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Media coverage of Kenya's 2002 elections:A Case Study of The Daily Nation and The East African Standard

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CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0 Introduction:

The functions of the media in a democracy and subsequently in an election process have elicited much interest from media practitioners and outsiders. Various scholars have attempted to bring out a simplistic explanation of the way the two institutions work alongside each other but it has proved difficult. This chapter is an attempt to study the role of the press in democracy and subsequently in elections. While it is often assumed that these roles play themselves out on a symbiotic relationship, the chapter additionally sets out to explore and test the hypothesis that they are best played out in the context of a free press. It is against these roles that we examine the theories of news production to show the routines that journalists undergo in news selection.

Schudson opines that journalism is an important constitutive element of public life and media institutions like any other are governed by traditions and dynamics of their own. But in the broader public life, news institutions do not define politics any more than political structures fully determine the news; there is an ongoing interaction (cited in Curran et al, 2000). It is these interactions between the political players and media that one needs to engage with, to try and look at the boundaries both institutions have with each other as power instruments. Curran notes that at its best, the mediatization of politics is one in which journalism is capable of standing as spokesperson for civil society, challenging political arrogance and political roguery.

The African press for long has had constant relations with politics. Kasoma (2000:83) renders the African press as having been a political press and operating as a political tool from the onset. He notes that politicians particularly those in government, have necessarily, always been involved in and with the press, legally and extra legally. That their involvement was in ordering journalists to do this and do that, complaining about

acts or omissions by journalists and the press, warning journalists and the press to report on what those in government are saying, even if it does not conform to what they are doing or not doing. Indeed, it is difficult to picture the African press without its hallmark of overemphasis on politics. Politicians have courted the press and when the reports seemed unfavourable to them, they turned against the same institution they need. Kasoma also notes that the press is shrouded in controversy arising out of its nature as a campaign press. The press has been used as a political campaign tool to mop up party support of either the ruling party or the opposition. This still remains the case especially where there is the distinction between government- owned press and the private press. As Imanyara (1992) has noted,

> "Generally, the role of the press in democratization has been that of an independent forum and mouthpiece of crusaders of change. The openness of the alternative press to the public and its bold approach to sensitive and critical political issues has had the cumulative effect of inciting the general public to wake up to their democratic rights and demand change" (1992:21)

Arising from this, is the need for the press to distance itself from political relationships where there would appear to be a conflict of interest. Often, it is advised that private or independent media will effectively fulfill their roles in a democratic polity.

Waldhal (2004) informs that an important task for the media under democratic rule is to monitor political life and to draw the attention of voters to how politicians are fulfilling their responsibilities to society. In the circumstances then, it is expected that journalists will seek to effectively carry out this task as their duty to the public. In the same manner, politicians will seek to prolong their stay in power even when their terms come to an end. But as Atieno-Odhiambo (1997) avers, modern times expect that there will be open competition for leadership. This competition in return assumes a high premium will be placed in the value of plurality and debate. For this to happen, the media can only serve the masses and flourish when it is not confined to governments.

In the democratic sphere, the need for a balanced interpretation of the day's happenings is central to the process. Walter Lippmann (1965) observed that journalists point a flash rather than a mirror at the world. He argued further that the audience does not receive a complete image of the political scene; it gets a highly selective series of glimpses instead. Lippmann was categorical in his argument that there is no such thing as objective standards in journalism; there are only conventions (cited in Graber, 2000:38). Which is why he saw every newspaper as the result of a whole series of selections as to what items shall be printed, in what position, how much space each shall occupy and what emphasis each shall have. News is fundamentally shaped by organizational routines and the content is shaped by these practices. To help outline these routines, it is important to engage with the theory of news production.

2.1Theories of news production.

According to Manning (2001:51), recent studies in news production have moved from considerations of individual bias in selection decisions to the concept of organisational bias arising through the production process. News organisations came to be understood as functioning bureaucracies or factories with given 'inputs' and 'outputs', organisational rhythms, an insatiable appetite for fresh raw material or information of a particular kind. They are seen as cultural carriers, a set of genres of public meaning-making.

How then is news produced on a day to day level? Schlesinger (1978) maintains that news does not select itself, but is rather the product of judgements concerning the social relevance of given interest and significance. The notion that the act of news making is the act of constructing reality itself, a representation, rather than a picture of reality has been argued by many theorists (see Tuchman; 2000, McNair; 1998, Lichtenberg; 2000, Gieber; 1964). The 'reality' it portrays is always in at least one sense fundamentally biased, simply by virtue of the inescapable decision to designate an issue or an event newsworthy and then to construct an account of it in a specific framework of interpretation. Using a sociological studies basis, Schlesinger (1978) found that the existence of editorial policies implied that news organizations construct news in identifiable ways in terms not only of selection of news but also their angling and mode of presentation.

Media critics would argue that the angling of news constitutes bias. Currently, media is witnessing a shift from citing bias to framing; an ideal that Schudson (2003:35) claims moves the analysis of news away from the idea of intentional bias. He notes that to acknowledge that news stories frame reality is also to acknowledge that it would be humanly impossible to avoid framing. Schudson elaborates that framing diminishes the event to which evidence of selection can be automatically read as evidence of deceit, dissembling, or prejudice of individual journalists; it also draws attention to ways journalists select certain traditions and routines of the culture at large and the news business specifically.

Generally speaking, Schudson is trying to clarify that even where news is taken to be a representation of an actual event; it is because journalists work within a broader framework than their existing personal biases. Manning (2001:50) contributes to this idea and seeks to clarify that journalists do not deliberately fabricate stories or lies, but the production of news involves the routine gathering and assembling of certain constituent elements which are then fashioned to construct an account of the particular news events. Elsewhere, Cottle (1997) found that media texts are produced by determined ideological, institutional, commercial, technological, statutory and professional conditions and arrangements, all of which inform the production, organization and delivery of media texts (cited in Macgregor, 1997). This concurs with Manning's view, the notion that the practice of news journalism is far from mirroring reality; it is more of a manufacturing and fabrication process (2001:50). The belief is that journalists rely on their routine organizational procedures to get the news out to the public instead of recording facts as they are.

Croteau and Hoynes (2003) found that the metaphor of news as a mirror no longer works as it excludes some positions and only reflects a small section of the society. The objects reflected are not passive and are usually images reflecting the relative power of actors in our society rather than some 'objective' reality. News then is the product of a social process through which media personnel make decisions about what is newsworthy and

what is not. The important question is whether these decisions are made by individual journalists or by editors and other individuals of a higher hierarchical order. This brings us to try and relate, where possible, the relationship between society on the one hand and the media on the other.

Broder (1987:18) has claimed that in recent years the reporting of government and national politics has narrowed to coverage of the insiders by the insiders and for the insiders. TV and newspapers do not just report but directly influence the dynamics of the campaigns. Broder regrets such strategy because such coverage corrupts people's character, diverting journalists from serving the broad public and instead favouring a few (1987:18). The manner in which political news is covered has a lot of bearing on citizens of any country. For an election campaign as noted by Waldhal (2004:5), is a decisive test of a democracy's quality. This is because the general political significance of the media and their importance to different social groups find their clearest expression in the tug of war for the voters favour. An election campaign then becomes just as important as the results (Mancini & Swanson in Waldhal 2004). For this reason, the way the media handles its coverage of the campaigns is important in giving both the runners in the game and the voters a fair chance to decide on their leaders. If reports of the campaigns are mishandled, there is a chance that citizens will not have enough information or have lopsided information while making decisions.

Accordingly, Splichal and Wasko (1993) argue that all citizens in the democratic polity should have equal opportunities for political participation and influence and should have equal access to communication resources and competencies. Ideal democracy therefore requires that communications "be organized as a public good and managed and controlled neither by private or state (that is pluralistic) interests, but rather by society as a whole." Their definition of democracy was that it represents a set of values which aim to create the best circumstances for people to develop their nature and express diverse qualities as well as prevent people from arbitrary use of political authority and coercive power. Democracy should involve people in the determination of the conditions of their social life and expand economic opportunity to maximize the availability of resources to people.

In realizing these values, communication and politics, because of their inherent nature and intertwining relationship, are critical to their pursuit.

An African outlook on democracy reveals the absence of channels of expression where citizens could openly express themselves. Historically, African leaders believed that the concept of plural politics was an imposition from the West (Wanyande 2000; Ottaway, 1997) so they reverted to subjecting the citizens to kleptocratic rule to keep themselves in power. It was impossible for citizens to openly argue against the government and the onus remained for media to expose the negative aspects of totalitarian regimes. It was within the power of the media to make the citizens realise they have a chance through the power of the ballot to change all this. Gurevitch and Blumler (2000) view democracy as a highly exacting creed in its expectations of the mass media. It requires the media to perform and provide a number of functions and services for the political system which include surveillance of the socio-political environment, meaningful agenda-setting and providing platforms for an intelligible and illuminating advocacy by politicians and spokespersons of other causes and interest groups. They suggest that media should initiate and facilitate dialogue across a diverse range of views from power holders and mass publics alike, and have officials to account for how they exercised power (cited in Graber 2000:25). By allowing this, the media will have facilitated for the rulers and the electorate to engage in participatory dialogue.

2.2 Role of Media in Democracy/ Elections:

The media is viewed as the lifeblood of the democratic process and plays at least four critical roles; information and analysis, watchdog role, and as an open forum for debate and discussion (Tettey; 2004, Kupe; 2003, Gurevitch and Blumler; 2000:25) It follows that expectations will be high around the media's execution of these roles:

2.2.1 Information role:

Media is viewed as an agency for information and debate that facilitates the functioning of democracy. Stytler *et al* (1994) believe that "democracy can only be safeguarded where the free flow of information views and opinions relevant to the electoral process are constitutionally guaranteed". The media according to Curran (2002: 225) brief the electorate and assist voters to make an informed decision at election time and provide a channel of communication between government and the governed. For this, the media needs to represent the facts as they are on the ground and must endeavor to inform citizens accurately about the electoral process. This information is not limited to election procedures but more importantly, what the candidates are offering the voters. Additionally, Kupe (1999) notes that the candidates must be made aware of the election depending on the electoral system of their country, as well as what is happening on the larger scale. It is impossible, as Waldhal (2004: 12) argues, for voters to form considered opinions on current social issues without relevant and credible information from the media. He warns that if the media fail in this respect, a significant proportion will either make their political choices on inadequate grounds or fail to participate for want of knowledge. The task then is for media to present as much information on elections as they can to the voters in general.

In 2002, the Electoral commission of Kenya (ECK) with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) carried out pilot voter education programmes with the help of the media through advertising on radio, television and in newspapers with the emphasis on non-violence and peaceful elections[12]. Although civic education ran in the villages and towns, the media was the largest central channel through which information could be disseminated.

In presenting the candidates and manifestos of the parties taking part in the elections, the media must be fair in allocating the parties equal amount of space to express their views. When the media does this, it ensures that the electorate gets all sides of the debate from

[12] 'Kenya Humanitarian Update' December 2002. Retrieved from the internet January 25, 2005 from: http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/AllDocsByUNID/d177aaebec29b26449256ca8002cdcd6

all the candidates in the race. Mill (1978) argued that this is made possible when a free press is in existence as it allows citizens to receive variegated information, on which they will rely to make informed political decisions (cited in Tettey 2001:8).

2.2.2 Analysis role:

In today's complex society, the average citizen according to Waldhal (2004:13) may find themselves too limited in their understanding of the political climate to get independent answers to all current political questions. The media steps in to analyze the situation and freely assess political developments. By monitoring the present day situation they are able to expose what the various parties and politicians represent and what political causes they are fighting for. The media must assess the implications of the country's future of the courses plotted by different parties; to which tasks they will give priority if they achieve power and which groups will benefit most from their policies. Kenya's 2002 elections presented a scenario that needed a careful analysis of politics, without getting into the excitement of the ongoing game at the time. The media in its analysis needed to question the political climate at the time, seeking answers rather than merely documenting electoral promises made by the politicians. The media then must keep a watchful eye on the present political life, penetrate beneath its surface and refuse to take politicians' assurances of good will at face value (2004:13). It is in this area that the media examine if there are dividing lines; say ethnically by the various candidates involved in the process. Notably, much of this analysis is carried out by teams which devote their energies to covering the political trail, not only over the election period, but also in times when governments are sitting in office. Media analysis usually intensifies as the election dates draw to a close.

There is a very thin line between the information and analysis roles of media and they are usually played out in the same context. Most editorials and commentaries are analytical in nature providing a response to the existing reports while news reports are generally, informational. The press must be careful in their presentation of news to ensure that they are able to separate fact from opinion in their reports.

2.2.3 Public debate and discussion

Only the media possess the capacity to disseminate political standpoints and assessments to a majority of people at the same time. For people who wish to contribute to the political discussion, it is important to have an outlet. Waldhal (2004:14) notes that this is carried out in two main ways: by devoting columns for letters from the readers and giving prominence to editorials and other commentaries. Political and social commentators make their input in this arena, allowing for healthy dialogue in the newspapers. Newspapers however are limited by space and often do not allow the myriad opinions from citizens sent into the newsroom to make their way in the news. They will pick out primary definers who are preferred in arguing out the existing political scenario of the day. Yet there is a limitation in the media's public debate and discussion forums. These will allow certain influential people to have their views articulated in the newspapers on the basis that they are definers in the fields in which they discuss about. The alternative press will suddenly spring up at such times to allow dissenting voices, but these more often than not carry their own agendas.

2.2.4 Watchdog or surveillance role:

Curran (2002: 217) notes that according to traditional liberal theory, this is the principle democratic role of the media and overrides all others in importance. Media should monitor the full range of state activity and fearlessly expose abuses of official authority. Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) argue that journalists should warily scrutinize the conduct and rhetoric of the politicians and a strong, intensive, effective and independent press effectively does this. The government and politicians in particular need to be watched lest they abuse their powers, exceed their mandates, commit blunders they would prefer to conceal, and elevate themselves to positions of non-accountable authority. The process of accountability may not mean much to politicians while they are holding office. However, when journalists review their terms during political transitions, voters are able to judge whether they want the same officials to hold office with their previous track record. Hence they cannot ignore the media completely.

In the course of enforcing their democratic duties, the media will expose ills that may reflect negatively on governments to their citizens and outsiders. It then becomes a case of national interest versus public interest. Tettey (2001) argues that the issue of national versus public interest in African media confronts journalists often with the government arguing for the former and journalists the latter. More often this phenomenon transpires in regimes that expect the media to primarily carry out a nation-building role and not being a guardian for society.

Election processes often have a high probability of fraud which needs to be countered by the media. Under the watchdog role, Tettey (2001: 7) notes, their watchful eyes help to minimize if not eliminate, rigging and bring transparency to the process. They ensure that elections are carried out fairly and freely and reports should be given on any irregularities that may occur within the process. It was common in Kenya for ballot boxes to 'get lost' on the way to counting halls or for voters names to disappear on the lists and the media's role in such circumstances is to highlight such anomalies and ensure the relevant authorities correct this. Voters must exercise their duty without being prejudiced in the process.

Curran (2002:227) additionally notes that the media in democracy play a representative role by relaying public consciousness that results from the people's debates to the government. This mostly takes the form of opinion polls that more or less are done on and around government's performance or other issues in the public interest. Opinion polls can also be taken to view the popularity of particular candidates with the people. In some ways opinion polls can negatively influence the choice of candidates where voters make their choices out of other people's preferences instead of their own.

In carrying out their duties, it is expected that the media be most effective working within the liberal-pluralist school of thought. The theory is steeped in the view that the media function as the fourth estate and play an important role in the democratic process in constituting a source of information that is independent of the government (Bennet 1982, Curran 2000). Curran expounds that the realization and preservation of democracy and its

ideals can only be played out within the context of a free press (2002:225). In elaborating on this point, Tettey (2001:8) points out that a free press not only allows for different views and claims to be made, but also subjects them to contestation. He notes that 'a free press plays an indispensable role in the protecting, preserving and expanding democracy'. The liberal view secures the media's independence as an intermediary and generates wide ranging and inclusive debate.

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) believes strongly that the exercise of free journalism is an essential part of any credible democracy and that voters must have access to accurate, timely and informed facts and opinions[13]. This increases the chances for truth to emerge and to shape politics, building upon the Miltonian argument that citizens should be well informed if they are to participate in the political process and effectively play their role as ultimate decision makers.

The watchdog role is effectively carried out by with the private media which appears to have taken on the challenge of pursuing democracy as well as operating as watchdogs and allowing a market place for the trading of ideas. To elaborate further, Sandbrook (1996) uses the example of Tanzania's transition to democracy in the 1990's. He notes that between 1990 and 1992, demands for the opening up of the one-party state emanated mainly from the pages of the newly established independent newspapers (cited in Tettey, 2001:8). The media in Kenya, especially the *Nation*, contributed to the democratisation of Kenya's public space and often served an oppositional role when necessary (Ogola, 2004). The same can be seen said about the South African media which opposed apartheid and served as a window for the world to see what was happening in the country at the time, helping to put an end to the apartheid regime.

The resounding call that liberal or private media allows for democracy to flourish would assume then that private media is error free in its presentation of news. But Curran (2002)

[13] International Federation of Journalists, Election reporting handbook, a media for democracy handbook. Danida. Retrieved from the web, 22nd Nov, 2004 from http://www.aceproject.org/main/samples/me/mex12.pdf

offers a challenge to this view. He argues that governments are not the only institutions that wield power but that private power (corporations and businesses) should also be subjected to press vigilance (2002:219). In this respect it would be detrimental to ignore ownership and control of the mass media as a key factor in the influence of news, an ideal that is best informed by the theory of political economy of the media.

Bob Franklin (1997) reviews Karl Marx's views in which Marx argues that journalists lack autonomy. Marx propounded that journalists are not critical watchdogs of government but more akin to lapdogs, the poodles of government and the powerful. Instead of criticizing government and corporate interests, they endorse and support them. Marx viewed media as being biased in favour of certain social groups, to borrow his celebrated phrase, ''the class which has the means of production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production'' (Marx cited in Franklin 1997:38). He argued that media helped to create and sustain a 'false consciousness' about social and political reality. While these observations may seem far removed from our time, they nevertheless inform the existing state of the media in Africa. Various media bodies have been set up not without their own political interests and through their reports, keep endorsing these views of their owners with time. In Kenya this was the case especially with such papers as the *Kenya Times*, *People* and *Citizen* Media Group to a fault.

From an economic scale, media ownership to a large extent influences the outcome of the news process as Ochieng (1992) notes. One then reverts to Waldhal's claims about the positions media and their owners choose to occupy in covering of elections. Curran (2002:231) poses the question that if private media is not the voice of the people, whom then do they serve? The answer depends crucially upon the configuration of power to which the media are linked. If the media is linked to the economic elite, it then exerts influence over the political system through its power base in the economy, control of private media, funding of political candidates and informal channels of access to the state. If the media is linked to the political elite, then it generally uses state power to develop a clientelist system of patronage and influence. If there is parity between political

and economic elites, then the media represent the elite consensus and seek to gain acceptance of it. In working out a model for media, there is, posed by Curran, the role of private media enterprise to shield staff from compromising corporate interest, and from the pressures of uniformity generated by concentration of ownership (Curran 2000).

Ochieng (1992) makes reference to his experiences at the *Nation* where he opines that the editors were relatively independent concerning what they published which was within the framework of the editorial guidelines provided. However, he remarks that when one of the editors George Githii[14] resigned with loud declarations concerning his principles, many praised him as a truly principled journalist taking principled action against an unscrupulous foreign owner. Ochieng sees it differently and remarks that "like every owner, the Ismaili chief and his printing and publishing adviser….had always to a greater or lesser degree been actively interested in the general editorial direction of the group without protest from any of the editors-in-chief" (1992:60). Githii's resignation then should have been taken as being more of a toe-in-line action or leave, of which he chose the latter. This was not heroism on an editor's part according to Ochieng, rather an act of owners managing their affairs in their own manner.

Interestingly, the controversial Githii left the *Standard* in almost the same manner after disagreeing on policy with management. Rambaya (2002) notes that Githii got into serious trouble when he wrote an editorial on July 20, 1982 criticizing Kenya's detention laws. He adds that the editorial was deemed to be a personal attack on President Moi and Githii was immediately stripped of the powerful posts of chairman and editor-in chief of the *Standard*. *Standard* was by then owned by Lonhro, which had strong ties with the government and editors were expected to toe the line with what management wanted, hence Githii's fall-out with the newspaper's management[15]. A reading of this incident

[14] George Githii, a celebrated Kenyan journalist, was one of the pioneer African editors at the *Standard* and *Nation*. Rambaya (2002) notes that 'the man who at the age of 29 was already an editorial chief is arguably the only journalist who has served the two mainstream media houses as a junior staffer and editorial chief executive, twice at the *Nation* and once at the *Standard*.'

[15] Rambaya, S. 'The Wits and Guts of George Githii: Maverick Editor who Politicians used to hate'. *East African Standard's Centenary*, November 5, 2002

would show that the two groups have experienced some level of interference from their owners, meaning they are not absolutely free from economic expectations.

The two incidents demonstrate that the private press does not always carry out an impartial role as suggested. Ronning (1995) observes that the private media does not necessarily reflect a disinterested political agenda. For instance, in Ghana's last elections, Temin and Smith (2002) argue that the private press could be criticized for being excessively vigilant as some newspapers seemed over zealous in their attacks of the Rawlings Empire, sometimes to the point of printing stories of questionable credibility. Matthew Kainyah, in an editorial appearing in the state owned *Daily Graphic* months before the election wrote, "Many of our private media have only one theme - to spite Rawlings and his associates. It is as if disgracing Rawlings and his family will necessarily improve the lot of Ghanaians." Kainyah was right in questioning the motives of the press and he is not alone. South Africa faced such a dilemma as it tried to analyze the role and transformation of the media in the new democratic state. Both countries were coming out of long totalitarian regimes as was Kenya during the 2002 elections.

As Randall (2000) notes, freedom carries with it responsibilities and journalists today stand accused of abusing their privileged position and instigating public cynicism towards the process. African journalists predominantly perceive independence as being freedom from government. As cited earlier, the question of whether it is possible for any media to be truly independent of interest groups and be objective, has remained an ideal rather than a reality. The distinction between independence and impartiality has only to a limited degree been brought up. Thus both sides in the debate concentrate on the concept of independence. The government maintains that the non-government press is oppositional, and consequently not independent, because it chooses a different angle or position than the one found in the government-controlled press. The independent press claims that it is independent because it is not associated with government or political parties. But both the government controlled and the independent press are of course partial in their reporting. It is the priviledge of press freedom that today needs to be safeguarded and watched especially in a democratic polity to ensure that journalists work

within parameters like fairness and objectivity, which needs to be discussed to ascertain its parameters.

Yet there seems a likely contradiction of terms in the quest for objectivity. For the theory of news production adequately informs that news is mediation, not a mirror of reality. However, the expectation from society towards the media is that it should play an impartial role. The concept of objectivity is a highly debated notion in journalism, yet as McNair (1998:65) notes, it is the key legitimating professional ethic of liberal journalism. A realistic outlook today reveals that liberal journalism is losing its hold on objectivity. Mindich (1998:5) notes that although journalists may once have believed that objectivity can be attained, today they are not so sure, especially those with strong political views. In explicating this, Mindich uses the Society of Professional Journalists' whose code of ethics highlighted 'objectivity' as its central tenet but in 1996, objectivity was dropped from the code. They instead replaced it with truth, accuracy and comprehensiveness. The importance of this is that allegations of bias occur in the media daily but are especially prevalent over election periods but the guiding principles like truth help maintain credibility in the profession.

Herein lies a conflict where the press is expected to remain objective and impartial even when the reality is that news is a production process which in many ways is influenced by various external factors. The IFJ handbook of Election Reporting for Journalists states that the omission of an item on the news or the slant taken in a report may be construed as bias but this is not necessarily the case[16]. Or as Lippmann once argued, the news is an account of the overt phrases that are interesting, and the pressure on the newspaper to adhere to this routine comes from many sides (cited in Graber 2000:38). Yet journalists have tried to be objective about this as one declared,

[16] International Federation of Journalists, *Election Reporting Handbook: A Media Democracy Handbook*. Retrieved from the internet November, 10, 2004 from http://www.aceproject.org/main/samples/me/mex12.pdf

> "We do not conspire with outsiders because we are newspaper people -- not politicians, megalomaniacs or political dilettantes. We do not slant news to favour any political party because -- apart from being a fraud on our readers and bad journalism -- to do so is dishonest. Journalism in its purest form is simply telling the truth, so long as it is in the public interest. We do not conspire with outsiders. We do not write for politicians or parties. We write for people"[17].

There seems to be a need to replace the concept of objectivity with that of balance. Journalism was not always concerned with objectivity for the early journalists who fought for liberal democratic rights of free expression and intellectual dissent in authoritarian feudalistic societies, were partisan…they were reporters of news, but also campaigners who wore revolutionary tracts on the rights of man. Lichtenberg (2000) has questioned the notion of objectivity from various facets, including MacKinnon's observation that objectivity is a strategy of hegemony used by some members of society to dominate others - the expression of an authoritarian, power conserving point of view. Thus we can view it this way, that however objective one newspaper may be in its reports, it may still be construed by another who does not hold the same viewpoints as being biased against them. Thus, there may be no defining line for the media to take.

Others like Schudson (2003:34) note that critics of media assume that there is a perfectly objective or fair way to represent each event in the world. These assume that deviation from fair representation can be accounted for by media bias. Schudson elaborates that 'bias' in this context means that the reporter, editor or news institution owner knows what the real event looks like, but will colour it to advance a political, economic or ideological aim.

Ramaphosa (1999) illustrates this view by arguing, 'in exercising control, many owners across the world prefer to remain at a distance from the editorial affairs. Many profess to support editorial independence and confine their input into the business side of their

[17] This was one senior newspaper editor making a point while rejecting the notion of conspiracy in the media. It is found in the ICJ handbook for reporters.

publication. In most cases, the reality is different. Owners may rely instead on a broad range of institutional mechanisms, particularly the appointment and promotion of staff, to ensure that the media they own reflects and promotes their views[18].

McNair (1998:68) argues that objective journalists are not devoid of opinion, nor do they entirely refrain from expressing them. Indeed, their opinions are what readers want in the form of editorials and commentary columns. However, the separation of fact from opinion, information and commentary, news and analysis must be clearly distinguished in the journalistic text. If journalists are able to depersonalise themselves from the reports and balance their reporting (aim towards neutrality), then they will be fulfilling the main aims of objectivity.

Further, McNair (1998) believed that broadcast journalism is more likely to work within the confines of impartiality than print because journalists are less likely to editorialise. Further, is it mostly the prerogative of senior journalists in broadcast to 'intervene' with commentary and analysis than the younger journalists (McNair, 1998).The print media provides more leeway for the opinions of editors, journalists and ordinary citizens to express themselves. Thus it was relatively easy for the public to endorse their choice of candidate by writing letters to the editors or opinion articles which the editors publish daily. One aspect that emerges from this space is that others may join in to counter the differences of what another has written, allowing for open debate and discussion on important issues.

Lenin opposed the idea of objectivity from a materialist point of view, arguing that all societies were economically, politically and culturally stratified along class lines and that there cannot be absolute truth in journalism. Along with other Marxist thinkers in general, they viewed the bourgeois journalists as writing for the bourgeois class. For Lenin, all perspectives reflected a world-view of a class: the only important question was on which side, which class was the journalist (cited in McNair, 1998:77). However,

[18] Ramaphosa, Cyril. 1999. 'The Media, the Editors and the Owners' *Financial Mail* May, 14 1999.

Lenin's arguments were composed in a different dispensation, different from the African point of view where journalism is not absolutely about class per se but about being a watchdog for the people from government.

There seems then to be no parameters within which private media can claim to be entirely free from some system. In the political world, this is played out more with media being used as an avenue through which politicians try to get access to the voters. It is not only government owned media that should have checks and balances imposed on it but private media too. But the media as Schudson (2003:40) declares are obligated not only to make profits but to maintain their credibility in the eyes of their readers. Media must retain their credibility not only with population at large, but with expert and often critical sub-groups in the population.

2.3 Conclusion:

There are obvious demands made on the profession which media is required to meet. Internal ones such as deadlines constrain the media; while external ones such as the ethical demands call for balanced coverage. Most of these demands cannot be disregarded; they are what make the profession to be regarded as the Fourth Estate. However, bearing in mind the production process of meaning-making, it is only fair that the media be expected to exercise fairness rather than objectivity in their reports. In a 1996 interview Christiane Amanpour, CNN reporter called for a re-evaluation of objectivity to mean, "giving all sides a fair hearing but not treating all sides equally, particularly when all sides are not the same" (Amanpour cited in Mindich, 1998).In the 2002 elections, the two main contesting parties were different and it would be expected that individually, the journalists as citizens of the country may already have taken a stance as voters. However, the difficult middle ground would be in not imposing their beliefs to their readers. This will help us in understanding the various angles that the Kenyan media took in its reporting of the 2002 elections.