

This paper is an analysis of the feature article “[*UDF’s rumble in DPP maze*](#)” by James Chavula which was published in The Nation newspaper and its online iteration (mwnation.com) on March 28, 2018. With the aid of specific examples from the text to illustrate our group’s analysis, this paper will discuss i) why the article’s topic is of interest to the public, ii) the type of feature it is, iii) how this feature differs from a news story, and iv) the functions it serves to the reader.

UDF’s rumble in DPP maze centres on the current state of the **United Democratic Front (UDF)**, erstwhile Malawi’s ruling party from 1994 to 2005, as the country heads into the 2019 election cycle. In his examination, Chavula explores dissention within UDF which has been fueled by the party’s “controversial alliance” with the ruling **Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)**; specifically, the involvement of party leader Atupele Muluzi “who iced his ‘agenda for change’ to take a Cabinet post in the DPP administration.” In addition, Chavula tackles discontent expressed by party members like Balaka North legislator, Lucius Banda - who calls the unofficial UDF/DPP coalition a “marriage without a certificate” - and party leaders from the South who pressed Atupele to “clarify the terms of engagement with DPP and his 2019 agenda” in an in-camera meeting. These ruminations are given a greater context by Chavula’s consideration of the party’s history, the Muluzi family’s “grip” on UDF and its “fading lustre” since DPP’s victory in the 2009 elections.

Chavula’s piece is of interest to the reader because it contains several news values i.e. characteristics that influence an event to be considered newsworthy (Rössler, 2017, p. 1383). Firstly, the article has **timeliness** because the country is at the precipice of another election cycle and so stories about political parties are of salience due to the public’s responsibility as an electorate. The piece is of interest to the electorate because it highlights some of the pressing issues facing UDF such as its alliance with DPP and lack of clarification on Atupele Muluzi’s agenda for 2019. These issues are important in influencing decisions at the ballot in the upcoming election and so articles such as Chavula’s are of interest. Secondly, the article is interesting because it references **elite persons**. Two of the story’s key subjects, Atupele Muluzi and Lucius Banda are both prominent political figures which makes them inherently interesting to the reader. People are interested to know their viewpoints and hear what they have to say because they occupy a prominent space within society (politics). Lastly, the

article is of public interest because it features **conflict** between members of UDF regarding the direction of the party with Banda going toe-to-toe, as it were, with Atupele over the UDF/DPP alliance. This is attractive to readers because they are interested to see the ramifications this conflict will have on the future of the party.

Published under the 'Politics' section in both its print and digital forms, '*UDF's rumble in DPP maze*' is a backgrounder because it is a straightforward feature tied to a recent event (Stephenson, 1998, p. 66) which at the time of Chavula's writing was Atupele Muluzi's address to party supporters at UDF Headquarters in Limbe (Chilunga, 2018). The article also satisfies the conditions of being a backgrounder by providing added information that offers more detail on the featured people in the story whilst considering the repercussions, causes and effects (Pape & Featherstone, 2007, p. 122) of the current disarray of UDF as the next election looms closer. Chavula contextualizes current events with past ones. For example, he relates the current "storm" gathering in UDF -i.e. the questioning and undermining of party president Atupele Muluzi - with past political mistakes made by his father, Bakili. Chavula writes that "internal conflicts" in the party began when the older Muluzi attempted to extend his tenure "beyond the constitutional two five-year terms" and these conflicts were exacerbated by a corruption case against Muluzi in which the former President is accused of stashing almost K1.7 billion when he was in power - a case he has been on trial for since 2006. Chavula connects these past events with Atupele's "see-saw antics" and highlights the speculation that Atupele has "sacrificed his party for the sake of his father", forming an alliance with DPP to protect ex-president Muluzi from prosecution.

This backgrounder differs from a news story in several ways. Firstly, it employs a pillar structure and narrative style whilst news stories utilise an inverted pyramid structure wherein the writer summarizes a story in the lead and present the facts in order of descending importance (Ahuja & Hiteshi, 2016). The importance of the issues examined by Chavula are not written of in order of importance. Instead they are layered in a way that shows the significance of all these events in relation to crux of the feature: UDF is in a precarious position as it enters the 2019 election cycle and Atupele Muluzi (and by extension, Bakili) is at the center of that. Chavula does this by making note of the "paintings of former president Bakili Muluzi's Jakumusi Bus Company and Atupele Trucking", which he writes,

“noiselessly proclaimed [Atupele’s] family’s grip on the party.” This foreshadows, for lack of a better word, Chavula’s analysis that the internal conflicts of UDF are rooted in the actions of the Muluzi family.

A second difference between Chavula's feature and a news story is that the latter uses a direct lead which is a straightforward introduction that summarises the the so-called five Ws (the core details) the story is about - the who, what, where, when and how (Nel, 2005, p. 94) whereas this feature uses a delayed lead which seeks to set a scene or evoke a mood (Mencher, 1987, p. 124). Chavula opens his feature by framing a greater story about Bakili Muluzi's legacy on UDF and failed attempts at a party revamp by using the recently repainted headquarters (upon which painters put a “glossy coating”) as a metaphor for the party's attempt to rejuvenate. Later in the article, Chavula calls back to this metaphor, “The painters might have sealed the cracks on the walls of UDF headquarters, but not gaps that emerged since the botched push for a third term in 2002.” This style of writing has a story-telling quality to it which could not be applied with a direct lead, thus differentiating Chavula’s feature from a news story.

Thirdly, Chavula’s feature differs from a news story because while the latter is a straightforward dissemination of facts, the former is a combination of objective facts and the writer’s own opinion. For example, Chavula characterises Atupele Muluzi as an “ambitious politician” with “see-saw antics”, who is sitting on the fence with one foot in Cabinet and another in his divided party. This characterisation is an opinion because it is not necessarily based on facts. A news story, on the other hand, has to be objective, meaning that it must be unbiased and can only convey verifiable facts so as to leave conclusions in the mind of the reader.

‘UDF’s rumble in DPP maze’ serves three functions to the reader, namely; i) providing context for UDF’s current “storm” by looking back at past events such as Bakili Muluzi’s corruption case and his attempt to seek another term in office unconstitutionally. This is helpful in conveying the fullest picture for readers who may not be aware of this history or those who may have forgotten. It also highlights the most pressing issues within UDF over the past decade or so; ii) providing a balanced characterisation of Atupele Muluzi as both

“ambitious” and wavering (“sitting on the fence”) which is important because the electorate deserves to have political figures scrutinized and their actions weighed; and iii) providing a commentary on UDF’s conflicts and current state of affairs - an examination which Chavula concludes by stating that the party “now has a new chance to rebuild as the national executive committee has resolved to hold a convention sooner than later.”

To conclude, *‘UDF’s rumble in DPP maze’* by James Chavula is a backgrounder about dissention within UDF, a topic that is of interest to the reader because of the looming general election in 2019 and because it features important political figures within the party being at odds. The backgrounder differs from a news story not only because of its shape and style but also because of its handling of facts and the type of lead used. The article serves to contextualise UDF’s contemporary issues and conflicts with the party’s history, to characterise Atupele Muluzi who will seek party leadership against Lucius Banda, and to provide a balanced commentary on the current state of UDF.

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