

**Access and Availability of Scholarly Information in Malawi, 1964-2007**

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## **I. Introduction**

There can be little doubt about the importance of scholarly information in research. It forms the very foundation of academic work: a citation, a footnote, a comment on the value of some related research. Academic publications are not expressions of self-contained imagination. On the building blocks of attribution, one creates a new scholarly product, another drop in an ocean of the vast knowledge commons. Researchers want to carry out this work in an ideal circumstance, that of sufficient funding, sufficient time, and access to sufficient information. But how is that research carried out in less than ideal circumstances? How can the scholarly product be achieved when time, money, and access are constrained?

This paper seeks to answer one part of this question. Specifically, what factors constitute the limitations and constraints on access to scholarly information in developing countries? Further, what impact can this have on research? In an era of rapidly expanding access through electronic networks and digitized material, in what position do the universities and scholars of developing countries find themselves, relative to their more resource-rich colleagues?

To examine these questions in more concrete form, this study focuses on the availability of and access to scholarly information in Southern Africa, specifically in the country of Malawi. Central to this is university education and scholarship, in which the role of scholarly publications is fundamental. Teaching and research require both access and availability, and constraints upon them make potential benefits of the university equally constrained. In order to fully evaluate these problems, I will examine the

University of Malawi as a case which presents a convergence of limitations, some economic, some political, and some technological.

### **Information poverty in Developing Countries**

Scholarly information is a broad term, so some definition is necessary.

“Information” itself is perhaps too vague. It refers not only to information objects: a citation, a book, a DVD, a digital file; but also to the intangible transmission of ideas: one person speaking to another, or the “sharing of information.” According to Buckland (1991), information can be usefully defined as “information-as-knowledge”, “information-as-processing” or “information-as-thing” (p. 351). For the purpose of this paper, however, I emphasize the following:

Information-as-thing is of special interest in the study of information systems. It is with information in this sense that information systems deal directly. Libraries deal with books; computer-based information systems handle data in the form of physical bits and bytes; museums deal directly with objects. The intention may be that users will become informed (information-as process) and that there will be an imparting of knowledge (information-as-knowledge). But the means provided, what is handled and operated upon, what is stored and retrieved, is physical information (information-as-thing) (p. 353).

Of course, this definition accepts the range of expression of information objects.

The mediums of transmission vary, from audio to video recordings, print and digital forms, microfilm, etc. Their size and scope may vary as well: a single quote, three hundred pages of text, a footnote, or a photograph. Hence, information as defined in this paper is most often tangible, physical and able to be isolated as a measurable phenomenon. More specifically, *scholarly* information will be viewed as the information object used in the pursuit of scholarship.

Scholarly research depends on a foundation provided collectively by availability and access. Further, this foundation is one on which university education, scientific discovery, and collective knowledge is built, i.e. the opportunity and freedom to obtain whatever information one needs. Yet this has been problematic for the African academic community. African students, faculty, and researchers alike have been hampered by various challenges that have limited their opportunities.

But what is meant by the idea of accessibility to and availability of scholarly information? Access encompasses a range of activities from being able to pick up, retrieve, purchase, or examine a work containing information in any format, of any subject. There is physical and virtual accessibility – the difference between access to a building or a website. There are economic, political, cultural, physical, social, and other barriers to access (RUSA, 1999). For the purposes of this paper, however, I consider accessibility as an outcome: when a user can use the information necessary to satisfy their needs, they have access (RUSA, 1999). Moreover, availability may be seen as the presence of usable information, constraints on access notwithstanding.

Accepting these definitions, the study of scholarly information in developing countries becomes manageable. Doing so, however, focuses on the development of systems to deal with information, such as libraries and technology infrastructure. It is of little surprise then that dominating the development discourse for library and information researchers are the concepts of “information poverty” and the subsequent technological phenomenon, the “digital divide” (Haider, 2006).

Information poverty seeks to describe the difference between those perceived as having more and those perceived as having less information. The basic principle

underlying this theory is that a state of information poverty prevents one having sufficient information to make the critical decisions that affects one's life (Chatman, 1995).

Traditionally, this has been viewed in economic or technological terms (Haider, 2006).

Thus, information is a commodity, to be given or taken, sold or bought, and something that can become plentiful or scarce. Or, information infrastructure (e.g. computers and computer networks) is a dichotomizing mechanism in which some can afford to have access to information while others cannot (Thompson, 2007).

Examples of information need abound: individuals need information about disease progression in order to make informed decisions about doctors or treatment, or farmers need weather, soil, or market price information in order to maximize the yield of their farm and value of their labor. Information is the common element in decision-making, without which one's options become limited. Britz and Blignaut (2001) outline the essential elements of an information poverty theory:

[1] Information poverty relates to the availability and accessibility of essential information that people need for development; [2] there is a link between economic poverty and information poverty; [3] information poverty is closely linked to a person's ability/inability to understand and interpret information; [4] and although it is an international problem, information poverty manifests within specific situations and contexts (p. 64).

The value of Britz and Blignaut's theory is that it is intended for the case of developing countries. Many previous studies of information poverty have focused on disadvantaged populations within developed countries, particularly with the advent of wide-spread computer-based information in the 1970s (Chatman, 1995; Thompson, 2007). But as the concept of a global information society has developed, with contributions to knowledge from both the developed and developing world, the concept

of information poverty takes on wider potential meaning. Information poverty becomes a viable model for which to understand a lack of information in developing countries and to consider appropriate policies.

In this light, information poverty is manifested as an argument for the provision of aid to alleviate the information needs of the poor in economically impoverished countries (Britz, 2004; Gebremichael & Jackson, 2006; Thompson, 2007). This aid framework focuses on the provision of information created abroad, such as book and journal literature from North American or European publishers, in order to reduce inequality created from information commoditization. But locally-created information has the capacity to satisfy information needs as well (Zezeza, 1997). If the subject of research for developing country researchers is local, than locally-created information becomes the most important source, and access is by definition satisfied. There are thus local and global forces at work in an information environment, and poverty is state defined not by one side, but by the interplay between the two.

But as Britz and Blignaut (2001) state, economic poverty and information poverty are closely linked and barriers form to reduce or prevent access. This is evident in a world in which information is commoditized. Subscriptions are necessary to access newspapers or magazines, books are sold, and access to the internet carries its costs too. But it should be noted that information poverty has social and political factors that can, in some cases, be as important as economic or technological ones.

Information poverty can grow from information illiteracy, or the lack of knowledge of how to understand and use the information to which one has access (Thompson, 2007). Personal subjectivity on the rightness or wrongness of certain

information resources can affect one's willingness to use them, and thus self-limiting one's access. This constitutes a form of censorship, a key constraint.

Censorship exists both unintentionally and as a deliberate act. Governments impose censorship, e.g. banning books or removing them from public libraries. Governments further withhold or classify information, sometimes for reasons not freely given (Murphy, 2003). University libraries self-censor in terms of perceived quality, i.e. certain materials that are not of sufficient quality for university education. Individual scholars self-censor as well, through bias and need, or constraints of time or location (Jaygbay, 1998).

And economic challenges provide a tremendous censor to access. Some individuals and organizations cannot afford books, articles or papers. Some are bound by arbitrary rules about specific types of information to buy. Some cannot afford to purchase materials from abroad (Loveday, 1979). Limitations are put on travel, on repairing valuable or damaged material, and on providing security for important materials (University of Malawi Libraries, 1978-88). All of these things prevent access and availability and by that definition, impose a type of censor, deliberate or otherwise, on information.

The challenge of this paper is to evaluate information poverty in the case of the academy in Malawi. But can the idea even be applied to the academy? Of course, academic information needs differ from that of non-academics. Scholars are not illiterate, often in the elite of their societies, particularly in developing countries, where a high level of education is a major advantage (Sturges and Neill, 1998, p. 38). Access to

information is often not a personal burden, but one borne by an institution, such as university or a research center (Zeleva, 1997).

But scholarly work is dependent on a proliferation of information resources. Logically, the absence of this critical information necessary to make decisions that affect scholarship and subsequently, careers, is both harmful and debilitating. Without current, varied, and high-quality scholarly information, the work of scholars and students suffer, be it teaching or term papers. In fact, the problem is not the quality of the work, but the absence of opportunity to extend one's voice into global academic discourses on an equal stature as those in more information-rich environments (Zeleva, 1997). In any other sector – economic or political – this lack of opportunity would be named a form of “poverty.”

In considering information poverty theory in the case of academic communities, however, certain adjustments need to be made. Britz and Blignaut's second condition, an ability to understand and interpret information, would apply less in regard to academia. Without question, Malawian scholars have the requisite education and faculties to use academic information. In the Chancellor College History Department, for example, most scholars received their doctorate degrees in the U.S, the U.K. or Canada (Pachai, 2007, p.117). Any individual information literacy education would have been on par with their colleagues in the global North, the “rich” of the information poverty dichotomy. Many previous applications of this theory have been focused on non-academic public institutions, such as public libraries or information centers, so perhaps there is more relevance of this condition for rural, general, and non-literate communities.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Thompson, K. for a history of information poverty literature and its roots in U.S. minority and disadvantaged communities.

## **Libraries & Scholarship in Africa**

Before fully plunging into the case of Malawi, it is instructive to review the broader trends concerning the practice of scholarship, publishing, and its effects on access and availability in Africa. The Bellagio Publishing Network has explored this concept with a series of reports that outline the nature of publishing in Africa. In the edited book, *Knowledge Dissemination in Africa* (Altbach, 1998), the assembled authors make clear that the rigors of scholarly publishing are not uniquely Western (or Northern). In fact, the challenges of editorial control, academic freedom, and institutional support all contribute to the success or failure of scholarly journals throughout Africa, just as in any other part of the world (Altbach, 1998). The difference in Africa tends to be the degree to which these challenges arise.

First, editors are challenged by problems in communicating with authors and members of the editorial board. This is exacerbated by the unreliability of communications, transportation and linguistic differences. There is some hope for these circumstances to improve through electronic means, but some of the problems remain. Notably, the language problem provides a particular set of limitations on the pool of researchers from which to supply material for an editor or publisher and limits the potential audience (Altbach, 1998).

Second, invasive government officials have tampered with academic freedom and have inhibited independent thought (Zezeza, 1995). Malawi has seen the imposition of censorship committees and curriculum review activities (Carver, 1990; Mapanje & Kerr, 2002). The production of history and language, of particularly interest to H.K. Banda led to a battle for Malawian historical narrative (Kalinga, 1998). Control of the intellectual

forces of the country was critical in this struggle. Thus, if academic freedom permits for the exploration of controversial and unconventional ideas without fear of reciprocation, then African scholars have been driven to make a choice between conforming and resisting. In either case, the academic enterprise is further impoverished.

Also, even universities and non-profit organizations that provide journals with support cannot often provide it in the long-term. Besides the need to pay for printing and production services, there is a cumulative effect of these problems. Only few institutions have been able to weather the challenges over along period of time, such as the Council on the Development of Social Research in Africa (CODESRIA) (Olukoshi & Nyamnjoh, 2008). Zambia, in particular, has been challenged by the partial nationalization of its educational publishing houses (Munamwimbu, 1996). The reduction in the freedom of publishers to compete for the lucrative textbook market have until the 1990s, reduced the Zambian publishing industry to a remnant of its earlier state. In spite of the best efforts of many African scholars, there is no relief to the constant waves of frustration and difficulty (Zezeza, 1998; 2002).

Lastly, as scholarship has increasingly migrated into electronic format, there have been new challenges. The revolution in information technology has forced African scholarly communities to keep up. The rest of the academic world is poised to move on, going digital in great numbers. The Dag Hammarskjold Foundation has held several workshops on strengthening indigenous publishing in Africa, with scholarly publishing as a major part of the conversation. From these reports (Davies, 1996; 2002; Mlambo, 2008), optimism emerges. Digital publishing provides the opportunity to cut costs, to

provide easier distribution and communication, and to remove physical barriers that force scholarly publishers and editors to expend great amounts of time and money.

However, that optimism is tempered by trepidation. While publishing online requires a certain level of institutional information technology (IT), the audience of a respective journal also needs to be online. Hence, while electronic publishing cuts distribution costs for poor African libraries, they do not often have the requisite technology to take advantage of online publications or the maintenance capabilities to repair problems (Sturges, 1998). Also, institutional infrastructures have to provide the information technology needed for access. Without an extensive network with reliable connectivity, only a few members of a given university will be able to take advantage at a time. This digital divide, between universities that can provide extensive IT access and those that cannot, underscores the impoverishment of the African scholarly community.

Here Britz and Blignaut's (2001) theory comes into play, through the relationship between economics and information poverty. In nearly every work reviewed for this paper, the root cause of many of the problems is money. Logically, money plays a significant role in the procurement of scholarly information and information technology, and in its consequent impact on the university community. University libraries have generally served as the most significant source of demand for scholarly publications (Zezeza, 1997). Thus, poor funding of these libraries means reduced demand for publications.

It is no surprise that many studies of both higher education and university libraries in Africa have focused on this issue of funding. Most notably, Diana Rosenberg's (1997; 2001) reports for the International Africa Institute have provided an empirical basis for

understanding the funding crisis. Her seminal 1997 report sounds the klaxon on poor allocation to libraries by numerous African public universities. She cites the massive budget allocations to cover staffing and nearly non-existent spending of acquiring new material. Thus, libraries have become dependent on external funding sources for provision of new material (Rosenberg, 1997).

Sumiu and Kanyengo (2004) specifically examine the funding of university libraries in Zambia, raising questions about the allocation of funds to the library. They find a continuation of Rosenberg's findings, with libraries receiving nearly zero percent of the overall university funding. Further, there are suggestions of political patronage within the university administration directing funding away from the library and towards other more favored institutes and research centers. Finally, the authors discover that even funds from self-generating income processes within the library, e.g. overdue fines or book binding services, get transferred back to the university administration.

While these are the local level economic conditions detailed in the literature, national and international economics play a role as well. Nationally, there are the problems of educational policy and government spending on education. In virtually every study on the topic of higher education in Africa, criticism of low government funding features prominently. Sumiu and Kanyengo (2004) detail the changes in government funding between 1980 and 2000. They tell a story of decreasing public funding and a shift towards increasing tuition-based support for the university, i.e. a move from nearly total public-funded support to increasing privatization. The impact of this transformation poses significant challenges to the university's survival, not only the ability of the institution to support academic publishing in either supply or demand.

Zeleza (1998) highlights the fact that as independent African states began to shift from semi-authoritarian regimes to more democratic ones in the 1990s – again using the example of Malawi and Zambia – academic freedom expanded and funding decreased. There is nearly a directly proportional relationship between the amount of control governments impose and the amount of funding they provide. As one expands or recedes, so does the other.

Finally, the economic difficulties of the scholarly enterprise can be viewed from an international perspective. African university libraries provide one area of demand for scholarly publications, but foreign universities in North America and Europe provide another. Zeleza (1998) indicates that Western university libraries in the 1970s and 80s began to draw down from their expansions in the 1950s and 60s. Thus, demand for African publications abroad decreased as well, undercutting growth by scholarly publishers in newly independent African countries.

Further, the 1980s heralded the beginning of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) to African countries. SAPs are blamed by many (Zell, 1993; Levey, 1995; Rosenberg, 1997; Zeleza, 1998; 2002) for putting restrictions on government educational spending and generally driving national economies into decline. In fact, Chilowa (1991) and Harrigan (2001), show that the economic impoverishment of Malawi is closely tied to the imposition of SAPs starting in 1981/82. This correlates almost perfectly with major serials budget cuts for the University of Malawi (Senate Library Committee, 1983/85).

A further effect of SAPs has been currency devaluation within African countries. Chiweza (2000; 2006) details the challenges imposed by devaluation. A library's

purchasing power in international transactions is based partially on the value of its currency in foreign exchange. As the Malawian Kwacha decreased, so did the University's ability to acquire material, not only in new acquisitions, but also for document delivery. This poses a tremendous problem. If document delivery does not function, then the prospective library users – already suffering from an inadequate library collection – find themselves without the opportunity to simply borrow materials their library does not have. It is a paralysis of library patron acquisitions.

Lastly, economic impoverishment has led to the growth of a dependency on foreign funding and donations. Since their earliest days, African university libraries have had at least a minor level of foreign assistance and donations. Plumbe (1997) extensively chronicles his periodic receipt of books and journals from the British Council which began the University of Malawi's collection. But as funding decreased, aid became increasingly necessary. Levey (1995) describes projects such as American Association for the Advancement of Science's (AAAS) efforts to provide African university libraries with journals. More recently, African university libraries have depended on the provision of electronic information through similar means – either given access freely or at a substantial discount (Ngwira, 2006; INASP, 2009). In most cases, this is the only way to acquire new database subscriptions.

Britz and Blignaut's (2001) final concept is possibly the most important: information poverty manifests within specific situations and contexts. For all of the general statements about the case of access to scholarly information in Africa, the need to ground these ideas in empirical evidence is paramount. The major challenge is questioning whether the most prominent current explanations – economic and

technologically deterministic ones – serve to present a clear view of the case of universities like those in Malawi (Haider, 2006).

In Malawi, a major scholarly dialogue around information use in post-independence Malawi has been one of the relationships between information and power under the Banda regime. The focus on the challenges of academic production under Banda in Malawi suggests that there is a political explanation for the lack of information circulation and that power may have played a role in resource allocation (Chiweza, 1995; Kalinga, 1998; Sturges, 1998; Zeleza, 1992; 2002). This is a crucial point to be explored. But much of the Malawian discourse on librarianship marginalizes the political implications and has focused primarily on the practical aspects of librarianship and service (Chiweza, 2000; 2006; Salanje, 2007; Eneya, 2008). Hence, there are two discourses on information in Malawi, those that concentrate on power and politics and a second dialogue that revolves around the practice of library-related work in specific contexts. It is in this second dialogue and its familial relationship to Western library and information science studies that the value of economics and technology come to be praised. There is perhaps still a stigma on claiming political interference.

And while it is difficult to discount the value of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in procuring information and improving access (Salanje, 2007; Chiweza, 2006) for Africa, there is a sincere danger in fetishizing technology for the purposes of expanding information sources and services (Zeleza, 1997). ICTs can be valuable components in the information infrastructure of an institution, but technology is often disguised behind an ideology of “technology-as-neutral” and is actually built into

existing forms of power and control (Rosenzweig, 2001). Thus, an analysis that recognizes the need for technology, but does not see it as tool for salvation is needed.

Finally, social and cultural orientations towards higher education and book culture founded in the colonial past have had a strong influence on the growth of the academic community and investment in university information resources. In the case of both the University of Malawi and the University of Zambia, the institutions were initially administered by former British colonial officials and the libraries founded by expatriate British librarians (Plumbe, 1997; Msiska, 1994). There is noticeable decline in library growth after their terms, a decline that coincides with the emigration of non-indigenous university officials in the 1970s. The study of this case might provide the sort of specific contexts that Britz and Blignaut (2001) suggest is needed.

## **Methodology**

This paper focuses on two units of analysis, one major and one minor. Together, they serve to give a strong picture of the access and availability of scholarship in Malawi from 1964-2007. The major unit of study is the University of Malawi Libraries. I have used a historical examination of the libraries, focusing on institutional change over time. Focal points for this analysis are the collections, library governance, finances, and technological infrastructure. One can evaluate a library in terms of quantitative data, e.g. numbers of items in the collection or budgets, but also through qualitative data. Qualitative data are the statements of numerous Malawian researchers, teachers, and librarians about the impact of the library on research and teaching, as well as their statements about the quality of the library.

The reason for focusing on the university library system is that it represents the most significant repository of printed scholarly information in the country (a branch library system initially comprised of four campuses, which has grown to six). This system also centralizes the university's demand for scholarly information in a single administrative entity. In effect, it is both the largest source of demand in Malawi to vendors and the largest supplier to individual users of scholarly information in the country. As a result, the University Libraries play an enormous role in the procurement of scholarly information for a large percentage of academic consumers in Malawi. Its problems and difficulties are extended upon the rest of the University community and the production of research within the country, particularly for those not capable of traveling abroad, e.g. students, both undergraduate and graduate.

To examine the library system, I have divided the historical study into three main approaches: political, economic, and technological. I will examine how the imposition of censorship and ideological hegemony drives the agenda of scholarly production, hinders academic freedom, and impacts the university library's own actions. Within politics, the major foci of research are censorship and academic freedom. To uncover these narratives, this work will look at the economic situation over time, i.e. how a university library in Africa functions in a time of rising information costs, declining budgets, and the unique impacts of structural adjustment with its dual costs of social spending (re: education) reductions and currency devaluation. In this approach, currency levels, educational spending, and information costs are the major focal points. Finally, in technology, I will also examine the promise of technology and the rapid expansion of the digital divide towards scholarly information. ICT infrastructure provides the major point of focus.

In the second part of the analysis, I have analyzed the sources used by students and faculty in seminar papers and journal articles to uncover some of their research methods, their citation patterns, and their topical foci. The goal of this procedure is to provide some evidence of the actual research process in the Malawian information environment. One can never know entirely what is or is not available to scholars as they publish, or even how long it took them to publish. But by comparing the findings of the historical analysis of the library system with this study of the History Department's student and faculty research, one can get a sense of both the context and the outcomes of doing research in Malawi during the bulk of the 1964 to 2007 time period.

The limitations on time and resources for this project have made fieldwork, focus groups, or large-scale interviewing impossible. Undoubtedly, all of these methods would increase the strength of the data collected and present possibly unconsidered factors. One could strengthen the analysis of citations with qualitative interviews, gaining further insight into the research process. One could also interview various college librarians, both active and retired to deepen the contextual understanding of their information environment. In the absence of these other sources, what has been obtained through library systems, the Internet, and informal networks have been used extensively.

## **Data Sources**

Throughout this project, the acquisition of as many primary source materials as possible has been sought. In the absence of interviews, the next best resource is personal accounts given about experiences and challenges by the major protagonists in the history of the University and its Libraries. Thus, autobiographical writings have been of tremendous importance. Perhaps it is the relative obscurity some of these scholars must feel that drives them to produce these works, but they provide wonderful accounts with personality and emotion.

There has been some serendipity as well. The connection between the University of Malawi and Indiana University in the 1980s has resulted in numerous documents that may otherwise not have been available. Without question, my research has been possible because of these documents. They consist most importantly of the University of Malawi Libraries Annual (or bi- and tri-annual) reports to the University Senate. In addition, various documents from the University Libraries, including staff bulletins, two special external reviews, the Malawi Library Association Bulletin and others have provided crucial primary sources documentation.

Traditional secondary literature has been equally vital. In some cases, the journal articles have been more descriptive and personal than they often are in academic writing, particularly when the authors discussed political situations of their own experience. The depth of these encounters have created secondary literature that seems almost primary in nature. Without question, these writings have been critical for research.

Statistical information provided through several reports, studies, and surveys by international organizations have provided a useful context. The International Network

for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) has fortunately produced numerous examinations of University funding, resource allocation, and library reports. Not all have had to do with Malawi, but they provide a bigger picture of African library and information challenges.

Finally, the seminar papers, conference papers, and grey literature collected at the Indiana University Libraries have been extremely crucial. With these, I have been able to review locally produced scholarship, not intended (at the time of writing) for a larger audience. This domestic student literature has tremendous advantages in identifying what and how students were able to do their research in 1970s, 80s, and 90s.

## **Historical Analysis**

The period from 1964-2007 can be defined by three major eras. From 1964 to 1980, the University community enjoyed a period of tremendous growth, as higher education came to Malawi for the first time. A middle period, from 1981-1994, marked the peak era for the Banda administration and a tremendous set of economic challenges, causing a significant decline in the quantity and quality of resources available. Finally, a third period, from 1994-2007, has improved academic freedom, but the dual weight of economic decline and technological underdevelopment has left the country with some major challenges.

### **A. 1964-1980: An Era of Growth**

As has been stated, the main focus of this paper is on the country of Malawi. Located on the edge of Central, Eastern, and Southern Africa, Malawi is a landlocked country that borders one of the largest lakes in Africa, Lake Malawi. Its modern borders were created by the British in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and codified through various incarnations, the last and longest was the Nyasaland Protectorate.<sup>2</sup> In 1953, the Federation of Central Africa was founded, creating a new administrative entity encompassing Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland (today Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi). Only in 1957 was a university created which catered to the populations of these countries. It was founded in Salisbury, Rhodesia as the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, but served primarily the white settler populations of those

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<sup>2</sup> Plumbe, 1997. Other forms included the Shire Highlands Protectorate, Nyasaland Districts Protectorate, and British Central African Protectorate.

regions (Ranger, 1981). In fact, it was not until 1964 that an institution was created to serve the needs of all Malawians.

In many ways, the period from the creation of the University of Malawi in 1964 until the imposition of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) in 1981 represents the most successful period of growth for scholarly information availability in Malawi's history. This includes not only the creation of new knowledge through scholarship, but also the acquisition of enough existing literature to enable the university faculty and students to engage in effective research. The first two University Librarians, Wilfred J. Plumbe and Stanley M. Made, together built a library called by the early 1980s "the finest academic collection in Black Africa" (University of Malawi Libraries, 1981/83, p. 1). Bridglal Pachai (2007), head of the History Department from 1964-1975, remarked that in his time, "it was well-stocked, expanding and had efficient binding, repair, acquisition and service sections" (p. 117).

The University of Malawi opened its doors in 1964 at its single campus, and its single library, that of Chancellor College, at Limbe. Two years later, it moved into its permanent location at Zomba. The Chancellor College campus was set up as the central campus for the university, with a focus on liberal arts education. Numerous departments were created, including the Departments of History, English, and Chewa Language and Linguistics, among others. The university library represented the largest central repository of scholarly work outside of the National Archives. As a result, the library played a prominent role in the dissemination of information (Plumbe, 1997).

From its inception, the library could not completely rely on the national government for financial support. The earliest Malawian national budgets did not contain

enough money to create an entire university from nothing. While the Chancellor College Library received ten percent of the total college funding (the high end of the spectrum), it was substantially augmented by donations from foreign organizations, primarily given by those affiliated with the British Government (Plumbe, 1997, p. 163). The libraries received massive donations of scholarly materials, primarily from the British Council, in the form of books and journals (Plumbe, 1997, p. 14). For the first few years, nearly twenty thousand items per year were added to the library system and by 1968, there were roughly 63,000 books, journals, tapes and other items available to students and faculty (Plumbe, 1997, p. 165).

This collection growth continued well through this first era. By the late 1980s<sup>3</sup>, the University of Malawi had over 290,000 items in their book stock (University of Malawi Libraries, 1986/87). Comparatively, by 1990 the University of Zimbabwe Library, an older institution formed from the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, had a collection of approximately 246,000 monographs (Rosenberg, 1997). The pace set by Plumbe and Made in the first fifteen years in fact wavered in the ensuing decades, to less than ten thousand books added per year (University of Malawi Libraries, 1986/87). But it remains that the first fifteen years was a period of tremendous growth.

Yet collections growth was not the only source of change. The physical makeup of the university system changed as well, with three additional campuses added by 1973. Malawi Polytechnic offered training in a variety of trades primarily in the area of engineering and applied sciences. Bunda College of Agriculture covered the agricultural sciences, the primary economic engine of Malawi. Two smaller campuses, Soche Hill

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<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, the latest collections statistics I have are for the 1986/87 year. They do however, work for the comparison with other libraries in this context.

College – a teacher training institution – and Institute of Public Administration were absorbed by Chancellor College when it moved to its permanent location at Zomba. A fourth major campus, the Kamuzu College of Nursing (KCN), was added in 1979 (Law, 1986).

But again, this expansion occurred due to external assistance. The funds for the construction of three college libraries for Bunda, Chancellor, and Soche Hill Colleges were all provided by the British Government, as well as scholarships for prospective Malawian librarians to study in the UK, bindery equipment, and significant funds for purchasing books, journals, etc (Plumbe, 1997, p. 19). The young country, freshly independent from Britain, still maintained close and significant ties to its former colonial ruler.

The University of Malawi Libraries were technologically on par with any other library. Equipped with various editions of major union catalogs, a card catalog to classify its literature, microfilm and microfiche readers, filmstrip projectors, and even line item budget allocations for ‘Stationary’, the library was able to handle the information technology requirements of the age (Plumbe, 1997, p.167). In the absence of email, only the distance between Zomba and their correspondents provided any delay. In fact, the only relative deficiency was the need to convert from the Bliss Classification system to the Library of Congress system in 1980. This they did with the funds to purchase new cards and completed the project very quickly (Law, 1986).

Collectively, the academic structure in Malawi took shape quickly. The university structure was established with the President, Dr. Banda as Chancellor, Ian Michael as Vice-Chancellor, and a principal responsible for each college. Many of the

staff were foreign expatriates, including some who had taught in other institutions in Africa (Plumbe, 1997, p. 13). The ultimate effect of this structure is that there was a strong political connection with Dr. Banda as the Chancellor, as well a minor tension with so much of the staff from outside of Malawi.

Between 1964 and 2004, Malawi underwent what can be regarded as three major political periods: a brief post-independence transition, from 1964-1965; one-party rule, from 1965-1994; and multi-party democracy, from 1994-present (Phiri & Ross, 1996). Inarguably, the prominent feature of this thirty-five year period was the domination of Malawian politics and life by the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) and its leader, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda. In order to understand the period of rule by Dr. Banda and the contributions of his rule to information impoverishment, some political history must be revisited.

Dr. H.K. Banda, raised in the Central region of Malawi near Kasungu, left in 1918 to continue his secondary education in South Africa. He studied politics, history and eventually medicine in the United States during the 1920s and 30s. Later, he journeyed to Scotland and set up a medical practice. He finally returned to Nyasaland in 1958 at the behest of the country's major nationalist leaders: Kanyama Chiume, Orton Chirwa, and Henry Chipembere (Kalinga & Crosby, 2001, p. xxxiii). Dr. Banda assumed the leadership of the Nyasaland People's Congress in what had intended to be a largely symbolic role. A major critic of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, he led the organization's protests against the British administration. In 1961, Nyasaland was granted self-governance and Dr. Banda was elected Prime Minister. Soon after, a

combination of nationalist unrest and the receding British presence in Africa led to the official independence of newly-named Malawi on July 6, 1964 (Pachai, 1973, p. 244).

Shortly after independence, a series of political clashes and disagreements over policy resulted in the resignation of seven cabinet ministers. Termed the ‘Cabinet Crisis of 1964,’ this watershed event removed the majority of Banda’s potential political rivals and cemented his power within the party (Baker, 2001). His position shifted from Prime Minister to President, and he appointed politically loyal politicians in place of those who had resigned. Immediately, the former ministers fled the country to neighboring Zambia, an action that would become commonplace for many political dissidents in the ensuing decades (Carver, 1990).

Immediately after Dr. Banda became President, the MCP began to consolidate power, and in 1968, Malawi was officially made a one-party state. Later this year, the Censorship Board – a critical institution for government control over information – was formed. Acts of violence and intimidation towards select groups, such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses, who contested the party narrative for Malawi history and culture became commonplace. The end result of the purging of opposition voices and political dissent would lead to Dr. Banda being named President for Life in 1971, a title which he held until a national referendum on multi-party elections in 1993 (Carver, 1990).

Forster (1994) describes Dr. Banda as a “conservative autocrat” in an article both careful to resist assumption and fair to the realities of Malawi under Banda’s rule (p. 483). Dr. Banda sought political domination, prevented others from opposing him, and sought to position his personal cultural views as the ‘right’ views of the nation in history, cultural practice, and language. Numerous authors have reacted to this period of

imposition toward their scholarly pursuits at the University of Malawi. Mpanje (2002) and Mphande (1996) discuss the impact in terms of the English Department, Kalinga (1998), Zeleza (2002), and Pachai (2007) in terms of the History Department, and Plumbe (1997) in terms of the libraries.

The government of Dr. Banda and its policies from 1964-1994 are key in understanding the state of Malawi today. The cultural hegemony referred to earlier can be seen in his government's actions towards research and publication. The economic crises come about because of the government's economic policies, and the technological challenges - not directly caused by Dr. Banda - are in part derived from the poor economic and infrastructure status of the country in the post-Banda era. Some of this one can attribute directly to the government and its policies, others one cannot.

### **Censorship**

Government officials, university bureaucrats, political party members and private citizens all compose a network of individuals who can impact both the production of scholarship and its consumption. Recognizing the implications of censorship, government manipulation of the academic agenda, and even the nature of university organization must be seen as critical factors contributing to either the growth or decline in availability and access. Ultimately, political considerations must be regarded as important to the problem of information access and availability as any other.

Dr. Banda's rule was marked by an adherence to his personal views of morality, tradition, and dignity. His primary political goal was to allow only a minimum level of dissent and to enshrine his views on the nation while building a stable, economically

viable state. But Banda differed dramatically from his nationalist colleagues. According to Forster (1994):

The movement for independence had been led by younger educated men, who were somewhat ambivalent about certain aspects of indigenous Malawian culture. They tended to regard headmen and chiefs as stooges, and disliked reference to witchcraft which might give white supremacists the impression that Africans were 'primitive'. They were prepared to some extent to take pride in traditions, but where they saw virtue in the past, it was in terms of egalitarianism rather than hierarchical authority (pp. 488-49).

These perspectives ran contrary to Dr. Banda, a man of an older generation and one who had effectively been absent from Malawi since he was a boy. His personal view of “traditional African culture” and the dignity of African life sheds further light on the actions of the Censorship Board. Institutions of control had to be built in order to enact his agenda. Thus, in 1968, John Msonthi (Member of Parliament and Chairman of the University Council) moved that the *Censorship and Control of Entertainments Bill* be passed (Article 19, 1993, p. 11).

The bill had several implications for constraining access and availability. Mphande (1986) notes that a “publication” was defined as:

(a) any newspaper, book, periodical, pamphlet, poster, playing card, calendar, or other printed matter; (b) any writing or typescript which has in any manner been duplicated or exhibited or made available to the public or any section of the public (p. 81).

This broad definition lends considerable power to the government to call any written or even photocopied work a publication. This extended as well to both video and audio recordings, and virtually all forms of recorded entertainment and information. Its purpose was clear according to Carver (1990):

[Banned publications are those] likely to give offence to the religious convictions or feelings of an section of the public, bring anyone into contempt, harm relations between section of the public or to be contrary to the interests of public safety or public order (p. 70).

Virtually any academic work was classified from within this framework. Thus, the potential dangers for academics, particularly those that pursue controversial subjects, were high. But the cost to scholars came not only in publication of their work from within Malawi, but also to the procurement of information. Between 1968 and 1975, the Censorship Board banned over 840 books, 100 periodicals and 16 films (Carver, 1990, p. 70). [see Appendix, Figure 1] This number continued to rise in the subsequent years.

### **Patterns of Censorship**

The marked patterns in the targets of the Censorship Board are not without a certain logic. The *Censorship Bill* itself calls for the Board to be wary of materials that would cause religious defamation or offense. Consequently, there were deliberate bans placed on items of a sexual or pornographic nature. Figure 1 in the Appendix, is a selection of mostly well-known authors or works likely intended for an academic audience. However, the list does not include items notorious for being banned in a number of countries on grounds of indecent content, such as *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *Lolita*. More questionable to the issue of scholarly information was the extension of this obscenity ban to works such as Isaac Shapera's *Married in an African Tribe* or Bronislaw Malinowski's *Sex, Culture, and Myth*, both academic works and in the case of Malinowski, a scholar whose work is considered to be fundamental to the field of modern social anthropology.

James Gibbs (1982), a professor of English at the University of Malawi from 1972-78, describes his own encounter with the Censorship Board as an encounter with “Kamuzuism,” i.e. “cautious, capitalist, and conservative” (p. 73). This description clarifies the remaining elements of the Censorship Board’s views. Trotsky and Marx were banned. Toynbee’s publication on the Russian Revolution was banned. Dr. Banda’s foreign policy, at once firmly encamped with the United States and the U.K. in the Cold War struggle, was both anti-Soviet and anti-Communist (Gibbs, 1982). The Board’s policies reflect this.

But for academic research and teaching, such a stance is questionable. What effect does this have on scholars pursuing a study of Cold War politics, the Soviet Union, or Soviet relationships with African countries? It might have been possible for faculty to emigrate and work outside of Malawi, but many of their students, particularly undergraduate, could not.<sup>4</sup> The Board determined that material discussing Russian or Soviet activities was unnecessary.

Further, there is an explicit condemnation by the Board of those publications that suggest the value or even the mere existence of youth dissent. Numerous publications relating to student activism in the United States are considered inappropriate for Malawian audiences. Clearly, in an environment of increasing political control, the suggestion that students can or should protest their government’s actions may lead to the view of student protest as a threat to state security. This is particularly revealing when one places it in context to Dr. Banda’s controversial state visit to apartheid-era South Africa in 1971, and the support by the Malawian government for the United States’ War

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<sup>4</sup> Numerous scholars came and went from Malawi during this era. I did not find any record of someone who had studied the Soviets or Communism, perhaps because of its taboo status. The point remains, however, that the mere possibility of studying them is not permitted.

in Vietnam, both countries with significant contemporary student protest movements (Kalinga & Crosby, 2001, p. xxviii).

Finally, Banda's own view of "African traditional culture" speaks to the actions of the Censorship Board. Philip Short's 1971 biography, *Banda*, was banned, one of the few of its kind to be produced at the time. Wilfred Plumbe (1997) speculated that the book may have been banned for suggesting Dr. Banda's date of birth and thereby throwing the epic narrative of Dr. Banda's youth into question (p. 160). It may also have been due to a chapter called "From Democracy to Despotism" discussing the Cabinet Crisis, with explicit accusations of manipulation and intimidation in Malawian politics.

But the banning of Robert Rotberg's *Rise of Nationalism in Central Africa: the making of Malawi and Zambia* (1965) and that of Cynthia Crosby's *Historical Dictionary of Malawi* (1981) suggests the full volume of control that the Censorship Board had over academic productions. In the end, any item regarded as dangerous, damaging, or insulting to Dr. Banda's conceptions of African culture and history were threatening. Those that presented alternative versions of history, suggested the primacy of other figures, cultures, or communities than those regarded by Dr. Banda and his associates as the 'correct' views, were considered not suitable for publication.

### **Censorship and Libraries**

Since 1969, the Chancellor College Library has developed a special 'Malawiana' collection. This was intended to be the major academic collection on Malawi in the country, and ideally, the continent (Msiska, 1980). Yet, the National Archives served as a National Library as well, thus collecting at least one copy of every item published in Malawi. Msiska (2001) notes that the National Archives functioned as the means to

preserve sensitive material protecting the University Libraries from being responsible for their preservation. Since the Archives were obliged by law to hold one of everything produced within the country, it was capable of functioning as a library of last resort for some items too controversial to hold in the University Libraries (pp. 97-98).

But at libraries, the banned publications were naturally removed, and for some librarians, the practice of self-censorship ensued (Msiska, 2001, p. 100) . Upon the sudden death of three cabinet ministers in May 1983, foreign newspapers that countered the Malawian state-owned press's accounts of the event, i.e. they suggested the possibility of murder, were so sensitive that librarians began to hold copies back from public display. The fear of state security officials monitoring reading habits in the library created an environment of self-censorship (Sturges, 1998, p. 9).

As mentioned before, Dr. Banda's regime sought – in nature, if not in fact – an encroaching ideological hegemony. When speaking of hegemony, there is the implication that there are those who carry out their duties, functions, and activities, without recognition of ideology, while others will engage in resistance methods. A library in a hegemonic system is particularly prone not to resistance, and likely to reproduce the ideology imposed upon it. The reasons for this are fairly simple to ascertain. Libraries exist as a function of their parent organization, whether governments, companies, or universities. Patronage – the act of receiving support from another – is the method of funding for libraries. As a result, it is an institution which is immobile both physically and virtually. It is unable to be moved or act independent of its parent, thus susceptible to intervention by state forces.

In this circumstance, it is not surprising that University of Malawi Libraries' annual reports do not speak of an inability to purchase banned books, or complain about the imposition of such restrictions. Further, a library that buys based on its faculty and curriculum when those very factors are directly affected by the government's policies on the teaching of various subjects, will only buy those materials suited to supporting the imposed agenda. Plumbe (1997) marks as a possible factor in his eventual deportation from the country the fact that he signed an acquisition order for the banned book, *Banda* (p. 163). Whether this is indeed true or not, the case remains that librarians did not have the freedom to act as they wished within the system, and in the next section, I will explore whether others had any more freedom.

### **Academic Freedom**

Academic freedom is not only a major part of scholarly life, but an inherent part. Altbach (2001) suggests that while the definition has changed over time, it possesses a core element, "the freedom of the professor to teach without external control in his or her area of expertise, and it has implied the freedom of the student to learn" (p. 205). The implication of this concept is that scholarly information needs to be openly available, so as to enable teaching and learning in a truly free environment. A political scientist, for example, should be free to access varying studies and analyses even if they celebrate governments or policies in conflict with the stated goals and policies of the scholar's own government.

But in the argument for academic freedom in Malawi, there are certain historical and circumstantial factors that threaten to blur the concept. Ian Michael (1978), the first

Vice-Chancellor, wrote tellingly of the challenge of building a university in a newly de-colonized and independent country. Early on, he was told by the Chairman of the University Council to expel six students for declaring a governmental patriotic display to be a waste of money as the government was currently receiving foreign aid. Michael refused, and the matter went to the President (p. 466). Dr. Banda was not only the Life President between 1964 and 1994, but he was also the Chancellor of the University of Malawi. This position is to some extent honorary, as this is common in Southern African universities, but also very powerful, particularly in the early days of the country.<sup>5</sup> Michael (1978) writes, “The President explained to me...that in a country where so few persons were educated the views even of a young student carried weight and were influential in proportion to the respect given to education” (p. 467). The outcome was that the students had to be disciplined for their statements, but were eventually accepted back.

This event correlates strongly with the issues of censorship raised earlier and government efforts to regulate the types of information being spread. Banning of potentially seditious works and the limitations on speech and academic freedom illuminates a common problem, the challenge of separating “the personal and the formal” (p. 469).

For many African universities, there is a complex relationship to the government. It is not unlike a system of patronage in which the university is provided with funding but must make sure not to offend the policies of their patron. As most universities were already dependent on foreign donors for significant revenue (Rosenberg, 1997), state patronage makes them doubly dependent. In Malawi, with the state so heavily

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<sup>5</sup> See also Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, Ian Khama of Botswana, and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe.

centralized towards the office of the President, seeking permission or access required some skill in personal politics.

As Ian Michael had been Dr. Banda's choice for Vice-Chancellor (VC), he had the President's ear. Professor Bridglal Pachai (1989) describes the relationship as crucial. Without personal access to the President and Chancellor, one had to go through the University Council – at that time run by the Minister of Education. Pachai organized two conferences for the exploration of Malawian history and the design of a history curriculum for secondary schools (p. 151). The first was in 1969-70 and Michael had taken the proposal straight to the President. It was approved and the conference was held. In 1974, a second conference was intended to revisit the decade since independence. The new VC, Gordon Hunnings, had been selected by the Council, not by the President, and took the proposal to the Council. After much debate, the proposal died due to lack of assurances that nothing "objectionable" about the government would be said at the conference (p. 153). As Pachai (1989) notes, "that is politics in a third world situation. The dividing line between success and failure is a very thin line and personalities and not principles decide the issue" (p. 153).

Personal politics also extended into the library. The university was initially staffed with expatriate faculty who gradually found themselves edged out, forced out, or even deported. Michael (1978) mentions an instance in which he complained to the Council Chairman about an expatriate member of staff. The question posed to him in reply simply was, "Would you like him deported?" (p. 468).

Yet it is important to recognize that in spite of this, not because of it, the collections at the University of Malawi Libraries during this period grew. The library

was continually receiving donations, albeit with a lapse between 1972 – when Wilfred Plumbe was deported – and the arrival of Stanley Made, a Zimbabwean librarian as the new University Librarian. Plumbe (1997) writes that the reason for his deportation was never revealed to him, and that it may have had to do with his refusal to fire three Malawian staff (p. 157). Made re-organized the library after the two year lapse of leadership and preserved the successful growth of the collections. Yet Made (1980) himself chose to leave in 1977 due to the increasingly unusual circumstances:

The situation continued to deteriorate in the University with more and more staff disappearing from the scene. Many expatriate Professors had gone and many local staff had been removed. It was a desperate and pathetic situation. One never got to know what was actually happening. Some time at the end of June it was rumoured to me that I might be one of those in line for terminating my work permit but for reasons that would never be revealed to me (p. 189).

What effect does this have on the availability and accessibility of scholarly information? First, the lack of academic freedom and dismissals without evidence contributes to an environment in which scholarship is not fully valued and cannot be practiced without increasing degrees of self-censorship. Thus, the scholarly product – be it book or journal or dissertation – is less capable of broaching new directions or innovative theories.

This is a vital point because some academic activities, directly or indirectly, lead to new information products. A fine example is the 1969 conference on the pre-colonial history of Malawi. The resulting book is *The Early History of Malawi*, a critical historical textbook for students of the country (Pachai, 1989, p. 151). Because a conference was held, the papers were brought together and were collected into a key text, replacing the need for a publishing house to seek out an individual and singly bear the

cost of production. The very act of academic knowledge sharing provided a creation of Buckland's (1991) information-as-thing.

While this conceptually focuses on information-as-thing, information-as-knowledge is perhaps more directly affected by threats to academic freedom. Teaching and student research is the prime example. If academic staff are being dismissed due to perceived insults or inaccuracies about the government, what then do their students learn? The only faculty who remain are those committed enough to evade the administration's censors, those who are politically safe, or those who are complicit. Secondly, the elimination of qualified staff increases the pressure on the university to fill those positions with capable individuals, prepared to pick up where their predecessors left off. In the case of the library, it poses a situation in which disorganization and insufficient leadership causes a reduction of access to library materials, and thus, research data.

### **Politics & Historical Research**

A further demonstration of the effects of Dr. Banda's rule on Malawi was his focus on history. Prior to independence, scholarly historical research in the territory of Nyasaland had been from a combination of colonial officials and scholars associated with the University College of Nyasaland and Rhodesia in Salisbury or with the Nyasaland Society (Kalinga, 1998, p. 526. The Nyasaland Society formed one of the key local scholarly societies responsible for the production of Malawian history. The majority of this scholarship focused on the pre-colonial era and much of it aimed to explain the various communities of Nyasaland before and during British rule (p. 525). Through this

organization, which transformed at independence to the Society of Malawi, the foundations of Malawian historiography were formed.

But in the new President's case, independence was an opportunity. With the creation of the University of Malawi, Dr. Banda held scholarly activities in Malawi as critically important. Historical scholarship through the university, for example, represented an opportunity to define the Malawian national narrative. Dr. Banda had considered history one of his favorite subjects<sup>6</sup>, and had classically defined Malawian history in terms of his own background, with its foundation in the Chewa ethnic group, which is largest in his native Central Province (Vail & White, 1989, p. 181). This focus served to legitimate Dr. Banda's personal view of Malawi's history, but also to position his own background as quintessentially Malawian.

The highly charged political atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s in Malawi made recent history a controversial subject. Kanyama Chiume, one of the founding members of the MCP and a dismissed member of the Cabinet Crisis of 1964, published his autobiography in 1975, *Kwacha*. It was banned. In fact, all of Chiume's works were banned (Gibbs, 1982, p. 72). The public record of Malawi's recent history was to be as the MCP viewed it.

Some have argued that this is not entirely unjust. Some areas of Malawian history, e.g. Chewa history, had been under-researched by the independence period when compared to other groups (Holland, 2004). And Pachai (1989) gives further reasons:

What critics in London or Stirling couldn't or refused to understand was that the new regime could not be hurried or bullied. Everything had to be brought along slowly (including freedoms for this or that!) They ([the] critics) called for no punches to be pulled in arriving at historical conclusions...but this is no way to help a nation that enlisted our services at considerable cost (p. 127).

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<sup>6</sup> Pachai, 1989. p. 129. "History was his first love, it came before even politics and medicine."

The argument then was that because the country was newly independent, one could not rush to begin asserting historical fact. The volatile politics of a fresh country would be susceptible to manipulation by cultural and historical entrepreneurs. And yet what never is fully recognized by the supporters of the government, however, is the problem of enabling open research, on any subject. Pachai (1989) states:

Research in the humanities and social sciences was always a sensitive issue. New rulers were protective of their natural and historical heritage and were unwilling to let loose thousands of zealous researchers scurrying all over the continent clothed in academic gown in search of materials for theses and books. Some African authorities even saw this development as a form of cultural imperialism (p. 127).

As a result, some topics became off-limits to researchers. These were varied and have implications for knowledge development. Holland (1994) identifies several: conflict theory, education, inequality, the elite, Marxism, poverty, birth control (p. 76). These match quite well with the list of banned books from the Censorship Board, suggesting a totalizing effect of government control on information.

The effect this has on the production of history is clear. As government control emphasizes what is acceptable to research and teach, it becomes the only historical knowledge disseminated. As White and Vail (1989), two history professors at the University during the 1970s, wrote:

The Cabinet Crisis [of 1964], despite its central significance to Malawi's history and despite the fact that it occurred well over twenty years ago, remains a wholly embargoed topic. The names of those who contributed to the rise of Malawian nationalism in the 1950s can be mentioned only in secret. During the show trial of Orton and Vera Chirwa in 1984, when Vera Chirwa began her testimony with the statement, "when I founded the Malawi Women's League...", a tremor of excitement ran through the spectators. The simplest historical fact has become subversive (p. 184).

### **1981-1994: An Era of Decline**

If availability and access to scholarly information was on the rise in the first fifteen years of Malawi's post-independence era, 1981 marked the beginning of a decline. Towards 1994, scholarly production persisted, but within a crucible of rising political authoritarianism, economic decline, and a growing need for a larger technological infrastructure. The University of Malawi Library poses a strong case for understanding these different constraints and depicts the challenges faced by scholars and students alike.

Perhaps most important in this era is the manifestation of the major structural forces for Malawi's information impoverishment. If the nation-building mentality of the earlier era helped to proliferate scholarly information in the interests of building a university community, then the market-driven behaviors of this second era made scholarly information directly responsive to financial factors. In other words, budgetary efficiency became paramount for information institutions.

### **The Economics of Information**

In order to understand the impact that economic forces had on the availability and access to scholarship during this era, one must first explore the state of the Malawian economy in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Events of the late 1970s had caused tremendous economic shocks to Malawian GDP. These were varied and largely international in origin: a fall in most commodity prices, sharp spikes in oil prices, international interest rate increases, and local disruption of trade routes due to the advent

of the Mozambiquan Civil War (Chilowa, 1991, p. 2).<sup>7</sup> With the exception of the loss of trade routes, most of the factors had contributed to a continent-wide economic malaise (Gunnell, 2004, p. 27). The combination of these forces drove the Malawian economy into contraction with negative GDP rates registering for the next two years (Chilowa, 1991, p. 4).

One of the many criticisms of Dr. Banda's government was a Western-oriented ideology which carried into the realm of economics. From its inception, Dr. Banda's government eschewed the more socialist path of many Southern and Eastern African governments, i.e. Nyerere in Tanzania or the ANC-advocated policies in South Africa (Harrigan, 2001, p. 25). The government of Dr. Banda pursued a mixed, generally free market-oriented pragmatic course of agreeing to financial assistance from international monetary organizations in order to shore up the economy and attempt a return to the pre-1978 growth patterns (Harrigan, 2001, p. 35). This was a solution sought by many African governments who had seen a drop in commodity-driven exports and were suffering from budget shortfalls. In fact, between 1980 and 1992, 38 Sub-Saharan African countries implemented SAPs to a total amount of \$7.1 billion of assistance (Harrigan, 2001, p. 2).

Thus, Malawians entered into a new phase of economic interaction with the world financial system in 1981/82. The World Bank proposed its first Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), which was followed by two more loans from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) by 1987 (Chirwa, 2005, p. 4). It is important to note that in this period of heavy financial assistance certain sectors of the economy, i.e. export

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<sup>7</sup> Chilowa analyzes the various aspects of the Malawian economy, particularly agriculture, fertilizer prices and the effect of SAPs on the both rural and urban poor. For our purposes recognizing the impact of this event is more to the point.

levels, rose according to the expectations of both donor and recipient. Other sectors of the economy, such as smallholder farmers, actually experienced declines in per capita income leading to Malawi's depiction of a state of high poverty (Harrigan, 2001, p. 91).

The specific effects of SAPs on developing economies has been widely reported and analyzed (Harrigan, 1997; 2001; Chilowa, 1991; Chirwa, 2005). In exchange for substantial financial injections, recipient countries were required to institute trade-friendly policies and decrease protectionism. This usually included a decrease in social expenditures, devaluation of currencies, privatization of state-owned enterprises, and a reduction of tariffs (Chilowa, 1991, p. 3). In its impacts on scholarly information, structural adjustment had two major impacts, to be examined in detail below. First, education sector spending was reduced, particularly for tertiary education; and second, the Malawian Kwacha was devalued in an attempt to prevent inflation.

As previously asserted, the University of Malawi Library provided the most central location in which scholarly material was aggregated and accessed in Malawi during this time. The National Archives, with its dual function as a national library, possibly provided a greater total number of materials, but did not claim the same mandate as the university library: to collect, organize, and disseminate *scholarly* information, regardless of source (Msiska, 2001, p. 11). As a result, the National Archives did attempt to collect the sum total of Malawian scholarly production, as well as, non-scholarly literature, government publications, etc. But the collection of foreign materials, donated literature, and externally-produced resources allowed the University Library to play a notably different role.

The University Library had various means of collecting scholarly information. Purchasing material was a common phenomenon, and the Library pursued academic work from both within the country and outside. Foreign orders, i.e. of scholarly information from Europe first and then North America and around Africa, provided the bulk of the orders (Law, 1986, p. 53). Periodicals, books, government documents, microfilm, and all other formats were among the materials collected. As a result, international book and journal prices played a significant role in the degree to which purchasing material was cost-effective.

But, economic constraints on Government expenditures had a direct impact on the ability of the University Library to obtain and provide access to information. In fact, even prior to the economic problems of the late 1970s, Loveday (1979) reports that a pattern had developed:

The index to “Average Prices of British academic books, 1978”... shows the average cost of a British academic hard-back as being currently £9.95 per volume. This represents an increase of 116.77% on the 1974 price of £4.59. It will be appreciated that even if the level of finance available for acquisitions is maintained at a steady level or even if it be increased by 7-10% the actual purchasing power of the Kwacha will be steadily reduced. Ways and means of halting this erosion must be found if the library is to continue to meet the expanding demands being made upon it (pp. 13-14).<sup>8</sup>

This tension between price inflation and currency devaluation provides one of the central causes of availability and access limitations between 1981 and 1994. Here, Britz and Blignaut’s (2001) theory of information poverty becomes relevant again: if access is in part dependent upon availability, then both are dependent on the economic environment; the two are linked. As the University Library faced a substantial depreciation of

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<sup>8</sup> Loveday’s report evaluates the University of Malawi Libraries just prior to economic decline and sets a series of recommendations, many of which were subsequently enacted. The majority involve organization restructuring, staff training, and facility improvements.

purchasing power, the means to procure scholarly information and make up-to-date research available was increasingly deficient.

A secondary effect of this purchasing power reduction was the inability of the bindery – the library department responsible for taking unbound or damaged periodicals and binding them in hardcover for long-term storage – to afford supply materials (University of Malawi Libraries, 1981/83). All of the bindery's supplies were foreign ordered. Thus, inflation abroad combined with currency devaluation at home meant that unbound periodicals had to remain on library shelves. Loose periodicals suffer from overuse, theft, damage, and a lack of proper storage. Thus, the serials were left to suffer damage from causes that might otherwise have been avoided.

Recognizing the inflation/devaluation tension, several cost controlling measures were implemented. First, journals subscriptions began to be cancelled in 1981 (University of Malawi Libraries, 1981/83). Until this point, the University Library had been increasing its collections on a year-to-year basis (University of Malawi Libraries 1978/81). In spite of these cuts, the libraries still received journals. Numerous subscriptions were still maintained, but the expansion of subscriptions was no longer a viable option. Also, in September 1982, an embargo was placed university-wide on all foreign orders. This largely eliminated the capabilities of the bindery to do anything about unbound serials and no new orders were possible, for either monographs or serials. This resulted in a complete loss of new serials acquisitions for the 1983 academic year (University of Malawi Libraries, 1984/86).

Chiweza (2000) recognizes that between 1983 and 1993, there was three hundred percent depreciation in the value of the Kwacha while journals prices rose

simultaneously.<sup>9</sup> The implications of this disparity are clear and confirm what Loveday (1979) wrote. Without a corresponding rise in library budgets to cover the cost, or a decline in journal costs, scholarly information is effectively priced out of the Malawian academic sphere. Student and faculty scholarship are increasingly disadvantaged in comparison to colleagues in other countries and continents in which the prices are manageable.

In response to this sort of economic constraint, two important activities became prominent. First, tradeoffs became a significant part of library collections management. Beginning in 1984/85, the Central Library Services division was created to centralize all acquisitions and cataloging activities for all the branches (University of Malawi Libraries, 1984/86). Thus, as library funding came from the university, the librarians were able to apply funding wherever it was necessary. Serial literature tends to be the primary currency of scholarly debate and publication; and serials were regarded as the primary beneficiary of funding. By 1984/85, the book 'vote', or fund, had been nearly completely transferred to the serials budget to accommodate the rising costs. (University of Malawi Libraries, 1984/86)

This had an effect of diminishing quality and quantity on the various campuses. With a gradually shrinking rate of growth for each year, the University libraries struggled to maintain quality. A survey conducted in 1983, the first year in which no new periodicals are purchased, concluded that as much as 40% of the collection was outdated.<sup>10</sup> Further, several abstracting serials were cancelled in that same year due to

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<sup>9</sup> Chirwa (2005) further recognizes that while the nominal exchange rate (US\$1=MK) had depreciated, there were some real exchange rate appreciations.

<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, this survey was not readily available. The results were instead reported in the annual University of Malawi Libraries' *Report to the Senate*.

elevated costs: Biological Abstracts, Physics Abstracts, and Historical Abstracts (University of Malawi Libraries, 1984/86). One can only speculate on the impact of these losses, but in a pre-CD-ROM or online database environment, it bodes poorly for faculty and student research, especially in the Sciences.

The second effect of budgetary constraints on collections was that increasingly, the University Libraries had to rely on foreign direct assistance for support. While this was not new to the University – the early library at Chancellor College had been heavily donation-supported – the use of donations to make up budget shortfalls suggested a new era of dependence.

In 1985, the University Librarian, Steven Mwyeriwa, reported that the only new publications received were through donation (University of Malawi Libraries, 1984/86). This total discounts the existing periodical subscriptions that were not considered “new.” Instead, any new unique materials to the library system had to come through the donors. These were many including, USAID, USIS, UNESCO, The British Council and the Schimmelpennick-Campbell Education Trust. Even the governments of the Netherlands, Germany, the UK, and Greece donated items (University of Malawi Libraries, 1984/86, p. 2).

Another form of this can be seen within the problems of library space. In the first era from 1964-1981, the library system had grown by leaps and bounds. All of the campuses had grown and Chancellor College especially had moved from Limbe to its permanent home in Zomba. But many of the other campuses began to fill their shelves to

capacity, study space for users and space to examine material was reduced, and security in the crowded libraries was becoming a problem.<sup>11</sup>

Two consultant reports, the aforementioned Loveday report, by former University of Zambia University Librarian Anthony Loveday in 1979 and a second from British librarian Derek Law in 1986, highlighted these problems as those most serious which needed to be addressed. But all of the branches of the Library system were maintaining gradually diminishing budgets over their resources. The only answer for the University was to further apply for funds from foreign donors. Again, the donors came through with assistance, while the serials budgets were being slashed, new buildings were being built (University of Malawi Libraries, 1984/86). In spite of this construction, the pattern continued. By 1990s, economic problems made the libraries entirely dependent on foreign assistance for any major growth.

### **Political Repression during the 1980s**

While the economic factors contributing to the limitation of both access and availability can be neatly divided between pre- and post-1981, the political factors were consistently increasing in severity. Dr. Banda's authoritarian rule did not change between the first fifteen years and the second. Rather, political repression worsened, with substantially greater penalties for those who opposed the state. It seems remarkable then, by 1994, Malawian democracy reached a landmark date. It was the first multi-party election since Dr. Banda had come to power 30 years earlier.

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<sup>11</sup> Numerous accounts from the annual reports mention these problems. Peak rush hour stories are given of the students clambering for seating. For further depictions, see various articles in the Malawi Library Association Bulletin.

In the first section on politics, I identified the ways in which censorship was used to target scholarly products for numerous government reasons. Further, the concept of academic freedom and the manipulation of the Malawian historical narrative were reviewed. In this section, I will focus on the extension of these practices to their next level: detention and police action towards the academy.

The actual beginning of detention without trial or charge actually began in the 1960s and 1970s. But it was really in the 1970s that academics began to be targeted (Carver, 1990, p. 23). Rising judicial activity against perceived dissenters demonstrated the government's willingness not simply to condemn dissent; but rather, to force the isolation and removal of dissenters from society. In the late 1970s, numerous academics received this treatment.

Around November 1975, several major and minor figures in the university were arrested for charges that were entirely unclear. Included were Peter Mwanza, a former Principal of Chancellor College<sup>12</sup>, the University Registrar, and several professors of political science, education, and English. Also, one librarian's assistant, Augustine Msiska, was arrested with the others (Pachai, 2007, p. 116).<sup>13</sup> Their length of detention was two years at the nearby prison in Zomba, Mikuyu Prison. Some began to refer to it as another university college as there were so many academics incarcerated there (Pachai, 2007, p. 118).

Nearly a decade later, the head of the English Department, Jack Mapanje was arrested (Carver, 1990, p. 74). There was never any charge given for his incarceration,

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<sup>12</sup> Pachai quite vaguely describes some of problems preceding the detention of the Mwanza in his 1989 autobiography. In his 2007 supplemental autobiography, he loses this ambiguity and clearly states the problems were due to ethnic politics.

<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, Msiska did not leave Malawi after his detention. He remained to become College Librarian of Chancellor College for many years, and University Librarian from 2003 until his retirement in 2006.

but there is a fair amount of speculation as to the cause. Mapanje is one of Malawi's most famous authors, and the first to be published in the internationally recognized African Writers' Series. His 1981 book of poetry, *Of Chameleons and Gods*, contains numerous poems potentially subversive in the eyes of government censors. Various poems are written in support of Steve Biko, the South African anti-apartheid activist; criticize Malawian elders; and discuss drug use, among other things. It is then not surprising that the book was banned from circulating in schools and bookstores (Carver, 1990, p. 75). Mapanje was released in May 1991, after a period of intense international pressure and lobbying on his behalf (Kalinga & Crosby, 2001, p. 236).

These actions have tremendous implications for academic freedom and the spread of information. First, it continues the erosion of free speech and open research at the university. Second, it demonstrates the willingness of the government to engage in aggressive techniques to stifle political dissent. Third, it discourages future research, learning and teaching. Academics are not only affected by government interference in the curriculum or indirect methods of dissuasion from certain research topics. They are literally removed from the classroom, the library, and the society. It is perhaps unsurprising that some, such as Peter Mwanza and Jack Mapanje, left the country shortly after.

### **The Beginnings of the Digital Divide**

Politics and economics delivered a dual blow to the availability and access of scholarly information, but technology began to play a role as well. Among the developments of the late 1980s were the growing usage of the personal computer or 'microcomputer', and optical disk storage in the CD format. For those interested in

scholarly information, this provided two new capabilities. First, with CD-ROM technologies, a library or individual could conserve space and increase the number and variety of materials with CD databases. Second, computers provided the opportunity to automate previously manual services, such as search and retrieval of bibliographic records, cataloging activities, and circulation.

From 1981 on, the University Libraries always tried to procure information outside of the traditional print publication format. Tapes, slides, and microfilm material played a prominent role in acquisitions for all of the University of Malawi's branch libraries. For example, between 1983 and 1987, even as economic constraints were limiting the library's acquisitions, Chancellor College managed to add over 1000 new microfilm reels per year as well as doubling the number of slides added each year, from 2500 to 5000 to nearly 10000. In 1987/88, the libraries also added their first software programs at Bunda College and the Polytechnic (University of Malawi Libraries, 1987/88). Further, there is some indication that other informational entities in Malawi, including the National Archives and the Malawi National Library Service, pursued these various implements of storing or using data.

But the growth of computers introduced the library to new potential innovations. By cataloging in an automated format, record keeping could be enhanced, efficiency and effectiveness would improve, and costs could be reduced. In fact, this is one of the primary motivators for technology adoption in African libraries continent-wide (Chisenga, 2006). With substantial budgetary constraints, library automation can be a powerful asset.

Yet the cost of the equipment provided a temporal limitation. The University Library system, and in fact, the University as a whole did not begin to automate until the early 1990s. For the library system, there was a need to wait until the requisite equipment was donated or supplied by foreign donors. Bunda College of Agriculture was the beneficiary of one such project. In 1991, the Technical Center for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (TCARC) set up a project to provide agricultural databases to libraries in Sub-Saharan Africa and the South Pacific (Salanje, 2007). The result was five CD-ROM databases and the necessary equipment to make full use of them.

Yet it needs to be noted that while these projects were beneficial to the individual centers that received them, the larger needs were not being fully realized. There were not large-scale computer purchases for the University community and no movements to computerize the library's operations as late as 1991 (Msiska, 1994, p. 17).<sup>14</sup> In short, the digital divide had begun and the Libraries were already playing catch up.

This era of decline was more than just an era of diminishing collections and political repression. It was also the period in which technology began to play a powerful role in academic life. In the 1990s, email discussion lists, electronic publications, and electronic data transfer was beginning to play a role in academic life. One must recognize the fervent devotion of Malawian librarians in the pursuit of maintaining a strong scholarly collection in the face of the challenges of the 1980s and early 1990s. But one must also recognize that technology adoption requires a rapid accumulation of resources in order to be effective. The haphazard, donor-dependent approach Malawian librarians were forced to take left the University system in a state of technological

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<sup>14</sup> It is important to recognize that there was a university-wide committee set up to deal with these issues by 1990.

underdevelopment. This underdevelopment – a failure of sufficient use of resources – will be explored in the final era.

## **1994-2007: The Digital Divide and Multi-Party Democracy**

When confronting Malawi's most recent past, there is unquestionably a tension between momentous change and quiet stagnation. It is in some ways paradoxical. For many, the regime of Dr. Banda posed the key obstacle to political freedom, economic growth, and social improvements. The perseverance of the Malawi Congress Party and its ideology, the lack of economic development, and the challenges of the education system all embodied these problems.

Yet it has been claimed by some that the political atmosphere of Malawi post-1994, while no longer oppressive, has changed more in principle than in fact (Dzimhiri, 1996; Englund, 2002). This view posits that nearly all of the major political officials in the country had previously held posts within in the MCP. Thus, it is a democracy of chameleons, a system in which one only needs to change one's outward appearance, shrug off past actions, and one is ready to lead anew. This idea carries allusions to Jack Mapanje's famously banned book, *Chameleons and Gods*.<sup>15</sup> The reality of "chameleonism" may or may not be true, but it is nearly undeniable that some change has occurred. For one, the social and political tension of the Banda regime no longer governs the country.

This has been manifest in several ways. Most notably, the infamous Special Branch and assorted mechanisms of the police state are no longer in place to enforce ideological rigidity or a specified intellectual agenda (McCracken, 2002, p. 1). There is a truly free press, i.e. one no longer controlled by the state. Further, the absence of political detentions and the freedom of those exiled abroad to return pose tremendous

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<sup>15</sup> The reference to Mapanje is my own, but see Englund, Holland, and Dzimhiri for further ideas on this subject.

improvements to an educational system that was tarnished by fear and incrimination (Phiri & Ross, 1996, p. 13).

A perfect example of this is provided by the literature since 1994 on the recent Malawian past. Several conferences, books, and journal issues have focused on uncovering Malawian history during Banda's regime (Van Donge, 1996). Phiri and Ross's (1996) book on democratization in Malawi presents a handful of articles that directly seek to uncover the political and social pressures under the Banda regime. While some, such as Kenneth Ross, argue for a Truth Commission to uncover past events, the simple fact of the pursuance and publication of this research without official interference is an improvement.

Yet by 2007, after nearly 15 years of independence, the major development indicators in Malawi show modest improvement (Van Buren, 2009). If the actions of Dr. Banda's regime had left Malawi by 1994 with some of the poorest indicators of social and economic development in the world, Bakili Muluzi's subsequent regime was elected to change that (Harrigan, 2001, p. 292). Unfortunately, the record of this period, 1994-2004 is one of tremendous economic growth for very few, while stagnation for most (Chinsinga, 2002, p. 25). Of course, this not an entirely derived from politics. The relationship between economic aid from major financial institutions, e.g. the World Bank or the IMF, has caused difficult financial circumstances for the state. In the following section, I will explore how similar international forces have impacted the university.

## **The University of Malawi, post-Banda**

For the University of Malawi, there is evidence of further decline. During the 1980s and 1990s, many universities in Africa moved from a nation-building philosophy for university administration to a market-driven one (Holland, 2004). The neo-liberal reforms of the structural adjustment period drove government budgets to relieve spending on numerous social services, including higher education.<sup>16</sup> As Holland (2004) notes, the market-based university model has resulted in tremendous challenges for scholars. Academic salaries have experienced a relative increase to other sectors of the Malawian society, but the changes have not translated into substantially improved lifestyle. Holland (2004) reports that in 1992, the average salary of an academic was about \$800 per month, but by 2004 it had fallen to \$500 (p. 107).

Further, the Malawian scholarly community has suffered a tremendous transformation through the massive increase in the NGO and development industry. It is not uncommon for a significant amount of research to be conducted, not for the general scholarly good or for academics' careers; but rather, for donor agencies seeking locally-oriented research to provide evidence or justification for their activities. In essence, much research has been separated as a function of scholarly activity and 'out-sourced' beyond the university to the realm of consultancy (Holland, 2004, p. 107).

Previously, the university monopolized scholarly knowledge production and consumed it within specified local networks: classrooms, departments, libraries, etc. NGO-based research relinquishes control of research products, especially in the event

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<sup>16</sup> Neoliberal policies are those ascribed to the development model of the 1980s and 1990s, in which economic and structural reforms are imposed on nations as conditions for financial assistance. These reforms are intended to 'liberalize' an economy and reduce government control, interference, and regulation in favor of market-based economic conditions.

that the Malawian scholar is brought in to provide local expertise rather than broader collaborative responsibility (Holland, 2004, p. 104). Thus, Malawian academics are disempowered by a substantially reduced authority over their own work.

Further, as Holland (2004) notes, university education in a market-driven environment suffers from a lack of government support. Traditionally, the Research and Publications Committee of the university provided some research funding support for local activities, such as local field research, nearly all of which is no longer available (p. 104).

Thus, the University does not allocate the necessary funds. Blame should be placed in part on organizations such as the World Bank and the UN, which have argued tremendously in favor of primary and secondary education as the major need of education spending for social development, placing tertiary education at a disadvantage (World Bank, 1995, p. 56). In fact, it is because of these conclusions that not only World Bank funds decreased, but donor funds for higher education generally decreased throughout the 1990s (Woodhall, 2007, p. 20).

But where does this place scholarly information dissemination? Scholarly information in Malawi exists in a space in which political factors no longer pose the same degree of constraint on access to information and technology has enabled tremendous potential improvement of access through ICTs. Yet in a market-driven environment without substantial government support, procurement of this information has very nearly been priced out of anyone's reach. Even a local publisher, based at the university, Kachere Series, gives its books to Chancellor College for free. They cannot afford to buy them (Fiedler, 2008, p. 89).

## **The Digital Divide**

One of the major transformations of late-twentieth century scholarly communication has been the rapid development and use of ICTs. Led by governments and universities, the revolution in information and communication technologies has initiated a massive transformation in how scholarly information is delivered and collected. No longer is a physical product necessary for the transmission of information, and storage of huge amounts of data is possible through CD-ROM technology, and more recently on data servers. Scholarly communities can debate and discuss Malawian issues with email listservs, such as Nyasanet or H-Net, and journal compilation and editing is facilitated through these improved communicative methods (Brody, 2009).

Instrumental in changing the environment was the invention and spread of the World Wide Web and the Internet. For countries in Malawi's position, this development offered a tremendous advantage over the traditional barriers of geography and isolation (Ngwira, 2006). The abundance of information available in digitized form represents a virtual library, outside the bounds of the traditional bounded library structure (Chiweza, 2006, p. 4). Reaching beyond the realm of authored webpages, the virtual library contains books, journals, datasets, and various other scholarly publications available for download in the "cloud", the amorphous community of servers on which all of this information is saved and accessed via websites (Dempsey, 2009).

The concept of the virtual library is contingent on two major conditions: persistent access and low or non-existent barriers to access. Persistent access depends quite simply on uninterrupted access to information twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. For most institutions in the developed world, once access is achieved, persistence is common

and expected. (Cotter, et al., 2005) For institutions in Africa, however, persistence is plagued not by the supplier-side, but by the users' side. Low bandwidth, poor connectivity, power outages and disruptions, computer viruses and assorted problems, all provide the user with a substantially weakened position in using this virtual library (Limb, 2005, p. 11).

Hence the digital divide – a division at once physical and virtual, which embodies the separation between the haves and have-nots of the digital age. Institutions with significant ICT infrastructure, i.e. computers, servers, etc., have the capacity to take full advantage of the abundance of information and deliver it to their faculty and students. Institutions without this advantage must build it up from essentially nothing, putting their students and faculty at a comparative disadvantage in teaching and research to their resource-rich colleagues. This includes libraries, who bear a significant share of the burden for resource access. Library processes that rely on slower methods of information collection and dissemination, such as searching print catalogs or waiting on book shipments from major publishers, place their users in a position of constantly falling further behind their colleagues who can manage primarily with electronic resources. Steve Mwiyeriwa, former University Librarian noted (1986) the challenges in resource procurement:

Slow postal delivery between countries; lack of automation; underdeveloped telecommunications which render exploitation of overseas databases through package switch data or dedicated or voice transmission impossible; absence of appropriate software; lack of standardization in bibliographic description; and outdated legislation (p. 17).

For Malawi, while the divide is very real and quite wide, it is not uncross-able. As noted elsewhere in this paper, the progressive decline of collecting abilities by the university library has resulted in a dearth of scholarly information resources. Serials budgets are relatively non-existent and book budgets are often contingent on special funds and donations.<sup>17</sup> The existence of digital information then presents an opportunity to escape the financial constraints of collection building and access freely available scholarly information online.

This depends, of course, on freely available scholarly information. As journal prices have increased and the Malawian kwacha has declined, the transition from print resources to electronic resources has precipitated a 'serials crisis' (Chiweza, 2000, p. 138). The University of Malawi simply cannot afford access to journals in subscription-based databases without massive discounts or consortial efforts (Ngwira, 2005). The commercial publishing model has entirely out-priced the University library, and most university libraries in the developing world.

A study by Chiweza (2006) at the University of Malawi has shown a tremendous advantage in digital access. Compared with a university in Australia, the study shows that for a given three hundred citations, there is approximately a 10 percent increase in accessible citations when the free internet is available. Further there is nearly a 30 percent increase when commercial digital resources, e.g. JSTOR or EBSCO databases, are used. In other words, the usage of digital resources supplants the need to obtain print and vastly increases the utility of library services as well as its support for research and teaching (p. 22).

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<sup>17</sup> See Report to Senate, 1968-1989; Plumbe, 1997.

This creates a dilemma for a university like that in Malawi. First, can the university efficiently and effectively access this information? Does the infrastructure exist to enable such access? The cost of internet access is comparatively high in developing countries, and for large institutions with high-bandwidth demands, the cost is substantially higher. Further challenges abound, including a sufficient IT staff supply to maintain and service the networks as well as the cost of inevitable upgrading of the system.

But even with the presumption of a functional ICT infrastructure, are commercial resources viable, given the financial constraints posed? Even in Africa, where some resources like JSTOR are given for free, accessing most commercial resources depends partly on a subscription funds, much like journals, and the University of Malawi has stopped all journal subscriptions due to financial difficulties in the past (Chiweza, 2000, p. 138).<sup>18</sup> Fortunately, several potential remedies have been proposed and some implemented to deal with this problem.

### **Divide-bridging Initiatives**

Of the two major problems, one of infrastructure and one of finances, both are in the process of being overcome in Malawi. Funded by various Scandinavian development agencies, an initiative of the International Network for the Availability of Scholarly Publications (INASP) called Peri (Program for the Enhancement of Research Information) is a critical mechanism for delivering commercial resources to the University of Malawi (INASP, 2009). It is responsible for delivering resources valued at

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<sup>18</sup> In 1996, no periodicals were purchased.

several millions of dollars.<sup>19</sup> INASP seeks to improve the availability of scholarly resources for universities and libraries in developing countries. Beyond this, INASP's programs also provide for training in accessing information resources and ICT training (Ngwira, 2005).

Further access is provided through a host of initiatives, including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). These projects provide extensive information in their respective fields, agriculture and engineering and health and medicine. More electronic information access projects in various science and technology disciplines are provided in the Appendix, Figure 2.

The core problem that these projects seek to solve is the cost/access constraint, i.e. the fact that most electronic resources cost money in order to obtain access. But the Open Access movement may be key in further relieving the constraint.<sup>20</sup> As Chiweza's (2006) study previously noted, there was a small increase in accessibility of journal citations through the free internet. With the growth in the past several years of institutional repositories, digital libraries, open access publishing experiments, and electronic theses and dissertation projects, one can only expect that the value of open access will only increase to universities like Malawi's. While there are some downsides, including increasing bandwidth usage, decreasing local internet performance, as well as searchability for open-access resources, the potential benefits exceed the costs.

In fact, the challenge most significantly posed to access and availability for the Malawian university community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is less one of cost, but rather of

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<sup>19</sup> The publishers include: EBSCO databases, including Academic Search Premier, Oxford University Press Journals, the Nature Publishing Group, the Royal Society publications, Sage Publications, and Wiley-Blackwell's Interscience publications.

<sup>20</sup> No studies were found on Open Access resources, but one can extrapolate its potential based on Chiweza's study of the value of online resources.

infrastructure. Tremendous digital resources require corresponding ICT support. This is further complicated by file types, such as PDFs, which are generally large and demand a higher bandwidth connection, especially when multiplied across the full range of potential users (Aidworld, 2006). PDFs are one of the most common methods of providing document access online.

In 2000, the University of Malawi Libraries had a variety of means for accessing the Internet, but none of which provided much beyond a basic dial-up connection. The College of Medicine had a connection speed of about 1kbps (kilobytes per second) in 2003. At that rate, a standard PDF of about 100kb takes nearly fifteen minutes to download completely (Aidworld, 2006). There were also several private options, but none provided adequate pricing for public sector institutions (Chiweza, 2000). The gap in adequate internet service provision proved substantial enough to engender new organizations that sought to ameliorate these connectivity problems.

The Malawi Library and Information Consortium (MALICO), formed in 2003, has provided a leadership role that exceeds similar consortial efforts in even many developed countries. It was formed in order to leverage the collective power of all of the member libraries for improvements in resource sharing, electronic collections, and expertise and training (MALICO, 2009).<sup>21</sup> While institutions in Europe and North America built ICT infrastructure as the internet developed, it was largely governed and constructed through the efforts of university administration as a key university-wide resource. In Malawi, the University gained access to those resources before the infrastructure came into place, thus creating a dilemma of access and availability – the resources were waiting to be used, but the means to get them was not sufficient. This

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<sup>21</sup> Appendix 1 shows a list of members.

includes not just the freely available internet resources, but also those commercial databases through INASP's Peri program. Thus, the MALICO consortium has been the driving body in the procurement of a new academic ICT infrastructure for the entire country (Ngwira, 2005).

The key obstacle was to acquire higher speed means of internet connectivity in an environment of substantial financial constraint. With the aid of donor agencies, such as the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) and cooperation from government regulatory bodies, four VSAT (Very Small Aperture Terminals) satellite uplink stations were purchased and installed (Ngwira, 2005). These terminals, absent any fiber-optic connection to larger global land-based internet networks, are currently the key access points for higher-speed connectivity to the Internet.

The effect has proven substantial. The College of Medicine, once desperately slow for the academy, now commands a speed of 1024kpbs. The same 100kb PDF file only takes about 1 second to download at this speed (Ngwira, 2006). While the rollout of these connections to each of the federated campuses is not entirely complete, the effect is measurable. In July 2005, for example, the number of articles downloaded at all campuses had nearly quadrupled from the previous year (Ngwira, 2005). As evidenced by a student at the College of Medicine, "I knew that the library had access to many electronic journals, but online access was so slow that in practice, I couldn't make use of them. Now I can search quickly and easily for the latest articles" (EIFL, 2006).

The cumulative effective of these two digital divide-bridging activities – access to online resources and the development of the MALICO network – has shown the capacity to use technology to overcome the physical and traditional constraints of library and

information access. But while it suggests a transition of sorts, there are some features of the academic environment that do not seem to have changed.

The University of Malawi libraries have increasingly, since their inception, relied on donor support for meeting the basic needs of its users. Book collections, serial subscriptions, hardware such as microfilm readers and computers, and most recently, VSAT internet terminals, have all been found without the support of the Malawian government. The donor-driven academic enterprise in Malawi is furthered, not just in the way research has been separated from the mission of teaching into the development industry, but now also in the way information procurement is contingent on continued goodwill by publishers cooperating with INASP or the WHO. Organizations like INASP are able to provide resources because commercial publishers agree to make their content available. INASP has no direct ownership over the content; instead, they play a mediating role between the developing world libraries (generally-speaking) and the commercial suppliers of scholarly information. Thus, if libraries such as the University of Malawi libraries become capable of paying for their content, the incentive to provide free content will evaporate as publishers will expect to be paid.

This fulfills the arguments of some who regard the academic publishing market as one of information imperialism. The idea that information is published and controlled by the “global North” – primarily North America and Europe – puts African universities in a subordinate position relative to their counterparts (Lor, 2007). Coupled with the poor financial support of the state, these universities are bound to the aid of donor agencies, much like the states themselves are bound to donor countries and financial institutions. Britz (2006) sums up the needs of the scholarly community in this environment:

The Knowledge Society only dawns in a country when its scholars are not merely users of imported knowledge, but themselves contribute to knowledge creation. This implies active participation in scholarly work, not merely absorbing knowledge produced elsewhere (p. 63).

Thus, there is a need for research to be created and owned by those in the global South or a removal of the commoditized value of scholarly information. In some ways, the latter is developing, albeit slowly. The Open Access movement represents an effort to present information in a global scholarly commons. Unfortunately for African universities, the burden of the growth of this movement is upon developed nations' scholars, as they are the ones who most significantly support the commercial scholarly publishers. The University of Malawi is pursuing a contribution to this movement as well, with initial discussion surrounding the creation of an institutional repository currently on-going (Ngwira, 2005).

The post-1994 period for the University of Malawi and Malawian scholars generally is largely unpredictable. While certain elements of undoubtedly improved, others have not. The freedoms enjoyed by scholars are perhaps at their peak and the openness to research opportunities are not constrained merely by politics or social pressures. However, the economic circumstances governing academic life have not improved, and without improved state support, the University will not be able to improve the lives of its faculty and researchers. Instead, they will be further driven towards the more profitable NGO sector.

Technology has presented a significant opportunity to step beyond traditionally problematic areas of print resources, especially for serials, and move more fully into the digital realm. The long strides of the librarians in improving access and ensuring availability are noteworthy and deserve recognition. But the well-known challenges of

neo-imperialism pose potential problems for the scholarly community. Perhaps through furtherance of Malawian control over their own research and a maintenance of control of their cultural heritage, the digital age will be an era of greater balance and prosperity. The challenges are large, but the Malawian scholarly community has already shown patience and a capability for transformative innovation.

## **V. Analysis of Citations from 1970s-2000s**

Thus far, this paper has been mainly concerned with identifying the impacts on access and availability of scholarly information from abroad, or on the forces that impact research locally. A more concrete understanding of information poverty in Malawi requires an examination of actual research sources used. To uncover this information, I have analyzed the citations of student seminar papers and faculty articles from the History department in order to gain insight into the major resources used in the creation of academic work.

This analysis is presented here, after the historical analysis, so that there is already a sense of the information context in which these students and faculty are working at the time of writing. As stated before, the historical analysis showed the importance of politics, economics and technology on the research process over several decades by its impact on access and availability of scholarly information. This section shows the outcome of those impacts; or, how scholars adapted to do research in during these eras.

An analysis of citation information can yield numerous benefits. A typical function is to provide an indication of the mostly highly cited literature in a given field. The measurement can instruct individuals about the relative importance of works, suggest the impact a work has had on a field, and give an objective measurement on how certain types of information resources are used (Ashman, 2009).

This last measurement is the key value for this study. If challenges facing information access have caused Malawian library priority-setting to exclude expensive journal literature or non-Malawian works, then does this appear in the nature of the

research? Can we expect students to write without appealing to broader literature? Are the works of faculty also constrained in this respect?

For this study, historical research from students and faculty of the History Department were chosen. I gathered 14 Chancellor College History Seminar student papers that were available (from the Indiana University Libraries) and compared them to 14 faculty publications from the same department. The student seminar papers were selected as they were available, i.e. all student papers that were available were used. There are several papers from the same seminar series that were given by faculty members, a local antiquities department director, etc., and those papers were not used. The faculty publications were selected by a search of the Social Sciences Citation Index on the Web of Science database.

The History Dept faculty members were chosen both for the obvious comparison value with the student papers, as well as for the fact that historical research tends to be very document intensive (de Tiratell, 2000). This is the case even in African history, where oral history plays a major role (Vaughan, 2001). Greater amounts of research material may mean that there is much data to analyze, but more importantly, it means that the researcher had to consult many different sources. The range, detail and volume of the research permits the opportunity to examine the items the researcher had access to and can speculate on patterns across the different works.

This opportunity does not preclude the reality that not everything a researcher examines appears in a citation. There are numerous reasons to not use a resource, and this has little to do with information access and more to do with one's approach to a topic. As a result, this analysis cannot be called irrefutable. But it can contribute to our

understanding of how resources were used between 1964 and 2007. At the very least, it will provide initial conclusions, those that could be expanded upon in later research.

Two additional criteria were used. First, the faculty member in question could not have been a temporary or expatriate member of staff. Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, there were many faculty members who taught for a few years before returning to the UK or US (Department of History, 1971-78). The goal of this paper is to view the work of faculty bound long-term, by choice or by circumstance, to the University of Malawi. Thus, a few extra papers were needed to fill out the total. To achieve this, I searched Google Scholar by the names of faculty I had for the study. I selected the first new papers I found, including conference papers. The end result was 14 publications from five faculty members that have published over the past 30 years predominantly from the University of Malawi. It should be further noted that the History Department is relatively small and has never had more than six or seven faculty members at a time, including pre-doctoral staff “lecturers” (Department of History, 1971).

A final note is that publications from the *Nyasaland Journal*, or the *Society of Malawi Journal* as it came to be called after independence, have not been used. While an important resource for the publishing of Malawi-related historical research, it is not a peer-reviewed publication. There are numerous articles from this journal that could have been used in this study, but the standards varied dramatically and other journals provided the sufficient number of articles. Further, as it is not indexed in the Social Sciences Citation Index, it did not come up in initial searches.

On Tables 1 & 2, you can see the results of the analysis, with a category given to looking at the time period in question. The document type categories are intended to take

into account the general nature of the publication used, so newspapers and journal articles were combined into articles/serials, although if the term M.N.A (Malawi National Archives; also N.A.M.) was used, it was considered an archival resource. Government documents were considered archival resources, due to the fact that most were colonial era documents and many used the term M.N.A. Grey literature is the other general column. This contains all references to other seminar papers, conference papers, unpublished works, pamphlets, etc. Finally, while citations were often repeated in the reviewed papers, this study focuses on unique mentions.

**Table 1. Student Seminar Papers**

ID	Date Written	Topic Era	Total Unique	Books/ Monographs	Articles/ Serials	Archival Documents (NAM)	Oral Testimony	Grey Literature (Seminars, Conferences)	Theses & Dissert.
1	78-79	1760-1910	32	3	1	0	22	5	1
2	81-82	1930s-1950s	31	8	4	5	10	3	1
3	86-87	1885-1940	41	6	13	3	12	3	4
4	86-87	1890-1960	31	4		15	9	2	1
5	87-88	1918-1936	27	5	3	12	5	2	
6	88-89	1850-1933	41	9	8	10	5	9	
7	88-89	1939-1950	43	15	7	16	5		
8	89-90	1920-1964	41	11	4	18	5	2	1
9	89-90	Pre-colonial	20	5	3	0	5	6	1
10	89-90	1907-1964	29	10	3	3	8	4	1
11	90-91	1902-1945	33	6	6	10	8	2	1
12	90-91	Colonial	6	1		4		1	
13	92-93	1944-1964	15	5	1	6	1	2	
14	92-93	1891-1946	32	3	3	14	6	5	1
		<b>AVERAGES:</b>	29.83	7.08	5.20	8.50	6.64	3.27	1.43

The results of the student papers analysis provide some interesting points. First, there is a relatively low variability in the number of citations across document types, with the exception of grey literature and theses & dissertations. Perhaps this is to be expected

given the lower total numbers of theses and dissertations versus other possible sources (books, journal articles, etc). Also, the use of the National Archives is high, which is both noteworthy for the role it clearly plays in providing scholarly resources alongside the University Library. The major reason for this is likely the Zomba History Project, a focus of research oriented towards the use of the National Archives by students and faculty (Vaughan, 2001). Further, since both the Archives and the University are in Zomba, it is perhaps more likely that they are used than if the Archives were in a different part of the country.

Also notable is the lower citation counts of journal articles. Students may have simply not have found much use in them, or their access could have been limited, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s with the financial constraints of the University Libraries. Research on a narrowly focused, localized topic may not lend itself to heavy use of published material, particularly if that topic has not been widely researched.

A second point of analysis is the time period in question. As is demonstrated in the table, no paper exceeded the date of 1964 as a topic in their studies. Perhaps with the earlier papers, in the 1970s and 1980s, this would be unexpected due to the newness of events, but by the final paper listed in 1992-93, there were certainly major historical events from the preceding decades that had occurred and could have been studied. But given the political situation in the 1980s and 1990s, research into post-independence Malawi, prior to 1994, was a potentially dangerous practice. For students, research in earlier eras would have provided a safer and perfectly rational topic to study.

Certainly these results are limited by the fact that no post-1994 seminar papers are available. As we shall see with the faculty publications, this may have seen some change

in the choice of time periods to study. Also, it will be interesting to see if the use of journal articles increase now that the divide-bridging initiatives, such as MALICO's and INASP's, have brought substantially more journal literature to academic users.

Unfortunately, this research will have to be carried out with substantially more recent publications than those to which I have had access.

**Table 2. Faculty Publications.**

	Date Written	Topic Era	Total Unique	Books/Monographs	Articles/Serials	Archival Documents (NAM)	Oral Testimony	Grey Literature	Theses & Dissert.
1	1977	pre-colonial	41	12	8	3	11	5	2
2	1978	pre-colonial	27	19	5			1	2
3	1982	colonial-1960s	20	11	3			4	2
4	1983	1900-1960s	67	32	28	2			5
5	1984	1929	37	8	6	23			
6	1984	1889-1931	60	22	12	15	6	3	2
7	1985	1891-1938	62	19	22	4	7	10	
8	1985	colonial-1961	5	2	2		1		
9	1993	1890-1953	43	7	9	25		1	1
10	1994	1890-1945	47	17	25	2			3
11	1997	1988-1994	65	23	28		12	1	1
12	1998	1988-1992	45	17	23	1	2	1	1
13	2002	1891-1964	29	10	13	3		1	2
14	2004	1960s-2002	16	9	7				
		<b>AVERAGES:</b>	40.29	14.86	13.64	8.67	6.50	3.00	2.10

This chart bears some significant differences from the student chart, some expected and some not. Most notably, citation counts are on the whole higher than the student papers. This is to be expected given the rigors of peer-review and the demands of journal publishing. Perhaps more importantly, is the much higher counts of book and journal literature relative to the other document types. For students, there was much

greater consistency in the number of different types of sources used. Faculty clearly used book and journal literature more heavily, which is not surprising given their need to situate research in broader contexts for journal publication.

It should also be noted that often, while faculty used theses and dissertations, it was most often their own projects that were referenced. As a result, there is not a lot of reliance on this type of document. But it does bring into question a broader issue. Examining this literature has uncovered the dramatically insular nature of Malawian historical research. In other words, the citations are sometimes self-referring, refer to local colleagues, and refer to other local publications such as the Seminar Paper series. Few articles and books seemed to be referenced by authors who were not either teachers or students or researchers in Malawi at some time. This is generally the case for both students and faculty, although there are definitely exceptions in faculty publications, such as references to works of well-known African historians such as Frederick Cooper, John Iliffe, and Roland Oliver. Yet faculty have their own research networks and legacy of work done beyond the borders of Malawi.<sup>22</sup> This implies that information scarcity, whether caused by economic forces, political ones, or any other, may exist, particularly for students, whose research often does not cite anyone not directly connected to the University and who may not have their own connections beyond the local university.

Finally, the time period studied appears to further the concept that after 1994, and the change in national leadership, certain topics became free to be studied. In Table 2, the publications never go beyond the 1960s until after 1994. At this point, research is done on the 1970s, 80s, and 1990s. There were also books published by the same authors

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<sup>22</sup> Since the University of Malawi follows a policy of localization, most doctoral work has to be done abroad. As a result, many faculty receive their PhDs in Europe, Canada, and the United States. The implication of this is that they have access to information there that they may not have in Malawi.

referenced in this study that examined the countries post-independence era. Both the direct accusations of exiled and diasporic Malawian scholars are true; that while in Malawi during Banda's reign, certain topics were off-limits.

As the analysis has shown, research in Malawi has an insular focus and the greater the number of local resources, the greater benefit to research. To explore this, I wish to touch on some of the trends in local scholarly publishing. Certainly the creation of local scholarly publishing options allow not just for great access to scholarly information, but also a potential source of revenue, always important in cash-strapped universities. If import duties and overseas shipping make ordering and acquiring print material from abroad dramatically more expensive, are there local alternatives?

There have been numerous publishing houses in Malawi's history, most commonly those connected to mission or religious organizations. Msiska (1993) notes that there were six by 1993: Dzuka Publishers Ltd. since 1977; CLAIM since 1968; Likuni Press and Publishing House since 1949; Monfort Press since 1957; Popular Publications since 1961; and the Government Printer (p. 156). It should be noted, however, that much of what is published is not necessarily academic work. Some certainly have, such as CLAIM and Monfort, but the majority of the publishing is religiously oriented.

Newer publishing ventures have begun to open however. Possibly the best example of this is the academic publisher, Kachere Series. From within the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Chancellor College, Kachere is responsible for the creation of a Malawian authority for academic work on religious and political topics. It provides a publication channel to students having completed high-quality dissertations

and theses, as well as an in-country source for general academic work, such as Harry Langworthy's *Africa for the African: the life of Joseph Booth* or Kings Phiri and Kenneth Ross's *Democratization in Malawi: a stocktaking* (Fiedler, 2007, p. 86).

As its managing director, Klaus Fiedler (2007), has remarked, Kachere Series challenges the illusion that there is no market for scholarly research within Africa (p. 87). It may not be as sizable as markets in North America or Europe, but it exists. The challenge is constancy and maintaining high standards of quality as well as only producing as much as one can sell. Further, through innovative approaches, it has penetrated wider global markets through Amazon.com, the African Books Collective/Michigan State University Press, and other sources (Fiedler, 2007, p. 88).

Print publishing is one direction, but electronic publishing affords opportunities as well. Fiedler (2007) accepts that print-on-demand (POD) may be the best means to controlling costs, but delivering a timely product to the buyer (p. 88). But this is still a form of print publishing. The Malawi National Statistical Office has begun the process of providing national statistics online as well as in print form. (NSO, 2009) And three journals of the university have begun to be published online through the academic publishing service, *African Journals Online*. These are the *Journal of Humanities*, the *Malawi Medical Journal*, and the *Malawi Journal of Science and Technology* (AJOL, 2009).

Publishing of this nature is not high-demand. In fact, it is relatively a small contribution to the global knowledge commons. But the value of locally developed publishing is not the magnitude of its effect, but the growth it engenders. The development of sustainable publishing mechanisms is key to balancing the unequal

power relationship between academic publishers in the global North and those in the global South. Information poverty is supported by the continuation of this discrepancy.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has sought to uncover the impacts on access and availability of scholarly information in the case of Malawi. The core concerns of Britz and Blignaut's (2001) information poverty theory are identifying whether problems of access and availability exist, and whether they are linked to economic poverty. The case of Malawi has proven both to be true. Without question, problems abound for Malawian scholars in accessing information and economic forces contribute greatly to it. But this case has also shown that there are other forces driving access and availability problems.

In its early period, as the country was newly independent, building its economy and relying heavily on foreign assistance and goodwill, the information environment was fertile. The university grew physically and the libraries' collections made the teaching and research during this period productive. The answer to the question of whether or not Malawi, between 1964 and 1981, could be considered in a state of information poverty must clearly be no. There were sufficient materials for the university community to do its work. Towards the end of this period however, the pressure of conflict with the state and the MCP began frequently to encroach on freedoms to access information.

But as time wore on, the economy and a market-driven, higher education policy drove the information environment into a state of scarcity. In the era from 1981-1994, availability increasingly became a problem and access became heavily influenced by political forces. Repression, detention, and censorship all contributed to a period in which disputed research was stifled. Currency devaluation and rising serials costs actually forced libraries to stop purchasing some journals and reduce their monograph orders. While research was possible, and much was done during this era, scholars and

students heavily relied on locally-created resources, such as oral history interviews and archival documents. Their topics thus had to be politically safe to research, such as the pre-colonial and colonial eras.

Taken together, the first two eras spell out the pattern of institutional underdevelopment common in African universities. Nation-building in a fervent era of nationalism led to high investments in creating universities to train a new generation of African professionals (Holland, 2004). Economic collapse in the eighties led to subsequent underinvestment in education, effectively starving the institutions (Zezeza, 1997). Malawi's information poverty thus is rooted in this type of underdevelopment. It is created in part by forces external and internal, a competition between economic needs, such as structural adjustment loans, and political needs, e.g. the need to control the production of knowledge in Malawi, stifle dissent, and ensure one-party rule.

The final period of Malawi's story has proven to be different in some ways, and unchanged in others. The defeat of Banda and the MCP in 1993 led to a new government, one that no longer maintained the same level of explicit oppression. And while some fear that politics maintains the same authoritarian tendencies (Mapanje, 2002), the reality is that research topics are no longer off-limits. But the economic situation has not changed significantly. Despite a modest improvement in recent years, it is technology that many are looking for in order to provide informational relief. Zezeza (1995) warned about relying on technology to gain salvation from information impoverishment. He is right to argue so. Technology bears its own financial costs, as MALICO's effort has demonstrated. Internet access is not cheap, and paying for high-speed, heavy-use bandwidth is even more expensive.

But technology also carries non-economic costs. Power relationships continue although technology changes (Rosenzweig, 2001). Even after colonialism, Malawian libraries are bound in an unequal relationship with commercial publishers through international intermediaries, a relationship that mirrors pre-existing ones with book and journal donors. Ultimately, access to commercial electronic resources – when a library has no money – is dependent on the goodwill and interest of the publisher of that content. Lose that goodwill, and lose the content as well. In the end, the growth of ICT infrastructure may create the capacity to deal with existing information, but does little to improve its affordability.

So what are the lessons to draw from Malawi? First, academic information poverty is inextricably linked to the underdevelopment of the university. The complicated web of factors that determine this underdevelopment, from government bureaucracies, academic departments, foreign donors and individual librarians, all contribute to the creation of the state of information impoverishment. Those who view information poverty as determined solely by economic or technological forces fail to grasp the whole picture.

Malawi highlights the importance of considering politics as a force in creating information poverty. At a local level, availability is fundamentally affected by the freedoms allowed by a governing regime. Access too, is dependent on an open-minded government, or at least, one that does not see the university as a mechanism for control. At an international level, the politics of donor-driven provisioning of information has tremendous consequences for access to information. Recognizing these political forces,

Malawian scholars are clearly in a tenuous position, and one that does not allow for easy change.

Ultimately, three factors provide an opportunity for a different information environment: greater local funding, decreased cost of foreign-created information, or increased locally-created information. The first places great importance on open access and the concept of global scholarly commons. Expensive, barrier-laden resources, whether books, journals, or electronic resources, create a system of have and have-nots. A broad open access movement, a drive to make scholarly information available for free could further facilitate a reduction in the gap between the information rich and poor. It is a hopeful sign that this movement is currently growing. One hopes that it is able to survive against commercial publishers seeking to maintain as much control over scholarly literature as they can.

Second, conceiving of an information environment as impoverished can provide powerful moral and ethical support for library or information development activities. Such activities may include donations of books, donations of money for improving ICT infrastructure, or training for staff in a developing country context. There can be no doubt that such actions feel good from the donor-side, or feel like they contribute to the establishment of better educational institutions in recipient countries. But does this actually improve the situation?

For Malawi, the answer must be mixed. Clearly, donor assistance has been the difference between a sufficient library and none at all. But recent efforts, such as the MALICO initiative and the Kachere Series publishers, have shown that Malawian scholars are quite capable of developing their own solutions to the complex problem of

information poverty. This is the crucial third opportunity. Through the improvement of local publishing, locally-owned and maintained ICT, and an increasing stake in the provision of Malawian-based information to the rest of the world, information poverty can be reduced, and perhaps eliminated. Thus, the solutions lie where the challenges do, in Malawi, and in the growth of local institutions.

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## Appendix

Figure 1. From: Malawi. Censorship Board, 1980.

Notable Books Banned in Malawi, 1968-1985		
Author	Title	Year
Achebe, Chinua	No longer at ease	1975
African Institute of the Soviet Academy of Sciences	Political parties of Africa	1977
Bailey, Bernadine	Malawi in pictures	1974
Beti, Mongo	Poor Christ of Bomba; Mission to Kala	1973, 1976
Bohannon, Paul	Love, sex, and being human	1971
Carter, Gwendolyn & John H. Hertz	Government and Politics in the 20th century	
Chiume, Kanyama	Kwacha	1975
Crosby, Cynthia A.	Historical Dictionary of Malawi	1986
Davidson, Basil	The Liberation of Guinea	1969
Ekwensi, Cyprian	Jagua Nana	1976
Guevara, Che	Guerrilla Warfare	1969
Kirkpatrick, Jean J.	The strategy of deception	1976
Larkin, Bruce D.	China and Africa, 1940-1970	1976
Lipset, Seymour M.	Passion politics (student activism in America)	1976
Liston, Robert A.	Dissent in America	1976
Lloyd, P.C.	Africa in social change	1976
Malinowski, Bronislaw	Sex, culture, and myth	1969
Marx, Karl	The revolutions of 1848	1973
McMaster, Carolyn	Malawi foreign policy and development	1974
Menesses, Enrique	Fidel Castro	1980
Michener, James A.	Kent State: what happened and why	1975
Needham, D.E.	Iron age to independence - a history of central Africa	1975
Nkhoma Synod	Machitidwe a Chilangizo	1969
Nkrumah, Kwame	Dark days in Ghana	1971
Odinga, Oginga	Not yet Uhuru	1976
Overstreet, H.	Iron Curtain; The War called peace (Kruschev's communism)	1976
Rockefeller, John D., III	The changing values on campus	1976
Rotberg, Robert I.	The rise of nationalism in central Africa: the making of Malawi and Zambia, 1873-1964	1965
Schapera, Isaac	Married life in an African tribe	1971
Short, Phillip	Banda	1974
Soyinka, Wole	Camwood on the leaves	1976
Staley, Eugene	Future of under-developed countries	1977
Toynbee, Arnold	Impact of the Russian Revolution, 1917-1967	1974
White, Landeg	Magomero: portrait of an African village	1988

Figure 2. Source: <http://www.malico.mw/electres.htm>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Africa Journals On-line (AJOL)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">AGORA (for Agricultural institutions through FAO)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">American Chemical Society</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">American Physical Society</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers (ASABE)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">American Society of Civil Engineers</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Annual Reviews</a></li> <li>• Beech Tree Publications</li> <li>• <a href="#">BioMed Central</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">BioOne Online Journals</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Blackwell Publishing</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Blackwell Synergy</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">British Library Direct</a></li> <li>• British Library Document Delivery Service</li> <li>• <a href="#">Cambridge University Press</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">DATAD : Database of African Theses and Dissertations</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Directory of Open Access Journals</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">EbscoHost</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Emerald</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Google Scholar</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">HINARI (for Health Institutions through WHO)</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Institute of Physics Publishing</a></li> <li>• International Forestry Review</li> <li>• ISI Web of Science</li> <li>• Journal Citation Reports</li> <li>• <a href="#">Mary Ann Liebert Inc.</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Multilingual Matters</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">National Academy Press</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">NRC Research Press Journals Online</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Oxford Journals</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Oxford Reference On-line</a></li> <li>• Royal Society of Chemistry</li> <li>• Royal Society of London</li> <li>• <a href="#">Springer</a></li> <li>• Taylor &amp; Francis Agropedia</li> <li>• Taylor &amp; Francis Europa World Plus</li> <li>• <a href="#">The Royal Society</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Wikipedia</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Wiley Interscience</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Document Delivery Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">African Journals Online</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">British Library Document Supply Centre</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Complementary programmes to PERI</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">AGORA</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">eIFL</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">HINARI Phase 1</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">TEEAL</a></li> </ul>
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**Figure 3. Source: MALICO website, 2009. <http://www.malico.mw>**

**MALICO Members**

1. Blantyre International University
2. Bunda College
3. Centre for Social Research
4. Chancellor College
5. College of Medicine
6. Domasi College of Education
7. Kamuzu College of Nursing
8. Malamulo College of Health Sciences.
9. Malawi Bureau of Standards.
10. Malawi Human Rights Resource Centre
11. Malawi Institute of Management
12. Malawi National Library Service
13. Mzuzu University
14. National AIDS Commission
15. National Research Council of Malawi / Ministry of Industry, Science and Technology
16. Reserve Bank of Malawi
17. The Malawi Polytechnic
18. University of Malawi

**Figure 4.**

**University Librarians, University of Malawi**

1964-1972	W.J. Plumbe
1974-1977	S.M. Made
1978-1980	S. Patchett
1981	B.G. Mphundi (Acting)
1982	F.M. Chimulu
1983-2003	S.S. Mwyirewa
2003-2006	A.W.C. Msiska
2006-2009	F.G. Howse (Acting)

# **Jeremy Kenyon**

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## **Education**

Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, 2005—2009

*Master of Library Science (MLS) and Master of Arts (MA) of African Studies*

University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, 1999—2003

*Bachelor of Arts in Political Science; International Studies*

- Study Abroad, South Africa (Feb-May 2003)

## **Work Experience**

Feb. 2007-August 2009

Graduate Student Assistant (African Studies Collection)

Indiana University Libraries, Bloomington, Indiana

June – July 2007

Internship (Library and Documentation Center)

West African Research Center, Dakar, Senegal

Sept 2005 – May 2006

Graduate Assistant (Collection Development)

Indiana University Libraries, Bloomington, Indiana

## **Skills**

Zulu Language – Beginning reading and speaking

French Language – Intermediate reading and speaking