

The Radical and Reactionary Politics of Hastings Banda: roots, fruit and legacy.

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Abstract

This article reconsiders the political thought and practice of Hastings Banda, Prime Minister and then President of Malawi from 1963 to 1994. Often side-lined and maligned in considerations of post-colonial African leaders for being an authoritarian comprador in service to Western interests, the article illustrates that Banda's life and practice illustrates a complex interplay between two types of conservatism: a more radical anti-colonial conservatism, and a more reactionary post-colonial conservatism. This approach has important implications for how we consider independence-era African political leadership more generally, as well as for an understanding of contemporary public protest in Malawi, and more broadly. Mainstream scholarly interpretations of anti-government protests in Malawi in July 2011 presented them as a response to an uninterrupted continuum of authoritarianism in the country stretching back to Banda, playing on ideas of innate African autocratic tendencies. However, this article argues that such comparisons result in an

ahistorical consideration of post-colonial Malawi, leading to analyses which mistakenly suggest that protests in Malawi, as in other African countries in recent years, are the result of liberal rights claims; as opposed to a nostalgic and markedly different reclamation of the cultural, national and economic promises of African independence.

Keywords: Banda, Malawi, Authoritarianism, Radicalism, Reactionary

Introduction

This article explores the life and thought of Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda, leader of the anti-colonial independence movement in then-Nyasaland, subsequently serving as Prime Minister and then life-President of Malawi from independence in 1964 until being deposed in the first multi-party elections held in the country in 1994. In being the only black African leader to sustain diplomatic relations with South Africa, and the Portuguese colonies of Mozambique and Angola, Banda has been maligned in the historiography of the period as a reactionary and conservative figure with little relevance for our understandings of anti-colonial African political thought, or the material and ideational factors driving contemporary protest in Malawi and across the continent in recent years.

In contravention to this approach, this article argues that Banda's life and thought, as well as his authoritarianism, can serve to illuminate a complex interplay of anti-colonial conservatism and post-colonial reactionary-conservatism (a distinction explicated in further detail below). In so doing, the article will both problematise common renditions of Hastings Banda and his broader significance in the immediate post-colonial period. It will also

highlight his significance for a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary protest and change in Malawi.

This is important because mainstream scholarship of contemporary Malawi has implicitly overlooked the complex anti-colonial conservative Banda in favour of an ‘angry black’ reactionary-conservative Banda.¹ This analysis has served to obscure the nature of contemporary political protest and change in Malawi.² The argument posed below entreats us to move beyond lazy stereotypes about African autocrats, or, as Binyavanga Wainaina put it, the ‘Oxford-educated intellectual turned serial-killing politician in a Savile Row suit’ (in Banda’s case the US and UK-educated, successful medical general practitioner).³ Such depictions persist in the contemporary era, both politically and culturally.⁴

At the same time, recent years have witnessed a growth in the (re)consideration and excavation of the thought and lives of a number of African independence-era leaders. In 2012, the *Review of African Political Economy* ran a number of articles offering an analysis of Julius Nyerere and his policy of Ujamaa.⁵ Ohio University Press have published a series on ‘African Leaders of the Twentieth Century’, including Thomas Sankara, Haile Selassie,

¹ A. M. Harvey Wingfield, ‘The Modern Mammy and the Angry Black Man: African American Professionals’ Experiences with Gendered Racism in the Workplace’ *Race, Gender, & Class*, 14, 2, 2007, pp. 196-212; A. M. Harvey Wingfield, ‘Are Some Emotions Marked "Whites Only"? Racialized Feeling Rules in Professional Workplaces’ *Social Problems*, 57, 2, 2010, pp. 251–268

² See, for example analyses of political protest in Malawi in D. Cammack, ‘Malawi’s Political Settlement in Crisis’, *Africa Power and Politics Programme*, Background Paper 4, Overseas Development Institute, 2011; D. Wroe, ‘Donors, Dependency and Political Crisis in Malawi’ *African Affairs*, 111, 442, 2012.

³ B. Wainaina, ‘How to write about Africa’, *Granta*, Winter 2005, available at <http://www.granta.com/Archive/92/How-to-Write-about-Africa/Page-1> Retrieved on 25th February 2015

⁴ For the latter see the predictable regularity with which made-up African states are deployed as tools by which to depict African chaos and inept leadership, in (but not confined to) Aaron Sorkin’s *The West Wing* and *The Newsroom* (‘Equatorial Kundu’); Sacha Baron Cohen’s *The Dictator* (‘Wadiya’); the *Mission: Impossible* TV Series (‘Bocamo’).

⁵ *Review of African Political Economy*, 39 (131), 2012, pp. 101-131

Patrice Lumumba, and Steve Biko.⁶ Amrit Wilson's recent book offers a sympathetic consideration of Zanzibari political activist Abdulrahman Mohamed Babu.⁷ A common thread uniting these works is the sympathetic and sometimes hagiographic rendering they all present of their central protagonists. This article sits uncomfortably within this literature.

The discomfort arises because Banda presents us with few opportunities to sympathise with his broad political programme. Perhaps precisely because of this, his legacy merits reconsideration in the light of this growing literature on anti and post-colonial African political figures. Indeed, this article will illustrate the ways in which a reconsideration of Banda can help to muddy the distinctions between radical and conservative labels applied to major protagonists of African independence, with notable relevance for any analysis of other figures with complex and often unsavoury records, such as Robert Mugabe or Félix Houphouët-Boigny, amongst others. Whilst the actions of Hastings Banda and his presidential successors in Malawi can be read within the context of a *longue durée* of extraversionary and pragmatic politics, this should not imply an uninterrupted continuum of authoritarianism.⁸ As we will see with Banda, there is a more complete set of explanatory factors for the actions of different Malawian leaders through that period, and the ensuing responses of the Malawian public. These include ideational factors, individual life-trajectories as well as the shifting international and geo-political economy within which Malawi has been embedded since independence. The final section of the article will illustrate how such a conception challenges the reductive narrative of stereotypical African authoritarianism in some mainstream contemporary scholarly analysis on Malawi, which posits contemporary public demands for

⁶ E. Harsch, *Thomas Sankara: an African Revolutionary* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014); B. Habte Selassie, *Emperor Haile Selassie* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014); G. Nzongola-Ntalaja, *Patrice Lumumba* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014); L. Wilson, *Steve Biko* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2013)

⁷ A. Wilson, *The Threat of Liberation: Imperialism and Revolution in Zanzibar* (London: Pluto Press, 2013)

⁸ Cammack, 'Malawi's Political Settlement in Crisis'

change in the country as a rejection of Malawi's and Banda's post-colonial political settlement tout-court.

This approach seeks to challenge literatures that conceptualise continuities and discontinuities between independence era and contemporary political leadership in Africa in purely material terms. The motivating factors which produce authoritarian governance are often understood solely as a function of the position of African states within the global economy, resulting in a neopatrimonial state form that relies on authoritarianism to glue together the various factions competing for limited state resources. There is a vast literature which understands authoritarianism in such terms, with major works including those by Bayart, Chabal and Daloz, Harrison, Bach and Gazibo, and Kelsall.⁹ Whilst this literature is helpful in understanding authoritarian behaviour in African states, it fails to account for more ideational factors which can for instance help to explain public approval for authoritarian forms of governance at various points. More importantly, it glosses over important tensions within, and differences between, the political thought of individual African political figures, and the legacies of these tensions for contemporary protest politics on the continent.

In this article, I will be using the terms anti-colonial conservatism and post-colonial reactionary-conservatism to denote the radicalism of the former and the colonial reactionary content of the latter, both present in the thought and practice of Hastings Banda. The reason I do not pose radicalism *against* conservatism is that we will see that it does not make sense to divorce conservatism from radicalism in a context where anti-colonial politics often involved

⁹ J.F. Bayart *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (London: Polity Press, 1999); P. Chabal and J.P. Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument* (James Currey Publishers, 1999); G. Harrison, *The World Bank and Africa: The Construction of Governance States* (London: Routledge, 2004); D. Bach and M. Gazibo (Eds) *Neopatrimonialism in Africa and Beyond* (London: Routledge, 2011); T. Kelsall, *Business, Politics, and the State in Africa: Challenging the Orthodoxies on Growth and Transformation* (London: Zed Books, 2013)

the clash of two conservatisms. Conflict over the relative values of indigenous culture set against Western (in this case British) culture produced a hegemonic struggle in which the popular and populist assertion of indigenous values became inevitably, albeit momentarily, 'radical' by dint of the anti-colonial struggle it was engaged in. This is not however intended to valorise anti-colonial conservatism, which, as we will see, was itself replete with gender, ethnic and other forms of repression.

Hastings Kamuzu Banda was an autocrat for much of his 31 years in power. He became notorious for imprisoning and "disappearing" his political opponents, his eccentric adoption of British culture and sartorialism, and more significantly the diplomatic and trading relationships he established and maintained with Apartheid South Africa and Portuguese-controlled Mozambique. This isolated him from his fellow independence-era peers, his actions regularly condemned during speeches at the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).¹⁰ Thus Banda was dismissed as a significant figure in the African independence movement by both the West, for whom he became a stereotypical 'African autocrat' and Cold War anachronism, and by his independence-era peer group for being a sell-out to settler-minority interests on the continent.

This article does not seek to cleanse Banda's record, which was defined in important respects by paranoia and authoritarianism. Neither Banda's politics nor personality was particularly likeable, the former providing regional cover for Apartheid, the latter producing self-veneration and violence. Nonetheless, Banda retained support during his life amongst those who had every reason to not do so. Chief mourners at his funeral included the first post-Banda president of Malawi Bakili Muluzi (unceremoniously sacked by Banda), ostracised

¹⁰ P. Short, *Banda* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), p.246

figures Aleke Banda and Gwanda Chakuamba (both detained for more than ten years by Banda), and Robert Mugabe, whose armed efforts at deposing Ian Smith in Southern Rhodesia Banda had refused to support. In Malawi itself, there is no necessary political benefit in being ‘anti-Kamuzu’ and reminders of Banda’s years in power persist and are actively marked.¹¹

Although seemingly an outlier from his peer-group of Nkrumah, Nyerere, Kenyatta and others, Banda’s particular brand of anti-colonial cultural and political conservatism, when set in an African context, resulted in a distinctive critique of Eurocentrism in Southern Africa. Admittedly, in later life Banda’s anti-colonial conservatism became more narrowly reactionary and nationalistic, and what anti-coloniality that remained in his pronouncements became primarily a method for deflecting criticism. Yet there is value in examining this idiosyncratic philosophy as it developed in his earlier years, for what it can reveal about the features of both historical and contemporary forms of authoritarianism in Malawi, and for dissolving the binaries of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ that so often permeate discussions of racial ‘Others’ in Western public discourse.¹²

No known diaries or personal records kept by Banda have yet come to light. Primary research for this article therefore mainly focused on public speeches he made in Parliament and around the country. All Malawi’s parliamentary Hansards are kept in the British Library archives, where Banda’s speeches to and state openings of Parliament for the years 1964-1980 were explored. Many of the events discussed in this paper occurred or emerged in the earlier part of Banda’s reign (1962-1970), and by 1980 it became evident that an increasingly isolated

¹¹ Malawi’s main airport is named Kamuzu International Airport, and in 2009 then President Bingu wa Mutharika unveiled a statue of Banda at the National Memorial in the capital, Lilongwe.

¹² M.Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 1998)

and entrenched Banda had very little new to say on these occasions, hence the decision to halt the exploration of his statements and speeches at this point. Other resources found in the British Library archives, as well as the National Archives of Malawi in Zomba, included speeches made by Banda at various non-parliamentary events. These were supplemented by materials held online in the Hastings K. Banda archive at the University of Indiana. Excerpts from these primary sources were coded thematically to identify prominent themes in Banda's various pronouncements. These sources were also supplemented with first-hand accounts of Banda's time in power and other relevant papers found in Africanist journals, outlined in more detail below.

Hastings Banda: understudied and misconceived

Hastings Banda led an itinerant life, leaving Nyasaland in 1915/16 whilst a teenager for the Copper Mines of South Africa, following which, in 1925 he was sponsored by the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), a separatist church which had been founded by free blacks in the United States in 1816 as the first African-American denomination in the country, to begin his high school education in the United States.¹³ Achieving degrees in medicine, politics and philosophy he then moved to Scotland, where he gained British medical qualifications, and practiced as a General Practitioner in Liverpool and London. He did not return to Nyasaland until he was in his late 50s, invited back by younger colleagues to lead the independence movement in 1958.

¹³ H. D. Gregg, *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church: Black Church in Action* (Nashville: AME Sunday School Union, 1980)

Banda remains an understudied figure. BBC journalist Phillip Short's sympathetic biography is the only publication of its kind, but was published over 40 years ago, twenty years prior to Banda's exit from power.¹⁴ Contemporaries of Banda who fell out of his favour at various times, resulting in prison sentences and exile, have produced unsurprisingly much more critical accounts.¹⁵ Another literature emerged in the years immediately following Malawi's democratic transition in 1994 to tackle Banda's legacy for Malawi.¹⁶ Finally, there are some more recently published histories of the period, including John McCracken's, which surveys Malawi during the colonial period and ends in 1966; and Joey Power's, which is a study of broader themes of nation-building and the use of culture during Banda's regime and beyond, in a similar vein to this article.¹⁷

Banda's reputation is not that of merely another African autocrat, but even worse, one who sold out his fellow Africans. He maintained ties with the Apartheid and Portuguese regimes; backed Nixon on Vietnam; and refused to support armed struggle against the Smith regime in Southern Rhodesia. Banda was indeed a self-obsessed, patrimonial autocrat who brooked no dissent and viewed Malawians and his fellow African anti-colonialists with a paternalistic disdain (Kwame Nkrumah earned the moniker 'my boy'¹⁸).

In this context, this article will seek to explore Banda's own political evolution from a pre-independence anti-colonial pan-Africanist tempered with cultural conservatism in the 1940s

¹⁴ Short, *Banda*

¹⁵ A. Ross, *Colonialism to Cabinet Crisis: a Political History of Malawi* (Zomba: Kachere Books, 2009); J. Lwanda, *Kamuzu Banda of Malawi: Promise, Power and Legacy* (Zomba: Kachere Books, 2010)

¹⁶ P. Forster, 'Nationalism, and the Invention of Tradition in Malawi' *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 32, 3, 1994, pp. 477-497; J. Kees Van Donge, 'Kamuzu's Legacy: the Democratisation of Malawi, or, Searching for the Rules of the Game in African Politics' *African Affairs*, 94, 1995, pp. 337-257

¹⁷ J. McCracken, *A History of Malawi 1859-1966*, (Suffolk: James Currey, 2012); J. Power, *Political Culture and Nationalism in Malawi: Building Kwacha* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2010)

¹⁸ R. Dowden, 'Obituary: Dr. Hastings Banda' *The Independent Newspaper*, 27th November 1997, available at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/obituary-dr-hastings-banda-1296534.html> Retrieved on 12th March 2012; Ross, *From Colonialism to Cabinet Crisis*, p. 131

and 1950s; to a reactionary anti-communist, tempered still at times by anti-colonial radicalism, in the post-colonial period from independence in 1963 through to the end of his life in 1997. The article argues that Banda's anti-colonial and postcolonial conservatisms were not antinomies, and that even though ultimately the former was engulfed by the latter, both were inter-related products of Banda's distinctive journey as an African anti-colonial leader. Understanding this is instructive for how we consider authoritarianism in other post-colonial contexts. Again, this is not somehow to cleanse Banda, but to challenge mainstream and racialised assumptions about African authoritarianism, including stereotypical narratives of contemporary protest in Malawi.

Banda's anti-colonial conservatism and post-colonial reactionary conservatism in domestic and cultural politics

At first glance, Banda seemed to be a 'big-C' Conservative. This was largely a result of his friendly relations with South Africa, Mozambique and Angola, as well as support for the South Vietnamese.¹⁹ As Banda's obituary in the *Independent* newspaper noted, a closeness to Margaret Thatcher saw her visit Malawi and take to the streets with him in an open-topped Rolls Royce. Further supposed evidence of Banda's anglophile Conservatism was his 'eccentric' dress of a Homburg hat and dark three-piece suit, although of course this would not have been considered eccentric were it not worn by a Black African man (one who had spent more of his life living in the West than in Africa). The eccentricity with which this was viewed was apparent in his 1997 obituary, describing time he spent training as a medical doctor in Scotland: 'He was becoming eccentrically European ... [and] very British, [he]

¹⁹ National Archive of Malawi (Hereafter NAM) Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda 'Who are the true nationalists? Partial text of the address delivered by the President of Malawi to the opening session of his Parliament on December 16 1966', (Saigon: Ministry of Information and Chieu Hai of the Republic of Vietnam, 1966)

parted his hair and adopted a Homburg hat, furred umbrella and dark three-piece suit'.²⁰ Banda certainly expressed a classical Burkean form of Conservatism and a degree of Anglophilia. Take the following passage for instance, delivered five years after independence:

In my view, the reason why Britain is the most stable country in the world...is that the British people are sensible enough not to throw overboard their old and ancient institutions overnight...I want the same here. While I want us to adopt new ways of life; while I want us to copy the good from other people, I do not want us to just throw away everything that is ours by tradition. We must change gradually.²¹

Banda here expresses a profound commitment to conservative culture, whether British or Malawian.

However, Banda's politics transcended simplistic conservative/radical dichotomies. Banda's cultural politics asserted a robust rejection of British rule, and 'Western' standards and culture, in the defense of a (politicised) Malawian tradition. Here, we can see more clearly the echoes of Banda's earlier engagements with radical circles in the AME in the 1920s, and with anti-colonialists and pan-Africanists in London in the 1940s. Banda's politics were revealing of an anti-colonial conservative cultural nationalism and pan-Africanism which continued to inform some of his pronouncements concerning cultural politics in independent Malawi. For instance, Banda asserted that the Western culture in which he had spent long, happy years was, for him, inferior to Malawian traditions and cultures: 'A number of you so called educated Africans...imitate the missionaries. You are a Chewa: why then, should you imitate

²⁰ Dowden, 'Obituary'

²¹ British Library Official Publications (Hereafter BLOP), Malawi Official Publications, CSC.4/8, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, 'Installation of Paramount Chief Lundu at Chikwawa by His Excellency the President Ngwazi Dr. Kamuzu Banda on 5th July 1969' (Blantyre: Department of Information, 1969)

an Englishman...or any other foreigner?'²² This affirmation of indigenous culture was of course by now about more than simple anti-colonial sentiment. It was also about post-colonial nation building, conferring national prominence on one ethnic identity (Chewa).²³ Banda was a keen advocate of a tactic deployed by many independence-era leaders at the time, which involved resurrecting a narrative of historical cultural greatness to justify both the anti-colonial struggle but also the importance of the strong leader within that struggle.²⁴ In this way then, Banda reserved some of his most vitriolic anti-colonial statements for this theme of indigenous consciousness-raising, arguing for instance that:

‘Europeans made a mistake...Just because they came here and found us with no bible...they thought we were savages and called us savages, but we were not. We had our own code of ethics which was in many, many ways even superior to the Europeans' code of ethics, much superior.’²⁵

This illustrates how an indigenous conservatism can actually be radical and anti-colonial in asserting the rejection of Eurocentric cosmologies and ways of being. However, significantly, there is also simultaneously an instrumental and political agenda at play, which transforms that anti-colonial radicalism into a post-colonial reactionary conservative cultural nationalism.²⁶

²² NAM, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, ‘Address by His Excellency the Life President Ngwazi Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda after Central Region school children had entertained him to songs and traditional dances, Lilongwe Community Centre Ground, 7th April 1978’ (Blantyre: Department of Information, 1978)

²³ Forster, ‘Nationalism’

²⁴ A.Mazrui, ‘The Monarchical Tendency in African Political Culture’, *The British Journal of Sociology*, 18, 1967, p.247; Power, *Political culture*, pp. 191-192

²⁵ BLOP, Malawi Official Publications, CSC.4/8, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, ‘His Excellency the Life President Ngwazi Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda Speeches: Inauguration of Youth Week, Nasawa Central Training Base, 4th April 1976 (Blantyre: Department of Information, 1976)

²⁶ This trajectory was, of course, originally suggested in F. Fanon, ‘The pitfalls of national consciousness,’ in *The Wretched of the Earth* trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963) pp.148-205

We can find this assertion of indigenous culture, in ways entirely consistent with Banda's international pragmatism, throughout the kind of society he tried to engineer into being. So for instance, Banda displayed a conception of wealth far removed from European practice of the time, and much more consistent with what James Ferguson has noted in other parts of Africa where he finds tropes of wealth which differentiate between the personal and the communal.²⁷ This is summed up in the following passage from 1976:

According to Europeans...if my sister has married somebody and by that somebody she has children and if that somebody has money then my sister and her children are alright. But if he has no money my poor sister is finished. Although I have plenty it is none of my business. That is the European way. But not ours. My sister's children to be poor when I have plenty of money? No! Not even my sisters' but what even the Europeans call my fourth cousin, tenth generation cousins.²⁸

This speaks to a conception of wealth which is the antithesis of the personal accumulation characteristic of the neo-liberal era. An intellectually contradictory figure, such a communalistic emphasis did not necessarily sit very easily with Banda's oft-publicised admiration for the American tradition of self-help individualism, which dated back to the twelve years he spent in the United States gaining his high school, bachelor's and medical qualifications.²⁹ Nonetheless, his communalistic morality was no less real for it, pre-existing and co-existing with his later experiences abroad from the years of his childhood, when he would reportedly share any spare money he had with his wider family and kin network.³⁰ Furthermore, it is notable that Banda never reached the degree of ostentation which

²⁷ Ferguson, *Global shadows*, p.72

²⁸ Banda, 'Inauguration of Youth Week'

²⁹ S. Morrow and J. McCracken. 'Two Previously Unknown Letters from Hastings Kamuzu Banda, Written from Edinburgh, 1938, Archived at the University of Cape Town', *History in Africa*, 39, p.345,

³⁰ D. Brody, Ngwazi Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda Founding President of Malawi, *Conversations with Kamuzu*, <https://www.scribd.com/doc/7693584/Dr-Banda-Biography-1>, accessed 14th August 2015

characterised the regimes of other autocratic (and indeed, not so autocratic) leaders of the time.

It is pertinent however to consider that Banda's pre-independence anti-colonialism never fully extended to the material sphere. In a Fanonian sense, Banda's anti-colonialism was never properly ideological i.e. it did not represent a decolonial challenge to a Western imperial capitalism based on narrow class and national interests.³¹ Banda's assertion of indigenous culture therefore was not always predicated on anti-colonial sentiments, but increasingly served his own purposes in solidifying his and his circle's prestige and power, becoming more conservative in the process.

For example, Ross notes how Banda twisted the traditional role of the Nyasa chief to his own ends, claiming that his more authoritarian activities were based upon traditional conceptions of authority and rule. According to Ross, however, whilst the rule of Nyasa chiefs was absolute, no decision was ever reached without a lengthy and open consultative process, something which was completely lacking from Banda's rule, as became very apparent early on with the 1964 'cabinet crisis'.³² The 'cabinet crisis' occurred when Banda summarily dismissed several cabinet colleagues, younger men who had worked to create an almost messianic degree of public expectation and allegiance upon Banda's return to Malawi after over forty years out of the country prior to independence. When they started questioning Banda's centralising tendencies, and in particular his refusal to countenance diplomatic relations with China, Banda acted swiftly to dismiss and force the resignation of six members of his cabinet, some of whom went into exile and attempted to instigate a rural uprising

³¹ F.Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays* translated by Haakon Chevalier, (New York: Grove Press, 1964), pp 186-187

³² Ross, *Colonialism to cabinet crisis*, pp. 208-214

against him. Banda put down the rebellion by turning to his European-officered army and police force and granting new powers to the paramilitary Young Pioneers.³³

However strategic Banda's anti-colonial sentiment was in this later period, it would be misleading to reduce it solely to a product of Banda's own personal ambitions for power. The seemingly more radical sentiments Banda exhibited in the post-independence period drew on the genuine anti-colonial cultural nationalism he developed during his time in the UK. He had worked then as a propagandist for the Nyasa struggle for independence, and with a former missionary in Nyasaland, Cullen Young, particularly on an edited volume on Chewa culture they published in the 1940s.³⁴ By the time he acceded to the presidency, however, this anti-colonial cultural nationalism had become largely subsumed by a reactionary post-colonial cultural nationalism. Cultural nationalism gave him 'radical' legitimacy while also serving to bolster his rule against what he perceived as domestic and foreign enemies (which, in the case of the 'cabinet crisis', turned out to be real).

The tensions between these two forms of cultural nationalism, anti and post-colonial, radically and reactionary-conservative, become clearer when we consider some of Banda's more well-known and controversial decisions and practices. For instance, much of Banda's reputation for paternalistic eccentricity is based on the fact that in 1970 he signed legislation banning women from wearing miniskirts and trousers, and men from growing their hair long. There was an assumption that this antipathy towards short skirts and long hair was linked to a social conservatism which had been present within him at least since his arrival in Johannesburg in 1918 when he 'felt great sadness at how far African people had fallen' from

³³ Ibid, pp. 206-225

³⁴ C. Young and H. Banda (Eds) *Our African Way of Life* (London and Redhill: United Society for Christian Literature and Lutterworth Press, 1948)

their tradition and culture.³⁵ Sevenzo describes how Banda ‘fulminated against the latest fashions...Kamuzu's rule was paternalistic in the extreme: though he called himself the Father of the Nation, his stodginess made him seem more like a grandparent’.³⁶ This is also what Short described as Banda’s ‘Chewa Values’.³⁷ On the face of things then, these actions seemed like the epitome of a social conservatism mixed in with self-aggrandising dictatorship, with Banda seemingly devising ever more convoluted, eccentric and personalised laws to regulate the everyday lives of Malawian citizens.

However, this legislation, and indeed Banda’s broader sartorial concerns, can be read as deeply embedded in his anti-colonial cultural politics. Thus, whilst the miniskirt ban was in one sense representative of Banda’s conservative cultural values, these were simultaneously transposed through distinctly modernist *and* anti-colonial lenses, with Banda relating the following:

...there was a certain European woman in Lilongwe who said ‘Oh, nobody can force me, there is no law against minis’, and she was telling other girls, you shouldn’t stop it. Telling African girls. Well, I wasn’t going to have that. I was not going to have a European woman defying the government of this country...I am not going to tolerate any arrogance by any European³⁸.

With this statement we see that the ban was not simply about asserting a cultural conservatism, but was heavily implicated also in an explicit anti-colonial discontinuity with European rule, which promoted the prominence of indigenous culture (again, with the important caveat that this form of anti-colonialism was nation and class-constrained).

³⁵ Brody, Ngwazi, Conversations with Kamuzu

³⁶ F. Sevenzo, ‘Bedtime for Banda’ *Transition* 10, 1, 2000, p.15

³⁷ Short, *Banda*, pp. 36-37

³⁸ Dr. H. K. Banda, ‘Session 7, Meeting 4, Day 8, 3rd March 1970’, *Hansard of the Republic of Malawi*, (Zomba: Government Printer, 1970)

This should not, of course, detract us from how ‘indigenous culture’ could be selectively defined and politicised, as well as highly gendered. This leads us to the other side of the ban, that is, its colonial continuities. Banda’s miniskirt ban fitted into a pattern of behaviour and legislation common at the time in post-colonial Africa, most notably in Idi Amin’s Uganda and Julius Nyerere’s Tanzania. In the latter case, Ivaska argues that the move to ban miniskirts in urban areas was tied up into a vision of the national which valorised the rural as the site of valid citizenship (most obviously manifested in Nyerere’s villagisation project, Ujamaa). This policy designated the city as a threat to this national vision, an ‘un-Tanzanian’ place, with its unchecked migration and young women attempting to assert economic and sexual autonomy.³⁹

This represented a deep continuity with colonial forms of governance, and the deep distrust with which the colonial state held the African urban middle and working classes.⁴⁰ Similarly, Banda often equated national development with a return to the soil, and making the land productive. An attack on the immorality of urban areas, peopled by women in miniskirts and men with long hair, thus fitted into Banda’s vision for Malawi’s agricultural development. Alongside Banda’s anti-colonial drivers then, the miniskirt ban also channelled deeply colonial continuities, particularly concerning gender and distrust of the cosmopolitanism of urban areas. It remains however impossible to reduce the ban to a straightforward case of grandparental stodginess.⁴¹

³⁹ A. Ivaska, ‘“Anti-Mini Militants meet Modern Misses”: Urban Style, Gender and the Politics of “National Culture” in 1960s Dar es Salaam, Tanzania’ in J. Allman (Ed) *Fashioning Africa: Power and the Politics of Dress* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004) pp. 104-123

⁴⁰ See M. West, *The Rise of an African Middle Class: Colonial Zimbabwe, 1898-1965*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002)

⁴¹ Sevenzo, ‘Bedtime for Banda’, p. 15

The pride that Banda seemed to take in his own dress, and his famed British fashion sense, reinforces the importance of paying attention to the anti-colonial and post-colonial tensions in his conservative approach to culture.⁴² On the surface, his adherence to British dress would seem to contradict the anti-colonial message implicit in the miniskirt ban. However, this pride in dress was linked by Banda to its opposite – nakedness – thereby implicitly articulating a discourse on autonomous national development.

Banda often took how his subjects dressed to be indicative of the journey the country had travelled since independence. Adoption of clothing was a rejection of some kind of dependent status: ‘It is no use a country calling itself independent when its people, its citizens are starving, are naked’⁴³, or ‘When I came for the first time in 1960 you were not dressed as you are now – men and women. But look at you now’.⁴⁴ Bayart discusses the importance of sartorialism to African elites following their encounter with Western and colonial traders: ‘European clothing suddenly became a coveted adornment by means of which one’s rank was displayed as much on the domestic social scene – where nudity often displayed dependant status – as in relations with a foreign master’.⁴⁵ The social status afforded by Western clothing is one which continued to have prominence amongst the leaders of the anti and post-colonial movements, ‘who made this astonishing journey wearing trousers’.⁴⁶

⁴² Although it should be noted that as well as preferring to wear a dark suit, homburg hat and sunglasses, Banda also perennially carried a flywhisk, a symbol of authority in Chewa culture. This was not accidental, and related to Banda’s attempt to promote Chewa culture above other cultural communal identities in the name of nation building after independence (See P. Forster, ‘Culture, Nationalism and the Invention of Tradition in Malawi’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 32,3, pp. 477-497).

⁴³ BLOP, Malawi Official Publications, CSC.4/8, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, ‘His Excellency the Life President Ngwazi Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda Speeches: Address to the Independence Tenth Anniversary celebrations, 1st-8th July 1974’ (Blantyre: Department of Information, 1974)

⁴⁴ NAM, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, ‘Speech by His Excellency the Life President Ngwazi Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda at the opening of Kamuzu Bridge on 4th May 1968’ (Blantyre: Department of Information, 1968).

⁴⁵ Bayart, *The State in Africa*, p.29

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. liii

Indeed, whilst setting Malawian (or specifically Chewa) culture against colonial rule, Banda's simultaneous attempts to modernise Malawian dress and sensibilities can be seen in the context of its colonial alternative. It set the new Malawian government against the colonial nativisation strategy pursued by the British in Malawi, as elsewhere, of making alliance with the 'men in blankets' as against the 'men in trousers'.⁴⁷ That Banda simultaneously reified and vilified (in the case of the miniskirt ban) Western clothing styles speaks to the ways in which Banda saw Western dress: not as a good in and of itself, but rather, as a means by which to cover nakedness and signify development.

The battle over minidresses and long hair was hegemonic. It concerned the battle between one form of cultural conservatism (Banda's) and another (British-colonial). This ties into Banda's other efforts to impose a form of post-colonial cultural conservatism which would embed his and his circle's power, based in a specific class interest which rendered gendered, ethnic and class liberations impossible. Does this mean that there was no radicalism involved in Banda's cultural politics? As argued above, in some senses Banda's political resources drew on the time he spent amongst more and less radical pan-Africanists in London. Banda's actions in banning minis and long hair simultaneously spoke to his belief that Malawians shared, and indeed exceeded, the status of Western Europeans.⁴⁸

We can see that, although in some respects there is a conservative bent to Banda's thinking, with some colonial continuities, there was also in these actions and perspectives a distinctly anti-colonial message. Banda's recourse to 'tradition' and to Chewa culture, and his

⁴⁷ Power, *Political Culture*, p.20

⁴⁸ McCracken reinforces this point when he argues that "Banda's clothes, totally unlike the baggy shorts and stockings favoured by colonial officials, conveyed metropolitan elegance rather than colonial imitation" *A History of Malawi*, p.346

opposition to what he claimed to regard as feckless Western immorality, are indicative of a resistance to western hegemony: that Malawi, its people and culture, were not to be dictated to by a programme of post-colonial 'soft' imperialism, and were indeed in many ways superior to Western cultural norms. However, the policy was beset by uncomfortable contradictions. It also consolidated his own power base, enabled the state to pervade further into the private lives of its citizenry, and presented a highly gendered form of national liberation. These two political bents penetrated and produced each other.

Of course, it would have been impossible, given Banda's conservative values, for him to adopt a culturally radical anti-colonialism. But at the same time, his conservatism would also have been very different had it not been for his exposure to, and incorporation of, various forms of radical anti-colonialism in his early life. In the next section, we will see how these radical and reactionary tendencies consistently interpolated into Banda's foreign policy, including his approach to pan-Africanism and the OAU, but most notably (and perhaps counter-intuitively) with his infamous approach to the minority ruled states of Southern Africa.

Radical and reactionary conservatism in Banda's foreign policy

The coexistence of Banda's anti-colonial (radical) and post-colonial (reactionary) conservatisms is evident in his foreign as well as domestic policy. During the 1940s and 1950s, Banda was a major figure in the exiled African nationalist movement. At his home in Harlesden, London, he played host to significant figures in the post-colonial African landscape, including Julius Nyerere, Jomo Kenyatta, and Kwame Nkrumah. Indeed, with Banda living in Ghana at the time of Ghanaian independence, Nkrumah invited Banda to join

his administration in a medical oversight capacity (an invitation Banda declined).⁴⁹ In many ways, Banda was a key figure in this cadre of African nationalists, and initially shared much with Nkrumah's vision of a pan-Africanist future for the continent. In an interview with an international student magazine, Banda responded to a question concerning ongoing splits in the pan-African movements:

I don't believe in the groups [Monrovia and Casablanca]. These groups are only a phase in the movement towards pan-African unity. The division between the so-called groups is not very serious...It hurts me that to go to Accra I have to go through Johannesburg.⁵⁰

It is perhaps these kinds of sentiments which led Nkrumah to rely on Banda's pan-African commitments long after the latter's commitment to the cause appeared to have waned, causing him to fall out with many of the other OAU heads of state.⁵¹ In letters to Banda dated a full year after the latter's speech at the OAU justifying Malawi's diplomatic relations with South Africa, Nkrumah continued his attempt to enlist Banda to his more radical pan-Africanist cause (which of course included a policy of complete non-engagement and military readiness with and against the Apartheid regime) for the following OAU summit in October 1965. Writing with the closeness of someone who had spent much time with Banda, Nkrumah sent him his 'warmest wishes for your personal well-being' and entreated him to attend the October summit at a time when Banda was prevaricating, going so far as to write that 'if you don't turn up I shall send a plane to bring you willy-nilly to Accra! You must do your very

⁴⁹ Short, *Banda*, 78

⁵⁰ An Interview with Dr Hastings Banda, *The Student*, No. 7, 24 July 1962, p.2, Indiana University Libraries African Studies Collection, H. K. Banda Archive, 1950-1999, included in Correspondence with P. Eckstein, 1932-1997

⁵¹ Following his state visit to South Africa in 1971, there were calls for Malawi to be expelled from the OAU. This never materialised, and despite Banda's own failure to attend OAU meetings through the 1970s and 80s, he continued to send ministerial delegations.

best to come, Kamuzu.’⁵² A further letter sent after the summit, expressing thanks for Banda’s subsequent attendance, is signed off with the words: ‘Please accept, my dear Brother, the assurances of my highest esteem and fraternal consideration.’⁵³

Nevertheless, this part of Banda’s life soon became overshadowed by his diplomatic recognition of Apartheid South Africa and the Portuguese colonies. Malawi was the only majority-ruled African state to formally recognise these countries. The policy directly contradicted established OAU policy, as did Banda’s refusal to back military action against Ian Smith’s unilaterally declared regime in Southern Rhodesia. With the major figures of the post-colonial African continent, including his old allies Nyerere and Nkrumah, ranged against him, Banda’s isolation was rapid. It became easy to view him as a maverick who had sold out not only the vision of African unity that Nkrumah had spent so much time trying to cultivate within the OAU, but also the victims of the Portuguese and Apartheid regimes.

Banda’s isolation from the OAU was matched in equal measure by Banda’s attempts to distance himself from the same organisation. His refusal to attend OAU meetings (although sending ministerial delegations in his stead) called into question his commitment to pan-African unity. However, this might also be read as a tactic deployed by Banda to increase his standing with the United States and its allies, who were keen to find bulwarks against the perceived Soviet threat in Africa. It could also be read as a tactic to save face domestically, as by 1964 he was beginning to face cabinet opposition to his regional and transcontinental policies, which ultimately evolved into the ‘Cabinet Crisis’. It is impossible completely to dismiss any of these scenarios, and indeed, given what we know of Banda’s public self-

⁵² Letter from Kwame Nkrumah to Dr H.K. Banda, 31st August 1965, Indiana University Libraries African Studies Collection, H. K. Banda Archive, 1950-1999 Dr. H. K. Banda Correspondence, 1932-1997

⁵³ Letter from Kwame Nkrumah to Dr H.K. Banda, 5th November 1965, Indiana University Libraries African Studies Collection, H. K. Banda Archive, 1950-1999 Dr. H. K. Banda Correspondence, 1932-1997

eneration it is likely that standing out from his fellow African leaders on issues of global war and peace appealed to him.

Nonetheless, it is equally important to recognise the ambiguities inherent in many of the statements Banda made at the time, which resonate with more anti-colonial political currents. Banda had for several years opined on the artificiality of the borders of the new African states and called for their union. For instance, according to Short, Banda ‘looked forward to the day when Dar-Es-Salaam would be the capital of a “United States of Central Africa”.’⁵⁴ In a book published with the former missionary, Cullen Young, in 1948, written some years before Banda had fully formulated his political designs, he wrote enthusiastically of reuniting the peoples of Southern Nyasaland, Northern Rhodesia and Western Mozambique based upon an underlying *Maravi* identity related to the pre-colonial empire of the same name,⁵⁵ thus rolling back the imperialist division of East Africa.⁵⁶ In later years Banda’s pan-Africanism devolved into a post-colonial nationalism (much as his anti-colonial radical conservatism devolved into a post-colonial reactionary conservatism) which drew on *Maravi* and Chewa tropes to solidify his domestic ethnic and regional power base.⁵⁷ However, initially Banda had envisaged a Maravi nation which transcended the colonial borders of Southern and Eastern Africa. Even more expansively, in a letter to an acquaintance in Nyasaland in 1938, Banda had written that:

...the British, the French and the Germans were once tribes just as we are now in Africa. Many tribes united or combined to make one, strong British, French or

⁵⁴ Short, *Banda*, p.177

⁵⁵ From where contemporary Malawi derives its name.

⁵⁶ T.Cullen and H. Banda, ‘Preface’ in J. Kambalame, E.P. Chidzalo and J.W.M. Chadangalara., *Our African Way of Life* Translated and edited by T.Cullen and H. Banda (London and Redhill: United Society for Christian Literature and Lutterworth Press, 1948), p.10

⁵⁷ This was to the exclusion of Malawi’s Northern Province, never Chewa territory, which as a result remains electorally barren for the modern-day version of Banda’s Malawi Congress Party. McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, p.373

German nation. In other words, we have to begin to think in terms of Nyasaland, and even Central Africa as a whole, rather than of Kasungu.⁵⁸ We have to look upon all the tribes in Central Africa, whether in Nyasaland or in Rhodesia, as our brothers. Until we learn to do this, we shall never be anything else but weak, tiny tribes, that can easily be subdued.⁵⁹

It seems, then, that whilst Banda's later pan-Africanism was far more ambiguous, and driven in part by narrower nationalist considerations, in his younger years Banda had espoused a pan-Africanism close to that of Nkrumah's (more than to the Monrovia Group of those such as the Côte d'Ivoire's Felix Houphouët-Boigny). Indeed, Banda's pan-Africanist beliefs resonated well beyond his disenfranchisement from the OAU, finding outlet again as late as 1988, five years before Banda's regime ended, when he stated that 'I do not recognise the boundaries between Malawi and Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique...They were made by imperialists and colonialists'.⁶⁰

What then can we make of what was probably Banda's most controversial foreign policy decisions i.e. the diplomatic recognition of the Apartheid regime in South Africa, Ian Smith's regime in Southern Rhodesia and the Portuguese regimes across the continent? Whilst it is certain that Banda's engagement with the settler minority regimes of Southern Africa were based in large part on material and geopolitical considerations, it remains important to note that Banda had also had a long relationship with pacifism and non-violence, having been a conscientious objector whilst in the UK during World War Two.⁶¹ This makes his opposition to a military solution to Smith's UDI in Southern Rhodesia (as advocated by some in the

⁵⁸ Birth village of Banda, and now a small regional hub in Malawi's central district

⁵⁹ Morrow and McCracken, *Two Previously Unknown Letters*, p.353

⁶⁰ BLOP, Malawi Official Publications, CSC.4/8, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, 'Session 25, Meeting 1, Day 1, 13th October 1988' Hansard of the Republic of Malawi, (Zomba: Government Printer, 1988)

⁶¹ Short, *Banda*, 41

OAU) more complex than an initial reading of events may suggest. It remains the case that during the years of outright confrontation with the British colonial government in Nyasaland (1958-1960), Banda at best tolerated threats against Europeans and their interests by refusing to condemn acts of violence, and may even have been directly involved in encouraging the use of violence against internal dissenters, and particularly Jehovah's Witnesses.⁶² It is also certainly the case that when Banda did eventually and unequivocally condemn public violence after his release from prison in 1960, where he had been ensconced at the behest of the Governor since March 1959 under State of Emergency powers, he did so in all probability in order to strengthen his hand in advance of negotiations with the British government, which later took place at Lancaster House that same year.⁶³

Such vacillations were not however uncommon amongst the strategies of nationalist leaders of the period (Jomo Kenyatta's ambiguous relationship with the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya being one such example).⁶⁴ However, it is Banda's politics prior to his leaving the continent for education in 1925 which adds an additional and distinctive layer of ambiguity to his stances concerning the settler minority states of Southern Africa. Travelling first in the US and then in the UK, Banda's politics were decidedly radical and pacifist, certainly predating his refusal to serve during World War Two. The themes which he found attractive during his involvement with the A.M.E in the 1920s – 'the right of Black men to run their own affairs...to raise their status in their own eyes and in the eyes of the non-black world'⁶⁵ – similarly informed his attitudes to the hegemonic struggle between Chewa and Western

⁶² McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, p.351. This is hard to say with certainty. According to McCracken 'Banda proved highly adept in publically distancing himself from acts of violence of which he may well have privately approved'

⁶³ *Ibid*, p.364

⁶⁴ See G. Delf., *Jomo Kenyatta* (London, Victor Gollancz LTD: 1961); J. Murray-Brown., *Kenyatta*, (London, George Allen and Unwin: 1972)

⁶⁵ Short, *Banda*, p.19

culture in the 1960s and 1970s. How then does this radicalism and pacifism sit with his relationships to the European settler colonies of Southern Africa?

Banda himself deployed two defences. In later years, he argued that his policy was one of engagement, and that boycotting or threatening the minority regimes would not bring them to their ends. During the initial period of recognition, however, Banda's main justification was that Malawi was defenseless in the face of potential South African military aggression and economic realities: 'I could not be expected to boycott South Africa, Mozambique and Rhodesia. We have no port of our own...to me to be a true African nationalist does not mean that one must cut one's own economic throat'.⁶⁶ Once it is taken into consideration that the Malawian state was far from the most vulnerable to South African interference in domestic affairs, and yet was the only majority ruled (in name, if not in practice) African state to offer diplomatic recognition to the Apartheid regime and its allies on the continent, Banda's argument can appear quite unconvincing (although just because Malawi was relatively less vulnerable than, for instance, Zambia, does not mean Banda was wrong about Malawi's vulnerability in absolute terms).

What is interesting here in Banda's statement, therefore, is his use of the term 'true African nationalist'. Being an African nationalist could of course mean many things. We have already seen that Banda had, for a prolonged period, been committed to the idea of an African nationalism which transcended parochial and colonial African borders. One way of understanding Banda's subsequent actions and positions is to see in them a transition into a contrasting conservative, territorially bounded nationalism that would not materially support

⁶⁶ BLOP, Malawi Official Publications, CSC.4/8, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, 'Session 25, Meeting 1, Day 1, 17th April 1969', *Hansard of the Republic of Malawi* (Zomba: Government Printer, 1969). See also Short, *Banda*, pp. 184-195

the struggles of fellow Africans, including those who Banda had previously held to be *aMaravi* in parts of Southern Rhodesia and Mozambique. As such this transition could be read as a victory of Banda's post-colonial reactionary conservatism and nationalism over his anti-colonial radically conservative pan-Africanism.

However, Banda continued to frame his position in pan-Africanist terms, thus problematising this reading. In addition to sending ministerial delegations to the OAU, Banda provided arms and financing to liberation movements in Mozambique and South Africa. Upon Banda's death, Nelson Mandela praised him for these actions (which included a large donation to the ANC upon Mandela's release from Robben island in 1990), as well as for providing assistance to the ANC in the run-up to the South African elections in 1994.⁶⁷ Additionally, the presence of both Robert Mugabe and Joaquim Chissano at Banda's funeral was notable, given Banda's history of engagement with the minority settler regimes of both men's countries.⁶⁸ Of course, in some senses Banda could stand accused of playing both sides of the game, maintaining diplomatic and commercial relations with the White settler regimes of both Mozambique and South Africa throughout the entire pre-1994 period, and in Mozambique pledging his own army forces in support of the post-1975 FRELIMO government, whilst simultaneously using the paramilitary Malawi Young Pioneers to support opposition (and Rhodesian-backed) RENAMO forces.⁶⁹

Nonetheless, on an ideological level, Short argues that Banda's rapid disillusionment with the OAU and the project of African unity was itself a product of Banda's own commitment to the

⁶⁷ BBC World Monitoring, 'Mandela expresses regret at Banda's death', 26th November 1997, available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/monitoring/34709.stm> accessed on 27th October 2016

⁶⁸ Sevenzo, 'Bedtime for Banda', p.4

⁶⁹ R.Chirambo, "'Operation Bwezani': The Army, Political Change, and Dr.Banda's Hegemony in Malawi', *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 13(2), 2004, pp 154-5

principles they were supposed to embody, and from which he felt the increasingly bifurcated OAU was falling short. Banda's argument was that the in-fighting and nationalism which was beginning to characterise debate at the OAU, as well as promises of military intervention in Southern Rhodesia which could never be fulfilled by a collection of young and militarily weak African states, was undermining the potential of pan-Africanism.⁷⁰ And so, whilst Banda's approach remained framed by pan-Africanism, this became a very singular and narrow interpretation of what pan-Africanism meant. In his interpretation, his engagement with the white minority-ruled states (and quietly funnelling arms and finances to a variety of resistance movements) was pursuing a policy in which his fellow African leaders should join, for reasons of African self-preservation and international standing.

In other words, for Banda, his decisions and actions represented true pan-Africanism; it was his fellow African leaders who were selling the pan-African project short. Given his earlier commitment to a more expansive pan-Africanism, it is difficult to dismiss this position as a purely self-aggrandising move. Whilst the narrowly nationalistic position Banda developed through the 1960s represented his most conservative and pragmatic side, his continuing pronouncements regarding pan-Africanism in general, and the conditions of the settler-minority regimes in particular, point in another direction. For example, at the Non-Aligned Movement in 1969, he asserted: 'I cannot say that I am in favour of white rule in South Africa as such. I am in favour of the rule for all the people; a rule that is neither white nor black, but for all the people.'⁷¹ This indicates a remaining and reverberating idealism concerning the perpetuation of his earlier ideological commitments.

⁷⁰ Short, *Banda*, pp.246-249; p.295

⁷¹ Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, *Press Conference held at Chichiri House, Blantyre, on July 8th 1969, attended by His Excellency the Life President Ngwazi Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda* (Blantyre: Department of Information, 1969)

This final point becomes important for it more generally sums up Banda's ambiguous cultural, nationalist and pan-Africanist politics in all of their anti and post-colonial iterations. Far from being a purely reactionary conservative, these tensions ran through Banda's life and politics. This is important for how historical and autocratic figures such as Banda are considered. There is, though, an additional matter of importance, which is the manner in which contemporary politics in Malawi is refracted through a particular reading of Banda's record which fails to take account of these tensions and ambiguities. The following section will address this matter in greater detail.

Political economies of protest and change in contemporary Malawi

As I began to outline above, it is impossible to understand events in contemporary Malawi without recourse to an understanding of Hastings Banda which sees both his thought and his practices/policies as ambiguous and riven with anti and post-colonial conservative tensions. Undoubtedly, the latter very quickly became the more dominant force in his thinking after his return to Nyasaland in 1958. Scholarly commentary on events in contemporary Malawi makes reference to Banda, but not to the Banda presented in this paper. Instead, and as will be illustrated below, this scholarship tends to paint Banda more narrowly, drawing on his post-colonial conservative tendencies, presenting him purely as an authoritarian anachronism with little relevance to protest movements which have been appearing and reappearing in Malawi with increasing regularity since 2011.

Nineteen protestors were shot dead by Malawian police forces on July 20th 2011 at a march against the regime of President Bingu Wa Mutharika.⁷² Scholarly commentary on the ensuing and ongoing political and constitutional crisis relied on lazy stereotyping, warning that Mutharika was leading Malawi back to the days of Banda, when ‘Malawi was almost a stereotype of an African autocracy with a geriatric Life President’.⁷³ Similarly, others saw in Mutharika a replication of Banda’s authoritarian record, simply under tighter aid conditionalities which forcibly reined him in.⁷⁴ There was in general a focus on purely ideational explanations for Malawi’s 2011 crisis, whereby both Banda’s and Mutharika’s actions were contextualised in a pervasive authoritarian and anti-rights logic.⁷⁵ However, these explanations are not sufficient for developing a fuller understanding of the actions of independence-era political leaders; nor of contemporary public responses to their records and to the demands made by publics of their governments today.

Common narratives of anti-government protests in Malawi, such as those referenced above, as well as protests elsewhere on the continent that have taken place with growing regularity over the past decade, rest on the idea that these protests represent a series of liberal rights claims for more transparency, better governance and respect for human rights.⁷⁶ As such, it becomes easy in this context to depict contemporary protests in Malawi and across Africa as being a continuing rejection of what is understood as an unambiguously authoritarian politics practiced by nationalist leaders such as Hastings Banda, and now being practiced by their

⁷² Malawi Human Rights Commission, ‘Report into July 2011 demonstrations’ available at <http://www.osisa.org/sites/default/files/article/files/MHRC%20report%20on%2020%20July%20demonstrations.pdf>, 2011, Retrieved on 8th May 2013

⁷³ K. Somerville, ‘Malawi: Democracy Dips Into Recession’ African Arguments, 21st March 2012, available at <http://africanarguments.org/2012/03/21/malawi%E2%80%99s-democracy-dips-into-recession-by-keith-somerville/>, Retrieved on 28th June 2012

⁷⁴ Wroe, ‘Donors, Dependency and Political Crisis in Malawi’ p. 142

⁷⁵ See, for instance Cammack, ‘Malawi’s Political Settlement in Crisis’, p.15

⁷⁶ Z.Mamphilly and A.Branch, *Africa Uprising: Popular Protest and Political Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015)

political descendants. Indeed, President Mutharika explicitly styled himself on Banda, adopting the same title of 'Ngwazi' used by Banda when he returned to Nyasaland in 1958.

Despite this, analyses which see African protest as exemplifying liberal rights claims rest on an elitist perspective. That such a perspective is shared by certain components of a privileged civil-society leadership, which, in the case of Malawi, saw a number of 2011 protest leaders take up jobs in Mutharika's successor government, under President Joyce Banda, reinforces this claim. Meanwhile, ordinary protestors, whose complaints were largely economic and material in nature, continued to agitate against Banda in the subsequent years of her presidency, until she lost presidential elections in 2014 (whilst civil-society leaders largely publically refrained from doing so).⁷⁷ These protestors conveyed a message that bore a much closer resemblance to the kinds of state-led development promoted by Hastings Banda during the first half of his rule than the market fundamentalism promoted by the international donor community during the 1980s and pursued by Malawi's post-Banda presidents (although interestingly, given the nature of the protests against him, not as enthusiastically by Mutharika).⁷⁸

The rendering of these more recent events in Malawi into an historical narrative which ties them to the authoritarianism of Hastings Banda, and thus as a response to a singular case of

⁷⁷ C. Gabay, *Exploring an African Civil Society: Development and Democracy in Malawi, 1994-2014* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), pp.85-86

⁷⁸ Mutharika most notoriously refused to devalue the Kwacha in 2011 at the behest of the International Monetary Fund. In addition to this the food surplus generated under Mutharika during his first term (2005-2009) was a result of an agricultural subsidy programme which occurred against a backdrop of World Bank calls for further agricultural sector liberalisation (See H. Englund, *A Democracy of Chameleons: Politics and Culture in the New Malawi* (Uppsala: The Nordic Africa Institute, 2002) p.145. I have discussed these issues, based on extensive ethnographic and interview-based data, elsewhere: C. Gabay, 'Two 'transitions': the political economy of Joyce Banda's rise to power and the related role of civil society organisations in Malawi' *Review of African Political Economy* 41 (141), 2014, pp. 374-388. For a material analysis of protest in Africa more broadly, see P. Dwyer and L. Zeilig, *African Struggles Today: Social Movements Since Independence* (London: Haymarket Books, 2012), pp 141-145

unbroken authoritarian and neopatrimonial rule, prevents a fuller analysis of both Banda's rule *and* the nature of protest and anger in contemporary Malawi. Indeed, this narrative overlooks the degree to which the July 2011 and subsequent protests in Malawi indicate that Banda's politics continue to inform public anger in Malawi. This can be understood in an economic sense, as explained above, but also in the broader sense of pertaining to the contradictions and tensions between Banda's anti-colonial conservative radical pan-Africanism and his post-colonial reactionary conservative nationalism.

Banda's conflicted conservatism continues to find public outlet. Not all popular protest represents a desire for western democratic modernity in place of African authoritarian conservatism. For example, there is public antipathy towards men who have sex with men, and the external (or externally funded) actors that continue to put pressure on successive Malawian governments to address legislative discrimination against LGBTQ people. Such antipathy stymied the attempts of Joyce Banda, the vice-president who acceded to the presidency following Mutharika's death, to significantly repeal 'anti-gay' legislation.⁷⁹ Of course such conservatism can be and is instrumentalised by various interest groups.⁸⁰ But the point here is that far from signifying Malawi's democratic and cultural 'maturity' (as understood in a Eurocentric epistemology of modernity), the July 2011 protests were part of a larger social movement which refracted itself *in part* through an embracing of the ideological tensions of Hastings Banda, rather than a full-throated rejection of them.

⁷⁹ Although Joyce Banda suspended laws criminalising men who have sex with men and other sexual relations which take place outside of heterosexual relationships, the law has not been repealed and in April 2015 Malawi introduced new legislation on marriage which defines a person's sex and gender as the one assigned at birth

⁸⁰ C. Biruk, 'Aid for gays': the Moral and the Material in 'African Homophobia' in post-2009 Malawi' *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 52, 2014, pp 447-473.

To conclude, I would suggest that the scholarly analysis and broader commentary surrounding the 2011 protests in Malawi created a very narrow frame for understanding both contemporary events in the country, as well as the history on which such analysis rested. Hastings Banda was not a straightforwardly authoritarian narcissist and reactionary conservative, although from independence onwards, these undoubtedly became more definitive characteristics of his conduct. Nonetheless, his beliefs concerning pan-Africanism, cultural conservatism, anti-colonialism, pragmatism and economic nationalism, even when (and because of) existing in tension with each other, bear recognition, and shed a different light on the actions of his successors as President. As stated earlier, whilst the actions of Hastings Banda and his successors can be read within the context of a *longue durée* of extraversionary and pragmatic politics, this has not equated with an uninterrupted continuum of authoritarianism. Ideational factors, individual life-trajectories as well as the shifting international and geo-political economy within which Malawi has been embedded since independence provides a more complete set of explanatory factors for the actions of different Malawian leaders through that period, and the ensuing responses of the Malawian public, than the sometimes reductive narrative of stereotypical African authoritarianism, which we find in some mainstream contemporary scholarly analysis on Malawi. Lastly, the case of Hastings Banda as presented here attests to the importance of being alive to the radicalism of his kind of anti-colonial conservative pan-Africanism. This radicalism partly drove the foreign and domestic politics of the immediate post-colonial period in Malawi, alongside concomitant post-colonial reactionary conservative nationalism. The latter was embedded in these more radical anti-colonial projects, and became rapidly more dominant in Banda's Malawi. The co-constitution of the two should warn us away from being too full-throated in either praise or vilification in the cases of figures like Hastings Banda, as well as the too easy dismissal of them in understanding contemporary protest and change in sub-Saharan Africa.

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