

While the government intends the monuments of Banda to represent Malawi's glorious past and to honor and pay tribute to Banda, Chipasula's monument contradicts that by suggesting a monument that represents Banda as a vicious dictator in Malawi.

# **“A Monument to a Tyrant,”<sup>1</sup> or Reconstructed Nationalist Memories of the Father and Founder of the Malawi Nation, Dr. H. K. Banda**

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*The mausoleum over former president Banda's grave and his statue in Lilongwe, the capital of Malawi, were unveiled in 2006 and 2009 respectively, with pomp and ceremony, and were hailed as giving Banda the honor and dignity he deserved. Both monuments were erected more than a decade after he had lost political power and died. However, his rule was not without controversy. While his supporters hail him as Ngwazi (Conqueror), Nkhoswe (guardian, protector, provider), savior or messiah of his people, and father and founder of the nation, his critics describe him as a demagogue and a vicious dictator. Frank Chipasula in 1981 in the poem “A Monument to a Tyrant,” even imagined a statue of Banda that would portray him as a despot. This article examines the narratives in Banda's public monuments and Chipasula's imagined monument as contested narratives that problematize reconstructed nationalist memories of postcolonial African leaders such as Banda.*

## **Introduction**

The constitution of Malawi's collective memories of a glorious past and the nation's founding myths through the construction of national public monuments honoring former president Dr. H. K. Banda are contested because of the nature of his regime. The narratives of the constructed monuments (both scripted and symbolic) recall and celebrate Banda as a nationalist hero, the father and founder of the Malawi nation, but his critics and victims suggest he was a vicious dictator. Such contested narratives are typical of most postcolonial leaders in Africa, who, after leading their countries to independence, led one-party governments that proscribed opposition politics and

violently crushed dissenters or critics. The memorialization of such leaders as nationalist heroes is therefore often contested.

President Banda and the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) ruled Malawi from independence in 1964 to 1994. Banda and the MCP relied on coercion and mobilization of grassroots popular support and consent to maintain themselves in power. As a single-party dictator, Banda saw Malawi as a personal fiefdom, consistently referring to its people as *my* people, in the manner of a grand patriarch that brooked no opposition; he authorized detention without trial, political persecution, forced exile, torture, and even murder of those opposed to him (Africa Watch 1990:23–54; Short 1974; Williams 1978). He used harsh censorship laws to stem criticism of his regime, banning critical materials and putting authors in detention without trial, or forcing them into exile (Gibbs 1982; Zeleza 1995). These activities have engendered memories of victimization for those who suffered or knew such brutality.

However, as hegemony, within the range of Gramsci's definition of the term (Femia 1981), Banda's regime mobilized a considerable consensus in Malawi to support his leadership. As early as 1963, before independence, he boasted, "I am dictator of the people by consent . . . by permission" (*Malawi News* 1963). After the achievement of independence, he capitalized on the measured economic growth and stability bolstered by Western governments' support to forge an image of himself as an all-wise and foresighted leader, presented as possessing supernatural or divine wisdom, and as a God-given or anointed messiah or savior (*mpulumutsi*) of the people of Malawi. He was called Ngwazi (Conqueror), meaning he was brave, ferocious, and invincible; hence his destruction of colonial rule and subsequent critics of his rule, whom he portrayed as enemies of the nation, regardless of the nature of their criticism. He was referred to as Nkhoswe No. 1, that is, protector, guardian, and provider of all his people, where the welfare of the nation and its people was seen as flowing directly from him. Over and above these, he was called father and founder of the nation, regardless of the fact that he took over leadership of the independence movement—the Nyasaland African Congress, formed in 1944—only when he returned to Malawi in 1958, on invitation of other nationalist leaders.<sup>2</sup> With these attributes, he not only assumed divine right and absolute authority to rule without challenge, but became president for life, Wamuyaya. For some of his fanatical supporters, such a title seemed to imply his reign was never going to end.<sup>3</sup>

To hegemonize Banda's regime, the MCP manipulated and appropriated the people's cultural traditions and activities to propagate a nationalist political discourse from the above ideas and beliefs (Chirwa 2001; Forster 1994). They concocted a hegemonic ideology called Kamuzuism, with and around which Banda and the MCP mobilized popular political support, creating a paternal and patronizing relationship between Banda and most ordinary people (Chirambo 2005, 2006; Gilman 2004).<sup>4</sup> Laws allowing Banda to use detention without trial, censorship, and other oppressive behaviors were perceived by his supporters as giving Banda the ability to protect the

best interests of the country and not as draconian or barbaric as his critics contended, and this could partly explain the resurgence of Banda's popularity after his death, a resurgence that has culminated in his national public monuments.

Banda and the MCP were edged out of power in 1994, when Malawi became a democracy. President Bakili Muluzi and the United Democratic Front (UDF) succeeded Banda and the MCP and ruled the country until 2004. Bingu wa Mutharika succeeded Muluzi, but ditched the UDF in 2005, forming his own party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), and is the incumbent at the present time.

Banda's national public memory in Malawi is constituted through the 14th of May as Kamuzu Day, a public holiday commemorating his official birthday, a mausoleum over his grave, and a statue in Lilongwe, the capital city—all constituted by the government at public expense. Kamuzu Day was discontinued by Muluzi and UDF in 1994, but has been reinstated by Bingu. While Levine suggests that, "the design, execution, and even the meanings of public memorials are subjected to the will of those with the political and economic clout that see to it that their own understanding of events is the one represented literally and symbolically" (2006:117), such memorials are open to contestation. This is the case because achieving consensus over representation of public memory of the past is difficult or impossible, given the competing agendas of interest groups, more so in post-totalitarian contexts, where perpetrators of atrocities in the past and victims have to share the same public space and public memory. The act of remembering becomes an act of forgetting—a selective process, wherein certain aspects of the past are suppressed or silenced or given prominence, depending on the interests of whoever constitutes the memorials. The ruling party as government in Malawi has assumed the privilege to collaborate with members of Banda's family to constitute Banda's public memorials (Sumbuleta 2005; Tenthani 2001a), but it is a privilege contested by writers such as Chipasula in "A Monument to a Tyrant," Jack Mapanje, Steve Chimombo, and some sections of the public (Chirambo 2008).

This article examines state-sponsored public monuments of Banda and an imagined statue in Frank Chipasula's poem, "A Monument to a Tyrant," as constituting contested narratives of the reign of Banda in Malawi. The constructed monuments are the official national public memories of Banda, while Chipasula's is an individual's recollection, "an alternative, unsanctioned form of public memory, [which] oppose[s] and contest[s] the dominant 'official memories'" as Forest, Johnson, and Till (2004:358) would argue. Though Chipasula's poem was published in 1981, long before the end of Banda's reign and his demise and the state's construction of the national monuments in 2006 and 2009, it is presented here as contestation of the constructed monuments primarily because Chipasula's imagination of the way Malawi would memorialize Banda significantly contradicts the manner in which he is actually being memorialized. Chipasula's contestation of the memory of Banda is more poignant now, after the fact of Banda's actual

monuments, as it enables comparative analysis of the memories of Banda—as either a tyrant, or the beloved founding father of a nation.

Between Banda's loss of power in 1994 and the construction of the monuments, a number of events explain the forms of Banda's memorialization that Chipasula could not have imagined in 1981. Bakili Muluzi, who succeeded Banda in 1994, used Banda's dictatorship largely to validate himself as a democrat. First, Muluzi was haunted by Banda's reign, mainly because he and most of the prominent politicians in the UDF had served Banda in high party and government positions, leading to suggestions that Muluzi and his cohorts must have known or could even have been involved in some of the atrocities of Banda's regime.<sup>5</sup> For this reason, it is possible to see Muluzi's initial response to Banda as trying to create distance from him. Thus, between 1994 and 2004, Bakili Muluzi and the UDF, as is typical in most post-totalitarian regimes, wanted to punish Banda and others as perpetrators of crimes during their dictatorship and do restitution for the victims. However, they were selective on issues they pursued, avoiding those in which it is believed they might have been coperpetrators. Van Donge (1998) describes such selective process as searching for a usable past, and Chirwa (2000) calls it use and abuse of the past for political expediency. For example, in 1994, Bakili Muluzi set up a Commission of Inquiry into the 1983 deaths in the hands of the MCP of four politicians: Dick Matenje, Aaron Gadama, Twaibu Sangala, and David Chiwanga, and prosecuted Banda and his right-hand man, John Tembo, for conspiracy to commit murder and attempted cover-up, using findings from the inquiry.<sup>6</sup> He exhumed the bodies of the four politicians for proper burial and erected a memorial pillar at the site of their murders in Mwanza District.

Muluzi shut down three of the most notorious detention centers during Banda's reign, Mikuyu Prison, Penu Prison, and Dzeleka, and turned Mikuyu Prison into a national prison museum, where instruments of torture can be viewed, though no documents or records are available there. He set up a National Compensation Tribunal to provide monetary compensation to some victims of the regime. He erased Banda's name on public infrastructure, such as Kamuzu Stadium, the Kamuzu Highway, Kamuzu International Airport, and Kamuzu Central Hospital, and replaced these with names of victims of Banda's dictatorship, such as Orton Chirwa and Masauko Chipembere.<sup>7</sup>

Muluzi did these things ostensibly to ensure that some justice would be done about the past; however, when pressed for a truth commission within the framework of reconciliation and reconstruction, modeled on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, he and his leadership rejected the idea (Chirwa 1997; Ross 1998; Tenthani 2001c). It is widely believed that they feared that a truth commission would uncover their own roles in the dirty past—illustrating the problem of political transitions where officials from the previous regime hold positions of power after the transition.

President Bakili Muluzi's own political fortunes changed significantly toward the end of his second term, 1999–2004, when he was increasingly being seen as a failed democrat. Among the reasons were his efforts to change the national constitution to allow himself a third term as president. For this, he courted John Tembo, president of the MCP, for support in parliament. He started embracing Banda as the first and founding president in Malawi, suggesting he had never been against Banda personally, but had opposed the system. It is arguable that these overtures toward Banda were intended to help him gain support of the people of Banda's home region, the Central Region, in a country where regional and ethnic affiliations are important factors in multiparty politics, as confirmed by presidential and parliamentary election results (Malawi Electoral Commission 1994, 1999, and 2004). In all these elections, presidential candidates got the most votes from their home regions.<sup>8</sup> Muluzi is a Yao from the Southern Region. Other than for the third-term bid, his popularity across the country had been significantly eroded by massive corruption, unfulfilled election promises, nepotism, and regionalism. By 2001, major aid donors to Malawi, including the European Union, the United States, and Britain, had suspended giving aid to Malawi, amid concerns of corruption that was believed to involve the president himself (Banda 2001; Tenthani 2001b). It was within this context that Muluzi mooted building a mausoleum over Banda's grave to honor him as the founding father of the nation, possibly to counter the growing disillusionment with his own reign; however, his bid for a third term failed in parliament, and plans for the mausoleum were shelved.

The mausoleum was, however, constructed by Muluzi's successor, President Bingu wa Mutharika, and inaugurated on 14 May 2006. Muluzi had handpicked Bingu for the UDF in 2004, hoping he would play puppet to him once in power. But by early 2005, Bingu and Muluzi had fallen apart because Bingu was refusing to operate under Muluzi's direction. In this power struggle, Bingu abandoned the UDF and formed his own party, the Democratic Progressive Party; however, he felt vulnerable to political machinations of the UDF because he had no MPs representing his party in parliament. The UDF, when joined by the MCP, had a majority in parliament that could impeach him and remove him from the presidency. Bingu turned to Banda's legacy, reevaluating his reign and salvaging whatever was positive and usable, things that had made Banda popular, such as food self-sufficiency and economic stability. He openly called Banda his model, making himself Banda's protégé. He has even adopted some of the praise names Banda used for himself, such as Ngwazi (Chirambo 2009a). He picked up the mausoleum project where Muluzi had abandoned it. He reinstated Banda's name on some of the infrastructures from where Muluzi had removed it, such as the international airport and the central hospital in Lilongwe, and the stadium in Blantyre. He needed to get into the hearts of Banda's ethnic group, the Chewa of Central Region, and undermine John Tembo and the MCP in the region. Bingu is a Lomwe from Southern Region.

## The Contested Functions of Banda's Monuments

The function of the constructed monuments and the imagined statue of Banda in Chipasula's poem, in the words of Choay, are not just "of informing, of calling to mind a neutral bit of information, but rather of stirring up, through the emotions, a living memory. . . . [The] past that is invoked and called forth . . . is localized and selected to a critical end" (quoted in Levine 2006:123). Localizing and selective processes have led to competing and antagonistic historical narratives and memories of Banda and Malawi's past. As monuments are, as Till suggests, "cultural space[s] through which a society understands, interprets and negotiates myths about its past" (quoted in Forest, Johnson, and Till 2004:358), there are always contesting interpretations and functions.

President Bingu wa Mutharika constructed and unveiled the mausoleum in 2006 (fig. 1) and the statue in 2009 (fig. 2). The government indicates that when complete, the monuments will include a museum, a dancing arena, and a library (Sumbuleta 2005; Tenthani 2001a). The monuments are in the "undeclared" Heroes Acre in Lilongwe, within the vicinity of central government offices and the new parliament complex. Presently, Banda's grave is the only one there, following the government's rejection for burial in the same area of two other supposed heroes of Malawi's nationalist politics: Kanyama Chiume and Chakufwa Chihana. Kanyama was a participant in the liberation struggle, the Nyasaland African Congress, and among leaders that invited Banda to return to Malawi in 1957. He served in Banda's first cabinet after independence in 1964, before being forced into exile following the cabinet crisis.<sup>9</sup> Chihana was among the leaders of the democratic movement that forced Banda to call for a national referendum in 1992 that ended his one-party dictatorship. Both were seen as deserving to be buried in the Heroes Acre—that is, as forming part of the nationalist memories of the country. The government objected.

The mausoleum is built over the actual grave of Banda and consists of a replica grave and a tombstone that in the photo can be seen at the end of the steps leading to the mausoleum square. This is a compromise design after Banda's family members objected to a design that would have allowed access to the actual grave or retraction of the coffin for public viewing (Liwanda 2006). On the tombstone are a cross and an epigram: "His Excellency Ngwazi Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, Father and Founder of the Malawi nation." Above the mausoleum is a dome-capped rotunda and at the pinnacle is another cross, visible in the photo. Also visible are a huge portrait of Banda on the front side of the dome. Another portrait is above the tombstone inside. The yard marking the parameter of the mausoleum is a square with a pillar at each corner, on which are engraved what Banda proclaimed to be the four foundational principles of his administration: unity, loyalty, obedience, and discipline.

The statue captures Banda in his three-piece suit to recall what he always wore in public, with his trademark walking stick and a flywhisk in



Fig. 1: H. K. Banda's mausoleum, Lilongwe, Malawi. Photo by the author, May 2006.

his right hand (Lwanda 1993; Vail and White 1991:296); the raised right arm is unmistakable—a gesture that he made often when he greeted people or danced with them. His gaze, smile, and poise make him symbolically tower over Lilongwe and in effect the nation as a whole. The statue is fitted on a square concrete block that, just like the mausoleum, bears the four cornerstones engraved at its corners. The unveiling plaque in front iterates that this is a statue of the father and founder of the Malawi nation; however, to underscore that Mutharika is Banda's protégé, it also addresses Bingu as Ngwazi.

It is quite obvious that the architectural designs of the mausoleum and the statue and their placement in the city add beauty to the city and are intended as attractions for locals and tourists (Tenthani 2001a). The eulogies pronounced during the unveiling offered the monuments as fitting tributes to the father and founder of the nation. They invoked a glorious past under Banda, whose memories would be crystallized for posterity in the monuments (Mmana 2006; Nkolokosa 2006; Nyangulu 2006).

Frank Chipasula, in contrast, imagines Banda's monuments, particularly the statue, as a place of attraction for very contradictory reasons in "A Monument to a Tyrant." Chipasula wrote his poem in exile, having escaped the country in 1973 for perceived threats to his life and following the detention of his brother, James (Chirambo 2009b; Nazombe 1992). The first lines say, "Imprison him [Banda] in concrete / In a moribund monument" (l. 12), where moribund suggests, rather optimistically, Banda's descent into



Fig. 2: H. K. Banda's Statue, Lilongwe, Malawi. Photo by the author, July 2009.

oblivion instead of prominence in the nationalist memories of the country. For Chipasula, a fitting statue of Banda evokes shame, something that symbolically imprisons and punishes him, even as he is abandoned to neglect and oblivion.

The statue of Banda in Chipasula's poem not only sets Banda "naked by the roadside" (l. 3), exposed to elements of nature, such as the "Chiperoni winds / rains that will whip him cold" (l. 6), but is "A spittoon for the weary

traveller, / A receptacle for bird-lime: *Chimbudzi!*" (ll. 7–8). *Chimbudzi* is a pit latrine or outhouse. The statue as pit latrine is where Chipasula says they must "imprison all the mess / the chaos, brutality, the torture: / Our History" (ll. 9–11). The weary traveler will spit or urinate on it; birds can rest on it and let their droppings cover it.

Chipasula suggests the statue would imprison Banda, where casting it is likened to putting handcuffs on Banda's wrists: "Harden the concrete around the steel hand / that has gripped and strangled our land, / The ruthless strokes of his dreaded pen / on the scarred skin of the detainee" (ll. 12–15). The image of a handcuffed Banda, rendered powerless and turned into a detainee, is particularly poignant and reads as prophetic, for Banda was actually arrested and tried for politically motivated murders of the four politicians referred to above. The "dreaded pen" refers to the signing of detention orders with which Banda condemned his victims to indefinite detention without charge or trial. Each signature he signed on detention orders is likened to a ruthless stroke on the body of his victim. Once detained, detainees were often tortured; hence the "scarred skin."<sup>10</sup> In Chipasula's poem, the Chiperoni weather, with its winds and rains, would whip and scar Banda, torture him as vengeance for doing the same to his victims (l. 6).

Chipasula sees the statue as symbolizing the execution of Banda for the wrongs against his society.

His heart will turn colder  
and sink into his heavy feet:

.....

Let the icy hand grip him  
and freeze him into his concrete block  
sculpted in his own image,  
gnawed by the tooth of the chisel,  
tortured and driven by anger,  
braided and seasoned with hatred.

Let the icy arrow rip through his cannibal  
heart and fill it with the *final cold*. (ll. 17–18, italics added)

In other words, the statue will grip, torture, and destroy Banda. The imagery here is of a Banda being squeezed by the monument and shot through by anger and hatred into his death. Chipasula adds,

And thus dethroned by death,  
let him stand there lonely  
despotic, tyrant till. . . (ll. 83–85)

Chipasula subverts the idea that Banda's monuments honor and celebrate his greatness or his heroism as a nationalist, father and founder of the nation. He extends our conception of a statue to see it as functioning as a prison, which symbolically arrests and executes those it represents.

While the government's monuments of Banda evoke a glorious past under Banda, Chipasula imagined Banda's monuments as a record of the atrocities he committed, and show what a fiend he was when he says, "In this concrete imprison all the mess, / the chaos, brutality, the torture: / Our History" (ll. 9–11). Chipasula sees the proper architectural design and construction of Banda's monuments as one where they "Mix concrete with his victims' blood" (l. 29), "and inscribe in blood / all the names of the innocent / victims crushed under his regime" (ll. 51–53). If the names of Banda's victims were to be written on the monument, it would resemble the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the Mall in Washington, D.C., where one would expect to find the names of those who died in his prisons or under mysterious circumstances. Chipasula would want such a list of names to bear testimony to the evil Banda did. Chipasula's monument of Banda, though only imaginary and therefore symbolic, is not to honor Banda, but to humiliate him, expose him to shame, the kinds that victims of his reign might have endured across the country, in detention centers, and in exile. This of course contradicts what Banda's monuments in Lilongwe are intended for, as places of honor and reverence and as tourist attractions.

## The Contested Architectures

Chipasula imagined that the vision and stories of the writers that endured Banda's dictatorship would inspire the sculptor to make a monument of Banda that would reveal Banda's barbarity to posterity when he says

Let the light and songs of the poet  
and the fatal fall of the sculptor's hand  
reveal this fiend to the world:  
"Let us give unto Caesar  
his brutality, his heartlessness." (ll. 35–39)

Thus, for Chipasula, Banda's monument would be an image of a heartless, power-hungry tyrant; in contrast, the architectural and sculptural designs of the government's monuments preserve for posterity the esteem of Banda's glory days. The magnificence of the mausoleum, and the statue in particular, evoke familiar and endearing images. The flywhisk and the walking stick, which gave Banda the aura of a respected elder statesman, with his smile, gaze, and pose, are meant to inspire awe and admiration.

Chipasula describes Banda's statue as having a "cold bronze face" with "pale metallic eyes gazing / frightfully at the mythic lizard / permanently imprinted on his mind's wall" (ll. 17–20). Allusion to the mythic lizard is to the lizard of a folktale about the origins of life and death, in which a lizard is the carrier of the message of death and a chameleon of the message of life. The lizard, because of his speed, arrives first to deliver his message. Banda, in Chipasula's poem, is frightened of that death and is

insinuated as the messenger of death. He is not the savior or messiah that he was called.

Chipasula says, "Let his [Banda's] form itself rest / on the terrible crucifix of his sin" (ll. 30–31)—which contradicts the majestic form that he has actually taken in the constructed monuments. Jesus is said to have died on a cross for the sins of the world, but Banda in Chipasula's poem is crucified for his own sin, his dictatorship. He is, in other words, not the savior of anyone, or even of himself. Similarly, other than the seemingly smiling Banda in the constructed monument, in Chipasula's poem it is his "eye's evil glitter and crocodile smile" (ll. 33–34) that suggest that the eyes and smile with which Banda charmed many in Malawi and are now represented in the statue are evil and the smile is fake. They are deceptive. Banda, for Chipasula, was a snake in the grass—something that should be captured in his monuments.

When Chipasula describes Banda's hand as an "iron hand" (l. 42), it is to celebrate him not as the Ngwazi (the brave warrior), but as the hand "under which / thousands have perished" (l. 43)—that is, the hand of a monster. This too, Chipasula suggests, must "show through / the cold concrete and stone" (ll. 43–44). Chipasula's image of Banda as possessing an "eagle eye / and claw" as well as a "steel beak" (ll. 47–48) alludes to the manner in which Banda's agents, like eagles, stalked their victims, on whom they descended without warning to destroy or put in detention; hence the suggestion that with his eagle eye and claws, Banda "picked our land clean" (l. 49). Chipasula suggests that these parts of Banda must show "clearly accented, unhidden" (l. 50). Jack Mapanje, in "For a Friend Taken, 1976," which says, "Even robots flick amber first / And you can whizz down the blood / Road before the red if you like!" (1981:50), also decries the swiftness and arbitrariness with which Banda's agents pounced on his victims and made arrests and detentions. Chipasula imagines all such callousness showing in the architecture of Banda's monument.

## The Contested Narratives

In monuments, the messages and meanings, both scripted and symbolic, are critically important, as Levine observes when he says that, "as important and relevant as aesthetic and design consideration are for memorials, their significance is to be found largely in their capacity to represent or convey certain meanings and messages" (2006:118). The messages and meanings in Banda's constructed monuments, as well as in the imagined monument in Chipasula's poem, are of instrumental value, which, in the words of Schudson, are intended "to promote a particular version of the past that serves present interests" (1995:353). The interests of the government of Bingu wa Mutharika would include representing Banda as a nationalist hero, in whose footsteps Bingu is trying to follow (Chirambo 2009a). In contrast, Chipasula's intention would include documenting for posterity the brutalities of Banda's dictatorship, which Chipasula personally suffered (Chirambo 2009b;

Nazombe 1992). He would be hoping that such documentation would serve as a warning for Malawians not to go the same route again. For this, the monuments are audience centered for rhetorical effect, meant to promote a specific view of Banda's reign in Malawi.

The constructed monuments of Banda recall what Banda touted as the foundational and guiding principles of his reign, which enabled him attain "peace and calm, law and order," and the four cornerstones of unity, loyalty, obedience, and discipline. These cornerstones were the basis of his ideology, called Kamuzuism. They were outlined in the MCP membership card, which every Malawian was forced to buy and carry at all times, as those who could not produce one were denied access to public services (Lwanda 1993). Every individual was supposed to be familiar with these cornerstones and always uphold them. The cornerstones were taught in schools at all levels. Malawians were taught to look out for acts of disloyalty and breaches of the cornerstones so as to preserve the peace. Any criticism of Banda or the party, even a complaint, was regarded as gross indiscipline, an act of disloyalty, disobedience, and a threat to national unity. A complaint against the party or Banda breached all four cornerstones, and punishment for such breaches included detention without trial. Hence, for his critics, including Chipasula, the cornerstones were instruments for silencing criticism and suppressing opposition. In "A Love Poem for my Country" (1991:39), Chipasula laments that Banda filled detention centers with people who in one way or another breached the cornerstones. Paul Tiyaambe Zeleza suggests that Banda used the cornerstones to "wage an endless war against plurality, against voices that told different stories or sang different songs, stories or songs that did not glorify the ever-lasting king's infinite wisdom, . . . its enviable peace and calm, law and order" (1995:33). They were used to censor and criminalize dissent. Therefore, though they are engraved onto the monuments and presented unproblematically as foundational principles of Banda's rule, they are contested principles because of what they enabled Banda to do to dissenters and the opposition.

The affirmative statement on the constructed monuments that Banda is father and founder of the Malawi nation restates what Banda throughout his reign insisted: that he was the guardian and protector of his people. His role in achieving independence for Malawi cannot be denied, but it is his failure to acknowledge, and his efforts to obliterate any memories of, his compatriots in the struggle for independence, all of whom he either forced into exile or killed, even in exile, that are problematic (Baker 2001, Chirambo 2006:109–126). The statement is more or less a denial of the historical facts, since the independence movement that Banda came to lead in 1958 had been founded in 1944 by nationalists who desired independence from British colonial rule. It is for these reasons that Chipasula and others pay homage to those who fell in the struggle against colonialism. In "A Poem for Martyrs' Day" (1991:22), Chipasula invokes memories of those who died in the independence struggle and those that died in the hands of Banda as martyrs, not just victims. He calls them freedom fighters. Mapanje, in his

poems “A Marching Litany to Our Martyrs” (1981:5) and “Before Chilembwe Tree” (1981:18), questions why memories of the martyrs were anathema for Banda. Steve Chimombo, in his poems “Pyagusi” (2009:102) and “Operation Corpses” (2009:128), suggests that James Fredrick Sangala, the founder of the Nyasaland African Congress, of which Banda became leader in 1958, was more deserving of a mausoleum than Banda. In all these, Chipasula and others challenge Banda’s claim to being the sole father and founder of the nation and its benefactor.<sup>11</sup>

Two plaques on the constructed statue quote from Banda’s speeches, revealing the selectivity of the process of memorializing Banda. The first, from his arrival speech in 1958, reads:

I have come back to break their [colonialist] stupid federation and to give you my people the Africans of this country your own government and independence. I have come back home to act as a bridge, to break the gulf of disunity between the races: between the Europeans and the Indians on one hand, and my own people, the African people of this country, on the other hand.

These statements are from a speech Banda made on his arrival in Malawi on 6 July 1958, responding to an invitation to lead the independence movement. Banda essentially spelled out his mission—which was exactly what he had been invited back to do. He cast himself as the giver of freedom and a peacemaker between races. The second plaque quotes Banda as saying, in his speech on the referendum:

I want to appeal to all of you to maintain peace and calm, law and order. Respect each other as Malawians have always done. Each one of you has an obligation to maintain the good name of Malawi.

This quote, though not dated on the monument, is from the 1992 referendum campaign period, when pressure groups campaigned for multiparty democracy against continued single-party rule. In his campaign speeches, Banda tried to portray multiparty politics as a threat to what he believed was the “peace and calm, law and order” he had achieved with the four cornerstones. He and his cohorts claimed multiparty politics would lead to civil war, as ethnic groups would fight for political power. He felt the multiparty campaign against him was disrespectful for portraying him as a dictator. However, he and the MCP lost the referendum, as people voted to introduce multiparty democratic politics. On the same plaque as the above speech appears a quotation from a radio broadcast he made in January 1996: “I selflessly dedicated myself to the good cause of mother Malawi in the fight against poverty, ignorance, hunger and disease.” This quote comes from a speech to the nation following his acquittal in the trial on a charge

of conspiracy to murder the four politicians killed in Mwanza; however, sentiments in some circles in Malawi, especially as expressed by the Public Affairs Committee, a nongovernment faith-based group campaigning for human rights, was that his acquittal was on technicalities of the law and could not be seen as a "not guilty" verdict, given the evidence of the murders under his watch in the Commission of Inquiry report. Banda was therefore pressured to own up to the atrocities committed during his tenure of office and apologize to the nation. He effectively refused to take responsibility for murders or whatever suffering any Malawians might have endured during his rule. The broadcast quoted in *Malawi News* went on to say: "if within the process [of serving Mother Malawi], those who worked in my government or through false pretence in my name or *indeed unknowing by me*, pain and suffering was caused to anybody in this country *in the name of nationhood*, I offer my sincere apologies" (italics added). This apology and the quotations in the plaques, from when he arrived in 1958 and from when he left power in 1992–1996, for his critics and victims would, first, show arrogance in Banda's part, for claiming that what he had promised in 1958 had come to pass without problems. Second, they would be seen as glossing over or silencing the close to thirty years between his arrival and exit, in which, his critics argue, he caused great harm and hurt to many—what Chipasula calls the mess and chaos that is Malawi's history.

The crucifixes on the replica grave and the dome of the mausoleum affirm that Banda was not just a Christian: they situate him in the dominant discourse of his leadership as ordained or appointed by the Christian deity.<sup>12</sup> After all, Banda was called the messiah or savior (*mpulumutsi*) of Malawi for his role in bringing independence to Malawi. Songs composed in his praise propagated these myths and beliefs, suggesting that the deity had chosen him before he had been born to liberate and lead Malawi (Chirambo 2005). To claim Christian moral authority, Banda, throughout his rule, constantly spoke of his membership and eldership in the Free Church of Scotland in the United Kingdom, dating from the 1950s, when he lived in Edinburgh. He presented these credentials as if they had not expired by his coming to Malawi.<sup>13</sup>

Chipasula contests the above representation of Banda as a Christian leader or messiah by suggesting that he was a fiend, a heartless Caesar (ll. 37–39). Chipasula compares Banda's entire detention system, designed to maximize the amount of suffering on its inmates, to the Nazi death camps where Jews were exterminated, and the American internment centers of Japanese at Lake Tule during World War II.

The iron-ribbed rock stretches forth  
its terrible claws  
offers us tiny concrete cell blocks,  
walls crowned with barbed wire,  
bares its hideous, obscene  
and monstrous face where victories  
inflicted against his own people frieze

inscribed in golden letters:  
DZELEKA, AUSCHWITZ,  
BUCHENWALD, MIKUYU, TULE LAKE:  
the iron fingers fold round necks  
and snap them like flower buds. (ll. 53–65)

In other words, Chipasula undermines the messianic claims by Banda and his supporters by pointing to his use of detention without trial and torture as some of the cruelest forms of punishment that Banda used against his people. Dzeleka and Mikuyu were among the worst detention centers in Malawi, renowned for torturing inmates to death. The poem suggests that Banda snapped his victims like flower buds—that is, he killed his victims in a deliberate, methodical, callous manner. The tiny cells and barbed wires of the detention centers were as obscene as they were hideous, reflecting the meanness of humanity against fellow humanity. Chipasula is implicitly questioning whether such a leader could be a Christian or a savior of his people, as Banda claimed.

## Conclusion

Both the government-of-Malawi-constructed monuments of Banda and Chipasula's imaginary representation of him in "A Monument to a Tyrant" come from experiences of Banda's reign in Malawi and are each characteristically selective, where, as Schudson argues, "remembering one thing requires forgetting another" (1995:360). The government recalls Banda's heroism, affirming his claims to being a Christian leader, the sole founder and father of the nation. The government has postulated the four cornerstones of unity, loyalty, obedience, and discipline as the foundational principles of the nation, through which Banda established what he termed "peace and calm, law and order." Unrepresented in the constructed national public monuments of Banda are the stories of Malawians that languished in detention without trial, were forced into exile, tortured, and killed—acts Chipasula thinks ought to be recounted.

Chipasula's monument is the product of his own experiences of forced exile, the detention without trial of his brother, James, and others. Hence, his literary representation of Banda creates an image of Banda, and the narrative captures and represents the horrors of torture, political murders, and draconian censorship. It is meant to evoke anger and hatred for Banda's regime. Chipasula, like other critical poets in Malawi, portrays Banda as a demagogue and perverted, sadistic dictator (Chirambo 2009b). Chipasula's statue of Banda is where Banda is symbolically imprisoned and executed, affording some kind of justice for his victims. The poem celebrates the end of Banda and his influence in Malawi's politics—a celebration that might have been premature, seen from the manner in which Banda has actually been memorialized in the constructed monuments.

As a recollection of Malawi's past under a regime that victimized him and many others, Chipasula's statue of Banda does not include what he says is "the little good he [Banda] did" (l. 41). Chipasula's narrative therefore silences such stories of Banda's heroism as leading the country to independence and the development programs he initiated and presided over.

Chipasula, like other poets, sees it as his role to reconstruct the past to reveal the brutality that was suppressed by censorship and fears of detention during Banda's reign. Censorship created silences of the truths and masked the realities of dictatorship by allowing only praises of Banda to find local expression. When Chipasula says the poet's song should merge in harmony with the sculptor's hammer to create a monument that remembers and reminds everyone of the "brutality and heartlessness" of Banda, he evokes the writer's role as that of recollecting the history of the nation. Mapanje makes the same suggestion when he says,

I believe it is the duty of Malawian writers and artists particularly, to extend the bounds of the imagination in order to reconstruct the chaos of the past thirty years through their different forms of art. . . . Now that tyranny is gone, let aesthetics take over, let memory take over to artistically reconstruct the injustices we have suffered these three decades . . . lay bare the barbarity that human beings are capable of inflicting on others without accountable cause. (1995:14)

Therefore, while the government intends the monuments of Banda to represent Malawi's glorious past and to honor and pay tribute to Banda, Chipasula's monument contradicts that by suggesting a monument that represents Banda as a vicious dictator in Malawi.

## NOTES

1. In Chipasula (1991:15–18).
2. Leaders of the Nyasaland African Congress that included Masauko Chipembere, Kanyama Chiume, and others invited Banda to come to Malawi in 1957 to lead the independence movement partly because they needed an elder person that could quell internal squabbling within the movement. For details, see Chipembere 2001 and Chiume 1992.
3. For a detailed discussion and examples of the praise titles and implications of the relationship between Banda and the people, see Chirambo 2005.
4. For a discussion of how African leaders acted as paternal figures within the hegemonic setup of their rule, see Mbembe 2001.
5. For example, Bakili Muluzi and Aleke Banda had served Banda in what was deemed as the number two position to Banda. Several other leaders of the UDF also served Banda in the cabinet or other high positions in the party. They all fell out of grace with Banda and MCP

- before forming their own party, UDF, in 1993. Hence, it was referred to in a derogatory way as MCP Team B.
6. For details, see Government of Malawi, Commission of Inquiry 1994.
  7. Orton Chirwa formed the MCP to replace the banned Nyasaland African Congress in 1959 while Banda was in detention following a state of emergency. He handed power to Banda on his release. He escaped the country into exile in 1964 following the cabinet crisis and founded his own opposition party in exile. In 1981, he and his wife were lured to the border between Malawi and Zambia by Banda's special agents, where they were arrested, tried in Malawi for treason, and sentenced to death. Chirwa's sentence was commuted to life, and he died in prison in 1992. His wife was released later.
  8. For a detailed discussion of ethnicity and multiparty politics in Malawi, see Chirwa 1998; Kaspin 1995; Osei-Hwedie 1998.
  9. The cabinet crisis happened immediately following independence, in August–September 1964, when six cabinet ministers, including Chiume, resigned because of what they called Banda's dictatorship and fled the country when threatened by Banda's supporters and agents. For details, see Baker 2001 and Ross 1997.
  10. Under the Preservation of Public Security Act of 1966, upon arrest, the police would obtain a detention order with Banda's signature, in which the detainee would formally be declared to be under indefinite detention. The detainee would be asked to affix his or her signature next to Banda's to acknowledge this status.
  11. In the growing disenchantment with government's revalorizing of Banda, the independent newspapers almost every year are getting bolder in referring to victims of Banda's reign as martyrs and heroes of the struggle against postindependence despotism. For example, in commemorating Martyrs' Day on 3 March 2009, *The Daily Times* included an article titled "Rethinking Martyrhood" with a picture of a pillar commemorating the political murders of four politicians killed in Mwanza in 1983 (Martyrs Day Supplement 2009). The article itself names more people who died under Banda's reign and calls them martyrs. *The Nation* has a picture of John Chilembwe, the first martyr who died fighting against white colonial rule in 1915 and the four Mwanza victims killed by Banda's reign as martyrs (Martyrs' Day 2009). Banda is called another hero of the nation, but not the only one. All individuals killed by Banda's regime are said to have died fighting for a free Malawi.
  12. For a detailed discussion of the religious factor in Banda's rule, see Muyebe and Muyebe 1999.
  13. In the campaign for change to democracy in 1992, the Free Church of Scotland came out in support of the prodemocracy campaign. Effectively disowning him, it indicated that Banda's eldership had lapsed automatically when he had moved away from Edinburgh, for one had to be in the church to serve as an elder.

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