

# **A Deadly Convergence of Medicine and Politics: Hastings Kamuzu Banda, The Great Lion of Malawi**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This article examines the early life, influences, and circumstances that enabled “President-for-Life,” Hastings Banda, to shift from a successful general practitioner career to a totalitarian dictator. Banda is among the few members of the medical community who transitioned from doctor to dictator or “doctator.” He walked in both worlds: having a successful medical career in London with patients who adored him, then later returned to his homeland, not as a medical missionary as initially intended, but instead as a ruthless politician. This psychobiography of Banda assesses his early life, education, and transition into politics. Our findings suggest that Banda was ultimately wooed into political activism by a keen desire to achieve an independent Nyasaland, now Malawi, and his narcissism drove his consolidation of power. In 1963, he assumed power and ruled as President from 1970 to 1994. To the present day, his role as a physician political leader is lionized by a variety of supporters and condemned by others.

*Keywords:* Dictatorship, Malawi, Banda

# **Una convergencia mortal de medicina y política: Hastings Kamuzu Banda, El Gran León de Malawi**

## **RESUMEN**

Este artículo examina los primeros años de vida, las influencias y las circunstancias que permitieron que el “presidente vitalicio” Hastings Banda pasara de una exitosa carrera de médico general a un dictador totalitario. Banda es uno de los pocos miembros de la comunidad médica que hizo la transición de médico a dictador o “doctor”. Caminó en ambos mundos: tuvo una exitosa carrera médica en Londres con pacientes que lo adoraban y luego regresó a su tierra natal, no como un médico misionero como se pretendía inicialmente, sino como un político despiadado. Esta psicobiografía

de Banda evalúa sus primeros años de vida, educación y transición a la política. Nuestros hallazgos sugieren que Banda finalmente se vio atraído hacia el activismo político por un gran deseo de lograr un Niasalandia independiente, ahora Malawi, y su narcisismo impulsó su consolidación en el poder. En 1963, asumió el poder y gobernó como presidente de 1970 a 1994. Hasta el día de hoy, su papel como líder político médico es elogiado por una variedad de simpatizantes y condenado por otros.

*Palabras clave:* Dictadura, Malawi, Banda

## 医学与政治的致命融合：海斯廷斯·卡穆祖·班达——马拉维雄狮

### 摘要

本文研究了“终身总统”——海斯廷斯·班达的早年生活、影响和环境，这些因素让其从成功的全科医生转变为极权独裁者。班达是医学界为数不多的、从医生转变为独裁者或“医生独裁者” (doctator) 的成员之一。他在两个世界中行走：在伦敦收获了成功的医疗事业，深受病人的喜爱；然后回到他的祖国，不过并非以最初预期的那样作为医疗传教士回国，而是作为一个无情的政治家。本篇关于班达的心理传记学评估了其早年生活、教育和从政转型。我们的研究结果表明，班达最终被“实现尼亚萨兰（现为马拉维）独立的强烈愿望”所吸引而投身于政治激进主义，而他的自恋驱使他巩固了权力。他于1963年掌权，并在1970-1994年间担任总统。时至今日，他作为医生政治领袖的作用受到不同支持者的推崇，也受到其他人的谴责。

关键词：独裁，马拉维，班达

### Doctors as Political Dictators

**A**lthough several doctors enter politics to achieve positive change in their communities, few have followed a darker path leading to dictatorship. As a subsection of dicta-

torship, “doctatorship” is defined as “the process by which a medical doctor, devoted to sacrificing himself to save lives, becomes a dictator, devoted to sacrificing lives to save himself” (Montefiore 1997, 17). Notable doctators include François Duvalier, President-For-Life

of Haiti, Radovan Karadzic, former President Republika Srpska, and Bashar al-Assad, the reigning President of Syria (Montefiore 2013; Simons 2016; Drumhiller and Skvorc 2018). During his rule, Duvalier blended his role as a physician with Voodoo imagery and is responsible for the death of 30,000 Haitians and the displacement of many more (Drumhiller and Skvorc 2018). Karadzic, originally trained as a psychiatrist, perpetrated an ethnic cleansing campaign in Bosnia killing approximately 45,000 people (Simons 2016). Finally, Bashar al-Assad is on his way to being the most ruthless dictator of all with the murder of 500,000 Syrians and the displacement of millions (Ebrahimi 2021). As physicians embrace the value and ethics of the Hippocratic Oath, one must question how doctors on this dictatorship pathway sanction widespread human suffering.

This article focuses on “President-for Life,” Hastings Kamuzu Banda, and assesses his transformation from a well-liked doctor into a dictator known for building more prisons than hospitals. As a compelling case, Banda’s medical career allowed him to present himself as a well-intentioned doctor who sought the best for Malawi, using his intellectual medical approach to gain the favor of Malawi’s political elite. However, his desire for western comforts and religious conservatism caused him to purge, torture, and imprison political opponents, redirect his nation’s wealth to himself, and build Malawi following his strict religious conservatism.

### ***Theories, Constructs, and Characteristics***

Psychiatrists and psychologists have an established history of studying dictators, with perhaps the most interesting in-person observation recounted by Carl Jung, describing his 1939 meeting of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini (Goldman 2011). When conducting their at-a-distance personality assessments of Kim Jong-Il, Saddam Hussein, and Adolf Hitler, Coolidge and Segal identified an inventory of six personality disorders that these dictators had in common: sadistic, antisocial, paranoid, narcissistic, schizoid, and schizotypal (Coolidge and Segal 2009). So-called “Dark Traits” have also been used to describe these personality disorders, including: egoism, Machiavellianism, moral disengagement, narcissism, psychological entitlement, psychopathy, sadism, self-interest, and spitefulness (Moshagen, Hilbig, and Zettler 2018; Haycock 2019). As a critical behavioral component, narcissism causes dictators to perceive themselves as unique and deserving of widespread adoration, in extreme cases, this can lead to a messiah complex (Norrholm and Hunley 2017; Burkle 2019; Haycock 2019).

However, Goldman provides an important caveat: there are numerous examples of individuals with personality disorders who do not become dictators or terrorists, and some dictators likely have different diagnoses of personality and psychiatric disorders (Goldman 2011). Furthermore, “nasty personality traits are not enough” to assume and sustain dictatorial pow-

ers (Haycock 2019). Instilling fear and terror in their opponents, lacking any remorse for the suffering of anyone challenging their rule, and appointing subordinates who can manage the logistics and details of administration—with full understanding of their loss of societal privileges if there is a regime change—are consistently used and reinforced. Moghaddam (2013) made the critical observation that comprehending the psychology of the dictator was less important than considering the environmental conditions that facilitate the rise of a dictator. Reinforcing this analysis, Haycock wrote, “...it takes a broken nation to raise a dictator,” or in the case of Banda, a developing nation with a conflict-ridden past (Haycock 2019).

Facilitating events, including economic devastation, political revolution, and polarizing political divisions, can create situations ripe for the rise of individuals with the requisite personality traits and ambitions. Intense uncertainty, insecurity, and destabilization can lead to a willingness to believe messages of scapegoating, resentment, suspicion, and fear (Haycock 2019). Subordinates are provided incentives, including status and power, to reinforce their loyalty, with disfavor resulting in extreme punishment, including incarceration or execution. Followers give up their self-sufficiency and dignity in exchange for someone they believe can restore stability with absolute solutions to societal problems—in other words, a messiah. Psychologically exhausted individuals—by virtue of war, poverty, disease, or disenfranchisement remain

loyal to the leader “for a long time, or forever” (Zeiders and Devlin 2019).

## **Methods**

**A** psychobiography, as it sounds makes use of the content analysis of historical documents, archival research, speech data from the leader, and also interview data drawn from interviews the leader gave themselves, or in some cases interview data developed from interviewing individuals that knew the leader themselves to assess behavioral themes, or in this case a leader’s behavior from a distance (Post 2003; Schultz 2005; Schultz and Lawrence 2017). To help ensure the accuracy of the data, source triangulation is used. For the purposes of this study archival research was carried out and assessed for key themes which helped to explain the leader’s transformation from doctor to dictator. Furthermore, psychobiography involves the “systematic application of psychological theory or concepts – usually (but not always) drawn from psychoanalysis or some other variant of personality theory and research – to the explanation of certain known biographical ‘facts’” (Post 2003, 12-13). By studying a person’s early childhood development, exposure to positions of power, key role models, political environment, inner circle, in addition to their personality, worldview, and leadership style a robust personality assessment can be developed that provides insight into a person’s political development (Post 2003; Schultz 2005; Moghaddam 2013). In carrying out a psychobiography there are typically

three key components that make up the study, including first, determining what needs to be explained (Post 2003). In this case, the study seeks to assess how Hastings Banda transformed from a successful general medical practitioner into a ruthless dictator. Next, the psychological or psychobiographical explanation is developed that explains the leader's transformation, and finally some researchers will attempt to "trace the origins...of the presumed dynamics" in childhood or other early experiences to the development of the subject being studied (Post 2003, 14). As a holistic approach, psychobiography allows for understanding a leader's personal characteristics, the characteristics of the groups they surround themselves with, as well as the cultural and situational context in which the leader operated (Runyan 1981; Moghaddam 2013). For this reason, this method has been successfully used to study leaders a wide variety of world leaders from Adolph Hitler (Victor 1998), Saddam Hussein (Post 2003), and François Duvalier (Drumhiller and Skvorc 2018), to Hillary Clinton and Condoleezza Rice (Fitch and Marshall 2008).

While research on dictators has demonstrated that that many come to share similar traits, this research seeks to further develop the current body of knowledge by focusing on a case drawn from a smaller subset of dictators, or doctators. In doing this the authors seek to better understand this subset of individuals and the unique circumstances which lead to their transformation. We draw upon key dynamics and traits specific to the development of physicians

and how they may provide clues for determining when a good doctor with an eye towards politics can go bad.

## **Results**

### ***Early Life***

There is disagreement on when Hastings Banda was born, with estimates placing the year between 1886 and 1906; he was born to poor farming parents of the Chewa tribe in Nyasaland, what is now Malawi (Short 1974). During his early years, he attended Mtunthama Primary School and then went on to the Church of Scotland Livingstonia Mission school (Short 1974). Banda's education at Livingstonia would have a lasting impact on his life as he came to strongly identify with Britain and the Church of Scotland, even taking a Christian name inspired by an admired missionary named John Hastings (Short 1974).

### ***Medical School and Practice***

#### **Education and Medical School**

Banda's interest in medicine began at an early age. Key experiences having a lasting impact on his medical interests include an incident where Banda witnessed an operation on a man who had been shot, and later, he witnessed a woman's death while giving birth (Short 1974). As a small step in cultivating his interest, he learned basic first aid at the mission school (Short 1974). Later in Hartley, in what is now Zimbabwe, Banda's interest in medicine was reinforced by the "appalling conditions in which African patients at the hospi-

tal were treated” (Short 1974, 14). To pursue his interests in medicine and help pay for education, he worked as a migrant miner in Johannesburg (Short 1974; Brody 2000). In 1925, Banda received sponsorship, moved to the United States, and completed high school in Xenia, Ohio (Short 1974; Dowden 1997; Perper and Cina 2010). From there, he went on to the University of Chicago and completed his BA in History and Political Science (Short 1974). Though this deviated from his medical interests, Banda stated, “he had no desire to become one of those doctors who ‘know everything about medicine and nothing about anything else” (Short 1974, 22). Next, he moved to Nashville, Tennessee, to attend medical school at Meharry Medical College, which he completed in 1937 (Short 1974).

Following his medical education in the United States, Banda sought to return to his homeland and appealed to the government for a position. However, his medical qualifications were not recognized, and he went to Scotland for his post-graduate work at the School of Medicine of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of the University of Edinburgh, which he began in 1938 and completed in 1941 (Short 1974; Brody 2000; Perper and Cina 2010). In a reflection on his time in medical school, Banda stated that he “worked very, very hard, studying and performing actual medical work under the supervision of my professors. To me, medicine was a religion, it was God-given inspiration and talent. Healing a person was an act of God and I as a physician was His instrument” (Brody 2000).

## **Medical Practice**

Before returning to Nyasaland, he set up medical practices in England in Liverpool, Newcastle, and Harlesden (Dowden 1997). Though he was conscripted to be an army doctor in 1942, Banda refused due to his strong beliefs in pacifism and instead was assigned to assist seamen within England (Short 1974). Banda was adored by his patients (Short 1974; Dowden 1997; Brody 2000). When he entered the waiting room of his office, his patients would stand to greet him (Short 1974). Based on his recollections, Banda enjoyed practicing medicine and surgery in particular; he is quoted as saying, “I enjoyed surgery very much. It was thrilling for me to repair an organ that was functioning improperly and to know that because of my skill and knowledge, my patient could live pain-free and fully functional” (Brody 2000). He was also noted to waive fees for those too poor to pay, paid rent, and provided other resources to those among his poorest of patients (Short 1974; Brody 2000). In discussing his time in Edinburgh, Banda reflected,

I treated everyone who came to the door of my surgery. Payment was never discussed. It was my sacred duty as a physician who had sworn to the Hippocratic oath to treat the sick. I found that people who could pay for treatment did so with no discussion, no argument. Those who could not pay were given the very best treatment that I could give them, along with the same dignity that

I offered the Lords and Earls that came for treatment (Brody 2000).

Other examples of Banda's generosity during his time in England include financing needy African students helping to educate at least 40 students in need (Short 1974).

### ***Political Engagement, Return to Africa, and Succession to Presidency***

Banda's interest in politics arose while he was in Johannesburg before attending high school in the United States. In particular, he was interested in the 1924 election and Rhodesia potentially joining the Union (Short 1974). While practicing medicine in the United Kingdom in October 1944, Banda further cultivated his interests in the political affairs of his homeland, helping to found the Nyasaland African Congress (NAC) and provided the group with financial support and political guidance (Williams 1978; Brody 2000). Through the NAC Banda became involved in the shaping of Nyasaland's political future and fought to prevent a federation from forming with Rhodesia, something he believed would mean inequality for the black minority in Nyasaland.

Before returning to Nyasaland, Banda first went to Ghana, a move steeped in controversy and mystery. After completing his medical credentials in Edinburgh, Banda again appealed to the Nyasaland government for a medical appointment. Some explanations of this situation portray racism as being a factor in why Banda did not take a position there. For McCracken (2017), this is an

inadequate explanation as documents revealed there was support for him taking a post where "he would have the full rights of any European doctor or missionary" (16). Furthermore, documents demonstrated that Banda was "unwilling to commit himself to government service" and refused to take orders from others; the position, as described by McCracken (2017), did not offer Banda the autonomy he desired. Another consideration for his move to Ghana is Banda's relationship with Merene French, a married white woman and his secretary, whom he met in South Shields, which could have raised concerns (Short 1974; McCracken 2017; Pendelbury 2019). In one document from 1945, a Governor discussing the potential of Banda's return makes the comment "I assume that there are no other complications such as a European wife or fiancée" (McCracken 2017, 16). In Short's (1974) biography of Banda, it was noted that in 1953 Banda had an affair with his secretary, who was married, and when her husband sued for divorce, Banda rejected her and fled to Ghana. However, Pendelbury (2019) makes the case that this was going on for much longer based on letters written by Merene French's child. According to the account, Banda and French had a sixteen-year love affair which included Banda having lived with the French family, then later, the French family moving in with Banda after the purchase of his first home (Morrow and McCracken 2012; Pendelbury 2019). Merene was allegedly active in Banda's political activities helping to even draw up a draft of the Nyasaland constitution (Pendelbury 2019).

Humiliated by the lawsuit and mentally exhausted, once in Ghana, Banda fell into a state of depression, and looked to French for support (Short 1974). She later joined him and they lived briefly as husband and wife. Pendelbury (2019) describes French as playing a behind the scenes role in Ghana as well as gaining the confidence of key leadership. In Ghana, Banda was able to establish a medical practice, however in early December of 1957 he received a notice by way of the *Ghana Gazette* newspaper, that his practice was suspended (Short 1974). Brody (2000) explains that this suspension was due to an administrative error on the part of the government, and that a letter of apology was later sent to Banda. Five months later, the notice would be overturned, and Banda would again be free to practice medicine. This is one of the few accounts of the situation during that time; regardless of why the suspension occurred, it was no doubt another blow to Banda's self-image. Banda himself never spoke of this time period, Short (1974) postulates that if this had not transpired that he perhaps would not have returned to Nyasaland.

Amidst his personal and professional woes, NAC member Henry Chipembere continues to engage Banda over Nyasaland politics and presents the idea of Banda's return as a party member to help fight for independence. For Chipembere, Banda presented a solution to the NAC problem as he had

qualities that would appeal to all factions of the nationalist movement. His age, manifest courage,

and eminence would appeal most powerfully to rural elders; his education, his profession, and his success would gain the respect of the young educated militants; he would know how to deal with Europeans— not only was he a doctor, he had been on terms of familiarity with leading politicians in Britain and, for the first time colonial officials in Nyasaland would be faced by a man who could go over their heads directly with the influential figures in the House of Commons (Williams 1978, 173-174).

It has also been assumed that due to Banda's age and prior medical accomplishments, upon Nyasaland achieving independence, he would transition out of leadership and into retirement (Williams 1978). After communicating an interest in returning, Chipembere responded to Banda that his image would first need to be built up, to the effect of being "heralded as a political messiah" to create excitement and "a revolution in political thought" (Short 1974, 87). Banda accepted these conditions and met them with a few of his own, including that he would only return as the NAC President and that he could run the party however he saw fit (Short 1974).

### ***President for Life***

Upon his return to Nyasaland in July 1958, Banda worked feverishly as the NAC president and set up another small medical practice; however, it would not be as successful as his work was in the

past (Short 1974). During the pursuit for political independence, Banda was jailed in 1959 by colonial authorities and other political activists (Perper and Cina 2010). Later, in April 1960, he was released and took part in the formal re-drafting of the Nyasaland Constitution. In September of that year, Banda accepted the position as lifetime president of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), successor to the NAC (Short 1974; Baker 2001). In 1961, the MCP “gained the majority in the Legislative Council and [Banda] was elected Prime Minister in 1963” (Perper and Cina 2010, 132). On July 6, 1964, Nyasaland gained independence and was renamed Malawi after a name Banda had seen on an old French map (Perper and Cina 2010).

Banda ruled authoritatively, and in 1970 declared himself president for life. “His official title was “His Excellency the Life President of the Republic of Malawi, Ngwazi Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda” (Perper and Cina 2010, 132). The addition of “Ngwazi,” or “great lion” came because of his fierce political prowess. Under his leadership, Malawi was run as a totalitarian state where complete subservience to Malawi’s only permitted political party and president was demanded and brought to bear by force.

### ***Leadership***

As a physician, I knew that I must be able to evaluate a patient’s symptoms, diagnose properly, treat properly, and then be able to communicate well with authority, so that they, the patients, would

follow my instructions precisely. This is true in any discipline. I did not know then that I was preparing for a political future in which I would use my speaking ability to motivate people to develop this country (Brody 2000).

Early accounts of Banda describe him as being “a shy, slight figure, deeply imbued with the puritanism of the Scots missionaries” and withdrawn into himself (Short 1974, 16). He was also described by his classmates as bright but lacking self-confidence and “pre-occupied with his image” (Short 1974, 21). Banda was vain given his reluctance to state his actual age, references to his youthfulness, and “would ‘purr like a cat’ when his achievements were praised” (Short 1974, 35). For some, Banda would be remembered as the leader of the pro-Western bloc in Africa, who “supported women’s rights, improved the country’s infrastructure, and maintained a good educational system relative to that of other African countries” (Perper and Cina 2010, 132). For others, Banda is remembered for his autocratic rule and ruthless treatment of political opposition, strict control of information, and Western bias and religious conservatism.

### ***Autocratic Rule***

“There is no opposition in heaven. God himself does not want opposition - that is why he chased Satan away. Why should Kamuzu have opposition” (Short 1974, 258)?

Banda ruled autocratically and mercilessly, and unlike his feelings toward his patients, he came to loathe his subjects. Just five years after returning to Nyasaland, Malawi achieved its independence. However, Banda was fashioned into a political messiah within those few years by the young politicians who lobbied for his return. Their goal, it seemed, was to achieve independence at any cost. An example of this is seen in one minister's statement just prior to independence in that "there was 'absolutely nothing wrong with dictatorship'" (Short 1974, 200). For some, their lives were lost, while others would come to be exiled a few years later.

Under the guise of being a political messiah, Banda was hailed as both the father and savior of Malawi. Despite the support he received from his ministers, only he was allowed to be revered for his role in the fight for independence. The government required the compulsory celebration of Kamuzu Day, Banda's birthday (Jones and Manda 2006). To further reinforce his cult of personality, his name and image adorned most public-facing infrastructure, including highways, the airport, stadiums, hospitals, and posters on all currency (Drogin 1995). Whenever he traveled, Banda ensured dancers were present who wore his image on their clothing and sang songs that offered him high praise. Those failing to use his full title during introductions were harshly reprimanded (Drogin 1995).

Upon his arrival in Nyasaland, Banda made quick work of consolidating power. As desired, he first became president of the MCP and ensured it

remained Malawi's only political party. Through the paramilitary wing of the Young Pioneers, the purchase of MCP membership cards was an annual requirement, and those failing to purchase cards were marked as political dissidents (Jones and Manda 2006). Banda hand-selected his ministers and subsequently removed them from their positions with violence or the threat of it. Some political rivals were assassinated abroad, while others were imprisoned, disappeared, or met their end in suspicious car accidents (Chirambo 2001). In one speech, Banda made clear that those who challenged his views would be fed to crocodiles (Ham 1992; Meldrum 1995; Forster 2001; Chirambo 2011).

In addition to being the head of state and head of Malawi's only political party, Banda placed himself in other key positions such as "minister of foreign affairs, justice, agriculture, and public works. He controlled banks, oil, tobacco and construction" (Drogin 1995). His political grip ensured that he would be able to siphon Malawi's wealth into his own pockets as he amassed 13 palaces, a fleet of limos, a Learjet; it was believed his holdings "comprised one-third of the entire commercial sector" (Drogin 1995).

As part of his power infrastructure, the Young Pioneers were created as the paramilitary wing of the MCP (Van Donge 1995). They came to carry out Banda's orders and were above the rule of the police and army (Williams 1978; Hill 1992; Gabay 2017). Some of the Young Pioneers were believed to be trained in Israel or the Soviet Union

and were alleged “better equipped than the army. It was the Pioneer’s responsibility to harass and murder Banda’s opponents, maintain order and public dignity and enforce” Banda’s rule (Sev-  
enzo 2000, 18). Banda’s manipulation of law and policy created vaguely defined rules regarding subversion that allowed his enforcers to arrest “any member of the Party guilty of disloyalty, rumor-mongering, deliberate manufacture of destructive stories, invidious whisper campaigns, loose talk, and character assassination against any member of the Party or the Party itself” to be dealt with as Banda saw fit (Williams 1978, 205). Such policies saw the development of more prisons than hospitals as people would be arrested without charges, then tortured for years in prison. One group, the Jehovah’s witnesses, was politically cleansed through murder, assault, and exile for resisting the purchase of MCP cards (Lwanda 1998; Jones and Manda 2006). The prison conditions were such that the goal was to achieve the greatest human suffering possible, a strategy possibly learned from Malawi’s relations with South Africa’s apartheid government (Jones and Manda 2006). Overcrowding, malnourishment, and torture were rampant, with prisons being specifically designed to cause heat exhaustion and freezing conditions (Chirambo 2011).

It is estimated that between 3,000 and 10,000 people were killed, tortured, or jailed without trial, and thousands fled into exile during Banda’s reign (Drogin 1995; Meldrum 1995). Determining the exact numbers of those imprisoned is difficult as no records

were kept. As a result, Malawi’s history during this time has been passed down through its culture of poetry and oral storytelling (Chirambo 2001, 2007, 2011; Etim 2020; Sacks 2020). Consequently, several Malawi’s poets and professors came to be imprisoned for their creative works that communicated Banda’s atrocities through imagery and prose (Chirambo 2001, 2007, 2011; Etim 2020; Sacks 2020).

### **Information Control**

Through coercion and the mobilization of his personality cult, Banda ensured that all information was disseminated through him. His “powers as head of state and leader of the party were... supplemented by the development of a private, informal structure of control with channels of information and command outside the formal party hierarchy” (Williams 1978, 213). Mail was opened and altered, phones tapped, and thousands of Malawians were jailed for holding alternative political views (Perper and Cina 2010). He implemented a system of censorship banning all materials critical of himself and the party, and he enforced a policy of detention without trial should one be found to be in possession or develop such materials (Chirambo 2001).

Banda was wary of all media, including foreign journalists and anyone presumed to provide them with information (Finnegan 1992). During his reign, there are a few documented cases of Banda imprisoning and torturing individuals for allegedly passing information to foreign journalists; in at least one case, a person imprisoned for such

“crimes” died from starvation (Finnegan 1992). “Government information about [Banda was] limited to a one-page official biography” and discussion of his age was strictly taboo (Battiata 1988; Drogin 1995). Numerous publications were banned in Malawi, including Short’s biography of Banda (Battiata 1988; Short 1974; Hill 1992). Banda controlled the state-run radio and prohibited widespread television services limiting satellite television to a few hotels (Hill 1992). The banning of songs, stories, poems, plays, and other creative works within Malawi was common (Chirambo 2007).

As part of this control over information, Banda and the MCP bent Malawi’s oral tradition and dance culture to enhance his legitimacy among the population. Traditional folk songs were altered to “advance the idea that Banda was the only person that could lead Malawi and should do so for life” (Chirambo 2001, 205-06). The words and names used within songs were changed to reflect the messaging that Banda wanted to be portrayed. For example, to demonstrate that Banda was the father of the nation and by extension, everything in Malawi belonged to Banda, the chant “*Zonse zimene zamatikitiki*’ (Everything is for Matikitiki)” was changed to “*Zonse zimene za Kamuzu Banda*’ (Everything is for Kamuzu Banda)” (Chirambo 2001, 206). In case anyone was mistaken as to what this would ultimately entail, the chant was further updated to include an “endless list for ‘*zonse zimene*,’ including *magalimoto onse* (all cars), *mbumba zonse* (all women), *mitengo yonse* (all trees),

and *anthu onse* (all people)” (Chirambo 2001, 207). Banda turned songs into weapons and used them against his adversaries. The changes made rewrote Malawi’s history and minimized or removed references to other leaders who had helped achieve independence (Chirambo 2001).

### **Western Bias and Religious Conservatism**

Banda’s western bias has been referred to both as an inferiority complex towards Europeans while also being perceived as a result of him being highly westernized (Finnegan 1992). Under his rule, even years after gaining independence, he favored placing white Europeans into government positions. In 1992, Finnegan commented that “nearly thirty years after independence, most of Malawi’s official agencies are still run by expatriates. A Scot heads the public works department, a German runs the central bank” (Finnegan 1992, 8). Banda would regularly humiliate his African ministers by referring to them as “my boys” and questioned their intellect and ability to lead the nation (Short 1974; Williams 1978).

His self-named Kamuzu Academy was modeled after England’s Eton, an all-male boarding school (Finnegan 1992). The students were required to learn European history, instead of African history, and studied Latin and ancient Greek, which were taught by predominantly White European faculty (Finnegan 1992). Banda’s preference for this faculty make-up is further reinforced by his comment that “no black

man will ever teach at that institution” (Jones and Manda 2006, 208). Additionally, Banda only spoke English during his rule and always had an interpreter present (Short 1974; Jones and Manda 2006). Banda’s use of English can be attributed to some degree as a sort of cunning used to build up his image as a leader while at the same time allowing him to calculate his next move. Short mentions that Banda’s use of English was only in part because of his lagging skills in chiNyanja, but it was also customary for a person in leadership, or a chief, to converse through someone else, and that in doing so this gave Banda more time to think about what he would say next (Short 1974).

Banda’s religious puritanism has been commented upon as surpassing “that of his Scots friends” (Short 1974, 35). Banda was a teetotaler and found western morality to be “repugnant” (Short 1974). He once rushed out of a room where another “revolting” man was without shoes or socks and was “exhibiting his nakedness” (Short 1974, 37). Banda would “preach against the use of alcohol” and speak “against sloppiness, sloth and immodesty” (Battiata 1988). He banned rock music, was known for carrying himself in a three-piece suit and homburg hat, and enacted strict rules within his Decency in Dress Act (Short 1974; Drogin 1995; Kadri 2003). Women were prohibited from wearing see-through clothing, trousers, and were required to wear skirts that covered the knee while sitting; repeated violations could be met with deportation (Hill 1992; Gabay 2017; Dunea 2018). Men were forbidden to wear bell-bot-

tomed pants or have long hair (Hill 1992; Gabay 2017; Dunea 2018). Under Banda’s rule, it was not uncommon for male tourists to be required to receive haircuts upon arrival at the airport or be told to wear their hair in a bun (Hill 1992). “Even foreigners coming to Malawi were subjected to the dress code, [and] not permitted to enter the country if they wore short dresses or trousers. Hippies and men with long hair were denied entry” (Dunea 2018).

## **Discussion**

### ***Transformation from General Practitioner to Dictator***

**T**o some extent, Banda’s controlling behavior was bolstered by his ministers, whose primary goal was independence; however, this came with a steep cost of human rights violations and the mismanagement of the country’s wealth. Their fear of speaking up, coupled with their fueling of Banda’s personality cult, left Banda’s power and behavioral outbursts unchecked. Banda would flare up violently when criticized, causing those around him to retreat and maintain their security (Short 1974). This was the dynamic before achieving independence; after independence, things became much worse as Banda maintained his position of power by cultivating a network of supporters and the Young Pioneers movement, whose members were above the rule of the police and the army.

The case can be made that a critical turning point in Banda’s life was his affair with Merene French. This act of

adultery no doubt shook his puritan values, bruised his self-image, and likely caused him to leave London for Ghana. There, exhausted and depressed, he established a medical practice but was later very publicly suspended from practicing medicine. Despite this suspension being later overturned, it no doubt would have served as another humiliation in Banda's life that would further scar his self-image. Within this backdrop, he returns to his homeland, reborn in some respects as a political figure. Given his interest in helping his people, the opportunity to return under the conditions of a party president with no supervisory restraints was something that could not be passed up. However, the fact remains that his self-confidence would be shaken, so the propaganda campaign that ensued upon his arrival served to build Banda up in the eyes of Nyasa people and his own, and would remain a need throughout his tenure as Life-President of Malawi. Within this context, Banda can be understood to swing towards extreme conservatism to compensate for his past self-perceived crimes. His harsh autocratic rule and control over

information served as another way for Banda to control the narrative and prevent others from exacting control over him or tarnishing his image.

### ***In His Own Words: "... And Crocodiles Are Hungry at Night"***

Banda was quoted in his obituary as providing these instructions to his Young Pioneer followers regarding how to react to dissenters: "Tell the police ... But if they do nothing, I put you above the police. And crocodiles are hungry at night" (Mapanje 2011). These unambiguous instructions had the impact of elevating his youthful followers above any legal restraints, leading to civil chaos and terrorizing thousands who were assumed to have disagreed with Banda's policies (Mthathiwa 2016). While several physicians have served honorably as world leaders (Ludmir, Elahi, and Richman 2017), Banda's legacy as a dictator, promulgating terror, brutality, and malignant narcissism, provides a stark and sobering departure from the ideals of the Hippocratic Oath and the historical annals of physician politicians and practitioners.

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