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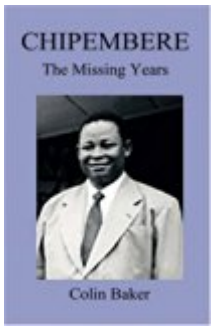
Colin Baker. *Chipembere: The Missing Years.* Zomba: Kachere, 2006. 391 pp. $39.95, paper, ISBN 978-99908-76-33-8.



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Most students of postwar Africa are able to identify individual nationalists who played major roles in the struggle for independence, or indeed, in the negotiating processes leading to decolonization. Malawi has a long list of such personalities, and very high on the list is Henry Blasius Masuko Chipembere. It was he who, along with other young activists, particularly William Kanyama Chiume, in 1957 encouraged their rather ineffective party, the Nyasaland African Congress (NAC), to persuade the older and more urbane Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda to return home from Ghana and take charge of the crucial stage of the fight against British colonial rule. By the time of his death in exile in the United States in 1975, Chipembere had started to write an autobiography which, clearly unfinished, covers his life to early 1959. Many years later, Robert Rotberg edited the manuscript, and in 2001 the Christian Literature Association in Malawi (CLAIM), of Blantyre, published it in its Kachere series under the title, *Hero of the Nation: Chipembere of Malawi: An Autobiography*. Thus the story of this popular politician, key to understanding Malawian affairs in the mid-twentieth century, remained incomplete until the publication of Professor Colin Baker's *Chipembere: The Missing Years*.

The book is divided into three parts, the first consisting of the main biography which is subdivided further into fourteen short chapters totaling about 160 pages, the second being a compilation of most of Chipembere's published and unpublished papers, and the third section comprising the epilogue, notes, and index. The first chapter, "Before the 1959 State of Emergency," highlights the colony's constitutional changes, mainly in the 1950s, including those which brought into the colonial legislature, for the first time, five Africans, including Chipembere, all elected by provincial councils. It also highlights aspects of Chipembere's early life, from the time of his graduation from the University of Fort Hare to his brief and unhappy employment in the colonial civil service, progressing to his political activism and entry into the legislature, and to his rise as a forceful radical and popular speaker. The chapter also summarizes the part he played in bringing Dr. Banda back to Nyasaland in 1958, and his key role in planning the nationalists' next course of

action, strategies which would lead to the state of emergency and the detention of hundreds of people, including Banda, Chipembere and the majority of the central executive of the Nyasaland African Congress.

The next three chapters cover the period from Chipembere's custody in a Gwelo (Gweru), Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) facility, followed by his release and tours to various parts of Nyasaland during which time he made some of his most impassioned anticolonial speeches, to his prosecution, conviction, and incarceration in Zomba Central prison from February 1961 to January 1963. His imprisonment meant that he was not included in the constitutional talks which brought about the first adult suffrage general elections in August 1961, resulting in the establishment of a government in which the Malawi Congress Party, formerly the NAC, had a majority. His confinement also prevented him from influencing directly deliberations and decisions on further political changes in the colony. These events are central to understanding the personal and political relations between Chipembere and Hastings Banda.

Using Chipembere's own biography and, more importantly, confidential government sources and personal communications with some of the colonial officers at the center of the decision-making process at the time, Baker shows how by late 1960 their relationship had in effect developed into a situation of tension and suspicion akin to that between a father and a son, one moderate in his politics and respectful of things British, the much younger person a committed firebrand prepared to advocate violence to attain decolonization. Chipembere's fourteen months in Gweru had been spent in the company of Banda and Dunduzu Chisiza, the secretary general of the NAC and an economics buff. While in Gweru, Chipembere read widely on history, politics, and philosophy, whereas Chisiza immersed himself in economics literature. They discussed their plans for an independent Nyasaland, and the two less-experienced wards listened to Banda express his ideas of life and politics. During this time they came to know each other better, and this association would be significant in the future. Throughout the book, Baker shows how Banda came to know Chipembere, and how this influenced his dealings with him in later years. For example, it is clear now that Banda could have exerted some pressure on the governor, Sir Glynn Jones, to release Chipembere at various stages between February 1961 and late 1962. Banda did not do so even when other senior party members urged such a course of action, apparently because he wanted to prevent Chipembere's radicalism from influencing the crucial constitutional negotiations and already charged political atmosphere in the colony. Equally notable is the manner in which Chipembere addressed Banda. In prison letters sent to his leader, Chipembere referred to Banda as "My dear atate" ("father"), and in one as "My beloved father and master." The letters ended with "Your affectionate son and servant" or "Your ever loyal servant." Granted that in many African societies elders are often addressed as "father," it seems clear here that Chipembere was respectful of Banda in a very special way. Nevertheless, as Baker also demonstrates, Chipembere was not averse to undermining his party's president whenever he thought Banda was being too temperate in his transactions with colonial and imperial authorities.

Upon his release from prison, Chipembere resumed his duties as treasurer general of the Malawi Congress Party, and Banda appointed him Minister of Local Government. At independence in July 1964, he became Minister of Education, a position he held until major disagreements in the new cabinet in August of that year set in motion a chain of events that led eventually to his exile from the country of his birth. Baker devotes three chapters to this epoch in Chipembere's life. We are told that he was a hard-working cabinet minister, with good relations with civil servants in the upper echelons of his ministries, most of whom

were at that time British expatriates. It is also evident that his stature as a leader was rising, to the point that most Malawians, including those high up in the Malawi Congress Party, quietly assumed that he would succeed Banda eventually. Banda himself was quite aware of this. However, Chipembere was not to be a cabinet minister for long, for in August 1964, barely six weeks after Malawi's independence, strains between Banda and the majority of his cabinet over, among other issues, the pace of Africanization, health care, and foreign policy, led to a major rift, forcing some of them to flee the country for fear of imprisonment and prosecution.

A major turning point in Malawi's recent history, the Cabinet Crisis, as it has come to be known locally, is a subject of one of Baker's books, and this section of part 1 of ***Chipembere: The Missing Years***, relies very heavily on it.[1] Chipembere's rising status was even more evident at this time. He was out of the country when the public schism developed between Prime Minister Banda and his cabinet ministers; as was known at the time, and as Baker confirms, had Chipembere not joined the side of his colleagues upon his return, chances are that the crisis would not have gone as far or would have been resolved differently. He united with his colleagues, this time on the opposition bench, but while they were to flee the country by the end of October, he escaped to the mountains of Fort Johnston (Mangochi) district to organize guerrilla warfare against Banda's government. The hunt for him became a main preoccupation of Malawi's security forces. Baker informs us that after the failure of Chipembere's "army" to attack the then-capital, Zomba, in February 1965, the search for him intensified, and so did the medical problems arising from his diabetes. This is where the book reveals much about the secret workings of the government. Banda's denunciation of his former minister became louder, more vicious, and more frequent; he told his audiences that he wanted Chipembere captured, dead or alive. At the same time, with Banda's knowledge and approval, the governor-general, Sir Glynn Jones, his chief secretary, attorney general, the head of the special branch of the police, and the army commander were working secretly to contact Chipembere with a view to taking him to safety outside Malawi. They did so with the logistical support of Archbishop Donald Arden of the Anglican Church, with which Chipembere's family had long been associated, his father being one of its senior priests. Also involved were the Southern Rhodesia and British governments. Although at the time rumors circulated in Malawi to the effect that somebody, probably an external power, had helped Chipembere flee abroad, the story of Banda's role and that of government officials, as well as the intensity of the delicate operation, will come as a shock to many in that country.

Baker presents Chipembere's life in exile as that of an unsure person. The former minister was concerned with the situation of his followers back at home; he was to live for some time in Tanzania, where he formed a party, obviously in the expectation that he would return to Malawi as a leader. It seems clear also that, perhaps because of the stress of exile life, each of the former cabinet ministers led his own life, and in some cases, his own organization. While in Tanzania there was an unsuccessful attempt to reconcile with the Malawi leader, again using some very intricate means and intermediaries, including Lady Listowell. This will be another major revelation to Malawianists. Chipembere's diabetes required that he be in a country with developed medical facilities, and although Britain was his first choice, the government there was not keen to have him there for long periods because it feared upsetting relations with the Banda government. The United States, where Chipembere was to study and teach for some years, was also rather wary of him. Finally, he seems to have been wrestling with another dilemma: whether to remain hopeful of returning to politics in Malawi or to commit himself to academic life as a university teacher, a profession Baker tells us Chipembere respected, en-

joyed, and one in which he had already proved his proficiency at California State University. Throughout the book, Baker gives the impression that Chipembere's diabetes influenced the swings in his mood and some of his important decisions. It was complications from the disease that killed him in 1975. The second part of the book includes a selection of Chipembere's speeches and published and unpublished papers, some which seem to have aided Baker in writing the biography. Perhaps the real importance of this section lies in the fact that it enables us to appreciate better Chipembere's mind, especially his thoughts on Malawi and those on postcolonial Africa in general. The last part of the book contains the epilogue and the notes to the various chapters. The epilogue is basically a summary of Chipembere's life from his birth at Kayoyo in Ntchisi (part of old Kota Kota) district, spotlighting particularly events that seem to have led him to adopt such a strong anticolonial position in his political life. Among such occurrences were the harsh manner in which some of his white school teachers had treated him and his encounters with extreme racism in Southern Rhodesia before going to Fort Hare, where he was to admire and seek to emulate a number of his black lecturers, particularly Professor Z. K. Matthews and Dr. James Njongwe. All this is interesting and useful information but, as a reader, I would have preferred it to come at the beginning of the book rather than at the end as it would have made it easier for me to understand some of Chipembere's utterances and actions.

Professor Baker used a variety of sources in writing the book. First is Chipembere's own unfinished autobiography, ***Hero of the Nation***. Second, as in the case of his other books on Malawi, the author avails himself of an assortment of official and semi-official sources: government archives and the official and personal (sometimes confidential, nonattributable) notes of many of the British colonial civil servants who worked in Malawi at this time.[2] As one such official, Baker knew some of them personally, giving him a very rare and enviable access to key information. Although in sections such official and semi-official sources seem to overly influence the tone of the book, Baker also interviewed or corresponded with several people close to Chipembere, among them his widow Catherine and Kanyama Chiume, a long-time close associate and one of the cabinet ministers expelled in 1964.[3]

This is certainly an important book concerning Malawi's recent past, even though it leaves many questions unresolved. For example, despite his success in portraying Chipembere as a vehement anticolonial politician, one with widespread popular support, Baker does not show clearly the dynamics between him and his colleagues during daily political life, nor does he really examine Chipembere's interactions with the common urban and rural person. What was the basis of his popularity, besides his rousing speeches? How did the perception of his strong leadership arise? These and many other questions would have been answered only by interviewing many more people than Baker does here. Also, granted that Chipembere, like others in exile, had to be careful of clandestine Malawi security operators, one would still like to know what everyday life was like for him and his family, especially in Tanzania, and the nature of his relations with other exiled former cabinet ministers, some of whom, like him, formed their own political parties. Another subject of interest which the book does not examine is the nature of the political system Chipembere hoped his government would adopt if and when he returned to Malawi. This question arises in view of his three years' residence in Tanzania at a time when the East African country was much associated with the socialism for which Hastings Banda had an almost pathological dislike. While in Tanzania, Chipembere taught at Kivukoni College in Dar es Salaam, then the ideological center of President Julius Nyerere and his ruling Tanzanian African Union (TANU) party. That was also the time when varieties of socialism

were being discussed in a significant number of African countries. We shall have to wait for a fuller biography of Chipembere in which, hopefully, these and other questions will be answered.

Finally, one must applaud the decision to publish the book in Malawi, where *Hero of the Nation* was also published. Considering the cost of books these days, it is hoped that many Malawians will be able to buy and read the biography of this beloved and able politician, the president-in-waiting whose destiny was never fulfilled.

Notes

[1]. Colin Baker, *Revolt of the Ministers: The Malawi Cabinet Crisis, 1964-1965* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001).

[2]. Including *Retreat from Empire: Sir Robert Armitage in Africa and Cyprus* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998); *Sir Glyn Jones: A Proconsul in Africa, London* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000); and *Revolt of the Ministers*.

[3]. M. W. Kanyama Chiume passed away on November 21, 2007.