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Violence and ‘othering’ in colonial and postcolonial Africa. Case study: Banda’s Malawi

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ABSTRACT *This paper takes binary epistemological and ontological configurations and subjects them to analytical review within the broad context of colonial and postcolonial states in Africa. During a process of conceptual interrogation, an ‘othering’ trend – and the violence by which the trend too often is accompanied – is traced to their colonial origins, and it is argued that the trend has been passed forward from a colonial to a postcolonial era. The paper’s thematic trajectory not least is motivated by a warning issued by Marcus Ramogale, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University of Venda, against repeating in post-apartheid South Africa “the scourge of conquest and domination”. Ramogale observes, “a culture of domination is self-perpetuating and requires the presence of the ‘other’ to dominate, whether the ‘other’ is white or African”. He further asserts “the challenge thrust on us by the responsibilities that come with power is to use it differently to those who once oppressed us” (Ramogale 2005). Having first embarked on a theoretical-conceptual exploration of contested spaces and silenced voices in colonial and postcolonial Africa, the paper narrows its focus to a Malawian case study, with particular reference to the Banda regime. The first section of the paper elaborates the conceptual framework and overall argumentation within which is set a Malawian case study. The paper’s methodology primarily is literature and theory based. However, the Malawian section incorporates an element of qualitative research in the form of interviews conducted by Domoka Lucinda Manda in June–July 2002 with civil society activists in Blantyre and academics on the Zomba campus of the University of Malawi.*

1. Introduction

1.1. Conceptual points of departure and lines of argument

The paper draws on aspects of postcolonial theory, notably its critique of binary reasoning in the form, for instance, of simple dichotomies between white and black, modern and traditional, alien and indigenous, developed and underdeveloped. Binary logic suppresses ‘ambiguous or interstitial spaces’ (Ashcroft et al. 2000: 23) between the opposed categories, thus excluding hybridity from substantive

consideration. In this context of critique, the notion of 'transitional' also is problematic given that it is not a category in and by itself, but rather a condition of *becoming* 'modern', 'developed', and so on. Deployment of 'transitional' *qua* ontological category thus feeds into a binary configuration of 'self' and 'other' since the 'other' is undergoing a process of becoming the 'self'. Thus, like 'modern' and 'traditional', 'transitional' derives from a binarized and teleological trajectory of 'lead' and 'residual' terms (Mamdani 1996: 9).

Postcolonial theory traces back to imperialism deployment of binary logic both as an epistemological device and as an ontology, which posits a seminal dichotomy between 'civilized' and 'uncivilized' conditions of being. Given their imperialist derivation, binary oppositions *ipso facto* are embedded in a process whereby the conquest and appropriation of territorial space then is affirmed by the imposition of cultural categories of 'superior' and 'inferior'.

This said, postcolonial theory does not axiomatically endorse the 'reverse discourse' of cultural nationalism which substitutes the icon of an essentialist African culture for the scientific modernity of Europe. On the contrary, cultural nationalism is critiqued on the grounds that it replicates imperialist processes of cultural reification and binarization (Appiah 1992: 108; Kanneh 1998: 40). It is argued that by retaining – in order to invert – imperialism's binary formula, cultural nationalism 'bases its reasoning on the 'either A or non-A, but not both A and non-A' logic of the excluded middle' (Masolo 1994: 249).

Illustrating the tendency critiqued above, Chinweizu, for instance, firstly argues a case for eliminating the authority that alien traditions exercise over the African, and secondly, a case against cluttering African culture with unnecessary borrowings. He further asserts that a central tenet of constructing new nations within territorial borders inherited from imperial dispensations is 'the willed enactment into history of some idea or myth of a nation' (1987: 217). Abraham adds an explicitly political dimension to processes of cultural nation building with his definition of culture 'as that knock-down rhetoric by means of which political objectives are sold' (1962: 37).

To the extent, then, that cultural nationalism combines essentialist features with instrumentalist objectives, it can be conceptualized as the handmaiden of postcolonial political power. Both Chinweizu and Abraham emphasise innate qualities of an African (sub-continent wide) culture that is utilised to facilitate nation building. Their arguments hinge on the notion of a pre-existing African culture, relatively free of exogenous influence, which can and – or so they contend – should be re-accessed in order to create culturally and politically distinct African nations within the wider context of Pan-African unity. In this thesis, European culture by-and-large is conceptualized as 'other' to an African 'self'.

By contrast, Said – whose *Culture and Imperialism* has been described as a compelling critique of post-imperial regression into combative forms of nationalist ideology (Gandhi 1998: 108) – defines culture as 'a matter of ... appropriations, common experiences and interdependencies of all kinds among different cultures' (Said 1993: 262–263). From Said's definition can be inferred a concept of cultural hybridity. This notion is elaborated by Bhabha as a 'third space of enunciation',

which is contradictory and ambivalent, and, as such, challenges the notion of culture as 'a homogenizing, unifying force.' He further avers that the colonial and postcolonial provenance of this third space may in time become the 'cutting edge' of 'national, *anti-nationalist* histories' (1994: 37–38, emphasis added).

Bhabha's thesis of the (potential for) dialectical reorganization of culture within a hybrid space of enunciation is instructive in the light of a comparison between accultured and transcultured conditions. A condition of acculturation is signified by the 'vision of the vanquished' or the subordinate's image of the dominant culture and his or her disempowered place within it. Conversely, transculturation connotes reciprocal interaction between cultures operating as approximate equals, and refers not only to different national cultures but also to elite and popular cultures within the same national space (Burke 1997: 158). Whereas accultured hybridization perpetuates – in a postcolonial era – the logic of the excluded middle, given that colonial processes of domination and subordination are replicated, transcultured hybridity codifies 'the liberatory signs of a free people of the future' (Bhabha 1994: 38), and thus makes a significant break with the coercive 'othering' of colonialism.

2. Colonial and postcolonial symmetries

In light of the comparison made above between accultured and transcultured forms of hybridity, it seems evident that – particularly during an era of developmental dictatorships in Africa – many postcolonial states fall into the former category. In such cases, quite irrespective of an official discourse of African (cultural) nationalism, a majority of the population are condemned to endure the vision of the vanquished. Ngũgĩ, for instance, writes eloquently of colonial–postcolonial symmetries in Kenya. Both eras feature a litany of staged enactments of the state's power to reward or punish, in the process foreclosing on the 'performance space' available to the people (1998: 37–69). Exclusionary practices are enacted by colonial–postcolonial policies of forced removals whereby dissident or ethnic others are relocated to a captive space on which the state, or colonizing culture, is able to inscribe its own version of legibility.

Ngũgĩ traces to slavery and colonialism the seemingly senseless violence that grotesquely disfigures postcolonial landscapes. Colonialism, he argues, reproduced patterns learnt from slavery, just as postcolonialism reproduces patterns learnt from colonialism. He cites as examples an elite habit of divide and rule passed forward by colonialism, accompanied by an uncritically reproduced notion of warring tribes, mixed with internalized racism and concomitant devaluation of African lives. This indeed is a recipe for '... the spectacle of televised, state initiated programmes of ethnic cleansing' (1997: 142).

In similar vein, Šóyínká argues that postcolonial violence derives its impulse from pathologies of self-alienation and self-hatred, which carve out '... a featureless landscape of rubble, of a traumatized populace and roaming canines among unburied cadavers' (Šóyínká 1999: 12). In stark contrast to the valorisation of liberation wars against colonialism, no poems are written to commemorate landscapes of postcolonial violence; no collective memory of loss is given enduring form by

granite cenotaphs for the fallen. Instead 'the air is bereft of the solace of its lament.' How, asks Šóyínká, can a lament emerge from an atrocity? 'An atrocity is the very silencing of the human voice' (ibid).

A combination of elements from Ngũgĩ's and Šóyínká's analyses of state violence uncovers a postcolonial equation in which the colonized 'other' transmogrifies into a hated 'self', which then is projected on to an imagined 'other'. Mamdani elaborates this equation. Reflecting on the origins of genocide in Rwanda, he summarises as follows the destructive trail mapped by binary pairs.

The political world set in motion by the modern state and modern colonialism generates subaltern identities endlessly, in binary pairs. For every sergeant, there is a subaltern, for every cat a rat, and for every settler a native ... To change the world, we need to break out of the worldview of not only the cat, but also the rat, not only the settler but also the native. Unless we can break out of the worldview of the rat, postcolonialism will remain a purgatory punctuated by non-revolutionary violence (Mamdani 2001: 8).

While Malaŵi, this paper's case study, was one among a number of post-independence states that followed a capitalist economic path, this paper does not argue that socialist regimes necessarily escaped binary configurations and attendant coercive *modus operandi*. On the contrary, as Quayson notes, postcolonial states across the ideological spectrum resembled their colonial forebears as regards highly centralized concentrations of power in tandem with cults of enlightened, even infallible leadership. Quayson points to the 'strange fact' that 'both Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Kamuzu Banda of Malaŵi carefully cultivated a personality cult from different ideological positions.' He further links a postcolonial leadership cult with a precolonial notion of 'culture hero', which was utilised by leaders of nationalist movements to legitimate a post-independence monopoly of power (Quayson 2000: 15–17).

While Banda's Malaŵi in a number of respects resembled other (*de facto* or *de jure*) one party states in Africa, an unusual aspect of his leadership – illustrated in detail below – was his culturally schizophrenic combination of ardent Britishness with a cult of personality bordering on an assumption of immortality. To this extent, Banda's Malaŵi is emblematic of an extreme version of accultured hybridity, well illustrated by Malaŵian scholar and poet, Jack Mapanje, in his description of the backdrop against which his arrest 'on suspicion' took place.

The arrest, when it came, felt like some stupid ancestral saying come true. An idle fragment of colonial superstition, probably invented by the British, says 'when Friday falls on payday or payday falls on Friday, the world grinds to a halt and begins to spin in the opposite direction!' The locals held on to this belief long after the colonials had left the political arena, although nobody really believed such incredulities ever happened. Today is Friday. Payday. Anthony Nazombe and I have just had fish and chips for lunch at Gymkhana Club, Zomba. We are ... joking about the papier-mache Queen Victoria, who used to arbitrate over the golf, tennis, and football trophies in the bars of Gymkhana Clubs once upon a time. Where has she been moved to? Who dared move that precious symbol? We are rudely interrupted (Mapanje 1997b: 53–54).

In sum, this paper's theoretical framework associates the logic of the excluded middle with drastic shrinkage of cultural and political spaces. Since cultures are

neither monolithic nor impermeable, the paper further argues that postcolonial dictatorships enable imposition of the 'vision of the vanquished' on a majority of a given state's population, thus generating an accultured version of hybridity. Since cultural and political spaces *ipso facto* are reduced, the gated and patrolled spaces of colonialism are reproduced by postcolonial enactments of power. As Ngũgĩ observes when comparing the postcolonial state with its colonial progenitor: 'The postcolonial state has the same fear of the uncontrolled space' (1998: 64).

3. Gated and patrolled spaces: colonial Malaŵi

The region of east-southern Africa named – after independence – Malaŵi, was declared a British protectorate in 1891 with Sir Harry Johnston as the first Commissioner and Consular General. Johnston's brief was to quickly and effectively establish British sovereignty over the region, lay the framework of administrative control, exact and generate revenue, and attempt to provide some measure of justice in determining the legitimacy of settler claims to land obtained in the short period of European penetration (Williams 1978: 54).

However, the first objective was to establish the legitimacy of British rule, which proved to be a difficult task. For instance, Johnston encountered stern resistance from the Yao people who inhabit the border (with German East Africa, later Tanzania) region. The Germans, too, were faced with rejection of their demand that the Yao voluntarily surrender. In response to a German ultimatum, a Yao leader wrote back (in Kiswahili) "'... you are God's creature just as I am ... Yet listen, I do not say to you that you should obey me; for I know that you are a free man ... As for me, I will not come to you, and if you are strong enough, then come and fetch me ...'" (Onoge 1977: 41). The Yao people are exemplars, not only of resistance narrative imbued with egalitarianism but also of ethno-linguistic space torn apart by imperial cartography. As punishment for their perceived sins, south of the border the land was overrun by the British crown, north of the border, by German troops.

A second obstacle triumphantly overcome by the colonial administration was that of 'providing a set of laws that would express the sense of justice of the colonial authorities and would carry some of the moral sanction of traditional custom.' This problematic – as Williams puts it – arose from 'the fact that on some points at least, notions of justice and equity differed between the new rulers and their subjects' (1978: 54–55). Not the least of the points of difference centred on laws designed to entrench the power of a small class of European settlers. Thus, a process of tribe invention was of primary importance in consolidating colonial rule. As Mamdani explains, the legal system of colonialism created a dual system of state law and customary law. The latter ensured that 'tribal' leadership accommodated state requirements by either selectively reconstituting tribal authority or by imposing tribal authority where none had existed before (1996: 17).

A third hurdle encountered by the British was that of making the colony economically productive enough both to maintain itself financially and to supply the metropole with an adequate modicum of profit. The colonial administration overcame this hurdle in the following ways. Firstly, the alienation of African farmers from their (non-profitable) smallholdings, and their replacement by settler-owned

commercial estates in which Africans were utilised as cheap or – in cases of forced labour – unpaid labour was a strategy geared to provide a colony with much of its revenue. Secondly, in generating the necessary supply of labour for commercial estates, poll and hut tax proved efficacious in foreclosing on African options, giving peasants no choice but to work on European-owned estates so that they could pay their taxes. Thirdly, legal engineering facilitated acquisition of African land. The journal of the Blantyre Mission highlights the plight of Africans in this regard.

At present with the exception of a few – a very few – natives who have got grants of land from the government or have secured them by purchase or lease, no native has any security of tenure for himself or his crops. If he has a house or garden on an estate owned by a European, he may be moved any day after certain notice, or he may have to make such arrangements as regards to rent or services to make it suitable for him to move elsewhere. If he is on government land he may have the land he has settled on transferred to some private purchaser; and though the deed of transfer secures his rights, yet the new conditions are such as he will no doubt prefer to move elsewhere. In neither case is there permanency of occupation guaranteed to him which alone can induce him to put his surroundings on a permanent basis. He will not build a permanent house nor will he care to plant and cultivate slow maturing plants, crops or trees (Williams 1978: 68).

A fourth hurdle was the contentious issue of how much – if any – education should be provided for Africans, and of what kind. It was decided that as long as law and order were maintained, all questions of education should be left to the missionaries (Pike 1968: 95). As Williams notes, the Scottish missionaries were eager to produce Christians who at the same time were skilled artisans. Africans who were offered a mission education ‘quickly appreciated the merits of a scheme which, with some adaptability and hard work on their part, would give them access to favoured positions in the social order introduced by colonial rule’ (1978: 78–79). However, missionary education of Africans had unforeseen consequences. It soon became apparent to Africans that employment opportunities were limited. Displaced from their land and unable to pay their taxes, many migrated south to the mines of central and South Africa. Additionally, most Europeans were hostile to missionary education policies, the effects of which threatened to confuse and complicate a reassuringly clear and simple distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’. As Afolayan points out, British educationalists on the whole preferred to keep education for Africans at primary level. He suggests that colonial governments by-and-large provided only very basic and limited education in order to forestall the emergence of a western educated and literate populace able to challenge colonial authority on its own terms (1997: 51). It thus may be inferred that retention and maintenance of ‘alien’ and ‘indigenous’ cultural binaries was essential to colonial self-interest.

4. Ambiguities of anti-colonial nationalism in Malaŵi

Malaŵi’s independence from colonial rule was negotiated by an elite faction dominated by one man – notionally on behalf of the excluded majority of Malaŵians. In this it did not significantly differ from other transitions to independence in

Africa. What needs to be emphasized in Malaŵi's case, however, is the extraordinary dominance of that one man: Hastings Kamuzu Banda.

Like many nationalist movements in Africa, the origins of the postcolonial ruling party, the Malaŵi Congress Party (MCP) grew out of a nationalist response to colonialism. However, the main impetus behind the Congress movement was provided by its resistance to a proposal to create a federation, encompassing the colonies of Northern and Southern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland (later Malaŵi), for the economic and strategic advantage of the metropole. At the time federation was proposed, Congress leadership largely was drawn from a very small number of educated men who, according to Williams, had little intuitive or ideological sympathy with the poorly educated peasant farmers who formed a majority of the population (1978: 116). Additionally, the leaders were too young and inexperienced to convincingly convert traditional leaders or elders to their cause. In the eyes of the young leaders, Banda – then resident in Britain – had a number of compelling leadership qualities. Firstly, his age and his relative eminence (he was a medical doctor) would appeal to the elders. Secondly, his anticipated success would gain the respect of the young militants in the movement. Thirdly, his fluent command of the English language and his presumed familiarity with the manners and mores of the metropolitan culture would enable him to negotiate with the colonisers as their equal. Finally, he was well known to virulently oppose the idea of federation. It is important to note at this point that the young leaders were personally unfamiliar with Banda. Williams speculates that they imagined he would make a useful – respected and articulate – figurehead who then would be willing to stand down, leaving to younger men executive leadership of the postcolony. If so, they were deluding themselves. Prior to his return, Banda stated that he would take up the banner of the indigenous nationalist movement 'only if he was guaranteed the presidency of the Congress party, the right to hand-pick the executive and extensive powers to run the nationalist movement in whatever way he thought right' (ibid.: 174).

As soon as Banda had been welcomed and accepted as party leader, he moved rapidly to consolidate his power and transform the MCP into his personal system of control. In this, he was fortuitously assisted by his gift for oratory. Among other strategies, he proposed the creation of various mass appendages to the party, including a women's league and a youth league.

The nationalist movement, driven by a single-minded commitment to the achievement of independence, cultivated an intolerable political culture characterized by hero-worship, centralized authority structures, exclusiveness, and intimidation of potential critics (Phiri & Ross 1998: 10).

Banda combined paradoxical qualities of ardent nationalism and populism on the one hand, with being more British than the British on the other. For example, he always spoke in English with an interpreter in attendance (Lawson 2000: 4). 'Even on the hottest days he dressed as he would in England, in the familiar three-piece suit and black homburg hat, with a beige raincoat to keep off the dust and brown leather gloves' (Short 1974: 92). Paradoxically, as Short further

comments, 'far from detracting from his popular appeal this served rather to heighten it by placing him on a par with the European ruling class' (1974: 92).

Thus, as indicated above, Banda was in an excellent position to rule in the style of a colonial governor: better yet, without even the moderate restraints imposed on colonial administrations by parliament in Westminster. He revelled in the mystique associated with British culture and education, plus the added advantage of his indigenous origins. Without the constraints of a watchful metropolitan attitude to the state coffers, all it took for Banda to reduce Malaŵi to the status of his personal fiefdom and pocketbook was sufficient ruthlessness – a quality he had in abundance.

Indeed, he dominated postcolonial state and society to such an extent that the name 'Banda' became synonymous with the name 'Malaŵi'. It is argued in the next section that Banda used his extraordinary degree of power to systematically deprive the Malaŵian people of an open political system and an open society. He drained the landscape of independent life, and endeavoured to assemble all voices in the society into a single obedient chorus behind his own voice. In Malaŵi, a 'binary pair' infiltrated almost every aspect of people's lives: put simply, you were either for Banda or against him.

5. Extreme foreclosure: postcolonial Malaŵi

President Banda deployed a number of means to achieve his desired objective. Information in this paper is restricted to his primary methods, detailed in the following order: statutory engineering; would-be hegemonic persuasion embodied in a personality cult; widespread coercion and in particular, the resort to terror tactics. Ngũgĩ describes an aspect of the generic postcolonial state (of which Banda's Malaŵi arguably is an extreme version): '... the state tries to impose silence on the population as a whole. Quite often the right to organise has been taken away, and people are not allowed to gather freely to voice their thoughts' (1998: 27).

Crucial in the imposition of a culture of silence is draconian control of the media. To achieve this, Banda dismantled the liberal constitution (Britain's departing and profoundly ambivalent gift to her colony), using an increasingly intimidated legislative to rubber-stamp his construction of an authoritarian dispensation. A key example is the Censorship and Control of Entertainment Act (1968) that made it a criminal, even treasonable, offence to publish anything likely to undermine the authority of or public confidence in the government. The Act also regulated, controlled and minimized freedom of speech and entertainment. The Censorship Board created by the Act controlled 'the making and exhibition of cinema pictures, the importation, production, dissemination and possession of undesirable publications, pictures and records' (Cullen 1994: 18). The Act also placed Malaŵi's only radio station under state ownership. Yet, as Chimombo argues, Banda achieved more than merely an oppressive legal structure. He also managed to get parliamentarians to censor themselves. 'Parliamentary debate was not even attempted. This was not only because of the ... loss of reflective ability by

parliamentarians but also because it was dangerous to make a statement that might have been misinterpreted' (Chimombo 1997: 31).

It is important to note that this extraordinarily pervasive piece of constitutional engineering also severely endangered academic freedom. The university community, like the press, was under constant surveillance with a significant number of academics eventually landing in detention for unspecified acts of 'sedition.' Furthermore, school and university curricula were limited to teaching and research (for publication purposes) approved by the President himself. A Malaŵian scholar sums up the effect on academe of Banda's policies and attitudes:

... there were certain subjects in the university that could not be taught by Presidential decree. For example, political science could not be taught ... we would only do political science as part of history. Professor [—], for example, was in the political science department and was allowed to teach the history of political thought – but even then, what would be taught was subject to government approval ... you were not allowed to teach anything about African politics or if you did, only in small doses. Dr. Banda did not like the writings of Julius Nyerere, and a few of his books were actually removed or banned ... Sociology was another discipline that was perceived as a threat. At one time, the department had only one staff member – the others had been detained. Professor [—] and Professor [—] had been detained because they thought we, as a department, were teaching ideologies that were against his own ideologies. For example, one of the allegations was that the department of sociology were propagating socialism. So, the place was seen to be a threat ... many of our experienced staff members were detained ...
... secondary schools were also taught a revised history of Malaŵi, which put Dr. Banda in the forefront of the struggle against colonial rule – but in his attitude and his policies, he simply perpetuated what had begun under the colonial government (interview with Professor A.)¹

The same scholar, referring to research and publication in Banda-era Malaŵi observed that:

... to do any research related to politics or anything to do with human beings in Malaŵi ... you had to be cleared by the National Research Council, you had to be cleared by the police and you had to be cleared by a series of other people. So it was much easier for the natural scientists to do research because they confined themselves to the laboratory. But anything that involved interaction with people was looked at with suspicion (ibid.).

As Mchombo comments, postcolonial Malaŵi 'came to attain a rare and dubious distinction of shifting from a one-party to a one-man state'. Further, 'the post-independence period in Malaŵi was marked by the extraordinary fact that all aspects of political power came to be concentrated in the hands of one individual' (Mchombo 1998: 21). Having noted this attribution to Malaŵi of 'a rare and dubious distinction', it remains to be said that Malaŵi's experience of constitutional

¹ References without date are to interviews conducted by Domoka Lucinda Manda, for details see References, section (b). The interviewer has deleted from this quotation names of people who were not directly involved in the research and who therefore cannot be assumed to have provided their agreement to be identified by name.

engineering fits to a nicety Okoth-Ogendo's sketch of a colonial-shading-into-postcolonial landscape.

Two characteristics that dominated the colonial power and administration was its labyrinthine bureaucracy; the other was its coercive orientation. These were hallmarks of the colonial-legal order. The sheer presence of state power in public administration in Africa was awesome. Without exception, independence instruments preserved that order intact as the foundations of administration in post-colonial Africa (Okoth-Ogendo 1993: 69).

For instance, a second statute deployed by Banda to achieve his objectives was directly inherited from the colonial state. This was a draconian Preventive Detention Act, re-activated by Banda to deal with a cabinet rebellion less than three months after independence (Short 1974: 221). Another statute strongly reminiscent of colonial policy was the Local Courts (Amendment) Act of 1969. The Act permitted specified Traditional Courts to try all types of criminal cases and to pass the death sentence. It further directed that no appeal should be allowed from such a Court to the High Court, thereby removing the right guaranteed in the (liberal) independence constitution. The Act also stipulated that defendants tried in Local Courts were debarred from employing defence counsel. The judicial function was to be performed by traditional leaders who would 'try cases according to what the president deemed to be traditional law and practice' (Williams 1978: 254). This Act gave Banda statutory power to regulate and reconfigure rural ('traditional') landscape as he saw fit. It also gave him, as a fringe benefit, effective sanction to enmesh traditional elites in a web of patron-client relationships that in turn facilitated divide and rule strategies.

Statutes cited above are but a few examples of drastic changes made to Malaŵi's constitution behind closed doors, without any form of meaningful consultation. By 1966, Malaŵi was a *de jure* one party state, and the President (for life) held sweeping powers embedded in statute, including the power to add to, amend and subtract from the constitution as he pleased. In the process of exercising these powers, Banda foreclosed on Malaŵians' brief vision, at independence, of open spaces and wide horizons.

Banda made every effort to supplement his constitutional powers with the power of his personality, attempting to add a persuasive element to his authoritarian control. A fully-fledged personality cult was developed in which he was presented as larger than life and endowed with godlike attributes, such as immortality. His real age was carefully kept secret, presumably in an effort not to compromise his immortal aura. Mchombo, by recalling and recounting a satirical song, both highlights the extent to which hero-worship was a constant refrain of the regime and hints at the regime's not altogether perfect success in this regard. The refrain went like this: 'Zonse zimene za Kamuzu Banda [All the roads belong to Kamuzu Banda], Azimayi onse a Kamuzu Banda [All the women belong to Kamuzu Banda], and so on' (1998: 21). A wealth of national institutions and facilities were named after him: Kamuzu International Airport, Kamuzu Stadium, Kamuzu Academy, Kamuzu Central Hospital are just a few examples. Further cameo illustrations of Ngũgĩ's analysis of the performance space monopolized by the state

for its enactments of power (1998: 38) can be seen in the compulsory celebration of Kamuzu Day and his Excellency's birthday. Everywhere he went the machinery of party and government surrounded him with pomp and ceremony. His portrait adorned the walls of shops and offices, T-shirts and national dress worn by members of the Women's League (Short 1974: 282).

Opinions about the success of this hegemonic enterprise are mixed. Williams suggests that Banda enjoyed fairly substantial – if tacit – public acceptance (1978: 16). Yet if tacit public acceptance of Banda's policies enabled the longevity of his regime, why were coercive methods and instruments, including the use of terror, considered a necessary feature of regime survival? Indeed, the extraordinary powers delegated downwards by Banda to regulatory state organizations largely were responsible for a culture of silence in postcolonial Malaŵi. For instance, under – as mentioned above – a 1965 re-enactment of the Preventive Detention Act, the police had wide discretionary powers and were not obliged to publish names of the people held in detention, nor the number of detainees. In consequence, police powers of detention were arbitrary and unpredictable, and as such, conducive to the creation of a climate of fear. Nor was the President above using the police to abduct and murder perceived rivals for power. An incident that still is remembered with shock in Malaŵi was the discovery of the corpses of four senior cabinet ministers in 1983 in the remote district of Mwanza.

Further, the Malaŵi Young Pioneers (MYP) developed a paramilitary wing that protected national security through activities such as enforcing the annual purchase of Malaŵi Congress Party (MCP) membership cards and attacking property of individuals suspected of having links with dissidents (Mchombo 1998: 24). Acts of violence committed against the Malaŵian people include the hunting down and killing, or sexually assaulting and mutilating, or driving into exile Jehovah's Witnesses because of 'their unwillingness to acknowledge secular authority and their resistance to purchasing MCP cards' (Mchombo 1998: 24). Mpanje notes that even Special Branch feared to take action against officials known to be under the protection of the MYP. And, to conclude this section on state orchestrated violence with an example of 'self' and 'other' mutuality, Mpanje points out that the Malaŵi Intelligence service had 'learned its tricks from apartheid South Africa' (1997a: 33). In a seeming paradox, the 'vision of the vanquished' was perpetuated not only in apartheid South Africa, but also in postcolonial Malaŵi.

6. Banda and 'othering'

There can be no doubt that in order to justify his methods and objectives, Banda 'othered' the vast majority of Malaŵians. Furthermore, it seems likely that the treatment he meted out to the people of Malaŵi through various instruments of control, repression and terror was imbued with a racist perspective inherited from one side of his (arguably) metaphorical mixed ancestry. Small but telling examples can be found, for instance, in his habit of referring to his cabinet ministers as 'my boys.' As Williams notes, 'the cabinet ministers never greatly appreciated the President's patronizing references to them' but they had 'sharper and more profound reasons to express their dissatisfaction' (1978: 213). For instance,

Orton Chirwa, a minister in Banda's first cabinet, was 'abducted by security agents ... and died under mysterious circumstances' (Banda 1998: 318). Further, a Malaŵian academic, having noted that Banda retained many elements of colonial rule, then provides an illustration of his meaning:

Banda used colonial modes of governance in the sense that he didn't want people to question what he was doing, just like the British colonialists didn't want us to question their policies. The British viewed us as barbaric and themselves as civilized. In the same light, Banda viewed himself as intelligent ... as the more capable person. ... he didn't think any other person could contribute to the formulation of better policies. So that is why he took a more or less solitary stance (Mwale, interview).

Another academic is equally explicit about Banda's rampant elitism:

We simply replaced Governor-general Glyn Jones with our own Dr Banda. I say this because most of the policies were simply a continuation of what the colonial government had done, for example, in education and agriculture ... in the case of Dr. Banda himself, he was – if you ask me – a *mzungu* – white man ... If you remember what he said about the Kamuzu Academy: 'no black man will ever teach at that institution' (Professor A., interview).

After the first, brief rapture of independence was over, Banda re-introduced the people of Malaŵi to the 'vision of the vanquished' by constructing a climate of fear in which he built a culture of silence, a silence – or so we argue – that indicates the pervasive presence of acculturation, passed forward by colonialism. For instance, to ban the wearing of short skirts and bell-bottomed trousers on the pretext that such garb is 'un-African' is not a necessary reflection of African 'self-hood'; just as forbidding teaching and research in certain subjects does not necessarily indicate the primacy of African epistemology. Rather, it indicates the extent to which Banda's regime superimposed a prison landscape on Malaŵi, thus causing the sides of the known world to close in and impose intolerable constraints on cognitive reality. It also, perhaps, suggests a fixed belief that the people of Malaŵi were not fit to rule themselves, that they needed a Supreme Leader, alternately paternalist and brutal, to do their thinking for them. This brand of self-fulfilling prophecy indeed is worthy of imperialism.

7. *The road to Banda's downfall*

As illustrated above, the Banda regime made a sustained attempt to delimit, dominate, and thereby control the cognitive and physical realities of the Malaŵian people. Further, Banda's grim endeavour greatly was facilitated by the ideological binaries of the Cold War in which: 'In the West, every move to the left was a gain for the Soviet Union' (Apter 1996: 380). Since Banda's capitalist credentials placed him firmly in the Western camp, his regime not only survived, but also thrived in a Cold War climate. However, beginning in the 1990s, a bipolar era of competing economic and ideological power blocs has been replaced by neo-liberalism's unipolar trajectory, along with the political conditionalities upon which post Cold War development aid is premised. Throughout the African sub-continent, this alteration in global *realpolitik*, in tandem with regional and local pressures induced one party and military regimes at a minimum to hold multi-party elections. In the 1990s,

therefore, *de jure* solo regimes and their 'President-for-life' were 'toppling over like bowling pins' (Monga 1996: 47). Banda was no exception to the rule.

The crisis year in Malaŵi was 1992. In March, the Roman Catholic bishops published a formal 'Pastoral Letter'. Among the many issues raised, the Pastoral Letter highlighted gross instances of corruption and poverty, along with intolerable levels of political corruption and oppression.

Academic freedom is seriously restricted; exposing injustices can be considered a betrayal; revealing some of the evils of our society is seen as slandering the country; monopoly of mass media and censorship prevent the expression of dissenting views; some people have paid dearly for their political opinions; access to public places like markets, hospitals, bus depots etc., is frequently denied to those who cannot produce a party card; forced donations have become a way of life.

This is most regrettable. It creates an atmosphere of resentment among the citizens. It breeds a climate of mistrust and fear. This fear of harassment and mutual suspicion generates a society in which the talents of many lie unused and in which there is little room for initiative (quoted in Meredith 2005: 407).

The letter was read in all Catholic churches and without doubt assisted in a process of freeing Malaŵians from Banda-induced silence. The people of Malaŵi took to the streets in all the major cities – Blantyre, Lilongwe and Zomba – demanding that Banda institute a referendum in which a now active electorate would vote for multi-party or single-party rule. Banda's confident expectation that the referendum would legitimate his regime proved misplaced with 63 per cent of the electorate voting for change (Meredith 2005: 408). In May 1994, Malaŵi held its first democratic presidential elections. Banda was defeated by one of his former cabinet ministers, Bakili Muluzi, leader of the United Democratic Front (UDF).

Three competitive multi-party elections have been held in Malaŵi between 1994 and the present date. However, changes in ruling parties and Presidents, even if sanctioned by the Malaŵian electorate, does necessarily or inevitably connote substantive expansion of previously foreclosed space, nor does a *de jure* multi-party dispensation by definition ensure that formerly repressed voices will be heard. Indeed, even the constitution itself was targeted in 2002 by (then) President Muluzi and his supporters in an effort to secure a third Presidential term for the incumbent, thus indicating a Banda-like reluctance to relinquish the seat of power.

Interviews (discussed below) were conducted in a dual and related context. Firstly, the context of the persistence of Banda's authoritarian legacy. Secondly, the context of civil society's struggle to articulate and strengthen the voices of the ordinary people of Malaŵi, who thereby were confronting and attempting to overcome the worst effects of an entrenched 'culture of silence'.

8. Post-Banda landscape: vignettes of perception

The elements of qualitative research that are presented below do not claim to be in any way definitive, and no conclusions are drawn in this paper on the basis of data analysis. Rather, these elements are offered as vignettes of perception drawn from members of women's organizations that act on behalf of rural women (comprising

52% of Malaŵi's population, interview with Chirwa) and academics on the Zomba campus of the University of Malaŵi. Vignettes are assembled under two headings:

8.1. *Spatial contestation*

This provides an emblematic theme through which to filter opinion of the interface between government and civil society activists. Of eight activists interviewed in a focus group format, while one had a good opinion of government's willingness to entertain criticism, seven felt that government reacts as though it harbours perception of (would-be) transformational voices as 'too political', and continues to arrogate political space for itself. 'They regard civil society as being in opposition' (Munthali, interview).

They are resisting when it comes to issues from civil society – but when Bills are in their interest, they act to pass the Bill. For example, with regards to the open/third term issue. We were not consulted, they stopped us from demonstrating. Civil society did not want government to pass the Bill. They had to make sure they blocked civil society from airing their views (Kamanga, interview).

An interview with the Executive Secretary of the Council of Non-Governmental Organizations (CONGOMA) elicited the following material about the current Malaŵian President's bid to change the constitution in order to avail himself of a third term in power. Asked how government felt about civil society's generally oppositional position on the third term debate, he replied

They did not like it. They were not happy. I remember there was supposed to be a meeting between civil society and government on the third term debate. I received a phone call from the so-called advisor to the President on Civil Society and NGOs asking me to appoint NGOs that are 'good'. I said: 'what do you mean, NGOs that are good? I didn't know that there are good and bad NGOs. As far as I know, all NGOs are good' (Nyandolo, interview).

Asked about the relationship between government and the civic organization she represents, a woman activist replied:

... the more things change, the more things remain the same... of course, in all fairness, I wasn't here during the Banda era ... but if you show a professional attitude to changing things in your own country ... it becomes at times difficult because government is always suspicious of your noble intentions. I don't know how it was back in the eighties, but I do feel this government still has to change its response to civil society (White, interview).

Referring to 'the deal government has signed with several donors', she added:

... on the surface, shutting down civic space would not be a fashionable thing to do – but it is still fashionable to crowd space. It is still fashionable not to allow NGOs to fly. So it's turned upside down (ibid.).

8.2. *An absence of voice*

Asked how easy or otherwise it is to speak out on controversial issues in post-Banda Malaŵi, an academic commented that

There is in Malaŵi, as you might have noticed, a huge problem of communication and interaction and in fact ... you can't blame academics from keeping sort of

aloof from what is going on outside . . . there is still what you call a culture of fear and silence (Senior Lecturer B., interview).

A second academic remarked that '... there are still elements of intimidation. These have to do with the legacy of authoritarianism in the country' (Khembo). A third scholar touched on the effect of a continuing fear of reprisals.

Many of us are still afraid of the potential negative consequences of talking about the ills of Malaŵian society – and even when they don't talk about Malaŵian ills; the fear is that some people might misinterpret the issues that are discussed (Chilimapungu, interview).

9. Conclusion

In 2003 Muluzi's attempt to revive an aspect of Banda's authoritarian legacy was defeated by a combination of opposition parties and civil society organizations. Nonetheless, Malaŵi's democracy remains fragile, and still is deeply flawed by a colonial/postcolonial inheritance that stresses the central role of 'big men' – an inheritance that implicitly justifies authoritarianism and concomitant abuse of public office and state resources. This paper argues that as long as the 'vision of the vanquished' continues to inform a post-Banda landscape, the ordinary people of Malaŵi will remain largely silent, thus ensuring that democracy is more a matter of form than of content. More generally, we argue that the longevity of binarized conceptions of identity in postcolonial African states facilitates state-orchestrated and/or state-sanctioned violence against a perceived 'other', deemed (in some fashion) 'alien'.

In the above respect, it is instructive to revisit Mapanje's account of his sojourn behind bars. For a writer by calling and by trade, possibly the worst form of non-physical torture is to be deprived of all written and writing materials. Such deprivation potentially is a small but devastating death.

If they found you with a pen, paper, a book – even the well-known police magazine – they punished you severely. They roughed you up and took you to the punishment cell . . . where you were stripped naked, clamped with leg irons and handcuffs, and tied to the stocks . . . They poured two or three buckets of cold water on you. They locked the door and left you there for three days without water or food. Only memory saved you from death (Mapanje 1997a: 29).

It was the ability to *remember*, to recite stories and recount events from memory, skills taught and revered in oral cultures that saved Mapanje's sanity. He describes the dilemma of an academic and writer who makes his living within and defines himself according to a written culture, who works in a study lined and carpeted with books, and who then finds himself, under extreme circumstances, resorting to the skills and artefacts of orature: memory, voice, oral narrative – in order to help himself and his fellow prisoners maintain a vital measure of sanity and humanity.

For Mapanje and other inmates of Mikuyu prison, orature created a shared and comforting landscape of reminiscences, anecdotes and stories that to some extent cushioned them against brutal enactments of power in a state prison. Skills of communication, of recounting individual, family and community histories, of generating shared memories and creating collective narratives in time built up a

counter-culture among prisoners that enabled them both to endure and to resist the colonizing culture of the state. Additionally, resort to oral narrative and the sharing of memories enabled Mapanje and other inmates of lesser socio-economic status to meet and mingle as equals. In his rediscovery and deployment of an endogenous tradition, he crossed the boundary between an elite (exogenous) culture of the written word, and a popular culture of oral narrative, thus providing – or so this paper argues – a small but significant example of transculturation, or – in Bhabha's words (above) – the cutting edge of national, anti-nationalist histories.

Bearing in mind that Mamdani's parable of the cat and the rat is not necessarily restricted to Africa, rather it also can be utilised to interpret civil wars and states of brutal alienation in other continents, a conjuncture in the human condition is imputed, namely that of choice between acultured or transcultured renditions of hybridity. Malaŵi's postcolonial history is only one version of a wider experience in which the barren sites of colonial–postcolonial symmetries are the dominant reality for a majority of people. Such scenarios are informed by 'self' and 'other' construction, and thus by the logic of the excluded middle.

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