

# A Man Half Wicked: Banda and Aristotle

**1. Gule** It appears that for Aristotle philosophy is a sovereign activity. There is a certain *jouissance* running through his musings transcending the good and the bad, the useful and the useless. He will consider everything as a philosopher. He is the *gule* of thinking. Most important is that he thinks, writes and disseminates. In *The Politics* he offers advice not only on good governance but also on tyranny—as if it's nothing to him as a philosopher. In the same book he exalts the merits of the “good life” and “noble actions” over those of mere living, utility and the empty pursuit of money and profit for its own sake, yet he also offers insights into the most callous way to gamble and turn in a good profit. It's as if for him philosophy is a political act. It most probably is. He must identify himself with the affected sovereignty of the tyrant or the doggedness of the tradesman and the moneylender, at least in thought and gesture.

The pursuit of sovereignty as a political act is not an entirely impossible common denominator between a philosopher and a dictator—this is where we encounter Aristotle with Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda, the self-styled ‘philosopher king’—*Ngwazi*—of the Amaravi peoples of the Republic of Malawi, from 1966 to 1994.

**2. Banda the Hellenophile** Banda was a hellenophile. He used to say that you are not educated until you know Latin and Greek. He frequently peppered his conversations with Greek and Latin phrases. In 1981 he opened a lavish grammar school, Kamuzu Academy (often dubbed the Eton of the Bush), in Mtonthama, Kasungu, in the middle of nowhere, where Malawian students from diverse backgrounds and on full scholarship were taught Latin and Greek exclusively by European teachers.

By Banda's standards the author of this article is learned. As a teenager he attended Banda's Kamuzu Academy and was subjected to Latin and Greek for six years. On Founder's Day he had to take part in Greek and Latin plays by Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Plautus and the like, performed before Banda; the president watched them intently. The author once asked his Greek teacher Monsieur La Rouche, who was close to the president, “Can Banda really understand Latin and Greek?” Monsieur La Rouche said “No.” It made the whole thing feel strange and puzzling. Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda, a US and UK trained physician with a background in political science, considered himself not educated then? It turned out Kamuzu Academy cost over one third of the national education budget.

But why did the most famous Chewa in the world prostrate himself before the classical canon with such a costly project? One could only guess. He perhaps wanted to make it as a complete man of letters by establishing this school. After reading Aristotle's *Politics* the author has come up with another possible thesis: maybe Kamuzu Academy was an homage to the Greeks for helping him stay in power for so long! As a political scientist Banda might have seen parallels between the turbulent political life of the Greece of Aristotle as it adjusted from ‘closed’

tribal life to democracy and that of his newly independent Malawi and learnt from it. As this study will show Banda's colourful life presidency is a near perfect appendage to Aristotle's nonchalant musings on how tyranny can be preserved. Even where Banda appears to be transgressing Aristotle's rules, he is animated by them and appears deliberate. And just as Aristotle promised if one followed his rules, Banda's tyranny lasted. The price for it though is that it killed both his own spirit and that of the Amaravi nation, as leader and subjects locked themselves in what the philosopher Achille Mbembe would describe as “mutual zombification” for almost half a century. Malawi is still recovering from the aftermath. Banda was dismissed as a cruel despot by the end of his rule in 1994 but recently attempts have been made to rehabilitate his critical role in Malawian history. These are often with cynical intentions, as a pretext for a return to tyrannical politics by scheming politicians. By studying Banda's specific political technique via Aristotle the author will attempt to map out a possible route to a real political revaluation and recovery for himself and his native country.

**3. Two Ways to Preserve Tyranny** Aristotle suggests two main opposed and contradicting ways to preserve tyranny: by force, which is the “conventional method” for tyrants, and by the simulation of kingship—“a tyrant should not appear like a tyrant in the eyes of his subjects, but like a king and a manager of a household.” The objectives of the rule by force are: to keep subjects in check by depriving them of power; to stir up strife among the people to keep them poor and low in spirit; and to work up an extreme form of democracy where subjects have no confidence in each other. The preservation of tyranny by kingship tactics has one objective—to guard the power of the ruler to enable him “to govern not only those who wish him to but also those who do not.” The peculiar and heterogeneous nature of Malawi's pre-colonial and postcolonial political terrain allowed Banda to deploy both ways on Malawi peoples over his 30-year rule. The former was modelled on the caprice and brute force of colonial rule, the latter, which we must look at first, on pre-colonial Amaravi “Karonga” kingship under the title *Ngwazi*—meaning conqueror, ‘dynamic and wise leader’, or ‘chief of chiefs’.

## **4. Of the One Who Packs the Heads of the Dead**

Precolonial Malawian history is oral. It is often a muddle when set in written text. One needs to introduce some form of framework to make sense of it. Mine is a psychoanalytic framework borrowed from Sigmund Freud's writings on the place of the figure of the “primal father” in tribal kinship in *Totem and Taboo*. Freud's paternal exception appears to animate the early history of Malawi and throws a light on Banda's basic Aristotelian political strategy. Nobody knows where the Amaravi peoples came from, there are only speculations. When the Amaravi appeared in southern Africa they found the Akafula peoples there, also known as the Abatwa. The Akafula were short, hot tempered and prone to violence. One popular folklore narrates that when you came across an Akafula man he would ask you,

“Where did you see me?” When you answered “*Pompano*, just here,” he would jump on your back and kill you. The right answer was “*Uko*, from over there!” You pointed at the horizon where you first saw him, for such was Akafula’s ego and *Dasein* that despite his diminutive size he covered the whole horizon, *dziko*. It is among the Akafula that we must find the Amaravi primal father. One can deduce from Akafula behaviour that, like Freud’s paternal exception, he was territorial, and that like a vicious silverback he marginalised his sons and kept all the women to himself.

The Akafula’s sudden disappearance from the scene soon after the appearance of the Amaravi peoples coincides with the ascendancy of the Amaravi matrilineal system installed by Akafula’s sons, the Bandas. Having killed their father, the Bandas set up a radical democratic matriarchal society ruled by spirit wives housed at rain shrines where various sacrificial rites and prodigious gift giving were carried out in ritualised play affected by *nyau* masks. The sons most likely started the *nyau* masking secret society that exists to this day to expiate the guilt of their father’s murder. The Amaravi primal father’s exceptional behaviour animates *nyau* masks, collectively known as *Gule Wamkulu* (the Great Play), in dramatic choreography and routines, at once intimidating and petulant. The *Gule Wamkulu* expresses the Amaravi people’s affirmative *jouissance* even in the face of extreme suffering. What one does while wearing *nyau* mask is beyond good and evil and beyond the reach of the law and everyday customs. *Gule Wamkulu* is where the Amaravi identity is revealed as part of the larger scheme of things. Within the Amaravi rite of passage the Amaravi primal father is in fact a spoilt man-child who should be given up by the boy upon entering adulthood and society at large at a special initiation ceremony into the *nyau* secret society. From there the primal father will haunt the boy’s entire adulthood as an insatiable ancestral spirit, and as a mediator between the living and the dead, who has to be constantly negotiated with and appeased in sacrifices, libations and ritual dances. Although exclusive to men (and women beyond childbearing age) the *nyau* allegiance to the matriarchal system and prodigious gift giving is seen in its principal mask structure, ominously named *Kasiya Maliro* (she who gives birth to the dead), which is a womb disguised as an antelope. It is a symbol of the radical generosity which lies at the heart of the Amaravi society.

For hundreds of years the Banda Amaravi lived in clusters of stateless villages until another group of Amaravis known as the Phiri appeared on the scene bringing with them ideas of centralised governance. They were led by an all-conquering warlord named Karonga (one who packs heads of the dead) who bore all the mythical brute attributes of the Akafula pygmy and the ritual sovereignty of the *nyau* masks. It’s as if the banished Amaravi primal father had returned to take revenge on his sons with interest. It is said when Karonga asked you, “Where did you see me?” and you pointed at the horizon he killed you and added your head to his collection. The right answer was to point at the sun and the stars, for such was his confidence of his place in the universe. Karonga banished the spirit wives and *nyau* masks to the fringes of Amaravi

society and introduced blood sacrifices at the rain shrines, which now came to be run by priests. Karonga ruled through village headmen who replaced the spirit wives. He demanded taxes in elephant tusks and opened up the Amaravi region to trade including in slaves. His clan, the Phiri, became the ruling class. He had countless wives. Soon enough the Amaravi primal father met resistance from the grassroots, spearheaded by a spiritual leader, a “rainmaker” named Mbona, whose martyrdom haunts the Malawian political imaginary to this day.

After the deaths of Karonga and Mbona, the Amaravi radical democracy and matrilineal system appeared to have returned, albeit in a synthetic form: *nyau* was rehabilitated as the “people’s prayer” and the Amaravi peoples fragmented once more, this time into various tribes ruled by titular chiefs, each known as *mwini dziko*, guardian of the land, and *mwini mzinda*, the ‘owner of the *nyau*’, or in a more descriptive way ‘the manager of the polis’. The chief mediated on legal matters (*milandu*) and ruled as a necessity, in consultation with the people and his *nduna*, an executive committee. He was also, along with the *Gule Wamkulu* masks, the principal “agent of the *nyau*”, an executor and manager of prodigious gift giving which came in many forms including spiritual and creative revelations, elaborate rituals, taboo and ritual transgression, interpretation of dreams and ongoing political and thought provoking *Gule Wamkulu* interventions and events in everyday life, and at performances and raves at the *bwalo*. Some of these chiefs, especially among the Chewa and Mang’anja tribes, had libidinal counterparts in *Gule Wamkulu* such as *Chadzunda*, *Njobvu* (elephant) and *Mkango* (lion).

The troubled *Chadzunda* bore the carnivalised despotic and petulant traits of the deceased Karonga as the ‘lord of the dance’. It was after the post-Karonga titular chiefs that Banda fashioned himself as *mwini dziko* and *mwini mzinda* upon his return from Europe - as a prelude to his real return as ‘the one who packs heads of the dead’. It was a political tactic influenced by *nyau* and the ritual sovereignty of the *Gule Wamkulu* which would enable him to apply Aristotle’s contradicting methods for preserving tyranny on the ready peoples of Malawi in the most effective way.

**5. Tyranny By Kingship** The ideal tyrant by kingship Aristotle renders as follows: he looks the part of a king and plays it well; he presents himself as a religious and pious man; he is a man of the people but is also friends with notables; he appears more as a steward and manager of his people; he exercises moderation in his appetites; he treats women and children with respect; he posits himself as a protector of women and cultivates a loving relationship with the youth; he refrains from harming women and children; when he punishes his followers, it appears out of fatherly love; he refrains from anger in proceedings; he refrains from upsetting men of honour and those with nothing to lose; men of achievement he punishes gradually not at once; public works in his honour appear as a gift from the public; he appears to work for the common good; he encourages open accountability keeping public records of finance; he keeps his wealth hidden in the open as a public purse; when he taxes and

extracts gifts from the public it's as if for the public good; he conducts himself with dignity; he creates images of valour in battle; he honours his men lavishly but does not single out favourites. As we shall see, Banda's political strategy as "Karonga" is animated by these rules from the beginning of his political career. Where the rules appear transgressed it is where Banda is labouring to adapt them to modern times and to a specific Amaravi context, some of which we have outlined so far.

**6. Messiah** Banda's return to Malawi in 1958 to take over the leadership of the struggling Nyasaland African Congress is sold as messianic. He anticipates it with widely circulated pastoral letters to his followers urging them to take heart in their fight against colonial rule as deliverance is at hand. Messengers are sent to the remotest parts of Malawi to proclaim his imminent return. There is a false start on 29 June 1958. There is a riot of 10,000 people when a British plane at Chileka airport in Blantyre does not produce a messiah. Then on 6 July 1958, people gather once more at Chileka, and this time Banda comes out of the sky and lands on Malawi soil after 40 years abroad, to ululation and jubilation. There are chiefs there to welcome him. Wearing a homburg hat, trench coat and three-piece suit, the messiah looks like a movie star. There is magic in the air. Banda says he has come to act as a bridge in the 'gap' between Africans on the one hand and Asians and Europeans on the other, and between the "old and the new". That's to say a 'mediator'. That was an Amaravi chief's role, among the living, and the *Gule Wamkulu* role among the living and the dead. He had in effect announced himself as a "nyau" leader. But little did the people know this meant an exceptional leadership that would be animated by an Amaravi radical democracy on the one hand and on the other by outright Karonga despotism modelled on colonial rule. He shouts "*Kwacha!*", meaning the dawn has come, and is whisked away in a long convoy. The whole country catches fever from his 'second coming' but he is still to convince the many political factions that he is the ideal leader to lead the Amaravi peoples against colonial rule.

This is where he has to prove himself as "adept at playing a king" and Banda would have impressed Aristotle with his meticulous application of the rules. To set up his kingship tactic Banda cultivates "loving relationships" with the youth: he surrounds himself with young Church-educated political agitators, the so-called "mission boys", who act as his entourage of advisors, secretaries, bodyguards and panegyrist at his political rallies; amongst these 'Young Turks' are rebellious colonial legislators Masauko Chipembere and Kanyama Chiume, journalist Aleke Banda, and the militant Chisiza brothers. Banda's avuncular relationships inspire loyalty in these young men as if they were his sons. They are prepared to die for him. Hailed across the country as the second coming, Banda already has plenty of political capital to do as he pleases with the moribund Nyasaland African Congress. With his intelligence and charisma alone he marginalises the former leaders of the party including TDT Banda, Manoa Chirwa and Orton Chirwa.

In 1959, having been made President General of the Nyasaland African Congress he demands absolute control of the party in the name of the 'common good' — the nation's struggle against colonial rule. He sets up *nduna*, a central executive committee, flanked by the Women's League (*mbumba*) and the Youth League as a sanctified chorus of his royal political designs. He controls the party with a considered arbitrariness as if in parody of the arbitrariness of colonial authority, hiring and firing senior members at will. His orders are impulsive, delivered with a stiff upper lip and in the Queen's English. He barks at Western journalists questioning his political motives in interviews, like an angry Akafula man. He pre-emptively rebukes all of them as if they were little children and calls colonial policy "stupid" at every opportunity. This rouses mass public enthusiasm in his subversive persona.

Party membership soars. His speeches, delivered with the cadences of an African American preacher, are repetitive — as if moved by the spirit — and he blasphemes like a Ngoni general as a sign of his resolve to get independence from the British with or without God's approval. Of piety, it is said that he is an ordained elder of the Church of Scotland and that he is actually a pious person despite his apparent excesses. His is an African form of piety. He speaks to his people through a translator like a colonial officer while dancing with his *mbumba* in a fluent archaic Chichewa spreading rumours that he is not really a Malawian, adding to his messianic mystery. He encourages his followers to dance from boma to boma undermining colonial values of decency, moderation and industry. Syncretic dances such as Beni and Malipenga parody British military discipline and power. He advocates a non-violent struggle while imploring "my people" to do away with his political opponents and colonial authority quietly like *chiswe*, termites. He keeps his hat on in front of Europeans, some of whom function in his entourage as his "notable" distinguished friends.

He is so well educated it has turned him into a sorcerer: it is said that the mark for his surgery exams at Meharry Medical College in America was an impossible 99.45%. His personality and identity are thus at once heterogeneous and a mystifying disguise. His performative and spirited leadership style is more that of the *nyau* demiurge *Chadzunda*, a libidinal counterpart of the Chewa paramount chief: mystery, contradiction, political transgression, excess and *jouissance* are part of his act. It's a political language and *nyau* spirit that Malawians understand, and they welcome him as their titular post-Karonga king, *mwini dziko*, *mwini mzinda* and *mpulumutsi*, saviour. With a film star image and the depth of an ancient *nyau* mask, he inspires unity and a spirit of radical democracy which the colonials cannot contain. In 1959 there is stoning of European traffic around the clock tower in Blantyre, and a rebellion all over Nyasaland ensues. Banda and his protégés are soon jailed by the colonial government at various places around the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. This only galvanises the will of the Amaravi peoples for self-determination. In Banda's absence after the banning of his Nyasaland African Congress his Secretary General Orton Chirwa resurrects the Party as

the Malawi Congress Party. Banda is made the party's Life President upon his release in 1960. In 1964, a reenergised and insurgent Nyasaland becomes independent from the British with Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda as its first elected prime minister. By 1966 Malawi becomes a republic with Banda as President. The next step was for Banda to consolidate himself as the absolute ruler of the Amaravi peoples and here Aristotle's tyranny by kingship strategy became most convenient.

**7. Malawi** Malawi's new name Malawi is taken from an area where Maravi kings, the Karongas, set their headquarters south of Lake Malawi. It is not a coincidence. On a national level Banda is seen as more than a titular Amaravi chief: for uniting the Amaravi peoples once more and freeing them from colonial rule and narrow tribalism he is the new Karonga himself, and Banda welcomes the mantle. Banda dresses up in three-piece suits and a homburg hat in all weather, a nod to his film star status and his days as a fashionable physician in London, but indicates his newly sanctioned role as *mwini dziko* with a flywhisk. This is where Banda deploys rule by force modelled on colonial caprice and brutality to consolidate his power.

**8. Tyranny by the Conventional Method** Of the rule by force Aristotle prescribes the following for the self-sustaining tyrant: he is to "lop off the eminent" and get rid of independent spirits; eat with foreigners rather than with citizens of his own state; prohibit mass gatherings in messes, clubs or education or anything of that kind, which would inspire confidence and independence in his subjects; he is to make sure there are no places for scholars and intellectuals to gather; subjects should not get to know each other so they don't develop the mutual confidence that leads to solidarity; he must keep dwellers in the city on view; he must keep an ear to everything being said in the community and let the subjects know there are listeners (eavesdroppers) everywhere so subjects are constantly paranoid; he must stir up strife among his subjects, setting friends against friends, the rich against the poor; he must keep his subjects working and poor with heavy taxes so his bodyguard is affordable; he must affect extreme democracy amongst his people, where there is "dominance of women in the home, and slack control of slaves"; he must keep the mob flattered and the baser sort in his company he must keep in an obsequious spirit with mutual compliments; he must assign base deeds to the base mob. A tyrant is to have no friends and must be ready to make war so he can use this as a pretext for taxes; he must set himself as defender of his people.

**9. Of the Tallest Ears of the Corn** When Banda is released from Gweru prison in 1960 and wins a landslide election with the Malawi Congress Party in the legislative council there are a few "men of spirit" and "eminent men" he has to lop off like the "tallest ears of corn" in the field before consolidating his power as the modern day Karonga of the Amaravi peoples—especially the so-called "mission boys". There is Gilbert Pondeponde, a former member of the MCP who had gone on to form the

Christian Democratic Party in protest against Banda having been made Life President of the MCP upon his release from prison. He is killed by one of Banda's personal bodyguards or "icemen" in 1963. His body is found floating only by the head in the Mudi river in Blantyre. Banda says on national radio that Pondeponde was killed by a jealous husband with whose wife he was having an affair.

Previously, in 1962, a hot-headed young political scientist, the MCP general secretary Dunduzu Chisiza, was killed in a car accident in Namadzi. The Malawi Youth, Banda's dreaded red shirted base multitudes, the "termites" (*chiswe*), are suspected of killing Chisiza. Chisiza had been arguing with Banda on the direction of the party for some time. In 1961 as if in support of Pondeponde's Christian Democratic Party he published a pamphlet, *Africa—What Lies Ahead*, warning against a future dictatorship and calling for the Church to step up its role in politics to ensure that equality, human rights and justice would prevail in the new nation. He followed this up with *The Outlook for Contemporary Africa*, which he defiantly delivered before Banda at a symposium on African governance in 1962. A few months later he was dead. Chisiza and Pondeponde, and indeed many of the "mission boys" in the MCP such as Chipembere, preferred a communalist and subsistent economic policy marked by a grassroots democracy and diplomatic relations with communist countries such as Russia and China, and opposed Banda's preferred spectacular industrial state capitalism drummed up by his political *jouissance* as lord of the dance, and presided over by himself and an elite coterie which included former European colonialists.

By the time of Pondeponde's death, Banda has already moved to tame the church and any aspiring "mission boys" within it. His young pioneers have harassed and exiled the Jehovah's Witnesses to Mozambique for not submitting to the MCP government. They have burnt the house of Chester Katsonga, leader of the Christian Liberation Party, and brought him to publicly recant and submit to Banda's paternal authority. He uses the *Malawi News* to counter criticism from the Catholic Church who ironically accuse him of "communist tendencies"; the paper is a propaganda organ of the MCP under the direction of one of his boys and a fellow shareholder in the paper, Aleke Banda. Aleke presents Banda as a saviour, calls for a national church in Kamuzu's name and the nationalisation of all mission schools. He makes sure Banda's image and hymns of praise are more ubiquitous than those of Jesus Christ around the country. He implores Malawians not to trust foreign missionaries in their struggle against colonial rule. By 1963 all parties backed by the church are dismantled. Soon after Banda bans multi party politics as "unAfrican". The Christian Church goes silent in exchange for religious freedom—as long as the Church does not interfere in politics, Banda lets it be. The purge is thorough. It would take 30 years before a regrouped Church saw to Banda's political demise.

**10. Cabinet Crisis** Then Banda moved to lop off "eminent men" from the struggle against colonialism, especially those he owed the most, the architects of his return to Malawi as messiah, by seeming to break Aristotle's rule for

sustaining autocracy: "...abstain from all ill-treatment in all its forms and in two in particular: offences against the person and the youth. This precaution must be taken especially with regard to ambitious men: for while the money-loving chiefly resents slights which affect their money, the ambitious and the respectable resent attacks on their honour." It is a pretext that most of his young protégés fall for.

Perhaps they are as naive as he makes them out after all. Banda preys on their passions and sense of honour to sow envy and discord among them and to drive them to rushed actions fuelled by anger. As prime minister, his favours to them are uneven. He gives less than ministerial jobs such as parliamentary secretaries to big egos, including the be-gowned impresario barrister Orton Chirwa (Justice) and the hot-headed political philosopher Chisiza (Finance). He leaves out others apparently because they lack good English (Makata) or for being too young (Aleke Banda). He gives himself several ministerial portfolios and does not consult his fellow ministers on policy while interfering in theirs. He personally handpicks MPs regardless of merit.

He has low regard for the half-educated and praises the wisdom of the villager. He suspends the Youth League leader and the independent spirit Jomo Chikwakwa and splits the organisation into two more subservient organisations, the Malawi Young Pioneers and Malawi Youth, the former being his personal militia and bodyguard. He encourages people and the police Special Branch to tell on his cabinet ministers directly to him through anonymous reports. He proposes detention without trial and isolates those who oppose him in that endeavour. This is when some of his European members of government quit their posts. At every opportunity, especially showing off before his already patronising European acquaintances and notables, he calls his Malawian ministers and ambassadors "my boys", no doubt to break their confidence and deny them any honour; he admonishes them for excessive drinking and speaking to Europeans while he himself keeps European company at sumptuous banquets. He excludes them from transitional talks with the colonial government until some of them, like Chipembere and Chiume, lose their temper, much to Banda's advantage. When within a month of independence (on 26 August 1964) they call a meeting to complain of his autocratic rule and colonial paternalism Banda expels his whole cabinet and goes to war against the eminent ones saying autocracy is the "African way". Chiume, Chirwa, Chokani, Chipembere, Chibambo, Chisiza, and Bwanausi, all cabinet ministers, are sent into exile. Banda is backed in this by his powerful Western friends, colonial Police, the army, the traditional authorities and chiefs, and the Malawi Young Pioneers who side with him for advantage in a post-independence Malawi.

In the aftermath of the cabinet crisis Banda chooses less educated and less eminent ministers, "party bosses" from the Nyasaland African Congress, more seasoned to submission to authority during colonial times than the Young Turks. Soon after, Malawi becomes a republic. Making sure everybody is in view and kept at his gate, Banda builds himself a palace on top of Sanjika Hill, in Malawi's commercial capital Blantyre.

**11. Discretionary Alignment** Banda's foreign policy carries the mark of his political *jouissance* as "lord of the dance", of *Chadzunda* himself. He calls his often contradictory and transgressive foreign policy "discretionary alignment". Its aim, apparently, is to make himself and Malawi a 'mediator' in Africa's relations with the rest of the world. He will go anywhere for capital and political expediency. His relationship with fellow African heads of state is pre-emptive. He treats them with disdain, and calls them "ignorant little boys", hypocrites and cowards. He makes trade deals with colonial Mozambique, a rogue Rhodesian government and apartheid South Africa. His new capital of Lilongwe is built by the government of apartheid South Africa. He represents himself as the protector of his country from communism and yet his rule has many traits of Maoism, especially with regard to the dictatorship of the proletariat over which he presides, enforced by the Malawi Youth and Malawi Young Pioneers. While he talks about African liberation and pride in African culture, he is an Anglophile and maintains close ties with Britain and America. Malawi's economy improves dramatically amidst Banda's ostracization from the Organisation of African Unity. Some African leaders warm up to his eccentric statesmanship.

**12. Rainmaker** As mentioned before, after the marginalisation of the spirit wives, the *nyau* and the destruction of radical democracy under the Karonga and the Phiri, there came grassroots spiritual resistance led by a spiritual leader named Mbona, whose shrines can still be seen today in parts of Malawi. Mbona sought the rehabilitation and the revaluation of the *nyau* and the spirit wives into the Amaravi society by showing how "the whole", peace and harmony, could co-exist with "the exception", *nyau*, diversity and difference, in a society based on love and understanding. He taught that everyone could reach God without the mediation of the priests through play, creative or ritualised: this was the true meaning of *Gule Wamkulu* in which any Amaravi who chose could take part. Mbona brought about 'rain' (which should not always be understood as literal rain, but rather as a metaphor for love and generosity in time of want) through dance alone, putting to shame the priests who ran endless blood sacrifices of the defenceless before God. Where Mbona danced, played and slept during his flight from the Karonga priests, flowers and trees grew. That's to say community blossomed. His acts were a form of gift giving. Mbona has since communicated his message of the general economy of love through his "skull" held at his shrines. Mbona's mythical resurrection into life is the Malawian religious event akin to that of Christ uniting the 'Jew and the Gentile' through the mysterious movement of his death and resurrection — which the Amaravi peoples understand as a *Gule Wamkulu* event.

**13. Antelope** During colonial times the Amaravi event of radical democracy passed from Mbona to John Chilembwe, a larger than life Baptist preacher who died in 1915 resisting colonial injustice. Chilembwe's father

was a former Yao slave trader and his mother Nyangu was a rescued Chewa slave. As mentioned earlier *chilembwe* is also the name of the Amaravi principal *nyau* mask *Kasiya Maliro*, which is a womb disguised as an antelope. Chilembwe lived up to his name, as an agent of a radical generosity. His commitment to a radical democracy and prodigious gift giving through the ‘great play’ of the death and resurrection of Christ in the face of repressive colonial rule and its restricted economics can be read from his colourful life as the founder of the “Achewa Provident Industrial Mission”, situated in Chiradzulo. Trained at Blantyre Mission School and America, where he was inspired by abolitionists and negro advancement movements, he was a dandy, a musician, and charismatic preacher. Chilembwe left us beautiful and animating photographs to inspire fidelity to his egalitarian message.

Unlike the colonial missionaries, Chilembwe baptised everyone and promised them the “end of time” and a “future community” where truth, love and justice would prevail. When Chilembwe came to rebel against colonial government it was against a “tyranny by conventional method” akin to that described by Aristotle which Banda is most likely to have experienced in childhood: Chilembwe was protesting amongst other things the burning of his churches and schools—a colonial effort to keep his followers from thinking and in menial and manual work; unpaid labour, *thangata*, and the hut tax; the dismantling of African communal life and the ‘pacifying’ of all dissenters; the forbidding of Africans from wearing hats, shoes and speaking English before white people; and above all the continuing shedding of the blood of African soldiers, *askaris*, trafficked throughout the British empire to fight in wars whose cause they seldom understood. The reified Amaravi chiefs, now despots working for the colonials, refused to join Chilembwe’s revolution, and it was the petty bourgeois, such as John Gray Kufa, who once supported his cause who betrayed him in the end. Before his death, Chilembwe promised a ‘messiah’ who would come after him to deliver Africans from the yoke of colonialism. Chilembwe’s martyrdom and prophecy, for good and bad, is the guiding light for Banda and many of the “mission boys”.

**14. Chipembere’s Turn** Henry Masauko Blasius Chipembere was a typical mission boy who attempted to fashion himself after John Chilembwe. Chipembere translates as “rhinoceros”. His grandfather, an enterprising fishmonger and trader in ivory, apparently took that name “to strike terror in the hearts of his enemies and rivals”. Chipembere did worry Banda with his political eminence in the struggle against colonial rule. Born a Chewa-Yao in Kayoyo near Nkhotakota, his father was an Anglican deacon. He went to school in Mangochi then for a university education at Fort Hare in South Africa, where he was inspired by the pan-Africanist teachings of Marcus Garvey. Back in Nyasaland in 1954 he joined the Nyasaland African Congress to resist colonial rule. After working for the colonial government in various posts he became one of the first two Africans to be elected onto the colonial Legislative Council, the other being the young Kanyama

Chiume, a Tonga and a schoolteacher from Nkhatabay with a degree from Makerere University. Looking for a way to unite the various political factions and traditional authorities against colonial rule, Chipembere looks the world over for the messiah promised by John Chilembwe, a man who would be Malawi’s own Kwame Nkrumah. His first bet is a false start—the theatrical antics and buffoonery of recently elected NAC President General TDT Banda are enough to galvanise popular support up and down the country but fall short of impressing the colonials. Chipembere eventually finds his messiah in the London-based Nyasaland physician Dr Hastings Banda an already known pan Africanist and an effective communicator among diaspora Africans and Europeans.

**15. Banda** Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda was born Akim Kamkhwala Mtunthama Banda in Kasungu in the late 19th century. He claimed he did not know the exact year he was born but it was around 1896 when the local Chewa Chief Mwase was pacified by British troops. Banda’s official birthday was 1906. As a Chewa his childhood education included an initiation into the *nyau* secret society where the initiate was put through a gauntlet of ritualised cruelty administered by various *Gule Wamkulu* demiurges to prepare him for the trials and tribulations of life. Banda at the same time attended the newly opened primary school run by the Church of Scotland missionaries. At the age of 16 he walked to South Africa in search of further education. Banda eventually found his way to the US where he trained in political science at the University of Chicago and medicine at Maharry Medical College in Tennessee. He then went to study for another medical degree in UK so he could practice within the British Empire. Refused jobs back in Nyasaland including at Livingstonia where white nurses refused to work under a black doctor, Banda settled as a highly successful physician in London. He became known for his generosity treating many poor patients for free. He also financially supported his family and friends and political activists back home in Nyasaland. In 1953 he moved to Ghana, where his licence was revoked for a time for running an abortion clinic.

By the time he was called back to Malawi to lead the Nyasaland African Congress, Banda had been away from Nyasaland for over forty years. It was during his time abroad that Banda deepened his knowledge of politics, especially as coupled with capitalism in the West. His work with anthropologists and missionaries such as Cullen Young no doubt influenced him in creating a vision of a modern Africa out of its ancient traditions and institutions, using the ancient Greeks as a model for cultural and political transition, from the tribal to the modern. His far reaching education combined with real world experience in the capitalist West set him ahead of his young supporters in Nyasaland, whose thinking of pan-African politics was based on a limited experience of the modern world and untried ideas of a modern African communalism based on African traditions long subjugated by the colonial speculators, missionaries and adventurers. Dazzled by Banda’s intellectual range, it was Chipembere and Chiume who gave Banda autocratic

power in the Nyasaland African Congress telling those who doubted that “the doctor knows best”. It was Chipembere who threatened violence against anybody opposing Banda, and he was prepared to go to prison for it. It was Chipembere who encouraged Banda’s incendiary speeches against colonialism and the “stupid” Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Chipembere and Chiume used Banda as a ready whip against the colonials and to appease and unite traditional authorities, but only because Banda was willing — Banda had his own plans, not least informed by Aristotle and his followers which included the British imperial government with which he was in touch in London. Had Chipembere and the Young Turks known of Banda’s own political intentions and savvy they perhaps would not have allowed themselves to be seduced by his charisma, taken his money or be so generous with him. As Malawians raised by the culture of the gift perhaps Chipembere and Chiume had expected Banda to reciprocate the honour they had given him.

It turned out to be a one-way street. Banda had most probably returned from United States a changed man. He had witnessed a lynching of a black man in Tennessee and he had experienced the all-consuming virulent dance of capitalism that saw everything “solid melt into the air”. Like a witch who had broken out of the traditional Amaravi communal circles, he now saw generosity as an opportunity for gain, and he moved to capitalise on his messianic political image. Further, as a political scientist, Banda must have known the Hegelian dialectic nature of the movement of history — after the revolution, the revolution itself must be negated. In 1964, barely two months after independence, Banda pre-empted the inevitable negation of his Karonga kingship style by the new, free nation of Malawi by expelling his young ambitious cabinet before they could implement their Chilembwe-inspired utopia of radical democracy now that Banda had served their political ends.

**16. A Martyrdom Denied** When Chipembere launches a doomed guerrilla war against Banda he eventually settles for a symbolic uprising modelled on John Chilembwe. As a last stand Chipembere marches with 200 men on the Malawi army headquarters in Zomba, but his army is soon scattered. Even here Banda pre-empted Chipembere. He denies him martyrdom. With a “fatherly pardon”, Banda sends him into exile in America in humiliating black face, apparently to disguise his identity on the plane. A contrite Chipembere resurfaces in Tanzania soon after, begging Banda to take him back. Banda tells him he has reached a point of no return. Chipembere would die of diabetes (some say poisoning) in 1974 in the United States, a doctoral politics student, no doubt having grasped where Banda’s political cynicism might have come from. The fate of the rest of the Young Turks after the cabinet crisis is equally tragic: The gung-ho Yatuta Chisiza goes into exile in Tanzania then trains in martial arts and guerrilla fighting in China. He comes back via Zambia with an army of ten men and attempts to start a coup d’état from Mwanza in 1967. He is killed by the Malawi army in a two-hour fire fight trying to enter Malawi. His body goes on public

display in the north. A penitent Chirwa goes to Blantyre to try to get an audience with Banda. He arms himself with traditional medicines for self-protection sourced from a witchdoctor in Mulanje but is beaten up by Banda’s ice-men and sent into exile in Tanzania where he ekes out a living teaching law. He starts a political party, the Malawi Freedom Movement. Years later, in 1981, he is kidnapped visiting Eastern Zambia by Malawi security forces. They say he was trying to enter Malawi. Chirwa is tried in a traditional court in Malawi, found guilty of high treason, and remains on death row till his death in 1990. Kanyama Chiume goes to Tanzania for exile where he writes and publishes numerous books. He returns to Malawi after Banda’s fall in 1994. He serves briefly as the director of the Malawi National Library and Malawi Book Service before retiring to America where he dies of depression in 2007.

**17. Elephant** In 1970, Banda is mounted on the back of the elephant masked structure at the crossroads to Mchinji and thus formerly made a post-Karonga titular chief. It is in essence a desperate attempt to limit his power, coming all too late. As a self-declared modern day Karonga, *Ngwazi*, he had by then already marginalised the Malawian matrilineal system and its gift economy and replaced them with a pseudo-Christian patriarchy and a spectacular Amaravi society driven by the market economy under the slogan “Unity, Loyalty, Obedience and Discipline”. Banda’s seeming political madness, virulent violence and his adoption of capitalism over the local matrilineal gift economies following his assumption of the Karonga kingship political strategy has a working rationale: a feverish capitalist economy is a perfect accompaniment to a tyranny that thrives on the disruption of cultural difference and radical democracy. His Karonga takes the shape of a ready course: the caprice and arbitrariness of British imperial rule. Those who protest are threatened to be “meat for crocodiles”, an allusion to one of the Karonga’s traditional methods of human sacrifice practiced in pre-colonial times. Many are detained without trial. As under colonial rule, all traditional authority is subject to Banda’s rule and acts as an instrument of his political and economic objectives in a blatant act of primitive accumulation. Banda’s word is the law.

He runs Malawi like a personal plantation and he boasts about that at state banquets. He says he is the will of the people, an expression of their sovereignty — that is to say their *nyau*. He turns former colonial lands into national farms which are in fact his own. His wealth hidden in plain sight under the company Press Holdings whose profits he invests in South African property and banks in Switzerland. While enveloping Malawi in a new Western Presbyterian patriarchy Banda pays lip service to the Amaravi matriarchy by calling himself *Nkhoswe* (uncle) Number 1, promising women empowerment and protection. That really means all the women and youth belong to him personally in a bold declaration of paternalism last seen during the days of “the one who packs heads of the dead”. Thus the Amaravi primal father finds a living reincarnation once more — this time in the equally diminutive, angry, petulant and impulsive Banda. Banda does not keep

any friends, as Aristotle advises. He places trust only in himself, and his “official hostess”, Mama Kadzamira, and her seemingly dopey uncle John Tembo.

His political rallies — the only political gatherings allowed — are accompanied by his *mbumba*, dancing women who wear his sneering frozen photographed face all over their bodies in colourful java prints and who sing his praises as conqueror, Messiah and “wise leader”. These women are a live “cinema of attractions”, a form of modern day *Gule Wamkulu*. Banda flickers and bounces off their gyrating bodies like *Chadzunda*, declaring Banda ‘lord of the dance’, not for the sovereignty of the people but for political expediency, self-aggrandisement and capital. During the independence celebrations school children in Kamuzu Stadium roll out his surly frozen photographed face from the stands in carefully choreographed cinematic swipes. On Soche Hill in Blantyre three words in the pan-Africanist colours of black, red and green flicker in succession: Long Live Kamuzu. It looks like *nyau* but it’s not real *nyau*. This is the Amaravi culture as mere representation. Banda’s spectacular cinematic dispositive comes complete with membership cards, t-shirts and badges which bear his name and are a form of tax, as they are compulsory. The same dancing frozen photograph hangs on the walls of every building and office, public or private, keeping everyone in ‘view’ of Kamuzu. The gyrating and ululating women sing *Zonse zimenezi ndiza Kamuzu Banda*, “Everything belongs to Kamuzu Banda.”

**18. Elephant II** To keep his civil service further under control and in crippling poverty he cuts their allowances and expenditure on social services in the name of frugality. He publicly lectures them on how to dress: no mini dresses or trousers for women. Men are to keep their hair short. He also imparts other advice on personal morality and continence. The policing of dress and manners up and down the country becomes a way of keeping the nation “at his gates”. He gives contracts to big business and multinationals such as Lonrho. Money is spent on spurious monuments, office buildings, palaces, rallies and his pet school Kamuzu Academy. As in colonial times, to keep people busy and servile the dreaded colonial *malimidwe* farming methods such as the time-consuming bunding are re-introduced. During the presidential crop inspection tour a portion of the harvest and money is given to the president as gifts. The districts compete on who gives the most to the Life President. Anticipation of these tours keeps everybody working throughout the year and too docile to rebel as it did during the colonial times. It is a crime if your garden is left unattended and Banda sees it. Banda traffics his *mbumba* amongst the elite, from district to district, as if a ‘gift giver’ in ongoing political potlatches, that see family ties relaxed and traditional dances instrumentalised as political propaganda. The now marginalised Amaravi matriarchy is symbolised by an ever-silent official hostess, Mama Kadzamira, who accompanies him everywhere; an Amaravi spirit wife in exile. *Nyau* demiurge, the *Gule Wamkulu*, are reduced to a licence for political violence and amusement during Banda’s exhausting ongoing political rallies and tours.

**19. Strife** Like Karonga and the colonial rulers before, Banda deploys class antagonism as a political weapon. He employs lumpen proletariat, penniless youths from the villages, the Malawi Youth and Malawi Young Pioneers to reinforce his autocratic rule. It is these people with “nothing to lose” that Banda claims to be working for. During Banda’s political rallies these young enforcers take over Malawi society like *Pinimbira* and antagonise the civil service and traditional authorities, with Banda himself as the lord of their misrule. Banda kept his civil service in check that way and by constantly shuffling his educated personnel who now worked under his watchful portrait everywhere, up and down the country. Citizens are encouraged to turn on each other, family members against each other, as the whole family, even tribe, was punished if one of its members was found to be involved in subversion. He denies Europeans and Asians automatic citizenship by stirring up racial tensions. He presents himself as the bridge between the classes, Africans on one side and Asians and Europeans on the other, but in fact he follows Aristotle’s advice for the tyrant “to thoroughly embrace” the “strong side” which in the modern Malawian economy are Asian traders and European expatriates. He entertains racial hierarchies left behind by the colonials. Only white people can teach at his beloved Kamuzu Academy or head his Press Holdings. He has many white expatriates working as farm managers and heading hospitals, the army and the police. Asians are made the trading class in cities and town trading centres. His own tribe, the Chewa, as under Karonga, are elevated to the ruling tribe while other tribes serve. Special Branch eavesdroppers are everywhere and one does not know who is listening. Education is basic, covering farming, utility and manual work. Academics who attempt raise a questioning spirit among the students and populations are jailed or sent into exile. The Malawian poet and academic Jack Mapanje became world famous in exile writing thinly veiled disguised verses criticising Banda’s rule. Banda’s elite school Kamuzu Academy has an alien syllabus rendering education at the school superfluous. Banda calls the youth “born frees” for political expediency but in fact this too is mere representation: he taxes them through party membership cards, free manual work at school and during ‘youth week’ they are involved in infrastructure work, repairing and cleaning dusty roads. He re-introduces the notorious colonial hut tax. Government messengers and the Malawi Youth enforce hut tax: one often sees men running away from their huts when they swoop on a village collecting tax. Under Banda there is heavy censorship of the dissemination of information: there is no television. There is only one radio station, the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, whose transmitter is a donation from apartheid South Africa, and two newspapers, both belonging to the Malawi Congress Party. He subjects the Malawian political imaginary of Chilembwe and Mbona to his Karonga designs: they two were a prelude to his second coming as the Amaravi messiah. His mother tongue Chichewa is imposed as the second official language after English. He deploys Byzantine state bureaucracy to bamboozle the populace. He shows his admiration for valour in the theatre of war through lengthy

speeches on the Zulu warrior Shaka. Every development project is named Kamuzu.

**20. Preservation of Monarchy** According to Aristotle, when kingships are destroyed it is often from within and in two ways: “when those who participate in the royal rule form factions among themselves, the other when kings try to run affairs too tyrannically, claiming powers more than they are legally entitled to.” Banda appears to have paid attention to this advice. By the end of the 70s his Karonga life presidency is well established. It is graced with visits from Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom in 1979. By the 80s his rule tends towards greater moderation: “The fewer those spheres of activity where the king’s power is sovereign, the longer the regime will inevitably survive undiminished. They themselves become less like masters and more like their subjects in character, and therefore arouse less envy among them.” His speeches during his crop inspection tours have become mundane, more like stand-up comedy. He allows his officials to be criticised by Mai Manjankhosi of the League of Malawi Women. He frequently watches himself and his defeated adversaries parodied by the *Gule Wamkulu*. He is ever ready to free female political prisoners after criticism from his European friends. He passes on the running of the country to his right hand man John Tembo. It’s a break with Aristotle rule that should the tyrant choose a favourite they “should not be of bold character”. Banda could simply be getting old. Tembo is shrewder than Banda realises. Tembo gradually isolates Banda from the general population until he loses touch with the everyday life of most of his grassroots supporters. Banda’s opponents such as Muwalo, Mpakati and Gwede are quietly dealt with by the traditional courts.

**21. The Fall** Feeling secure as Karonga in the early 80s, Banda entertains the thought of multi-party democracy, probably thinking of the British constitutional monarchy. He calls a meeting to discuss this possibility with his cabinet ministers. He panics during the meeting, seeing enthusiasm for multi-party democracy and no reverence for the status quo amongst his ministers. His nasty Karonga side takes hold once more. He dismisses the meeting and sets out to marginalise those who had shown enthusiasm for his suggestion for multiparty politics. In 1984, three of these ministers and an MP, Dick Matenje, Twaibu Sangala, Aaron Gadama and David Chiwanga are killed in a mysterious accident in Mwanza. It is the beginning of the end of his rule. Five years later, the Berlin Wall comes down and with it Western support for the so-called Cold War dictators. Sanctions ensue from donor countries including the United States and the United Kingdom. Banda resists, but a papal visit to the country reenergises the Catholic Church, and the Bishops write a pastoral letter mobilising popular sentiment against him. In 1994 Banda is deposed after losing a referendum and a multiparty election. He hands over power gracefully and retires saying that’s the way politics goes. By 1997 he is dead, having spent the rest of his days being wheelchair to court to answer to his political crimes, including the murder of the three ministers and the MP in Mwanza. He was acquitted for a

lack of evidence. A photo of the architect of his messianic return to Malawi, Masauko Chipembere, was found in his room. In the grainy black and white photograph the fugitive Chipembere in the bush in Mangochi wears a trench coat and carries an umbrella like movie star.

**22. A Man Half-Wicked** For Aristotle, a tyranny which simulates kingship delivers at least a partially evil man, and perhaps this is why Banda remains an ambivalent figure in Malawian history: “If he acts thus, his rule is bound to be not only better and more enviable (he will not be hated and feared, and his rule will be exercised over better men, not men reduced to impotent submission), but also more lasting; and he himself will have either right of disposition or at least a half-good disposition with respect to virtue, a man not wicked but half-wicked.” Banda is loved and loathed in equal measure. Those who knew Banda as a person say that his cynical political image was just a political tactic. He exuded a lot of “dignity” and “refined manners”. With regard to the indulgence of the body he was no “tipsy man who is easily got at” — he didn’t drink. He was a vegetarian who chose his food for good health and not luxury. As an Elder of the Church of Scotland he showed himself “more obviously earnest than anybody else”, but his religion was driven by accommodation rather than blind dogmatism. It is most likely that what people saw in Banda as Christian piety was merely an inherited Chewa altruism that was then compensated in *Gule Wamkulu*. Banda showed a typical Chewa disregard for material wealth and groundedness by travelling in an old Land Rover, although a Rolls Royce was always on standby in his convoy. He disdained corruption and refrained from grandiose projects. He looked after his relatives, patients and friends. As long as politics was not involved, he encouraged enjoyment. Pubs were everywhere where people could dance to the Rumba of Franco, Sam Mangwana and Mbilia Mbel. His braggadocio before the colonials and his adversaries hid a man who lacked self-confidence and lived in constant fear. He was in fact a man of extreme generosity and good intentions who placed the future of the Malawi nation in “born frees”. Some colonials called him “probably the most remarkable man in Africa today.”

When he was deposed from power at multi-party general elections all public works named Kamuzu were named after other political heroes, mainly his adversaries; Kamuzu Highway for instance was changed to Masauko Chipembere Highway. Kamuzu Stadium was renamed Chichiri Stadium. By the early 21st century, Masauko Chipembere Highway had reverted back to Kamuzu Highway, so did Chichiri Stadium and other such projects. The Malawi pan-Africanist flag which bore a partial red sun as if paying homage to Banda’s politics of “discretionary alignment” was changed to one bearing a full white sun after Banda’s rule came to an end, but it quickly reverted back to the red half-sun after popular nationwide protests against the change. Recently various monuments have been elected around Malawi honouring him as the “father of the nation”, including a large mausoleum bearing his embalmed remains in Lilongwe. The monuments have become the loci of religious pilgrimage and political protest

for the now retired Malawi Youth and Young Pioneers. All the while prominent historical figures such as Chipembere have entered the pantheon of *nyau* demiurges where they play second fiddle to Banda's *Njobvu*, "lord of the dance". But what real modern political imaginary does Malawi have when not entertaining and honouring tyrants? What is the 'end' of the Amaravi history? Like Banda we will have to look within and beyond the Amaravi pre-colonial history to find possible answers.

Samson Kambalu, 2020