employed in this study.

This study used ethnographic field methods which have been used in cultural studies to study the meaning audiences make of texts. Morley (1980) used focus group discussions to determine the meanings British TV audiences made of the programme "Nationwide", Radway (1984) used participant observation in her study of why women read romance and Strelitz

(2002) used both in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to study media consumption amongst South African youth.

Summarising the major goal of ethnography in cultural studies, Storey writes:

Cultural studies ethnography is not a means to verify[ing] the 'true' meanings of the text; rather it is a means to discover the meanings people make; the meanings which circulate and become embedded in lived cultures of people's everyday lives. (1999:164)

It is clear from the above discussion that while reception analysis is a general term describing the qualitative study of media reception, ethnography is a research method that involves such techniques as participant observation, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews (Morley and Silverstone, 1991).

While the results of this study may not necessarily be generalisable to other communities, the study offers an understanding of the meaning rural communities in Chiradzulo, Malawi, make of human rights and gender messages passed through local Malawian music broadcast on radio.

#### *4.2.7 Triangulation*

Defined simply triangulation is the use two or more research methods in one research design.

Bilden and Biklen (1982, cited by Bryman, 1988) argue that although quantitative and

qualitative research methods emanate from different epistemological and ontological perceptions, the two can be combined for practical reasons. Warwick and Lininger (1975 cited by Bryman, 1988), argue that qualitative and quantitative techniques are useful for certain purposes and useless for others. Wolf *et al.* emphasise the idea of triangulation thus:

Although survey (quantitative) and focus group (qualitative) techniques are derived from divergent theoretical approaches, there is nothing inherent in the methods themselves that forbids their combination. (1993:119 cited by Strelitz, 2002)

Below, I discuss the research process of this triangulated research design.

#### *4.3 The research process*

The research process saw me go through four phases. The first phase involved desk research at Rhodes University (Grahamstown, South Africa), the Malawi Polytechnic (Blantyre, Malawi) and the Zambia Institute of Mass Communication and Education Trust (Lusaka, Zambia) from 1999 to 2001. The second involved identifying an appropriate media text to be used for focus group discussions. Thirdly, I designed two questionnaires (appendices 1 and 2). One (consisting of nine closed and open-ended questions) was sent to the message producers and the other (made up of 12 questions) was sent to media outlets that have the potential of broadcasting into the case study area. Fourthly, I conducted field research (focus group discussions) in the area of Traditional Authority Likoswe, Chiradzulo, Malawi. The results of

the desk research from the literature review in Chapter 3. In this chapter, I discuss the rest of the research phases. The two questionnaires form appendices 1 and 2.

#### 4.3.1 *Administering the questionnaires*

Since it was very difficult to travel around the country, self-completion questionnaires were sent to human rights campaigners to determine the preferred interpretation of the messages of their campaign material and their belief in media power. This was followed up by face to face interviews/discussions with those organisations operating in Blantyre. The second questionnaire was sent all to radio stations (and TV-Malawi) that beam into the area of TA Likoswe, Chiradzulo, Malawi.

The first questionnaire was sent to the following organisations:

<i>Questionnaire on the use of (mass) media for human rights advocacy</i>		
Name of organisation	City	Status of questionnaire
1. Women's Voice	Blantyre	Returned
2. Centre for Human rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR)	Lilongwe	Returned
3. Malawi Human Rights Commission	Lilongwe	Returned
4. Active Youth Initiative	Blantyre	Not returned
5. Livingstonia Synod	Mzuzu	Not returned
6. Malawi Council for the	Blantyre	Returned

Disability Affairs		
7. Malawi Carer	Blantyre	Returned
8. Association for Dialogue	Blantyre	Returned
9. Civil liberties Committee	Blantyre	Returned

*Figure 4.1: Table showing organisations to which questionnaires were sent*

Out of nine questionnaires sent to human rights/gender advocacy organisations, seven (78%) were completed and sent back.

The second questionnaire was sent to the following electronic media:

Name of organisation	City	Status of questionnaire
1. Malawi Broadcasting Corporation	Blantyre	Returned
2. Capital FM	Blantyre	Returned
3. FM 101 Power	Blantyre	Returned
4. MIJ 90.3 FM	Blantyre	Returned
5. Television Malawi	Blantyre	Returned

*Figure 4.2: Table showing electronic media to which questionnaires were sent*

Five out of five (100%) questionnaires were completed and sent back.

It must be noted that while human rights campaign projects and operations cover the whole country, their offices are mainly based in Blantyre. Only the four contacted media houses

broadcast into my case study area: the area of Traditional Authority Likoswe, Chiradzulo. So, the electronic media based in Lilongwe were purposely left out. At the time of the data gathering process, Radio Maria and Radio Islam, both with a wide broadcasting range, had not yet been launched.

#### 4.3.2 *Selecting and translating media texts*

The audio recordings of the three songs used in this study were bought from street vendors. I listened to the songs. For the benefit of non-Chichewa readers and listeners, I translated them into English. It must be emphasised that translation is more than a technical activity. It involves decoding the text from the source language, assimilating the message, finding equivalents in the target language, before re-encoding it in a different code (language). In such a process, the original meaning is sometimes lost or changed and new ideas introduced. In brief, what the translated version of the song means may be slightly different from the original.

The key media text (*Jenda*) was composed, written, and sung by Overtoun Chimombo. Other texts are songs by the Kasambwe Brothers Band (*Zasintha Udyo*) and Ben Michael (*Kamba Anga Mwala*). These songs enjoy good airplay on both private radio and national public radio (Malawi Broadcasting Corporation). I am not aware of any research into the popularity of Malawian music. As such, it is difficult to judge how popular or unpopular *Jenda* is.

From all the accessible texts, Overtoun Chimombo's song, *Jenda*, was chosen as the key text, because of its linguistic accessibility (it is in Chichewa while most radio programmes on human rights are in English). It was also chosen for its comprehensive treatment of human

rights and gender issues. It is clearly divided into two parts. The first part (stanzas 1-3) summarises the gender equality messages human rights advocates are sending out (see sections 2.2 and 2.3 above). The second part (stanzas 4 - 6) presents anti-gender equality perspectives as advocated by those opposed to the gender equality campaign. *Jenda* is a well structured argument that gives the 'listener' the two sides of the gender debate raging in Malawi. As such I did not need to look for many human rights texts. The text was dense enough to give people a chance to debate various issues. Additionally, the song is entertaining, an element that made the discussions run on for more than an hour without losing the attention of the participants.

#### 4.3.3 *Piloting*

The song was played to a group of fairly literate gender seminar participants at Grace Bandawe Conference Centre, Blantyre, Malawi in July, 2001. Initially, the participants did not understand much. When I gave them a transcript of the song, *Jenda*, the participants got the message of the song. They immediately started referring to other Malawian songs and proverbs that stereotyped women and men. This gave me an insight into audience attention to music. The participants were initially more interested in the song's beat than in the message. This was a controlled environment, yet participants did not seem to concentrate on the message. What more when the environment is uncontrolled? The answer to the foregoing would constitute the subject of a full and independent study and thus is not tackled here.

#### *4.3.4 Recruiting focus groups*

The research process involved travelling to the area of Traditional Authority Likoswe of the Chiradzulo district, whose population is mostly Lomwe, as a case study. There, with the help of community leaders, notably Chief Likoswe himself, focus groups were organised (see appendix 5 for the exact composition of the groups). This was done out of academic prudence and observance of protocol to enter the community. In a culture where suspicion and fear still characterise people's lives, it would have been impossible for me to get people into free discussion without the assistance of traditional leaders. While chances of bias were there, traditional leaders have been reported to have assisted without bias in earlier studies (Women's Voice, 2000).

I had originally planned to conduct focus group discussions throughout Malawi and among all Malawian ethnic communities. I realised later that that could not be achieved. I needed money to pay interpreters (for discussions in communities whose languages I could not understand), feed them, and accommodate them. I further needed reliable transport to travel up and down the country. Although Malawi is a small country, its transport infrastructure is problematic. Fuel is very expensive and the research funding available did not allow for extensive travel. A further complication was that in Malawi, protocol demands that a researcher gets permission in writing from the District Commissioner of each district before conducting any research. Permission to conduct research in the area of TA Likoswe alone took two months to be granted.



#### 4.3.5 *Sampling techniques*

The focus groups were recruited using non-probability sampling techniques. Sampling is used in research for purposes of limiting the study population into manageable units. Unlike a national census, which covers all corners of the target population, it is impossible, due to logistical, migratory and economic reasons, in an academic study to deal with every member of the population. That is why only small portions of the population are chosen as representatives of a large population.

There are two types of samples: probability and non-probability. A probability sample, according to Comstock and McCombs (1981), is a portion of the population made up of typical elements that have each an equal chance of being chosen. Examples of probability samples are systematic samples, which are chosen at specific intervals. For instance, choosing every seventh person in a crowd would result in typical systematic sample. Another example of a probability sample is a random sample. For instance, given that the population of Malawi has a ratio of 52:48 women for men, ideally, each sample should be composed of 52 women for every 48 men chosen. When further variables such as age and social status are considered, the final stratified random sample should also include the proportion of these variables to reflect the reality on the ground.

The second type of sample is the non-probability sample. This type of sample is also called a "convenience" or an "opportunity" sample (Comstock and McCombs, 1981:159). Non-probability samples are used when, as is the case in most rural areas, there is no reliable sampling frame, that is, a register or list of the population (Peil, 1982) and "its usefulness

depends on the judiciousness applied to its selection" (Comstock and McCombs, 1981:159). Major examples of non-probability samples include quota and purposive samples. An example of a quota sample would be the allocation of a certain portion of room for women that matches with the ratio of their numbers in a population. If Malawi's population has 52 % women and 48 % men, then 52 % of seats in parliament should be taken up by women. The remaining 48% seats would be the men's quota.

A purposive or judgmental sample (see Babbie, 1992) is chosen because it fits certain criteria. For example, a study on eating habits of rural people excludes urban dwellers. According to Peil, purposive sampling is employed in case studies, where a community is considered as a typical "example of the variables with which the research is concerned" (1982:27).

It must be noted that the nature and purpose of the research project determines the type of sample to be used. Random samples are good for surveys about tastes and frequency of occurrences. However, they are ill-suited for qualitative studies whose goal is to explain or understand why things are as they are (Warwick and Lininger, 1975 cited by Bryman, 1988). As will be seen in Chapter 6, probability sampling techniques could not work in recruiting focus groups for my case study focus group discussions.

Focus group discussions formed the core part of data collection for this study. The ideal would have been to follow Livingstone and Lunt (1993), who suggest that a researcher should run the group discussions until there is no more new information coming forth. However, due to time and financial constraints and the fact that the case study society is largely

homogenous, I thought six groups each comprising between four and eight people sufficed. These were divided by such variables as gender, age, and authority. Eventually, I had five groups (middle-aged men, middle-aged women, old women, old men, and chiefs). I grouped them thus because experience and research have shown that in rural Malawi women and the youth feel constrained to express themselves in the presence of men (Women's Voice, 2000). The same goes true for chiefs who would automatically dominate the proceedings if they had been mixed with common people.

#### *4.3.6 My role as moderator*

I facilitated all focus group discussions. This permitted me to have "first hand" knowledge of the community I was studying and helped me guard against falsification of data. The groups listened to one recorded song (*Jenda*). For some, it was the first time that they had ever heard the song. Others had heard it before. The messages of the song were discussed. While I left the discussion open, I used my interview guide (appendix 3) to steer it so that every participant had a chance to contribute to the debate.

The discussions, held at the Chief's home, were audio-taped by my younger brother, Mark, who acted as my assistant. These appear here in translated form as appendix 5. The original discussions in Chichewa are available on audio tapes.

#### *4.4. Data analysis techniques*

Data collected through the use of questionnaires was analysed manually. However, with the assistance of Salule Masangwi, senior lecturer and head of mathematical sciences at the

Polytechnic, University of Malawi, I was able to classify the data and produce graphs to summarise the findings discussed in Chapter 5. Information collected during focus group discussions was classified into natural meaning units (Kvale, 1996) before being translated into English. Kvale (1996) refers to the classification of discourses into natural meaning units, which I call 'units of sense', as meaning condensation. Creswell (1994) calls the process reduction, while Keenan and Schiffel (cited by Brown and Yule, 1983) call it discourse topic. Kvale (1996) describes meaning condensation as " a technique of analysing interview data by abridging the meaning expressed by an interviewee into shorter, more succinct formulations" (cited by Chikunkhuzeni, 1999).

Participants' discussions were manually grouped into units of sense. The meaning units were then fitted into Hall's (1974b) Encoding and Decoding model to gauge how the participants interpreted gender and human rights discourses and the meanings they made from the same.

#### *4.5 Conclusion*

This chapter has emphasised the fact that research paradigms determine the methods. The nature and goal of the research project reported on in this thesis required triangulation of methods. Thus, both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (focus group discussions) methods were employed. Alone, quantitative techniques would have given me a catalogue of preferred messages the advocates want their audiences to get from the human rights texts. However, that would not have explained the meaning members of the audience themselves make from the advocacy campaigns. Further, quantitative methods are insufficient in unveiling the complex nature of human communication. Like all studies in this tradition, there is no claim to

external validity or generalisation and universality since it cannot be guaranteed that a similar study would come up with the same interpretation since people's perceptions change by the day. Discourses change constantly. Human behaviour is dynamic and dialectical.

## *Chapter 5: Research findings: campaigners' preferred messages*

The overall intention of 'effective communication' must, certainly, be to 'win the consent' of the audience to the *preferred reading*, and hence to get him (sic) to decode within the hegemonic framework. (Hall, 1977:344)

### *5.0 Introduction*

In the foregoing chapter, I indicated that the research process was triangulated: desk research, survey and focus group discussions. In this chapter, I present and discuss the results of the survey, whose principal objective was to determine the policy of the electronic media vis-à-vis human rights and gender. Also, I wanted to find out the human rights campaigners' preferred messages. I thought it was against this background that I would understand the messages the rural people make from human rights and gender messages.

### *5.1 Media content and policy*

All the four electronic media institutions contacted mentioned entertainment, information and education as their common *raison d'être*. MIJ 90.3 FM, said, in addition to providing entertainment, information, and education, it had the role being a model radio station to the nation. To this end, MIJ 90.3FM offers professional training for broadcasters. All the electronic media contacted believe radio and TV are an effective tool for human rights advocacy because of their wide and diverse audience. However, Television Malawi admits that TV may not be effective because most Malawians living in rural areas can hardly afford TV sets. Even if they did, TV runs on electricity and only 4% of Malawian territory is

electrified. Electrification favours urban areas and hence the rural poor areas suffer. To complicate matters, Television (Malawi) broadcasts mainly in English, thereby alienating the 60% illiterate, rural-based Malawians from getting information.

All stations have programmes on human rights. Television (Malawi) has two programmes (*Know your rights* and *Women and Society*) while the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) airs, weekly, *Your rights* and *Disability Forum* and the same programmes are available in Chichewa as a *Ufulu Wamu* and *Nafenso ndife Anthu*. Capital FM runs a phone-in cum discussion programme, *Sunday Debate* while a similar programme called *Power People* is broadcast by FM101Power. MBC Radio 2, which introduced the phone-in programmes, has taken its own programme, *Talk of the Nation*, off the air for reasons no one at MBC wants to reveal. MIJ 90.3 FM runs a *School Debate* programme involving secondary school students, and *Tomorrow Today*, both of which tackle human rights issues.

Except for MIJ 90.3 FM's schools debate, the human rights programmes are not sponsored.

The electronic media cite consolidation of democracy, and educating or reminding people about their rights as reasons for having human rights programmes on their networks.

Although MBC claims to play the song, *Jenda*, no one remembers having heard it played.

One reason would be that the song seems to be anti-establishment. It is virtually against gender policies being advocated and implemented by the government (Malawi Government, 2000). Only MIJ90.3FM frequently plays Overtoun Chimombo's song, *Jenda*. Other radio

stations and TV Malawi do not play the song ostensibly because they do not have the CD containing the song.

As for their policies on music selection, the media said they made the selection depending on the quality of the recording, relevance of content, and audience demands. Above all, one station (MBC) said, the need for balance and variety dictates the type of music they play.

Radio and TV broadcasting in post-colonial Africa has been highly influenced by John Reith's BBC broadcasting policy of educating, entertaining and informing the people independently of political influence (Weymouth and Lamizet, 1996). This policy has been based on the linear communication model, where the programme producers determine what the public needs and wants because the audience is conceived as passive. However, the inclusion of phone-in and discussion programmes in recent times illustrates the realisation among broadcast professionals for the need for audience input or feedback to programmes.

## 5.2 *Media for advocacy*<sup>1</sup>

Human Rights advocates were asked nine questions which mainly sought to find out how the advocates rated the power of the media to inform, educate and change people's attitudes. They were also asked to mention factors that impede the acceptance of human rights messages. Further, they were asked to rate, on an arbitrary 5-point scale (0-30; 31-50; 51-70; 71-90; 91-100 %) ranging from poor to excellent (see appendix 1), the extent to which specific social groups had responded to their messages. Finally, they were invited to freely



comment on the main text, *Jenda* and isolate the message(s) that the song sent to the audience. Below I summarise their answers.

### *5.2.1 Media power to inform*

All the seven human rights organisations that responded to the questionnaire rated radio's power to inform highly (between 71-100%) while two organisations considered television (Malawi)'s power to inform highly (71-100%). One organisation scored its power as above average (51-70%). The rest thought television (Malawi)'s power to inform fell below average (0-50%). As for newspapers, three organisations rated their power to inform highly (71-100%), one considered their power as average but the rest of the organisations rated newspaper power to inform below average. Two organisations rated music highly, three thought its power to inform was above average (51-70%) and the other two considered it below average. The power of books to inform received high (71-100%) ratings from only two organisations and one organisation thought the power of books to inform is above average but four organisations scored the power of books to inform below average (0-50%).

It is clear from the above ratings that radio is considered the most informative mass medium in Malawi.

### *5.2.2 Media power to educate*

As for media power to educate, four organisations thought radio rated highly (71-100%) while one scored its power to educate at above average (51-70%). Two others considered its

---

<sup>1</sup> For quick reference, the information contained in sections 5.2.1 to 5.3 is presented graphically at

power to educate below average (0-50%). Two organisations rated TV- Malawi's power to educate highly and five considered this power above average (51-70%). Only one organisation rated newspaper power to educate highly, three considered this power above average and two rated newspaper power to educate below average.

While radio was considered the most powerful medium of information, (see section 5.3.1 above) television (Malawi) is considered the most powerful tool for education (all respondents scored it above average).

### *5.2.3 Power to change behaviour and attitudes*

Three respondents thought radio has very strong power (71-100%) to change people's behaviour and attitudes, two thoughts this power is above average (51-70%) but two scored its power to change behaviour below average (0-50%). Two respondents thought television (Malawi) had a high potential to change behaviour and attitudes, two considered this power above average. Three respondents scored it below average. Only one organisation thought newspapers had an excellent chance (91-100%) of changing people's behaviour and attitudes but the other five thought newspaper power to change behaviour and attitudes fell below average (0-50%). Three respondents considered music's power to change people's behaviour and attitudes as high (71-100%), three others rated it above average and only one considered it as falling below average. Two organisations thought books had strong power to change people's behaviour and attitudes, two scored music's power as average while the other three respondents rated music's power to change attitudes below average.

---

appendix 8.

From the above statistics, one can conclude that radio is considered as more powerful than other media in changing people's behaviour and attitudes.

### 5.3 *Media as an advocate's ally*

Five organisations considered radio as their trustworthy ally (71-100%) while two rated its involvement below average. Two scored television (Malawi) highly, one average and the rest below average. Two organisations thought newspapers were trustworthy allies (71-100%), three thought their trustworthiness was above average and the remaining two scored newspapers below average. As for music, two scored it highly, one as above average while the rest scored it below average.

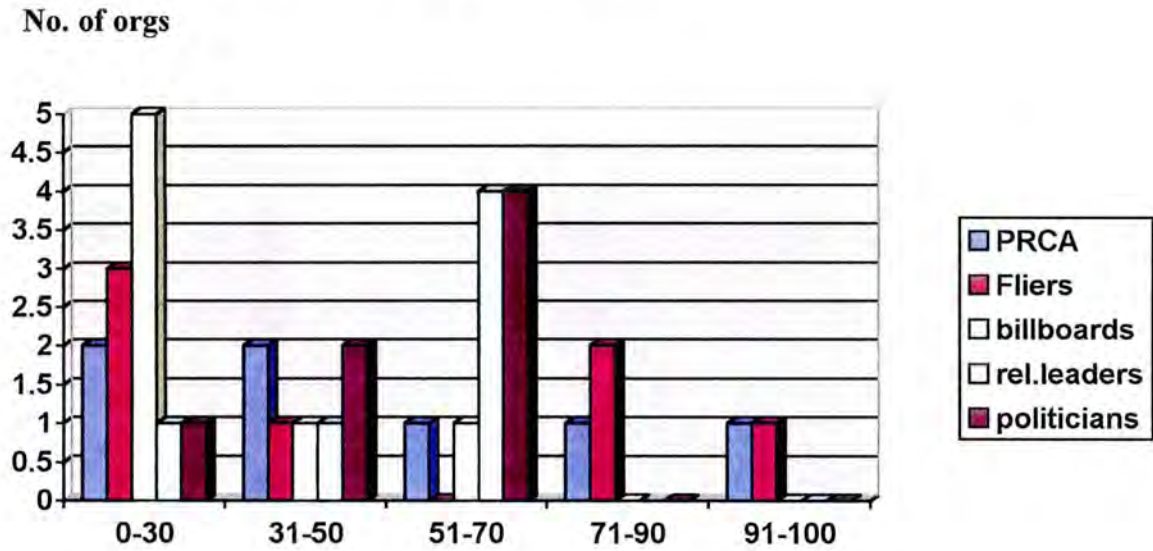
It is clear from the above summary that human rights organisations consider radio a better ally than other (mass) media.

### 5.4 *Other advocacy methods*

The organisations were also asked about their other methods of advocacy. Two organisations said they often (71-100%) employed participatory methodology that includes group discussions, simulation, music performance and drama. One organisation said it used this method above average (51 to 70 %) and the other four rarely, if ever (0-50%) used this method. Three respondents said they frequently (71-100%) used leaflets, one said its use of fliers was above average (51-70%) while three others rarely used them. As for billboards (road signs), one organisation said it frequently used them, one used them above average while the rest rarely used them. One said it often used opinion leaders such as religious leaders

and politicians while four organisations used them above average (51-70%) and the remaining two rarely used them.

The above data are captured graphically in figure 5.1 below.



*Figure 5.1: Graph showing the extent to which advocacy organisations use media other than radio, TV and newspapers. While participatory methods and leaflets are sometimes used, billboards are rarely employed*

As to what their preferred methods would be if they had enough funding, two organisations said they would first target their advocacy campaign at the politicians themselves because ‘they are the most confused and confusing group’. Thereafter, the politicians and religious leaders would be used for human rights advocacy because they interact with a large national constituency which includes rural areas that sometimes human rights organisations fail to cover. Chiefs were not mentioned as opinion leaders that could be used to effectively deliver human rights messages to their subjects in rural villages.

Most (7) preferred participatory communication appraisal as their methodology because according to one organisation ' it is effective and it directly involves grassroots people'.

#### 5.5 *Factors likely to lead to people's resistance to human rights messages*

Five organisations said illiteracy was a serious factor (71-100%) that made people resist human rights and the other two respondents thought impact of illiteracy was not very serious (0-50%). Six organisations thought ignorance was a grave problem (91-100%) and only one respondent thought ignorance had a negligible (0-30%) impact on the acceptance of its messages. One respondent thought religious beliefs were a major impediment (71-100%) and two thought religion was an above average problem (51-70%) but the rest considered religion as a below-average problem. While one organisation thought traditional beliefs had a negligible effect (below 30%), two considered them as an above average problem affecting the propagation of messages (51 to 70%) and the rest thought traditional beliefs were a very serious barrier (71 to 100%) to the campaign for a culture of human rights respect and observance in Malawi.

Only one organisation thought its own credibility was a serious source of the public's resistance (71 to 90%) to its messages. One thought its own credibility was an above-average (51 to 70%) cause of people's resistance to human rights and gender messages.. However, the other organisations were convinced their credibility was unquestionable (below 30%) and thus it could not contribute negatively to the audience's resistance to human rights messages.

One organisation blamed the resistance on the audience's own satisfaction with the status quo (71-90%), three thought the problem was average (51-70%) and three organisations thought

satisfaction with the status quo was a below-average contribution to the audience's resistance to human rights messages.

The graph below summarises the above information.

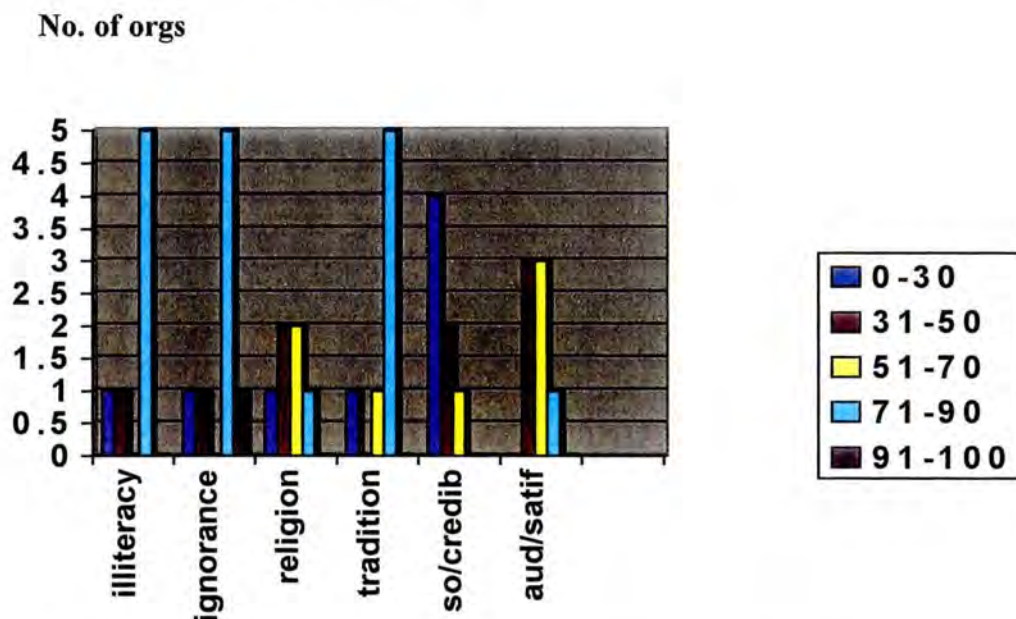


Figure 5.2: Graph showing factors responsible for resistance to human rights and gender messages

The above data lead to the conclusion that human rights advocates consider illiteracy, ignorance, tradition and satisfaction with the state of affairs as factors that lead to resistance to human rights and gender messages.

### 5.6 Audience acceptance of human rights messages

The organisations were also asked to rate the extent to which their audience had accepted human rights messages.

Seven organisations thought more than half (51 to 100 %) of urban men had accepted human rights messages while one organisation scored its success at between 31 and 50% converts. All organisations thought over half (51 to 100%) urban women had accepted human rights messages and the same was also true for secondary school and university students, educated men and women wherever they may be. Although two organisations thought less than 50% of rural men, women, girls, boys and primary school pupils had accepted the human rights messages, the other five organisations thought that even among these social groups, the message acceptance rate ranged between 51 and 90 %.

#### 5.7 *Campaigners' reading of Jenda*

The human rights advocates, who all claimed that they tackled all genres of human rights, including those concerning gender equality, were asked to comment on the major 'gender text' used in this study, the song *Jenda* by Overtoun Chimombo. Those who did not have the CD or audio tape of the song, were asked to depend on the transcript of the song and the accompanying literal translation (appendix 4).

Only two organisations thought the song was right in presenting gender issues the way it did. The two organisations said most gender issues are in conflict with Malawian cultural beliefs and that gender rights campaigners were mixing up gender and feminist issues. Other organisations condemned the song for various reasons. One organisation described the musician, Overtoun Chimombo, as a male chauvinist who needed basic civic education on gender rights. Another organisation said the song misunderstood and thus misrepresented gender equality because the campaigners were actually fighting against stereotyping and

arbitrary role assignment to females and males as portrayed by Chimombo in his song. The organisation argued that men and women can do all domestic and money-earning chores equally and interchangeably. Given equal chances or opportunities, women can go fishing, work as night guards, carry caskets and bury the dead. In the same manner, men can cook, go to maize mills, wash pots, sweep houses, and mop floors. One organisation said role assignment to males and females was a social construction and had nothing to do with religion or God.

#### *5.8 Interpretation of survey findings*

From the responses to the questionnaire, it can be noted that human rights advocacy organisations in Malawi believe in strong media (particularly radio) power to inform, educate and change people's attitudes. Radio is considered as having the strongest power to play a crusading role in the advocacy for human rights because of its wide coverage. Illiterate people have no choice but to listen to the radio or watch television to get information about national and international events.

Elsewhere, television is rated as a more effective ally than radio because of its ability to transcend distance and (il)literacy barriers. However, in Malawi, national television fails to achieve that status because, as noted in Chapter 2, it is still an elitist medium accessed by a small fraction of urban and semi-urban dwellers. Television sets are too expensive for the average person. In rural areas, poverty makes it impossible for the majority of the people to buy TV sets. Even if they could afford one, there is no electricity to run the TVs on. Poverty aside, Television (Malawi) programming has little local content. Although comprehensive



research on Television (Malawi) is yet to be done, it would not be an exaggeration to say the station churns out foreign content (mostly outdated free American and European programmes) than Malawian content. Above that, Television Malawi is seen as a government propaganda tool and those who do not like the government simply do not watch it.

Nearly all Malawian human rights institutions run on donor-funded shoestring budgets and can hardly afford advertising their programmes or sponsoring them on radio and TV. This also explains why advocacy methods like fliers, billboards and participatory appraisal techniques are rarely used, if ever at all. They all need money. Religious leaders are sometimes used because they attract large crowds and through them messages are passed to the public for free.

Human rights organisations sometimes go round the problem of scarcity of resources by inviting the republic's president to their functions. Since the president gets free live broadcasts on radio and television, human rights messages are passed on live too. Another method the organisations have resorted to is the spreading of messages at funeral ceremonies. It is beyond the scope of this study to examine how effective these advocacy techniques are.

#### *5.9 Conclusion: encoders' preferred messages*

Human rights organisations are confident that their reputation or credibility is not questionable and therefore their message cannot be resisted on that score. Their intention is to convert the public in this male dominated country to accept the new socio-political discourse which includes multiparty democracy, respect for human rights and gender equality.

Chimombo's song, which, in the main, criticises or mocks people's attempts to change the power and social relations between men and women could be viewed as being structured in dominance (Hall, 1977) if we take the long held-to Malawian cultural beliefs as the dominant discourse. Thus, the human rights organisations are reading Chimombo's song from an oppositional perspective. Seen upside down, so to speak, Chimombo could be viewed as reading the current and 'imported' discourse (human rights and gender) oppositionally.

From their comments on the text, *Jenda*, the proponents of this 'imported' discourse believe in international instruments that recognise human rights of all people's irrespective of race, ethnic origin, colour or creed. They emphasise that gender is socially constructed and has nothing to do with religious dogma or cultural values. The 'imported' discourse holds that people are born equal and therefore can perform any social role regardless of sex. This is the human rights advocates' preferred message and they expect their target audiences to read it the same way.

How the audience, decodes, receives, uses, interprets, consumes, or dialogues with this human rights discourse forms the subject of the next chapter.

## *Chapter 6: Research findings: the meaning rural people make*

The...message is ... a complex sign in which a preferred reading has been inscribed, but retains the potential, if decoded in a manner different from the way in which it has been encoded, of communicating a different meaning. The message is thus a structured polysemy. (Morley, 1980:86)

### *6.0 Introduction*

This chapter presents the data from the focus group discussions I conducted in the area of traditional authority Likoswe in Blantyre. As hinted earlier on, the area was purposively chosen for its proximity to Blantyre City. This had two advantages. Firstly, since the study was not sponsored, expenditure was minimised. Secondly, I knew the people of Likoswe well, though I do not originate from there. Thus, I had very few problems in getting sponsors, the chiefs and particularly TA Likoswe himself, to recruit people for group discussions.

### *6.1 The focus groups*

I had planned to conduct six focus group discussions. However, due to delays in getting permission from the District Commissioner (Chiradzulo) to visit the villages, I was forced to hold the discussion during school term time. As a result, and much as it would have been important to get the meanings the youth make, it was not possible to have any discussions with young school-going people. Nearly all youths are school-going these days because of the free primary school education programme. Instead, I conducted five group discussions. As said in Chapter 4 above, the discussants were divided by age, sex, and social status. As such, I

had a group of four old men (Group A), one comprising four old women (Group B), the third made up of eight middle-aged women (Group C), the fourth consisted of eight middle-aged men (Group D) and the fifth made up of six chiefs (Group E).

The age cut-off was arbitrary. The people described as old were grandfathers and mothers whose ages varied between 55 and 75 years (only one person in this age-range was sure about her age). The middle-age group ranged from 30 to 54 years. The chiefs spanned 40 to 75 years. Only one of the six chiefs was a woman.

The traditional administration structure consists of a Senior Chief, who usually looks after an entire ethnic group. Then, traditional authorities (TAs) follow. Below the traditional authorities are group village heads (GVHs) who oversee village heads (VHs). Until the late 1990s when the republic's president started appointing and promoting chiefs, chieftainship, like all royalty in the world, followed blood relationships.

Chiradzulo district has eight traditional authorities. The area of TA Likoswe has 18 group village heads and 121 village heads. I had initially decided to sample randomly and get a few group village heads, who would each bring three people of each sex, and age range. However, TA Likoswe suggested that I invite all the village heads, who would in turn be asked to take with them the required number of discussants. Some people, he said, rightly, would not come as that was the farming season. The participants were not informed about the topic. Therefore, chances of participants having been favoured and prepared for the purpose were almost nil.

The number of participants in one group ranged from four (groups A and B), six (group E) and eight (groups C and D) reflects the reality on the ground as there are more middle-aged people than the elderly. Each person's statement is coded. For example, code A2a refers to group A discussant number two's first statement (see appendix 5).

## 6.2 *Meanings rural people make*

In all group discussions, the participants were asked to define or describe human rights (*ufulu wa chibadwidwe*) and then gender equality. Later, they offered their interpretation of *Jenda*, which deals with gender issues.

### 6.2.1 *How they define human rights*

The participants defined human rights differently. Some described human rights as freedom of movement (A1a, A2a, E6a), peaceful coexistence in a family or the community (A1a, A3a, B2a, B3b, C1a, E4a), others said human rights mean free education (A4a, C6a), yet others thought human rights mean freedom to rule oneself or do whatever one wants (C2a, C3a, C4a, E1a). Some (mostly old women) thought human rights were about children respecting their parents (B4a, B1b, B2c). One person thought human rights were about the freedom to realise one's dreams and do business. One person described human rights as the exemption from paying personal tax to the government (A4c). Yet another person thought it meant helping each other (D1a).

### *6.2.2 How they define gender*

The majority understood gender equality as men and women or husbands and wives working together (A3d, A3c, A1b, A4b, B2a, B1c, C6a, C1g, B2d, C1a, C4b, C8a, E1a, E4a); as family unity (E1a, E3a, E5a, D3a, B3a, B3c, A3a) and as doing work without regard to sex (C1a, C4b, C8a, E2a). Some thought it meant people living in peace (B3c). One person (E5a) described it simply as a human right.

### *6.2.3 Women's roles*

Almost everybody identified women's roles as cooking, drawing water, raising children, milling maize, and any other domestic chores. In addition, women were supposed to go farming with the husband (B2a, B3d). They are supposed dig shallow graves and bury children under the age of three months (C1b, C3c, B2f, B1d, E4a). Women are also supposed to assist men when building homes (C6a).

### *6.2.4 Men's roles*

Men's roles were identified as constructing homes, latrines, granaries (A3b, B3d, C6b, C2b, D4b, D3b); digging graves for adults (D4b, D3b, E5b, E3c, A2b, A3c); assisting women when the latter are ill or busy (B3d, B2f, E6a, E1b, E4c, E3c, E4d, D1a, D4a, D8a, D5a); heading the family (D7b, E4c, E6b, C3e, B1d); farming and fending for the family (C3e, E4b).

### *6.2.5 Why roles are different*

Several reasons were forwarded to justify the gendering of roles. Men can do virtually anything. They dig graves for adults or work as night guards because they are born strong

while women are weak (B2g, D1c, C3e) and easily succumb to grief (D5c). Some participants argued that it is against Malawian culture for women to dig graves for adults (E1b, E3, E6b) and that women are born or created to cook (C4a, A2a). It is the same culture that prevents men from doing domestic chores (D4a, D6c) and makes cooking laughable if it is done by men (C1d, C1e). For some, it is God that dictated that man should be the head of the family (C2b, E4c, E2b, B1d) and prevents women from wearing men's clothes like pairs of trousers (E6b).

In brief, males and females perform different roles in society because it was God's wish and Malawian culture has dictated that male and females have different roles in society.

#### 6.2.6 *Property inheritance*

Old men and women did not raise the issue of property inheritance. I did not alert them to the topic because the aim of the discussion was to determine the message the participants themselves made from the song.

Almost all those who raised the issue thought family property belonged to children and the living spouse (D1d, D8b, D8c, D6b). Because of the frequent quarrels experienced in villages over deceased people's property, some discussants emphasised that all families should prepare a will (D5d, C1I, E3c). Where there is no will, chiefs are expected intervene during the *nsudzulo* ceremony, when the widow or widower is freed to do whatever she or he wants (mostly this freedom pertains to the widow or widower's freedom to remarry). Chiefs are expected to share the deceased's property equitably among the family of the deceased, the living spouse and children (E3c, D6b).

### *6.2.7 Married women and change of names*

Although the tradition is changing, when a woman gets married, she drops her maiden name and adopts that of her husband. Since the 1990s, women in Malawi have resorted to changing their names by hyphenating their maiden name with that of the husband. For example, a Miss Gloria Njoka who gets married to a Mr Banda will be called Mrs Gloria Njoka-Banda. One participant (E5c) did not understand the phenomenon. However, one (E3d) felt he had understood it and described women who change names that way as potential thieves who want to steal from the husband's estate upon his demise.

### *6.3.1 Interpretation of focus group discussion findings*

Human rights advocates have tailored messages for their public. Although, the discussants could not define human rights as entitlements one is born with (<http://hrusa.org.hrmaterials>) they associated human rights with the right to free expression, the right to freedom to do business (C1a, C4a), the right to peace (A1a, A3a, C1a), the right to self-determination (E1a), the right to life (C7a) and the right to employment (C1b). Although only one discussant (E1c) recognised gender equality as a social or cultural construct (Heywood, 1999), participants described gender equality as women and men working together, as lack of distinction between male and female chores.

Although they understand and agree with the definition and intent of gender equality messages, some discussants were completely against the messages and the phenomenon. One



person (B1d) said unequivocally that she did not believe in gender equality because men and women can never be equal. She says:

One thing I want to emphasise is that men and women can never be equal. The fact that they sleep in the same bed does not make them equal. Man is head of the family. It was God's wish. I do not believe in gender equality. I follow our cultural traditions. (Mrs Wasili, see appendix 5:B1d)

The majority of the discussants thought that though gender messages were good, there was need for Malawian communities to approach them cautiously by adapting them to the Malawian situation (C2d) because the messages are against God's wishes (E6b) and Malawian culture (E3c).

From the case study material one can conclude that the majority of the people welcome and understand the idea of gender equality. However, they would only adopt it fully on condition that certain social arrangements remain the same. For example, both men and women agree that grave digging, family leadership, fending for the family and night guarding should be left to men. Both men and women agree that while human rights are good they should not be abused (E2b) to the extent that women start giving instructions to men (A4c,E6a). Men should only do domestic chores when a woman is ill or away.

### 6.3.2 *Social power*

One strong conclusion that emerges out of the discussions pertains to social power; the power to control and influence events. Power is strength. Those who have social power automatically get authority, superiority, dignity and esteem. For now, in rural communities at least, men wield this power. It is clear from the discussions that men do not want to lose their power over women. For instance, a man is free to take a stroll, go drinking, or watch a football match (A2d) without getting permission from his wife. A woman is not expected to do the same (A2d, A2e). As noted in Chapter 2, even when a woman becomes a chief, she is expected to obey men and particularly her husband. Women have been socialised to see themselves as weaker (B2a) and less courageous than men (C3e,C6c). One chief (E6b) feared that giving in too much to women will result in men losing their authority over their families. This explains in part why men do not want to see women digging graves. Chief Likoswe explains:

I want to comment on grave digging. Grave digging is male job and allowing women to join in is unacceptable. If this type of gender equality continues, in future women will assume all powers and men will be downtrodden. (see appendix 5: E6b)

### 6.4 *Conclusion*

From the above analysis we can conclude that in the main the rural people of TA Likoswe, Chiradzulo approach the issue of gender equality sceptically and hesitate to embrace it 'full and straight', to use Hall's (1974b) expression. It would be wrong to say they do not like or believe in gender equality. Instead, they vacillate between acknowledging its importance (C2a)

and rejecting it completely (B1d). In short, they understand the concept but reluctantly welcome it. Like the striking workers Storey (1999) referred to in his study, the people of Chiradzulo take a negotiated stand towards gender equality messages.

## Chapter 7: *Conclusion*

The interpretation of the results can only be offered as tentative conclusions...

The interpretations should be read critically. (Morley, 1980:111)

### 7.0 *Introduction*

In this final chapter, I discuss the findings in relation to other scholarly works and research questions. Additionally, I give a general conclusion of the study and offer recommendations for future studies in the area of reception analysis.

#### 7.1 *What the study has achieved*

As mentioned in Chapters 1 and 3, this study was based on Stuart Hall's Encoding and Decoding model (1974b) and David Morley's ethnographic study of the *Nationwide* Audience (1980) to understand the meanings the rural people of Malawi make from, and the decoding positions they take vis-à-vis, human rights and gender messages. The area of TA Likoswe was used as a case study. To recap, Hall's model posits that the audience actively participates in meaning making as it comes into contact with media messages and indeed any messages. If the producers of messages and the audience share cultural and linguistic codes, which are structured in dominance, then the audience makes the same meaning as that preferred by the producers. Secondly, the audience may partly share the codes and thus question the intent of the message. In this case, the audience is said to negotiate the text. Finally, the audience may deliberately make a diagonally opposite meaning of that preferred by the producers. Hall (1974b) says that while the dominant-hegemonic and the oppositional decoding positions are

clearly cut and well determined, the negotiating position is nebulous because the audience oscillates between acceptance and rejection of messages. Hall emphasises that:

Decoding within the negotiated version contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements: it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), while, at a more restricted situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules- it operates with exceptions to the rule. It accords the privileged position to the dominant definitions of events while reserving the right to make a more negotiated application to *local conditions* (my emphasis). (1974b visit <http://merz.akademie.de/~stephen-gregory/texte>)

As Morley's (1980) study proved, some people, such as the trade union officials, who negotiated the messages opposed more than they accepted the messages and vice versa (see Chandler, 1997).

There are many factors that lead to the total acceptance of, doubting of, or opposition to the preferred message. Below, I examine the results of research findings presented and partially interpreted in Chapters 5 and 6.

I set off from the assumption, based on conclusions made by earlier studies, that there was resistance to human rights messages, which include gender rights. As I observe in Chapter 1, previous studies blamed the failure of human rights education and advocacy in rural areas on

illiteracy, religious beliefs, and traditional cultures (Malawi Carer, 1996; IMCHRD, 1999; Women's Voice, 2000). The responses to my questionnaire, which sought to find out what the human rights advocates themselves believed, seemed to confirm this fear. I also hypothesised that the resistance could have been the result of the target people's lack of faith in the credibility of human rights advocates themselves. The advocates, though, thought their own credibility was intact (see Chapter 5). Indeed, only one focus group discussant mentioned the issue of credibility (E3c) when he said those who preach human rights should lead by example.

It could be concluded that in general the focus group discussants, like human rights and gender advocates themselves, do not see source credibility as an impediment to the communication of human rights issues. The credibility of the source had virtually no influence on the way the rural people made meaning from messages on human rights and gender discourses.

## 7.2 Preferred messages vs rural people's interpretations

The messages that the rural people make from media messages on human rights and gender equality can best be captured in table form where I compare human rights preferred messages with those made by the rural audience. The summary is based on appendix 5 (focus group discussion transcripts).

<i>Preferred message</i>	<i>Rural people's message or interpretation</i>	<i>Possible reason for rural people's decoding</i>
<u>Definition of human rights:</u> entitlements human beings	<u>Definition of human rights</u> 1. freedom of movement	1. during the one-party era people's movement

<p>are born with, eg life (whence: birthright <i>or ufulu wa chibadwidwe</i>). (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. living in peace with neighbours</li> <li>3. freedom to do what one wants</li> <li>4. children respecting parents</li> <li>5. freedom to conduct business</li> <li>6. exemption from paying personal tax</li> </ol>	<p>was restricted as they prevented from doing so unless they carried an MCP party card</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. people largely suspicious of each other during MCP era</li> <li>3. parents complain children do not respect them. Want to go back to the old order</li> <li>4. people were not very free to conduct business due to the forfeiture act</li> <li>5. rural people had problems paying annual tax. New administration abolished personal tax</li> </ol>
<p><u>Definition of gender.</u> Socio-cultural construction -a term referring to "different roles...society ascribes to men and women". (Heywood,1999:226)</p>	<p><u>Definition of gender</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. men and women working together</li> <li>2. family unity</li> <li>3. living in peace in the home</li> <li>4. doing work without regard to sex</li> </ol>	<p>1-4 Malawi's patriarchal society ascribes different roles to men and women.</p>
<p><u>Gender roles</u> Men and women can do and should do any job, access the same social facilities and get equal entitlements. (Cornish,1999)</p>	<p><u>Gender roles</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. women - cooking, raising children, assisting men</li> <li>2. men -constructing homes, fending for the family, digging graves, assisting women</li> </ol>	<p>1-2 religion, culture, tradition or custom dictates separation of roles and want it to remain so</p>
<p><u>Why different roles?</u> Patriarchy to blame; no biological justification. (Heywood,1999:224)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. men born strong; women weak</li> <li>2. culture dictates so (not to blame)</li> <li>3. God created people differently and made them do different things.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. associating God with cultural ideology-satisfaction with the status quo</li> </ol>

	4. people cannot change the will of God	
<u>Views on the song, <i>Jenda</i></u> 1. song misinterprets gender (5 orgs) 2. gender has nothing to do with religion (5) 3. musician is male chauvinist (1) 4. song right (2)	<u>Views on the song, <i>Jenda</i></u> 1. Song right. Men and women born different 2. song right that gender issues must taken cautiously since gender is against God and Malawian culture (see appendix 5)	1-2 Malawi's patriarchal society ascribes different roles to men and women.

*Figure 7.1: Table showing similarities and differences between human rights advocates' preferred messages and rural people's understandings*

From the above table, one could conclude that though the rural people of Likoswe are illiterate, the research findings (see *Figure 7.1* above) indicate that the majority is aware of human rights and gender issues. It understands the messages. Actually, only one participant (B4) was at a loss and could not explain human rights concepts. Therefore, misunderstanding, as a result of illiteracy, was not an issue. At the level of definitions, there is code sharing (see Hall, 1974b, 1977) between human rights advocates and the rural people. There is communication between the two camps. As we have already seen, human rights discourse is a Western ideology that is being sold to poor countries. Slowly but subtly the human rights discourse is getting into the thinking of rural people (Watson, 1998).

The other issue that I hypothesised was the influence of religion and traditional customs or culture. Although the human rights advocates do not consider religion a serious impediment, the focus group discussions point to the fact that religion and traditional customs (not illiteracy as human rights and gender advocates contend) are a critical issue that could lead



people to resisting human rights discourses. However, the fact that some participants mentioned that gender equality was good because it helped in alleviating the work burden women and men bore in the past, indicates that the rural people see something positive in the new socio-political discourse.

### *7.3 Why rural people negotiate human rights and gender messages*

What seems clear from the focus group discussions is that rural people are worried about losing their culture. They do not want the new discourse to corrode or subjugate the “good” old ways. Although they welcome the human rights and gender discourses, they adapt them to their 'local conditions' (Hall, 1974b). This adaptation or localisation is clear from the way they define the terms and view gender roles (see *Figure 7.1* column 2 above). So, it can be concluded that rural people understand and generally accept the preferred meaning of the gender equality messages but they vacillate between full and straight acceptance and total rejection. In Hall's (1974b) formulation this does not amount to rejection but negotiation that veers towards rejection. Men, and especially, chiefs seem to hesitate to fully accept gender equality for fear of losing their social power.

It could also be concluded that, though the human rights advocates never mentioned chiefs as opinion leaders that could be used to campaign for human rights, the focus group discussions point strongly to the importance, influence and reliability of chiefs in rural community politics. For instance, they are entrusted with delivering justice and even sharing deceased's property.

#### *7.4 Generalisation: the need for caution*

This work is a qualitative reception analysis, with the area of Traditional Authority Likoswe as a case study. The results that I have discussed and conclusions that I have reached may be generalisable internally to that community only. As discussed earlier (see section 4.2.3 above), generalisation in qualitative research need not be viewed as the reduction of research results into a universal law as is the case with quantitative research. As Yin (1994) points out, in case studies generalisation is internal, that is, it is valid for the community under study. However, because most Malawian ethnic groups are similar in their social practices, this study's conclusion could be externally generalisable to those ethnic communities, too.

Earlier studies on the topic indicated that people approach gender negotiatingly. Evaluating the impact of its programmes on people's attitudes to human rights and democracy, the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Human Rights and Democracy (IMCHRD) reported in 1999 that traditional cultures and beliefs had a negative influence on people's inclination to accept any new cultural discourse. Women's Voice (2000) reached a similar conclusion when it conducted a nation-wide study into people's understanding of gender and human rights. Journalist Thandiwe Chirwa (2001) discovered when she conducted research into gender equality among the Chewa community of Kasungu, central Malawi, that men and women understand gender equality but accept it conditionally. In an even much earlier study, Malawi Carer (1996) concluded that the participants felt men were superior to women and that since men and women are born different (biologically), they should do different tasks. However, all the above studies conclude that men and women appreciate the need for them to work together and assist each other when need arises.

Thus, this study can be generalised, but cautiously, to all societies that share characteristics with the people of TA Likoswe. However, it would be over-ambitious to claim that this generalisation would be timeless like is the case with generalisation in the natural sciences. Human society changes, though slowly (Griffin, 1991).

### *7.5 Recommendations*

I would recommend that a more detailed and fully-funded study be conducted countrywide. Methodological triangulation is important. Thus, in addition to using qualitative research methods like focus groups discussions, there is need for structured one-on-one interviews with individual participants because some people are introverts; they do not talk very much in a group. Individual interviews would give them more time and attention to speak up. I would also recommend a survey to run parallel to the qualitative study.

Since this study failed to investigate the meanings rural youth make from human rights and gender messages, a specific study would fill the gap left by the this research.

Finally, it would also be interesting, as a follow-up, to study the meanings literate, educated, employed people in urban areas get from human rights and gender discourse.

## References

- Ahmad, A. 1983. *Muslim Women and Higher Education*. Beirut: The Holy Koran Publishing House.
- Anyaegbunam, C. et al. 1998. *Participatory Rural Communication Appraisal: Starting with the People*. Harare: SADC Centre of Communication for Development.
- Article 19. 1999. *At the Crossroads: Freedom of Expression in Malawi*. London: Article XIX.
- Babbie, E. 1992. *Practice of Social Research* (6<sup>th</sup> edtn). Belmont: Wadsworth.
- Baoill, A. 2002. Sladshot and the Public Sphere. [Http://firstmonday.dk/issues](http://firstmonday.dk/issues)  
Accessed 14/07/2002
- Bennett, T. 1982. Theories of the Media, Theories of Society in Gurevitch, M. et al. *Culture, Society and the Media*. London: Muthuen.
- Benson, T. et al. 2002. *Malawi: An Atlas of Social Statistics*. Zomba: National Statistical Office. Available online <http://nso.malawi.net>
- Berger, A. 1991. *Media Analysis Techniques*. London: Sage Publications.
- Berger, G. 1995. Rethinking Development in South Africa. [Http://ru.ac.za/journ/berger](http://ru.ac.za/journ/berger)  
Accessed 24/07/2002
- Berger, G. 2002. New Media and Development: Learning from Whence We Come. [Http://ru.ac.za/journ](http://ru.ac.za/journ). Accessed 30/9/02
- Bin Adnan, M. et al. 1991. The Nature of Development in Communication for Development Manual. Nairobi: ACCE. (pp 1-14)
- Brazil, D. et al. 1980. *Discourse Intonation and Language Teaching*. London: Longman.
- Brown, G. and Yule, G. 1983. *Discourse Analysis*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Burgoon, M. 1989. Messages and Persuasive Effects in Bradac, J.(ed.) *Message Effects in Communication Science*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications. (pp129-165)
- Carey, J. 1989. Space, Time and Communications: A Tribute to Harold Innis in *Communication as Culture*. New York: Routledge (cited by Thornton, A. 1999. *Can the Internet Revitalise Democracy in the Public Sphere?*)

- Chandler, D.1996. Constructivism at Work: Goldsmiths vs Fiske in *International Journal of Communication Studies*. [Http://aber.ac.uk/~jmwww/bkrev01.html](http://aber.ac.uk/~jmwww/bkrev01.html). Accessed 30/10/02
- Chandler, D. 1997. David Morley's Study of the Natiowide Audience (1980). [Http://aber.ac.uk/modules/tf33/20/morleynw.html](http://aber.ac.uk/modules/tf33/20/morleynw.html). Accessed 12/4/02
- Chikunkhuzeni, F.1999. Towards an Understanding of Commercialisation at the MBC (Unpublished MA thesis). Rhodes University.
- Chilambo, M. *et al.*1995a. *Malawi Primary Education Social Studies: Pupil's Book 5*. Zomba: Malawi Institute of Education.
- Chilambo, M.*et al.* 1995b. *Malawi Primary Education Social Studies: Pupil's Book 6*. Zomba: Malawi Institute of Education.
- Chirambo, K.and McCullum, H. 2000. *Reporting Elections in Southern Africa: A Media Handbook*. Harare: Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC).
- Chirwa, T. 2001. Human Rights and Wrongs in Higgs, D.(ed.) *Writing on Human Rights*. Lilongwe: British Council in Malawi. (pp 22-23)
- Chiume, K. 1984. *The Autobiography of Kanyama Chiume*. London: PANAF Books.
- Chronicle World.2002. Revealed: How UK Media Fuelled Race Prejudice. [Http://thechronicle.demon.co.uk/tomsite](http://thechronicle.demon.co.uk/tomsite). Accessed 8/09/2002
- Comstock, G. and McCombs, M. 1981. Survey Research in Stempel, G. and Wesley, B. (Eds.) *Research Methods in Mass Communications*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall. (pp 144-166)
- DeFleur, M. and Dennis, E. 1988. *Understanding Mass Communication* (3<sup>rd</sup> edtn). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. 1994. Entering the Field of Qualitative Research in Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y.(eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*: California: Sage Publications.(pp 1-98)
- Doucette, J. 2001. Images of Women, Cultural Space and Empowerment: the role of the Media in the cultural struggle of gender in Tanzania. [Http://www.nordmediakoferens.hi.is/papers/eighteen/jjdoucette.doc](http://www.nordmediakoferens.hi.is/papers/eighteen/jjdoucette.doc). Accessed 14/07/2002
- Drew, D. and Weaver, D. 1991. Voter Learning in the 1988 Presidential Election: Did the Debates and the Media Matter? in *Journalism Quarterly*. Vol.68.No.1/2 Spring/Summer. Columbia: university of South Carolina .(pp 27-37)
- Fay, B. 1987. *Critical Social Science: Liberation and its Limits*. Oxford: Polity Press.

Fiske, J. 1987. British Cultural studies and Television in Allen, C.(ed.) *Channels of Discourse*. London: Methuen. (pp 244-288)

Fiske, J. 1987. *Television Culture*. London: Muthuen.

Fiske, J. 1990. *Introduction to Communication Studies*. London: Muthuen.

Gershman, C. 2001. Internet and Democracy Building: The NED Experience. A paper presented at an international Workshop organised by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Witon Park, UK, April 27-28. [Http://www.ned.org/about/carl](http://www.ned.org/about/carl). Accessed 13/09/01

Golding, P. 1996. Worldwide Wedge: Division and Contradiction in the Global Information Infrastructure in *The Monthly Review*, Vol.48, No 3 July-August, 1996.(pp 70-85)

Graber, D. 1989. *Mass Media and American Politics* (3<sup>rd</sup> edtn). Washington: Congressional Quarterly Press.

Griffin, E. 1991. *A First Look at Communication Theory*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Guba, E. 1990. The Alternative Paradigm Dialog in Guba, E.(ed) *The Paradigm Dialog*. New Bury Park: SAGE. (pp 17-26)

Guba, E. 1994. Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research in Denzin N. and Lincoln, Y.(eds.) *Handbook of Research Qualitative Research*. California: Sage Publications. (pp 105-117)

Hall, M and Ham, M. 1994. Economics of Press Freedom and Media Development in Malawi in *Media for Democracy in Malawi: A report of a conference convened by the International Federation of Journalists*. Blantyre, Malawi. (pp 67-86)

Hall, S. 1974b. Encoding and Decoding in the TV Discourse cited in Storey, J. 1996. *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture: Theories and Methods*. Edinburgh University Press. Also available at <http://merz.akademie.de/~stephen-gregory.texte>. Accessed 20/10/01

Hall, S. 1977. Culture, the Media and the 'Ideological Effect' in Curran, J *et al.* (eds.) *Mass Communication and Society*. London: Edward Arnold. (pp 315-348)

Hall, S. 1982. The Rediscovery of "Ideology": Return of the Repressed in Media Studies in Gurevitch, M *et al.* *Culture, Society and the Media*. London: Muthuen. (pp 56-90)

Hatim, B. and Mason, I. 1997. *Discourse and the Translator*. London: Longman.

Hartmann, P. *et al.* 1989. *The Mass Media and Village Life: An Indian Study*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Hara, U. et al. 1996. *Malawi Primary Education Social Studies: Pupil's Book 7*. Zomba: Malawi Institute of Education.

Halloran, J. 1998. Mass Communication Research: Asking the Right Questions in Hansen, A. et al. (eds.) *Mass Communication Research Methods*. London: MacMillan. (pp 9-34)

Herbamas, J. 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Hieber, L. 1998. Media as Intervention: A Report from the Field in Tack Two. Vol.7 No. 4. Cape Town: Media for Peace Centre. (Available at [www.ccrweb.ccr.uct.ac.za](http://www.ccrweb.ccr.uct.ac.za). Accessed 8/09/01

Hornik, R. 1988. *Development Communication: Information, Agriculture, and Nutrition in the Third World*. London: Longman.

Human Rights USA, *The Human Rights Education Handbook*.  
<http://Hrusa.org/hrmaterials/hrseries/hrhandbook1/part1c.html>. Accessed 28/08/01

Huntington, S. 1997. After Twenty Years: The Future of the Third Wave in *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 8 No.4. Washington: John Hopkins University Press. (pp 3-12)

Isoba, J. 1996. Social Marketing as a Strategy for Communicating Agricultural Innovations in Rural development in Okigbo, C. (ed.) *Development Communication Principles*. Nairobi: ACCE. (pp 149-165)

Jamieson, R. 2001. Ethics and Professionalism in the Media in Malawi in Ukpabi, C. (ed.) *Handbook on Journalism Ethics: African Case Studies*. Windhoek: MISA. (pp 115-130)

Jensen, K. and Rosengren, K. 1990. Five Traditions in Search of the Audience in *European Journal of Communication*. Vol.5. (pp 207-238)

Jensen, K. 1991. Reception Analysis: mass communication as the social production of meaning in Jensen, K. & Jankowsik N. (eds) *A Handbook of Qualitative Methodologies for Mass Communication Research*. London: Routledge. (pp 135-147).

Kanjo, G. 1998. *Gender Sensitisation Workshop for Media Personnel (Final Report)*. Lilongwe: UNICEF.

Karim, J. 2002. Women in the Malawi Media, *The Lamp*, Balaka (Malawi) Vol. 7, No.35, May-June. (p6)

Kunczik, M. 1988. *Concepts of Journalism: North and South*. Bonn: FES.

Kvale, S. 1996. *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Larsen, P. 1991. Textual Analysis of Fictional Media Content in Jensen, K and Jankowsik, N *A Handbook of Qualitative Methodologies for Mass Communication Research*. London: Routledge (pp 121-134).

Leedy, P. 1989. *Practical Research: Planning and Design* ( 4<sup>th</sup> edtn). New York: Macmillan.

Lijenda, B. 2000. *A Central African History*. Blantyre: Malamulo Publishing House.

Lowe-Morna C.(ed.). 2001. *Southern Africa Gender in Media Handbook*. Johannesburg: Genderlinks.

Lowery, S. and Defleur, M. 1987. *Milestones in Mass Communication Research*. New York: Longman.

Lopi, B. 1999. *Reporting Gender in Southern Africa: A media Guide*. Harare: SARDC.

Lucas, F. 1999. A Radio Broadcasting Model for Rural Women and Farm Households. Bagkok: FAO Regional Office. Available at [www.fao.org/CDdirect](http://www.fao.org/CDdirect). Accessed 14/09/01

Lull, J. 1995. *Media, Communication, Culture: A Global Approach*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Malawi Carer. 1996. *Human Rights Needs Assessment Report*. Blantyre : Malawi Carer.

Malawi Government. 1997. *The Malawi Platform for Action: Follow Up to the Fourth World Conference on Women*. Lilongwe: Ministry of Women, Children's Affairs, Community Development, and Social Welfare.

Malawi Government. 1999. *Malawi National HIV/AIDS Strategic Framework: 2000-2004*. Lilongwe: Ministry of Health and Population.

Malawi Government. 2000. *The Constitution of the Republic of Malawi*: Lilongwe: Malawi Parliament.

Malawi Government, 2000. *National Gender Policy: 2000-2005*. Lilongwe: Ministry of Gender, Youth and Community Services.

Malunda, H and Mpinganjira, M. 2002. *Social and Development Studies Book 3*. Blantyre: Jhango Publishing House.

Manda, L. 2001. Role of the Media in Promoting Transparency and Accountability in Kondowe, E.(ed.) *Training Modules for Parliamentarians on the Role of the Media in a Democracy*. Lilongwe: UNESCO (pp17-21).



McQuail, D., Blumler, J. and Brown, J. 1972. The Television Audience: A Revised Perspective in McQuail, D.(ed.) *Sociology of Mass Communications*. Middlesex: Penguin Books (pp135-165).

McQuail, D.1977. The Influence and Effects of Mass Media in Curran, J. *et al.*(eds.) *Mass Communication and Society*. London: Edward Arnold (pp 70-94)

MHRC. 2001. *Malawi Human Rights Commission Annual Report for the Year 2000*. Lilongwe: Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC).

Media Council of Malawi. 2002. Research into Factors Affecting Media Freedom in Malawi (unpublished research report).

Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA). 1996. *So this is Democracy?* Windhoek: MISA.

Moemeka,A.1996 Perspectives on Development communication in Okigbo, C.(ed.) *Development Communications Principles*. Nairobi: ACCE (pp 1-28)

Moore, S. 1993. *Interpreting Audiences: the Ethnography of Media Consumption*. London: Sage Publications.

Morley, D.1980. *The 'Nationwide' Audience*. London: British Film Institute.

Morley, D.1989. Changing Paradigms in Audience Research in Seiter, E. *et al.*(ed.) *Remote Control: Television, Audiences and Cultural Power*. London: Routledge.

Morley, D.1992. *Television, Audience and Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge.

Morley, D. & Silverstone, R. 1991. Communication and Context: Ethnographic Perspectives on the Media Audience in Jensen, K. & Jankowsik, N. *A Handbook of Qualitative Methodologies for Mass Communication Research*. London: Routledge (pp.149-162).

Mouton, J.1996. Theory, Metatheory and Methodology in Development Studies in Reconstruction, Development and People: Johannesburg: International Thomson Publishing (pp 16-32).

Muluzi, B. *et al.*1999. *Democracy with a Price: The History of Malawi since 1900*. Blantyre: Jhango-Heinemann.

Namangale, F. 2002. Harassment of Journalists Since 1994 in *Daily Times* (3.5.2000). Blantyre: Blantyre Newspapers Limited (pp 8-9).

Pachai, B. 1973. *Malawi: the History of the Nation*. London: Longman.

Palamuleni, M.1998. Social Cultural Barriers to Family Planning in Malawi in Kondowe, E. (ed.) *Tizame, No.6*. Lilongwe: Malawi National Commission for UNESCO (pp 33-40).

Parsons, N. 1993. *A New History of Southern Africa* (2nd edtn). London: Macmillan.

Pauly, J. 1991. *A Beginner's Guide to Doing Qualitative Research in Mass Communication* (monograph). Columbia: Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.

Peil, M.1982. *Social Science Research Methods: A Handbook for Africa*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.

Poster, M.1995. Cyberdemocracy: Internet and the Public Sphere. University of California. [Http://humanities.uci.edu/mposter/writings/democ.html](http://humanities.uci.edu/mposter/writings/democ.html). Accessed 7/08/02

Qureshi, K, and Moores, S.1999. Identity remix: tradition and translation in the lives of young Pakistani Scots in *European Journal of Cultural Studies*. London: Sage Publications.

Radway, J.1984. *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. London: Verso.

Rogers, EM. 1976. The Passing of the Dominant Paradigm: Reflections of Diffusion Research in Schramm, W and Lerner, D (eds.) *Communication and Change: the last ten years-and the next*. Honolulu: East-West Centre Books (pp 31-33).

SAPES BOOKS. 2001. *SADC Regional Human Development Report 2000: Challenges and Opportunities for regional Integration*. Harare: Southern African Political Economy Series Trust.

Schramm, W.1964. *Mass Media and National Development*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Schramm, W. 1974. The Nature of Communication Between Humans in Schramm, W. and Roberts, D.(eds.) *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press (pp 3-54).

Schwandt, T. 1991. *Qualitative Inquiry: A Dictionary of Terms*. London: Sage Publications.

Stevenson, N.1995. *Understanding Media Cultures: Cultural Theory and Mass Communication*. London: Sage Publications.

Strelitz, L.2002. Where the Global Meets the Local: South African Youth and their Experience of Global Media. Grahamstown: Rhodes University (Unpublished Ph.D thesis).

Thorton, A.1999. *Will the Internet Revitalise Democracy in the Public Sphere?* MA Thesis in Journalism. Sydney: University of Technology. (Available at [www.wr.com.au/democracy](http://www.wr.com.au/democracy). Accessed 14/09/01

Tshimungu, CB. 2000. La Necessite de l'evolution du Statut de la Femme Africaine a l'heure de la Mondialisation in *Revue de Pedagogie Appliquee*, Vol.xvi, No.3. Kinshasa: Institut Pedagogique National (Appendix 1).

Tubbs, S. and Moss, S. 1991. *Human Communication*. New York: MacGraw Hill

Ugboajah, F. 1996. Communication As Technology in African Rural Development in Okigbo, C.(ed.) *Development Communication Principles*. Nairobi: ACCE. (pp 112-136)

Underwood, M. 2001. CCMS Infobase. <http://cultsock.ndirect.co.uk/MUHome>. Accessed 4/7/02

Vivian, J. 1991. *The Media of Mass Communication*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Volosinov, V. 1973. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. New York: Seminar Press.

Watson, J. 1998. *Media Communications: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. London: Macmillan.

Welch, C. 1995. *Protecting Human Rights in Africa*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.

Weymouth, T. and Lamizet, B. 1996. *Markets & Myths: Forces for Change in the European Media*. London: Longman.

Williams, F. 1989. *The New Communications* (2<sup>nd</sup> edtn). California: Wadsworth.

WILSA. 2001. *Myths and Realities About Domestic Violence*. Blantyre: Women and Law in Southern Africa (WILSA) Research Trust.

Wilson, D. 1996. Traditional Systems of Communication in Modern African Development: An Analytical Viewpoint in Okigbo, C. (ed.) *Development Communication Principles*. Nairobi: ACCE (pp 91-111).

Women's Voice. 2000. Traditional Practices that Impinge on Women and Children in the Exercise of their Rights (draft report). Blantyre: Women's Voice.

Yin, R. 1994. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

*Appendix 1: Questionnaire on the use of (mass) media for human rights advocacy (NGOs)*

**A. Profile of organisation**

Name of organisation

.....

Address

.....

.....

Phone

.....

.....

Fax

.....

.....

Email/Website

.....

.....

Type of organisation (government/national NGO/International NGO)

.....

.....

Date established

.....

.....

Core HR business (eg Disability Rights Advocacy)

.....

.....

Any other Related HR work ( eg civic education)

.....

.....

.....

**B. Use of (mass) media for Advocacy**

If you ever use the mass media for advocacy, how would you rate (in %) the value of the media of communication below:

1. power to inform

• Radio	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• TV	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• Newspapers	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• Music	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• Books	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100

2. Power to educate

• Radio	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• TV	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• Newspapers	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• Music	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• Books	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100

3. Power to change behaviour

• Radio	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• TV	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• Newspapers	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• Music	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• Books	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100

4. How often do you use the media below for advocacy purposes?

• Radio	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• TV	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• Newspapers	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• Music	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• Books	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100

5. How often do you use

• PRCA <sup>23</sup>	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• Fliers	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• Billboards	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• Religious leaders	0-30	31-50	51-70	71-90	91-100
• Political leaders	0-30	31-50	51-70	71-90	91-100

---

<sup>2</sup> PRCA - Participatory Rural Communication Appraisal is a method that involves group discussions, questions and answer exchanges to elicit ideas. The method includes folk drama, music, dance etc.

6. Given little funding which of the above methods (1-6) would you prefer?

7. To what extent are the following responsible for your target audience's resistance to human rights messages ?

• Illiteracy	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• Ignorance	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• Religious beliefs	0-30	31-50	51-70	71-90	91- 100
• Traditional cultures	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• Your credibility	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• Audience satisfaction with status quo	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100

8. To what extent have the following accepted of human rights messages?

• Urban men	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• Urban women	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• Rural men	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• Rural women	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• Urban boys	0-30	31-50	51- 70	71- 90	91- 100
• Urban girls	0-30	31-50	51-70	71-90	91- 100
• Educated men	0-30	31-50	51-70	71-90	91-100
• Educated women	0-30	31-50	51-70	71-90	91-100
• Primary school pupils	0-30	31-50	51-70	71-90	91-100
• Secondary students	0-30	31-50	51-70	71-90	91-100
• University students	0-30	31-50	51-70	71-90	91-100

8. Please read the attached transcript of the song, *Jenda* by Overtoun Chimombo. Or, If you have an audio tape of the song, please listen to it, isolate the messages and comment on them. Please be detailed.

*Appendix 2: Questionnaire on the use of (mass) media for human rights advocacy  
(Electronic media)*

**A. Profile of Radio/TV Station**

Name of organisation  
.....  
.....

Address  
.....  
.....

Phone  
.....  
.....

Fax  
.....  
.....

Email/Website  
.....  
.....

Questionnaire completed by  
.....  
.....

Position  
.....  
.....

Date:  
.....  
.....

1. What is the mission statement of your radio/TV station?  
.....  
.....  
.....

2. What is your stand on the potential of using radio/TV for human rights advocacy?

.....  
.....

3. Do you have any human rights advocacy programmes?

.....  
.....

4. If yes, please explain why

.....  
.....

5. Are they sponsored?

.....  
.....

6. If yes, who sponsors them?

.....  
.....

7. If sponsorship were withdrawn, would you continue with the programmes?

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

8. Do you ever play the song *Jenda* by Overtoun Chimombo ?

.....  
.....

9. If yes, how often and why?

.....  
.....

10. If you do not, please indicate why.

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

11. Do you agree with the contents of *Jenda*?

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



12. What do you take into account when choosing music to go on air?

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

Thank you very much for your time.

### *Appendix 3: Focus group discussion/interview guide*

#### **Objective**

The objective of the current research is to understand the meaning rural Malawians make out of human rights and gender messages they get from various sources but particularly from the radio. This discussion will be based on the song *Jenda* (Appendix 4)

#### **Procedure**

(Duration 1 hour- 2 hours per group).

(6 groups to discuss two issues: human rights and gender equality).

(Group A: 3-10 old men. Group B : 3-10 old women, Group C : 3-10 middle-age Group D: 3-10 middle-age women, Group: 3-10 chiefs, Group E: boys and girls).

(All proceedings will be recorded).

#### **The facilitator/moderator**

- Before he/she starts running the tape, the facilitator will introduce him/herself and explain the purpose of the exercise
- He/she will inform the participants/discussants that the discussions will be recorded and will be used for academic purposes only
- He/she will inform the discussants that the material will be treated anonymously and that their bibliographical details are for records only
- He/she shall then get everybody to introduce themselves onto the tape
- The facilitator will remain in control of the discussion to help focus it. Where participants seem to veer off the theme but make interesting and relevant comments, the facilitator shall allow the discussion to continue.

#### **The assistant**

- He/she shall record all proceedings

#### **Guiding questions**

#### **Preliminary**

1. What do you understand by human rights?
2. What are some human rights that you known?
3. How do you like the concept of human rights?
4. What is your responsibility in all this?
5. When you hear the term gender, what does conjure in your mind?
6. Gender is about social roles what the roles for men and women?

**After playing the song**

7. Was the song clear?
8. What do you think about human rights now?
9. What do you think about gender roles and relations now?
10. What is your view about the song and the musician?

*Appendix 4: Jenda*

from *Makolo (Parents)*  
by Overtoun Chimombo (2000)

(1)

Amai akudandaula  
(Women are crying)  
Kudandaula kufuna jenda  
(Crying for gender equality)  
Jendayi, akufuna chilungamo  
(They want justice)  
Oh, Ayi, Jenda yabvuta  
(Oh, Gender is a problem)  
Jenda yabvuta  
(Gender is a problem)

(2)

Ntchito za amai bambo agwirensa  
(Men should also do women's tasks)  
Ntchito za abambo mai agwirenawo  
(Women must also do men's tasks)  
Safuna pakhale kusiyana  
(They don't want discrimination)  
*Ah, Jenda yabvuta*  
*Jenda yabvuta*  
Ntchito zapanzumba  
(House chores)  
Akuti kulandirana  
(Should be shared)  
Kaya kukonola  
(Like pounding maize)  
Akuti kupeta mphale  
(Removing the chaff from the maize)  
Kunka kuchigayo  
(Going to the maize mill)  
Kuyanika ufa  
(Drying maize flour)  
Kuphika nsima  
(Preparing meals)  
Kutsuka mbale  
(Washing plates)  
Kukwecha mapoto  
(Washing pots)

Kusesa nyumba  
(Sweeping the house)  
Kukolopa nyumba  
(Mopping house floors)  
Akuti kulandirana  
(Men and women should work alternately)  
Wana wakuona  
(Imagine children watching)  
Apongozi mkati  
(The father/mother-in-law is busy doing domestic chores)

*Ayi Jenda yabvuta*  
*Jenda yabvuta*

(3)  
Nanga ntchito zina  
(How about other tasks ?)  
Ndiye zikhala bwa(nji) ?  
(How will it work ?)  
Monga kukumba manda ?  
(Like digging graves?)  
Kunyamula maliro ?  
(Carrying caskets)  
Kukwera m'mtengo  
(Climbing trees )  
Kukadula nkuni ?  
(To cut down firewood ?)  
Kupalasa bwato  
(Rowing canoes)  
Kukakoka khokha ?  
(To go fishing ?)  
Kudzuka usiku nanga ?  
(How about waking up in the night )  
Kukagwira yaulonda ?  
(To work as a night guard ?)  
Izi zitheka bwa(nji) ?  
(How will this be?)  
Kungomva ndi jenda  
(Talk about gender equality)  
Apa pabvuta  
(This will bring confusion/problems)  
Zikhala zachilendo  
(It will be strange)

*Ayi, Jenda yabvuta*

*Jenda yabvuta*

(4)

Amayiwa alusa

(These women are up in arms)

Akhazikitsa mabungwe ambiri

( They've established many organisations)

Kuyang'anira ufulu wao

(To protect/fight for their rights)

Ufulu wachibadwidwe x 2

(Their birthrights) X 2

Akukana kuponderezedwa

( They don't want to be suppressed)

Mwamuna wao akamwalira

(When their husbands die)

Chuma chonse chipite kwankazi

(All the deceased's estate should go to the wife)

Akuchimuna chao palibe

(The husband's relatives get nothing)

Or anaphunzitsa okha

(Even though they sent the deceased to school)

(5)

Nanga akamwalira mkazi

(How about when a wife dies ?)

Kusiya mwamuna ndi wana

(Leaving behind the husband and children ?)

Longosolani timve

( Explain to us clearly)

Chuma chipita kuti ?

(Who should inherit the deceed's property ?)

Poti tinazona

( We once witnessed this)

Zinachitika ku Zomba

(It happened in Zomba)

Mkazi kuyikidwe lero

(A wife was buried like today)

Mawa akwao kubwera

(The following day her relatives came)

Kutenga katundu yense

( Collected all the property)

Akuti anagula yekha

( Claiming that she had bought all the property)

Kusiya mwamuna ndi wana

( Leaving the husband and children)

Onse ali padzuwa  
(Destitute)  
Poti kuli jenda  
(Talk of gender equality)  
Palibe chilungamo  
(There is no justice)  
Ayi, sichilungamo  
(This not justice)

*Ayi, Jenda yabvuta*  
*Jenda yabvuta*

(6)

Amayi okwatiwa  
(Married women)  
Kusintha dzina nkulephera  
  
(Fail to change their maiden names)  
Kutchula lao dzina  
( They mention their first name)  
La abambo wao pakati  
(Then their father's surname)  
La amunawo kumapeto  
(Then their husband's surname is at the end)  
Akuti iyo ndi jenda  
(They say that's gender equality)  
Uku nksokoneza  
( No, this is creating confusion)  
Jendayi njachilendo  
(Gender is a foreign concept)  
Tiyitenge bwino  
(Let's proceed cautiously)  
Sichikhalidwe chathu  
(It is not our culture)  
Njochita kubwera  
(It is imported)  
Isatisokoneze  
(It shouldn't disturb)  
Miyambo yamakolo  
(Our fore-parents' traditional customs)  
Mizimu yidzaticwiyira  
(Their spirits will haunt us)  
Ndipo tidzasowa mtendere  
(And we'll have no peace)  
tidzasowa mtendere

(We'll have no peace)

Zinthuzi sitingazisinthe

(We can't change these things)

Mwini wake anazilenga choncho

( God created them like that)

Umu inu ndim'mene anafunira

(That's how He wanted them to be)

Nkuona analenga mdima

(That's why He Created darkness)

Nkudzalenganso kuwala

(Then created light)

Poyamba analenga mwamuna

(In the beginning He created man)

Kenaka nkudzalenga mkazi

(Then created woman)

Kuti iye amunthandizire

(So that she should help him)

Panali zifukwa zake

(He had reasons)

Ife sitingazisinthe

(We cannot change these arrangements)

Sitingazitembenuze

(We cannot turn them upside down)

Sitingazisinthe

Sitingatembenuze

Anatilenga choncho

(He created us like that)

(Ndi) momwe anafunira

(That's how it pleased Him)

Sindife tinafuna

( It was not our wish)

Zonse ndi mwini wake

(But His)

If ndife ayani ife

(Who are we, ourselves)

Kuti tizitembenuze ?

(To change them?)

Sitingazimbenuze

(We can't change them)

*(to fade)*



*Appendix 5: Focus group discussion transcripts*

The focus groups were held at the residence of Chief Likoswe, Chiradzulo, 5- 10 January, 2002.

Each discussion lasted a minimum of one hour and 30 minutes.

Group A (Old men)

Moderator: LZ Manda

Assistant: Mark Manda

Participants

Jali Chabwela ( A1)

Time Thobwa (A2)

Benford Mkomela (A3)

Grey Limbuni (A4)

Moderator (*After introductions*): Welcome to this group discussion of human rights and gender issues. Could you tell me what you understand by human rights (*ufulu wa chibadwidwe*) and gender equality (*jenda*)?

A1a: Freedom to go anywhere without hindrance. In terms of culture and tradition, things have now changed.

A2a: Freedom of movement. Peaceful coexistence with chiefs and government officers.

A3a: Respect for parents, the government, and chiefs. Peaceful coexistence. Doing the right thing at the right time. No insults. No curses.

A4a: We had problems in the past. With the new government, there are no problems. We are not paying taxes. There is free education. This is proof that we are now enjoying our birthrights.

Moderator: And what is gender?

A4b: Doing men's and women's jobs together. Now that women and men are assisting each other, things are fine.

A3b: When a woman is busy, we (men) can make her task easier. We may assist by chopping firewood for her and washing dishes. It is not proper that only one person should be working.... It is not shameful for a man to do women's chores because there is gender equality ... There are certain jobs meant for men like constructing pit latrines. Women cannot do that type of job because they are weak.

A2b: Freedom (peace) in the family means helping each other with chores. The man/husband may carry hoes (on the way from the field), while the woman<sup>4</sup> looks for vegetables. When the family arrives home, the wife prepares tea. After taking a bath, she gives her husband a chair and his tea to drink. While the woman is doing all that, the man is doing something else.

A1b: Gender as far as human rights are concerned is about working together without distinction between men and women. Women can assist in doing men's work. Both men and women should wash dishes. A husband should assist her to free her to do other things. There is nothing shameful about doing female work because these are gender equality days... Gender equality is not new... Women can dig graves and bury the dead.

A2b: He is right. There are dead bodies buried exclusively by women. For example, women bury children under the age of three months<sup>5</sup>. If the woman is away, a man can cook as long she has done the preparatory work for him. A woman was created to *cook (khuki wachilengedwe)*.

A3c: I agree. Gender is nothing new. For example, both women and men dig graves and bury the dead. Women bury infants. However, we cannot allow women to dig graves for elderly people. Gender or no gender that is not acceptable. Women can bury infants. Men can sweep houses even in the presence of women and children.

A4c: I understand the song. If a woman is busy or sick, a man can do house chores. However, not when she is all right. The song is clear about men and women working together. God created woman to help man... My understanding is that people do not really understand gender equality. All it means is that women and men should work together. It is not good to see a woman carrying a baby on her back, wood on her head, and hoes in her hands while a man is walking freely. Men should help the woman in such cases. But women should never take gender issues as a way of changing our traditions and usurp men's authority. A woman who asks a man to go fetching water is overstepping the mark because that is her job. But we must work together. That is what matters.

A3d: Gender is good. When a woman is ill a man can draw water if the source is near. A man can clean the house while a woman is doing other jobs. I am not ashamed at all. I can tell my friends that I cook because my wife is ill. However, it should not be a habit that you become a cook and she sits there doing nothing

A4d: I think you miss the point. The question is the woman is not ill, she is not busy but she simply sits there while you do the house chores. She has no problems at all. Will you do her work?

---

<sup>4</sup> In Chichewa, depending on the context, the word *mkazi* means female, woman, wife or weak man. *Mwamuna* means man, husband or strong woman. In these discussions, the words mean husband and wife more than man and woman.

<sup>5</sup> Note that children under the age of three months are not considered as human beings yet.

A3e: If she tells me she is going away, she shows me pots of relish, I will cook because I know her trip is essential but I cannot when she is not preoccupied. For example, she goes drinking and I become her cook. I can't allow that.

Moderator: But men go away drinking without informing their wives.

A3f: You mean, I should let my wife go drinking in bars in the name of gender equality? I cannot be party to that type of gender equality. Sorry.

A2d: If my wife tells me she is going away to do worthwhile things, I will allow her to go because the trip is necessary. But if she tells me she is going drinking, the answer is no... If she does go, the result is a fight... However, a man has a right to take a stroll and go drinking.

Moderator: I thought we were born equal!

A2e: Yes. But she cannot go drinking and leave me home. I am old but I will slap her at least. If she is preparing meals, she can ask me to draw water. But I cannot allow nonsense.

A1c: I do not see any problems for a man to cook if the woman is busy. He can even wash nappies. Nobody will laugh at me since I am doing it for your family.

Moderator: Thank you very much.

Group B (Old women)

Moderator: L Z Manda  
Assistant: Mark Manda

Participants

Mrs Wasili (B1)  
Mrs Emily Liyaya (B2)  
Mrs Bauleni (B3)  
Mrs Milliam Maluwa (B4)

Moderator (*After introductions*): Welcome everyone to this discussion. Fell free. What are human rights? What is gender equality?

B1a: The are differences between today's human rights and those we enjoyed in the past. In those days, before girls got married, they took advice from parents as they grew up. When we got married, we were advised about the importance of the family. Today girls do not take advice.

B2a: In the past, we coexisted peacefully. We (husbands and wives) worked together in the garden. Women would carry firewood, hoes and strap a baby to their back. Women led the way while the husbands followed. These days we work together, do house chores together. Men and boys assist in chopping wood while women and girls clean the kitchen.

B3a: Today's freedom is problematic. In the past, we lived peacefully as a family. But these days, women refuse to take their husband's orders. Human rights mean living happily as has been the case for generations following our culture.

B4a: I have a very helpful grandson who looks after me very well. I do not quarrel with anybody.

Moderator: What are human rights?

B4b: What? I do not understand the concept.

Moderator: If a child says this is my right, what does he mean?

B4c: Respect for parents.

B2b: What she is failing to explain is that children are supposed to respect all people: young and old. No insults.

Moderator: And your rights as women ?

B3b: Living peacefully with my children, my husband. No insults.

B2c: Respect for children, respect for parents. However, today's children are disrespectful.

B1b: I agree with her. Children of this generation do not take advice. They are stubborn.

Moderator: What is gender?

B1c: Gender means men and women working together. The jobs we can do together are cooking, gardening, and repairing houses. Girls draw water...Girls and boys working together without complaints.

B2d: Gender means helping each other in the home. But when you tell today's children about working together, they complain. You wonder what type of children they are. As a woman, my duty is to teach children to help me when I am sick. Even boys can cook and wash plates when I am taken ill.

Moderator: Why do you say even boys can cook?

B2e: Well, it is not their job. But gender people tell us even boys should cook. These days boys carry water...gender equality teachings are good because women's loads are now lighter.

B3c: Gender is living with children peacefully and loving everybody. Gender equality means working together. Sons and daughter, husband and wife.

Moderator: What are men's or women's jobs?

B3d: Men garden, build houses and kitchens, construct latrines and dig graves. Women garden, fetch wood, cook, draw water. But men do not draw water.

B4d: I do not understand anything. I have no comment.

B3e: A woman can go drinking (alcohol) and leave her husband behind if they agree that arrangement...Minding the home and cooking are women's jobs.

B2f: Male children help us. Even husbands assist. Let me add that both men and women bury the dead. Women bury infants while men bury older people.

Moderator: Why?

B2g: Women cannot dig very deep because they are physically weak.... Men and women can do any other job... Things have changed. Today men cook while their wives are seated knitting. Men and women are now working together. It is good.

Moderator: Can you order men to do something for you?

B2h: No. It is disrespectful to the men. We ask them to help. If I have too much work to do, I ask my husband to assist. It is our culture that tells us that women should assist men.

B1d: I want to talk about grave digging. I have never heard of women in this area of TA Likoswe, Chiradzulo digging graves. Elsewhere, women did graves for infants and adults. May be because of gender, here too, women will start digging graves... Men these days go milling. There is no problem. It is out his love that a man will do women's work. A woman cannot command. The man is head of the family. One thing I want to emphasise is that men and women can never be equal. The fact that they sleep in the same bed does not make them equal. Man is head of the family. It was God's wish. I do not believe in gender equality. I follow our cultural traditions. Respect for men. Even if both of us had gone farming, I would warm water for my husband to bathe.

B2e: Gender messages have helped in easing women's burdens because men are assisting women in doing home chores.

B3f: It is nice working together. The load becomes lighter if men and women work together.

B4e: I do not have much to say. I just thank my grandson. He helps me a lot.

Moderator: Thank you very much for your participation.

Group C: (Middle-aged women)

Moderator: LZ Manda

Assistant: Mark Manda

Participants

Mrs Maliro (C1)

Mrs Margaret Lemani( C2)

Mrs Moses (C3)

Mrs Catherine Matemba (C4)

Mrs Twaya (C5)

Mrs Grace Chowe (C6)

Ms Dorothy Fedson (C7)

Mrs Lewis (joined the group late) (C8)

Moderator (*After introductions*): Welcome to this group discussion of human rights and gender equality issues. Could you tell me what you understand by human rights (*ufulu wa chibadwidwe*) and gender (*jenda*)?

C1a: Human rights mean everybody's right to freedom of speech, and living happily in a community. Gender equality means working together. Men and women, boys and girls working together. There should be no distinction in roles. Boys and girls can both draw water and cook. Men should assist women in carrying hoes on return from gardening... Men should not overload women while they sit idle and just play *bawo* games. With the coming of gender equality, women have been assisted (by the government).

C2a: Human rights mean the freedom to rule yourself. However, one must submit to authorities. We are told gender means men and women doing the same work. I loathe the idea that women should wear trousers like men. May be it is gender politics. But it is not right to do so. Anyway, may be we are free to do anything.

C3a: Human rights mean having good manners and living peacefully with others. Gender means men and women working together. When a wife is busy, a husband should not be ashamed of doing women's chores. Today men and women are equal.

C4a: Human rights mean that nobody should stop anybody from doing what he/she considers beneficial. People should speak freely. No insults. A person should build wherever he/she wants. Gender means men and women working together. For example, it does not make sense for a man to chop wood everyday because he is strong. Women can also do the same. Though it is written that women shall fetch water and cook, a man can also do the same. Men can also carry babies, well...in their arms. Husbands should also carry babies since the babies belong to both husbands and wives. Our culture dictates that women look after babies but that can be changed.

C5a: Human Rights mean advising children to work together, to do any job. They can go to the mill together, fetch water. Some children, particularly boys refuse to draw water though that is a woman's job. It is not proper for parents to always labour the girls while boys concentrate on their academic studies. That is why girls do not go very far with school.

C6a: Human rights mean doing anything you like. This does not mean abusing other people's rights, swearing at people or cursing them. It also means sending children to school. Home chores should not hinder children from going to school.

Gender means working together and assisting each other. For example, a husband lays bricks; a woman gives him bricks and mortar. Women and men can both cook. Gender equality means helping each other.

C7a: Human rights or gender equality does not mean cursing parents or insulting people.

C6b: Women's jobs include collecting firewood, drawing water, washing dishes, gardening. Men jobs include building homes, gardening, etc.

C3b: Men's jobs include digging graves. A woman cannot dig graves... Well, I have never heard about it since I was born.

C1b: I beg to differ. Women dig graves for infants of less than three months. Men refuse to dig grave for such infants because they fear being cursed. Sometimes men help dig graves for older infants (5-6 months). So women did graves. Allow me to say this. The problem we have in this country is sheer jealousy. Why should a husband stop his wife from working for pay? Gender equality entitles men and women to seek employment, work together and prosper together. Women can do any job. Women should not be suppressed. Thanks to this forum, we can now express our concerns.

C3c: I still maintain that men are responsible for digging graves for adults. Women cannot do that.... But I agree that women suffer a lot because men are lazy. For example, a husband and his wife are both tired but the husband expects his wife to prepare a mat for him to sleep/rest.

Moderator: This must change?

C3d: Yes. We need gender equality. Men may not like it though. The fight for gender equality is an uphill struggle. So we have problems. But it could happen. It does not mean that women should behave like heads of the family.

C2b: There are no special roles for men and women. Anyone can go to the maize mill, build houses. But tradition has it that men are heads of families. As such they should be respected. A woman can build houses, make fences when there is no man around.



C1c: Upon arrangement, a man can go to work for money while the wife stays home and works for subsistence.

C3e: A man's job is to look for food in times of difficulties. Women cannot work as night guards because they are weaker and less courageous than men are. Men were created strong. Men are courageous. They can face danger in the eye. Women cannot.

C6c: Night guarding is a preserve of men because they are strong. At night there are several dangers a woman cannot confront. If men get killed by thieves, what more with a woman!

C8a: Gender means men and women working together. Some men are so kind they will help with domestic chores.

C1d: Imagine a man who wants to assist his wife with cooking. He goes into the kitchen because he does not want curious people to see him.

Moderator: Is it shameful for a man to cook for his family?

C1e: Yes it is. Men sometimes resist accepting gender messages because we ridicule them by telling friends that such and such a husband cooks. People will laugh at your husband as soon as they learn that your husband cooks.

Moderator: Don't you think by telling her friends, the wife is simply being appreciative?

C1f: Why should I broadcast my appreciation to the whole world? It is a private family matter.

C6d: I have listened to the song. I don't think it is proper for men to wash dishes while the wife is just seated. Well, may be when the wife is ill.

C1a: Gender equality dictates that men wash dishes even when the wife is not ill. God cannot punish us for that. A husband should assist his wife.

Moderator: You said **assist**?

C1h: Yes. Because such work is not for men. Only that the coming of a culture of respect for human rights and gender equality has freed women and are now able to do other things including going to play netball.

C7b: A woman should first seek permission from her husband to go away. Men must be respected always.

C3f: Women must seek permission. Our culture dictates that men must be respected...Men too seek permission from their wives before they do anything serious. If a husband does not seek permission, a wife expresses her disgust openly but in a friendly manner.

C1i: The song also talks about inheritance. It is important for the husband and wife to prepare a will before either of them dies. Without a will people simply fight over property. The widow or widower suffers as a result.

C3g: Honestly gender equality messages are not very welcome because they result in diluting the authority of the husband. It is important to always respect men as God's chosen heads of the family.

C8b: What is important is love and peace in the family. Some women think gender equality entitles them to disrespecting their husbands. That is wrong.

C6e: Gender equality policy is good. Women and men should work together in raising their children.

C7c: It is important to understand that human rights and gender equality does not mean killing people wantonly. Some people threaten to kill others in the name of human rights.

C3h: We thank (the government) for introducing gender equality. Today, men can assist women in doing domestic chores. It has brought love to families.

C2d: Gender equality does not mean women should take to male dressing or behaviour. Though gender equality is here to stay, it is up to us to adapt it to our culture.

C1j: Gender equality is a good thing because now men and women, boys and girls work together. Gender equality has brought in respect for women's rights.

Moderator: Thank you very much for your contributions.

Group D (Middle-aged men)

Moderator: LZ Manda

Assistant: Mark Manda

Participants

Emmanuel Chikopa (D1)

Edson M'Mangisa (D2)

Wells Dafutala (D3)

Lewis Dokotala (D4)

Kennedy Mwaona (D5)

Mateyu Pemba (D6)

Million Abraham (D7)

Thomas Richard (D8)

Moderator (*After introductions*): Welcome to this group discussion of human rights and gender equality issues. Could you tell me what you understand by human rights (*ufulu wa chibadwidwe*) and gender (*jenda*)?

D1a: Human rights or gender equality means helping each other in the home. When a wife is ill, the husband does his wife's jobs. Clearing roads, clearing graveyards is done by both sexes. But women cannot dig graves. Grave digging cannot be a question of gender equality. Women look after children, which a man can also do when the wife is ill.

D2a: I agree that women cannot go grave digging. It is difficult. They are not supposed to.

D3a: Gender equality is about family unity and raising children together. There are some jobs for women and others for men. For example, cooking, caring for children are women's chores. Men can only do so when women are ill.

D4a: Gender is helping each other. Farming together. Women have a duty to prepare meals. As such they must be spared other taxing jobs like farming by knocking off earlier. When a woman is busy or ill we can assist her with cooking and caring for the home. However, it must be made clear that men should only do women's work when the situation demands. Otherwise, it is unacceptable.

D5a: Gender equality is working together. Men can also wash dishes.

D6a: We must thank whoever brought the idea of gender equality. In the past, men were overloaded because women were forbidden to do certain chores. Women are now assisting men... Human rights are about free speech. In the past we could hardly criticise the government. Now we do. There is freedom now.

D7a: Thanks to gender equality messages. In the past, men would come from the garden, seat down and simply wait for meals. Things have changed. Today men can wash dishes, clean the house. Women are freer now than before.

D8a: It is easy to work together and share work with women. For example, while the wife carries vegetables, the husband carries wood... Around dawn, a man can draw water (because nobody can see him). It is not good to overwork pregnant women. Gender means helping each other. But respect is needed.

Moderator: It is clear from the discussion so far that men can assist women. Why do we say **assist**?

D5b: Women have specific jobs to do. For example, women are supposed to cook and draw water. If a man does these jobs he is assisting his wife because it is not his job.

D1b: Women's jobs are cooking, looking after children. Men's tasks include gardening, digging graves.

D4b: I agree. Men dig graves, construct homes, dig pit latrines, mold bricks, look for wood and make granaries. A woman cannot do these jobs.

D3b: I agree with my colleagues.

D2b: The song is right. Women cannot work as night guards because they cannot fight off thieves and armed robbers.

D1c: They cannot dig graves for adults because they are weak. Otherwise, they can do all other jobs.

D1d: Something about property. Children inherit their parents' wealth. If a man dies and leaves behind some property, the property should be shared between his widow and children.

D4c: The husband is not supposed to cook or wash dishes while children and his wife are idling. Our culture does not allow men to do women's work. Otherwise such a man loses his dignity.

D8b: Property belongs to the wife but she should share with the husband's family.

D3c: We need to work together to achieve gender equality.

D5c: Women cannot go grave digging because they are easily overwhelmed by grief.

D7b: People should love each other. But gender equality should not mean men losing their positions as heads of their families.

D6b: We don't seem to understand gender issues. May be they are too complex. Once upon a time women could not work as drivers, today they do. However, expecting men to wash dishes and cook for their wives is against our culture...When a husband dies, chiefs should intervene to prevent quarrels over who inherits property. Chiefs should share property equitably between the widow/widower and the bereaved family.

D1e: I want to comment on wife beating. It is not good to beat up women even if they are wrong. Instead, we should consult our marriage counsellors.

D5d: As for property inheritance, it is wise to prepare a will explaining how your property should be shared when you are dead.

D7c: The only problem is that you won't know what people do to your will because you are dead.

D8c: It is not wise to expect to inherit somebody's property. A man should fight to have his own property. And when he dies, his property is for his children and wife. If a man wants his parents to have property, he should buy some for them.

Moderator: Thank you very much for your participation.

## Group E (Chiefs)<sup>6</sup>

Moderator: LZ Manda

Assistant: Mark Manda

### Participants

Chief Chilemba (E1)

Chief Kanje (E2)

Chief (TA) Likoswe (E3)

Chief Mulanjira (E4)

Chief Nsomela (E5)

Chief Mchere (E6)

Moderator (*After introductions*): Welcome to this group discussion of human rights and gender equality issues. Could you tell me what you understand by human rights (*ufulu wa chibadwidwe*) and gender (*jenda*)?

E1a: Gender in Chichewa would mean family unity; love between husband and wife; brothers and sisters working together. Human rights could mean everybody's freedom to rule themselves.

E2a: Human rights are about everybody's freedom. There should be no distinction between work done by women and that done by men. Men and women can cook, sons and daughters can draw water, fetch firewood.

E3a: Everybody was born with rights. People are free to do whatever they want to realise their dreams. You can operate a business without anyone worrying you. This freedom does not entitle anyone to breaking into people's homes or swearing at people. People should engage in activities that are beneficial to their own development and the development of their communities. Gender equality is good for the family. When the wife or husband is busy, any spouse should do any job. Gender does not mean women usurping men's authority or insulting their husbands. The husband should respect his wife too.

E4a: Human rights mean living in peace without fear of any threat from anyone as the government preaches. Unlike in the past, people are now free to buy and trade in anything without fear of confiscation by the government. Gender equality is nothing new because men and women have worked together since time immemorial. Gender equality is about working together and respecting each other.

---

<sup>6</sup> Note that the area of TA Likoswe boasts 121 village heads, 18 group village heads, and one Traditional Authority (Likoswe) who doubles as group village headman Likoswe. Of the 18 group village heads only one is a woman.

E5a: Human rights are the freedoms one has. We do not have to fear the husband (man) but he needs respect. As a family we need to sit down and plan our future together. Gender equality is part of human rights. These days women build and roof houses because our president (Muluzi) has given us that freedom. We have to respect our husbands and seek permission to leave the home. Women who do not do so go against the spirit of gender equality.

Moderator: Are there specific jobs for men and women?

E5b: Women do not dig graves. But as for domestic chores everybody can do. There is no reason why a man should cook when the wife is all right. Taking turns in doing domestic chores is new. I have never heard about it. The idea is not giving each other turns. But helping each other.

E4b: Imagine both husband and wife coming from gardening. Then the wife sits there. Tells her husband to prepare meals. And she calls it gender equality. That is wrong and unacceptable. Gender equality should encourage men and women to work together. Men should seek salt, relish, etc. Things a woman cannot find on her own.

E3b: Our tradition does not allow women to challenge their husbands authority. Otherwise, a wife who disrespects her husband invites divorce. A woman going away should get permission from her husband. The husband is head of the family and that cannot be changed.

E2b: It is right. There is need for respect in the family. Gender equality or not a woman cannot order and lord over her husband. If it happens, then gender equality is against our culture and God's wishes. Human rights are good but they should not be abused.

E6a: Human rights mean the freedom to live, travel. Children should be taught this. Gender equality is about assisting each other. I do help my wife when she is sick. I fetch firewood while my wife is attending to other chores. Marriage has the blessing of God and therefore man and woman must work together. It is not wise to leave everything to women. Why not allow women to go and play, chat with friends. No one should abuse gender rights though. A woman should never order her husband to do women's chores in the name of gender equality. Chief Chilemba said women could dig graves. I agree with her. Women today work as mechanics, builders, anything.

E1b: I find it difficult to imagine women digging graves. When people get used to the idea, women may start digging graves. It is against our culture to see women digging graves. And let it remain so. On women working as night guards, my feeling is that women can only do so if they are armed. In some areas men pound maize or they take the maize to the maize mill.

E4c: The song says God created woman to help man. Thus the two should help each other. But there should always be a leader or head in a family. That is man. Man is stronger for the

same purpose. A woman should never be allowed to assume too much power. Woman was created to assist man.

E3c: As for digging graves, gender or no gender, our culture does not allow women to dig grave for adults. However, they do dig for children under the age of three months. Not for someone fully recognised as a human being. If women go all the way to burying people, then we are breaking our culture. We must respect the dead. That does not mean women have no role at funerals. They cook, draw water, and sing dirges.

The chiefs are responsible for distributing the property of the dead. Writing wills is a new phenomenon. But chiefs play a great role in this matter. This sharing of the property of the deceased should be settled amicably by the families of the wife and the husband. Chiefs only assist.

Gender equality should start from the home. Those who preach gender equality should lead by example. Women must respect their husbands. If a woman is sick, a husband can do all domestic chores including bathing the wife, washing dishes and going to the maize mill. Women should never attempt to command their husbands to do domestic jobs. If women take gender equality as a means to challenging the authority of their men, then men will resist and divorce.

E2c: I agree with my fellow chiefs. We must remember that women have their own jobs and men too have specific domestic tasks to perform. A man can cook, draw water and go to the mill if his wife is ill.

E6b: I want to comment on grave digging. Grave digging is a male job and allowing women to join men in doing so is unacceptable. If this type of gender equality continues, in future women will assume all powers and men will be downtrodden. There should be a mutual agreement about what men and women should do. Giving too much power and liberty to women will result in men losing their authority as heads of the family.

Our culture and God do not allow women putting on trousers. Since gender is a human (social) policy, women do wear trousers. Otherwise, God does not allow it.

E1c: We know that men are capable of washing clothes, minding children, going milling. But as for grave digging, our culture does not allow women to dig graves. The only problem is that men have commercialised grave digging. As a result, women will be forced into doing the digging. Women can dig graves. However, it is out of respect for our traditions that they do not. If women can build, drive, become soldiers, etc. They can also dig graves and bury the dead.



E5c: In the song, I heard something like writing your name, then your father's name, and finally your husband's. I do not understand<sup>7</sup>.

E3d: A woman who prepares a will and puts it in her maiden name is a thief because she wants to alter her husband's will and steal.

E4d: Gender is not new. Women should not behave as though they know things any better. Women must always remember God created them to assist man. While gender equality is good, women should never be allowed to become too powerful. Otherwise, man will lose his authority.

E6c: A married woman should not use her maiden name because she no longer belongs to her father. Even when a husband dies the wife must retain her husband's name.

Moderator: Thanks very for your participation.

---

<sup>7</sup>Most female gender activists hyphenate their maiden names with their husband's. This not an issue in most parts in Malawi because women are not addressed by their husband's names. Instead, they keep their maiden names(mfunda or chiongo). What could be queer is the idea of having two surnames.

*Appendix 6: Zasintha udyo*

by the Kasambwe Brothers Band (2001)

Zinthu pa Nyasalande<sup>8</sup>

(In Nyasaland)

zasintha udyo

(Things have changed for bad)

Zinthu mudzino lino

(In this country)

zasintha udyo

( Things have changed for bad)

Zinthu m'Malawi muno

( In Malawi)

zasintha udyo

(Things have changed for bad)

Akazi aja tsopano ndi amuna

( Women have become men)

Amuna aja ndi akazi

(Men have become women)

Abambo aja tsopano akuphika

(The husband now cooks)

Akuphika kuti mkazi uja adye

(He cooks to feed the wife)

Gender!

Mkazi uja akunkonza tsitsi

(While the wife is plaiting her hair)

Zinthu m'dziko lino

(In this country)

zasintha udyo

(Things have changed for bad)

Kaya ndi jendayi

(Whether it is (this)gender)

Yabwera udyo

(Has come in badly)

---

<sup>8</sup> Nyasaland, as Malawi was called before independence, is here used derogatorily to mock those who rush for foreign things before they understand them.

*Appendix 7: Kamba Anga Mwala*

by Ben Michael & the Ziggzagers (1999)

Zina ukamva mudumbu wane  
(When you hear certain stories, my sister)  
Tortoise is like a stone

Zina ukaona, my brother  
(When hear you certain things, my brother)  
Kamba anga mwala,  
oh Akamakuuza sungazimvetse  
(When people tell, you cannot understand them)  
Tortoise is like a stone, oh  
(.....)  
Abambo kukitchini  
(The husband is busy in the kitchen)  
Amayi wakumowa  
(The wife goes drinking)  
Oh, gender equality yafikapo  
(Oh ! Gender equality at the peak !)

Abambo kuchapa  
(The husband does laundry)  
Amayi wakubola  
(The wife goes watching soccer)  
Gender equality, oh, umvetsetsa  
(.....)  
Gender equality, oh, you are in for it).

