

The Warm Heart of Africa: A Brief Look at the People, History, and Culture of Malawi

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Purpose: The purpose of this report is to better understand the people, history, and culture of Malawi, in preparation for a two-month mission internship to Malawi in May and June of 2009.

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Preface

Since childhood, I've been interested in foreign countries and global missions. Scattered throughout my family's volumes of photo books are pictures of me dressed in costumes from Israel, Vietnam, Africa, Japan, and India. One of my favorite parts of school was studying world geography. In high school, as I studied world geography, I prepared ethnic dishes from different countries—from Japanese fungi soup, to rich European chocolate, Greek spinach salad, fried plantains, and *pavlova*; I traveled the world via my palette. I've eaten a variety of ethnic foods and enjoy trying new dishes whenever I have the opportunity. Even in college, I have enjoyed learning about other countries and their customs in different classes. Last fall, I loved attending the university's ethnic food day, when our international students prepared their native dishes for us to sample.

As I studied other countries and sampled authentic foods throughout my school years, I also learned about the global church. Specific events in my life have drawn ties between far away lands, my own life, and the Biblical commission to "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). I remember hearing missionary stories from Rwanda when I was a few years old, and thinking of Tootsie Roll candy when we learned about the fighting between the Hutus and the "Tootsies"! When I was about ten, my church had a special missions emphasis weekend on Tibet. I met some missionaries and was motivated to pray daily for the mission work in this least-reached country. Throughout high school, I kept in touch with missionary friends in Belgium, Ecuador, Taiwan, Indonesia, and Malawi via e-mail.

This spring, through a course of interesting events, I find myself preparing for my first overseas trip—a combination of geography, missions, and a touch of accounting—a two-month internship in Malawi, Africa. In preparation for visiting another country and being immersed in its culture, I am once

again facing the wonderful combination of geography and missions. Since I find researching, studying geography, compiling information, and accounting a delightful mix, I have enjoyed assembling this paper as an independent study, and I plan to enjoy even more my cross-cultural experience in Malawi.

I invite you to enjoy a measure of my Malawi experience with me. Though I could perhaps write a better paper after I return, this project has aided in preparing me for my first excursion to and immersion into another culture. I hope that as you read, you will enjoy learning about Malawi with the same gusto I felt in preparing this paper.

To God be the Glory!

Julie Cook
April 2009

There's much truth in the phrase "The Warm Heart of Africa." Not only do the climate and lush vegetation of the lakeshore [of Lake Malawi] conform effortlessly to every stereotype image of tropical Africa, but the people of Malawi exude a warmth and friendliness that make most visitors feel instantly at home. Malawi may well be the most laid-back nation on earth (Briggs xi).

Introduction

Nestled between Zambia, Tanzania, and Mozambique, inland from Madagascar, is a small, elongated, densely populated country nicknamed "The Warm Heart of Africa." Malawi has earned its name not only from the country's warm temperatures and beautiful scenery, but also from the warm

hearts of its inhabitants. Although Malawi is one of the least developed countries in the world, it claims cultural charm and beauty unequaled even by its close neighbors. Malawi's varying geography includes Lake Malawi, mountains, plateaus, rain forest, lowlands and grasslands that makes the country unique among its neighbors (Miller). The Lake, mountains, and beautiful scenery attract backpackers. Malawi has also been dubbed "Africa for Beginners," a great place to begin to discover the continent (Briggs 1). And aside from the chances of getting malaria, a trip to Malawi is considered as safe, beautiful, cheap, and hassle-free as can be expected when visiting an African country.

Country Profile

Nearly 14 million people call Malawi home, making it one of the most densely populated countries in Africa, specifically southern Africa (*The World Factbook*). Over 90% of Malawi's population are rural subsistence farmers, most of whom live in the fertile southern region (*CultureGram*). Ninety-nine percent of Malawians are black Africans (Encarta). The largest ethnic populations are the Chewa (90%), Tumbuka, and Yawo; the Hyanja [Nyanja], Lomwe, Sena, Tonga, Ngoni, and Ngonde are among the smaller groups (*CultureGram*, *Encarta*). There are also a few Asians and Europeans in Malawi.

Malawi has two official languages, English (used for government and business) and Chichewa. Malawi's former leader, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, chose Chichewa as one of the official languages, because he was Chewa (*CultureGram*). Chichewa is mostly spoken in the central and southern regions (around 57% of the population), while Chitumbuka is spoken in the northern part of the country (9.5%). Other major languages are Chinyanja (12.8%) and Chiyawo (10.1%) (*The World Factbook*). Bantu-related

languages are spoken in smaller ethnic groups; these languages "are melodic and expressive; every syllable ends in a vowel, though some are not pronounced" (*CultureGram*).

Since 1975, Lilongwe has been the nation's capital, but Blantyre (named for David Livingstone's birthplace in Scotland) is the largest industrial city. With only about 10% of its population living in urban areas, Malawi is one of the most rural countries in the world (*The World Factbook*).



Fig. 1. Map of Malawi in relation to southern Africa, from www.worldaccord.org, 2009

Geography

Malawi is roughly the size of Pennsylvania (45,747 square miles) and boasts a variety of geographical features. Lake Malawi, the country's most notable geographical form and the continent's third largest lake (after Lake Victoria and Lake Tanganyika) makes it easy to locate Malawi on a map of Africa. Tourists dub Lake Malawi "The Lake of Stars," because of the way it shimmers in the sunlight (*World Info Zone*). It is also called the "Calendar Lake," because it stretches approximately 365 miles long and is about 52 miles across at the widest section, though it averages 10-15 miles wide. Malawi shares Lake Malawi with Tanzania and Mozambique. The Shire River runs between Lake Malawi and the Zambezi River. When David Livingstone discovered Lake Malawi while traveling up the Shire River in the 1800s, he named it Lake Nyasa, which is the Yawo word for "Lake." Malawi also has three smaller lakes (Lake Malombe, Lake Chilwa, and Lake Chiuta) besides Lake Malawi (Miller).

Malawi's highest point is Sapitwa Peak at 3002 meters, on Mount Mulanje, while the country's lowest point is 37 meters, along the international boarder of Mozambique and the Shire River (*The World Factbook*). Malawi's seasons are separated into three categories: rainy, hot and dry, and cool. During the rainy season (from November to April), Malawi receives 90% of its yearly rainfall. Because it is south of the equator, Malawi's cool season is from May to August, and the hot, dry season goes from September to November. Temperatures vary throughout the country from 45° to 70°F during the cool season to 85° to 100°F in the hot and dry season. Temperatures also vary depending on altitude, with the hottest temperatures in the Shire Valley. Near Lake Malawi, temperatures are tempered due to the lake effect (*CultureGram*).

As with most African countries, Malawi is home to a variety of large mammals, including buffalo, elephant, lion, leopard, hippopotamus, and rhinoceros. Because of Malawi's small size and dense population, safari animals are mostly restricted to reserves (much smaller than the more popular African reserves). There are 649 recorded species of birds in Malawi (Briggs 27). Bird watchers from South Africa enjoy visiting Malawi to watch for birds, because Malawi has many more species of birds than South Africa.

Lake Malawi is world-famous for cichlids, a type of freshwater fish known locally as *chambo* (World Info). Africa's three largest lakes (Victoria, Tanganyika, and Malawi) each have more fish species than any other lake in the world. It is estimated that Lake Malawi has 500 to 1,000 different fish species—more than all the freshwater fish species in Europe and North America combined! (Briggs 35). There are many varieties of cichlid fish in Lake Malawi. Unlike most fish, cichlid fish parents care for their offspring. Scuba divers love the brightly colored mbuna cichlid fish. *Chambo* are ncheni cichlids. Unfortunately, Malawians have over-fished Lake Malawi, creating a major problem. *Chambo*, at one time a plentiful, fundamental food source, have been depleted and are now scarce (Briggs 36).

Malawi's fauna is an incredible display of nature's beauty. Around 400 different species of orchids have been identified in Malawi, many of which are found in Nyika National Park and (World Info). Many orchids also grow on Mount Mulanje and Zomba Mountain. The peak season for orchids is between November and March (Briggs 25).

Malawi's land is covered by *Brachystegia* woodlands; trees in the *Brachystegia* family are fire resistant and keep their leaves almost year round (except September and October, when they drop their leaves). The Baobab tree is common in low-lying parts, specifically near Lake Malawi and in the Shire Valley (Briggs 24). Baobab trees have an unusual, bulbous shape, and the trees can live to be thousands of years old. In well-watered low-lands, there are some palm trees. Although there are many different kinds of trees in Malawi, the most common wooded areas are pine and eucalyptus plantation forests. Though plantation forests have fewer birds and mammals than indigenous forests, and their aesthetic



Fig. 2. Hippo standing in water, from www.game-reserve.com, 2004

appeal is low, they are useful in preventing continued reduction of indigenous forests (25).

History

Malawi's name alone holds a great deal of the country's history. The word *Maravi* (the origin of Malawi) is the name of Malawi's early inhabitants and also means "the sun's rays," or "flames of fire" (*CultureGram*). There are still some Maravi bushmen who live in Zimbabwe and areas closer to the Sahara (Miller). Malawi's flag displays a rising sun, also representing the country's name.

The country's early history began in the 13th century, when the Maravi people moved from the Congo to the area that is known today as Malawi. It is thought that the Maravi people may have used flaming sticks when fighting, a reason for their name "flames of fire." In the 15th century, two people groups merged to become known as the Chewa. The Chewa drove away the bushmen (dwarfs also known in Malawi as "Akafula"). Later, additional groups migrated to the area, including the Yawo in the south. The Yawo worked with the Portuguese and Arabs in the slave trade, and eventually incorporated parts of Arab life into their own culture (including language, appearance, and religion) (*CultureGram*).

By the 19th century, slave trade began to penetrate the country. Fighting and destruction were linked with the slave trade, and by 1839, over 40,000 Africans were sold as slaves each year at Zanzibar's slave market. For all those slaves who were sold at the slave market, there were probably equally as many who died each year in slave raids and along the long trail from the Rift Valley lakes to the coast (Briggs 8). Malawi became headquarters for several coastal slave traders who shipped thousands of slaves across the lake to Kilwa each year (9).

Slaves were captured from villages in night raids called *chifwamba*. Raiders killed all the men and sickly people, keeping the healthiest women and children bound together with neck bracelets. The prisoners were shipped across Lake Malawi and forced to carry heavy loads of ivory and other goods to Kilwa, a trek that took three or four months. Throughout the journey, any slaves who were weak or sick were killed, so their neck bracelets could be reused. Once the slaves made it to Kilwa, they were shipped to Zanzibar in such poor conditions it was not unusual for a group of 300 to start the journey, and less than 20 to survive the entire trip (Briggs 9).

This type of horrific slave trade was taking place throughout East Africa, but Malawi was especially affected by the slave trading done by the Yawo people:

From 1850 onwards, many Yao [Yawo] settled in southern Malawi, operating as a kind of fifth column, repaying the hospitality shown to them by the local Mang'anja and Chewa by capturing and killing them in their hundreds, and in a manner only slightly less ruthless than that of their mentors. The Yao [Yawo] also sold their captives to the Portuguese, whose trade in slaves grew greatly after about 1850 (Briggs 9).

By the mid-1800's, slave raiding and trading wreaked havoc throughout the country, leaving Malawi a bloody mess. In 1859, Scottish missionary David Livingstone arrived and began his work in Malawi. No one knew then what a crucial role he would have in shaping Malawi's future. Livingstone was born in Blantyre, Scotland, in 1813. He became a medical doctor and also trained at a mission school in London. In 1840, he joined Robert Moffat's mission station in South Africa and married the Moffats' daughter Mary. Livingstone viewed his work in Africa as more than just converting souls to Christianity: he paved the way for later missionaries to begin work in Africa's interior. Livingstone became the first European explorer to travel Africa west to east, and after seeing the mass destruction of slave trade, he "became convinced that the only way to curb slavery was to open Africa to Christianity, colonisation, and commerce," the three-Cs (Briggs 10).



Fig. 3. David Livingstone, Scottish missionary to Malawi, courtesy of Scottish government archives, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Img/1071/0051015.jpg>

As Livingstone explored Africa's interior, looking for a navigable river that could be traveled by steamboat, his travels took him to Malawi via the Shire River. In 1859, he traveled up the Shire River and discovered Lake Malawi, which he named Lake Nyasa (literally, "Lake") (Briggs 10). Malawi was named Nyasaland, which means "Land of the Lake." Livingstone traveled Africa's interior as an explorer for the British government. The area of Malawi continued to be plagued with bloodshed resulting from the slave trade. On his last trip up the Shire River (in 1861), one of the expedition's members labeled the river a "River of Death," because of the corpses that clogged the boat's paddles each morning (11). Unfortunately, in his effort to open the Shire River to the three Cs, Livingstone also provided a way for the Portuguese slave traders to develop their industry. Although at the time Livingstone's expedition to Malawi looked like a failure in implementing his vision, it was influential in the eventual end of slave trade. Because of Livingstone's accurate descriptions of the horrific African slave trade, public awareness was aroused, and Britain began working to stop the slave trade (12).

Although the British Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) had failed in previous attempts to launch a mission in Malawi, in 1875 it returned and established several mission stations. Other missions were also able to start working in Malawi, specifically the Blantyre Mission, established in 1875. The Scottish Missions in Malawi were spurred on by Livingstone's example of respect towards Africans. Following in his footsteps, missionaries risked their lives to eradicate slavery and terminate local wars. Missionaries dotted the area, bring a climate of respect instead of hostility. The mission schools were so effective at one time that education standards in Northern Malawi were the highest in Central Africa, with Likoma Island boasting a 100% literacy rate (leading the entire African continent) (Briggs 12).

The British Central African Protectorate established itself as the governing body of Malawi (Nyasaland) in 1891. Harry Johnston worked with the British Central African Protectorate to eradicate slave trade in Malawi, specifically focusing on the Yawo slave trader Mpondo [Mponda]. Mpondo and other traders refused to surrender their livelihood without a fight. In time, Johnstone was able to halt the slave shipments across the lake, though it was 1895 by the time the last Yawo traders were overpowered (13). Though he did not live to reap rewards from his labors in Malawi, "Twenty-one years after his death, Livingstone was proved to have been correct – Christianity, commerce and colonialism had ended the slave trade" (Briggs 13):

Livingstone is one of the most influential figures in Malawi's history. As Briggs writes:

The arrival of the Scottish missionary, David Livingstone, in 1859 was the catalyst that put an end to the slave trade, and the string of mission stations that followed opened up the country for trade and colonisation. The missionaries were a strict bunch and offered a high standard of education to all, a tradition which, to this day, ensures that Malawians are well-educated and well-disciplined (4).

In 1907, the British Central African Protectorate divided the land into two territories, Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) and Nyasaland (Malawi) (13). Because of the way the British Central African Protectorate chose to govern Nyasaland, by 1953 90% of the land was for communal use, and the majority of the rest of the land was set aside as protected forest reserves. The availability of communal land made Nyasaland unique among British protectorates, and was supposed to allow the natives to continue traditional subsistence farming practices. In reality, the British government gave the people "free" land, but demanded unrealistic taxes on the use of the free land. As a result of the taxation, many farmers became migrant workers in neighboring countries and died of poor living conditions (15).

Malawi was known as the British Protectorate of Nyasaland until its full independence from Britain 6 July 1964. One of the great influences in Malawi's history is the former president, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, "The Black Messiah" (BBC). Banda was born in Malawi around 1898, studied at mission schools, moved to South Africa, and eventually moved to the US, where he earned his Doctorate of Medicine in 1937 (Briggs 16). After closing his London practice in 1953, the doctor moved back to Malawi. Through a series of political events, Banda became the Prime Minister of Nyasaland, and later became the first president of Malawi, a position he held until the 1994 election (18). Banda is remembered as "entirely ruthless in his quest to obtain and maintain absolute power" (19).

Although Banda ruled Malawi as a dictator, at first he was respected. By the early 1990's however, Banda lost what favor he previously held in the eyes of his people. At the 17 March election in 1994, Bakili Muluzi was elected as Malawi's second president, and reelected in 1999 (22). Throughout Muluzi's period in office, Malawians gained new freedoms they had been unable to enjoy under Banda's reign.

Dr. Bingu wa Mutharika was elected president in 2004, and is running for reelection 19 and

20 May 2009. His opponent is former president Dr. Bakili Muluzi, who led the country from 1994 to 2004. Muluzi was the first president under multi-party democracy, and endorsed Mutharika in the 2004 election (Miller). Once he became president, Mutharika detached himself from Muluzi, forming his own party (Democratic Progressive Party) (Miller). The upcoming presidential election will be another pivotal point in the country's political and economic stability.

Today Malawi's government is a multiparty democracy, which is split into 28 districts and patterned after English government. The president acts as the chief of state and head of government. His cabinet is composed of 46 personally selected members. The country's legal system is rooted in English common law and customary law, and the Supreme Court of Appeals reviews legislative acts. As in the US, voting rights are given to those 18 years and older. Malawi's Legislative Branch is a unicameral National Assembly with 193 positions (five-year terms) elected by popular vote. The Judicial Branch includes the Supreme Court of Appeal, the High Court (with a chief justice chosen by the president, and associate judges chosen by the Judicial Service Commission), and the magistrate's courts (*The World Factbook*).

According to the *World Factbook*, currently Malawi's government "faces many challenges, including developing a market economy, improving educational facilities, facing up to environmental problems, dealing with the rapidly growing problem of HIV/AIDS, and satisfying foreign donors that fiscal discipline is being tightened." Donors have questioned whether the government has properly allocated funds in the past. In recent years, under President Mutharika and the Finance Minister, the country has demonstrated better financial discipline (*The World Factbook*).



Fig. 4. Kwacha, Malawi's currency, <http://atsnotes.com/catalog/malawi/malawi-49.JPG>

Today Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world, with 53% of its population living below the poverty line. Malawi's fragile economy is based primarily on agriculture. Much of the population lives as subsistence farmers in the southern region. More than 1/3 of the country's GDP and 90% of export revenues come from Malawi's agriculture (*The World Factbook*). Over 50% of the country's workforce is employed in farming, fishing, and forestry (Encarta). Unfortunately, the fertile land suffers from deforestation and over-cultivation (*CultureGram*).

The country's largest export is tobacco (over 50% of total exports), purchased by the US (*CultureGram*). Other export products include sugar, coffee, tea, macadamia nuts, tapioca, and cotton. Malawi's faltering economy relies on large donations from the IMF, the World Bank, and individual donor nations. Malawi receives around \$575 million dollars of economic aid each year. In 2007, Malawi's estimated GDP was nearly 10.6 billion USD, at a real growth rate of 8%, making the GDP per capita \$800. Malawi's currency is the Kwacha (MWK). Its current trading value is around 140MWK/\$1USD for check rate of exchange and 170MWK/\$1USD for cash rate of exchange. The inflation rate for consumer prices is around 8% (*The World Factbook*).

Malawi's natural resources are limited, and the country continues to rely on international aid to develop agriculture, health, education, and infrastructure within its borders (*Culture Gram*). Although Malawi does not have many natural resources, it has limestone, arable land (just over 20% of the total landmass), hydropower, and unexploited uranium, coal, and bauxite deposits (*The World Factbook*).

Malawi's major export partners are Germany (nearly 12%), South Africa (10%), and Egypt (9.2%); other partners include Zimbabwe, the US, Russia, and the Netherlands. Malawi imports food,

petroleum products, consumer goods, and other products from South Africa, India, Tanzania, the US, and China (*The World Factbook*).

Culture

With about ten different ethnic groups in the country, Malawi has a mosaic of cultural norms and practices... Above all though, it is the tradition of hospitality, friendship and courtesy that permeates the entire country and warrants the claim ‘Africa’s Warm Heart’ (Briggs 4).

Malawi boasts a unique culture. Several of the ethnic groups represented in Malawi today are the native African Chewa, Nyanja, Tumbuka, Yawo, Tonga, Ngonde, Lomwe, Sena, and Ngoni, along with some Asians and Europeans. As a whole, Malawians are considered friendly and courteous, but not overly expressive. Unlike some cultures, where people “are used to celebrating a new bike, a job or even a good sneeze,” Malawians are reserved. Politeness is valued over extreme public shows of emotion. Malawians are concerned about the way others think of them—pride, jealousy, and witchcraft create strongholds of fear (Miller). Kindness, courtesy, and hospitality are valued, and the Malawians consider themselves friendly and trusting. Public displays of affection between men and women are unusual. Husbands and wives do not hold hands, kiss, or hug in public. Unlike Western culture, it is perfectly acceptable for men to hold hands or to touch each other in public—just as friends, nothing more (this sort of affection is also normal between women in public) (*CultureGram*).

Following proper cultural practices, a typical Malawian greeting would be a right handshake, while placing the left hand under the right forearm; this displays sincerity and trust (*CultureGram*). Sometimes men bow slightly as they greet each other, and women usually curtsy slightly or sometimes kneel if they are greeting someone who is sitting down. Children often kneel, showing respect. Visitors wait for the host to initiate greetings and conversation. After the initial greeting, a more formal, in-depth greeting is exchanged. The host will ask for details about the guest’s health, family, recent activities, etc. Unannounced visits are especially common in Malawi, and it is also customary for the guest to bring a small gift for the host (Miller).

When trying to get the attention of someone else, Malawians sometimes make a hissing noise. Some younger Malawians have picked up on the US “thumbs up” gesture and saying “Sure,” but forming the US “okay” sign with the thumb and first finger is offensive. An interesting Malawian gesture is their way of showing children’s heights. Instead of placing their hand palm-down at the approximate height of the child, they place their hand with the palm upraised, as if to show that the child is a certain height, but is growing. The US gesture (palm-down) is used only to show the height of animals! (*CultureGram*).

Over 75% of Malawi’s population is labeled as Christian, most of whom are Catholic, Anglican, and Presbyterian. Baptist, Evangelical, and Pentecostal groups make up the minority, with many nominal congregants (Miller). Around 20% of the population is Muslim, living near the lakeshore (*CultureGram*). Less than 10% of Malawians practice traditional indigenous beliefs that include rituals, festivals, and dances (Miller).

In rural Malawi, large, extended families live together in compounds of several huts. Men are typically farmers, fishermen, or general laborers; women are in charge of the children, gardens, and food preparation (*CultureGram*). In Malawi, if a boy is interested in a girl, he works through the girl’s uncle to see if he can marry the girl. The uncle (usually the mother’s oldest brother) “acts like a marriage counselor and later as a mediator if there are conflicts....This man has the highest level of respect and the greatest responsibility in the family, even more than the father, since it is a matrilineal society” (Miller). According to custom, the couple settles in the girl’s home village. When children are born, their parents often name them after emotions the parents are experiencing after the birth, which leads to many children named “Happy” and “Blessing,” and a few with names like “Trouble”! Mothers teach their children to respect their elders, a practice reinforced by elders from all ethnic groups (*CultureGram*).

Children are taught both official languages, Chichewa and English, in public schools. Mission schools are still scattered throughout the country, and the government promises eight years of free education for children six years and older. Most children attend primary school. Few children are educated beyond primary school, although there are secondary schools, technical training schools, and several universities throughout the country (*CultureGram*). In 2003, Malawi spent nearly 6% of its GDP on education. Nearly 63% of Malawi’s population (15 and older) is literate, which is approximately 76% of the males, and 50% of all females (*The World Factbook*). Boys usually stay in school longer than

girls. Because of overcrowding in the schools, the government has recruited over 20,000 teachers in the past few years (*Encarta*).

Malawi's staple food is maize, cooked into nsima, a stiff porridge (Briggs 67). Interestingly enough, maize was not grown in Malawi until the Portuguese brought it with them at the end of the eighteenth century (*World Info*). Near the lake, fish is an important source of dietary protein. Depending on the availability of food, Malawians might have two meals a day instead of three. Women prepare the *nsima* over fires, and in some places the women and girls eat separately from the men. Malnutrition is a problem throughout Malawi, because the majority of Malawians do not eat enough calories to maintain healthy bodies. Some protein sources besides fish are beans and peanut flour. Many locally grown fruits (like papaya, mango, bananas, tangerines, sweet potatoes, and avocados) are also available throughout the year to supplement Malawians' diets. Street vendors sell produce, vegetables, and, in some places, roasted mice on sticks, a delicacy considered unclean by Muslims (*CultureGram*).

For those who can afford it, tea is a popular drink in Malawi. Drinking tea is probably a remaining mark of British rule many years ago, although tea is one of Malawi's main exports. Beautiful tea fields grace the lower slopes of Mount Mulanje. Because tea is a major export, it is readily available throughout the country. Most markets and trading centers house "Tea Rooms," and it is not unusual for children to drink tea just like the adults do (Miller).

Malawians are poor, but they take special care of what material possessions they have; "Bicycles are prized, and it is quite an achievement to own a car. However, the family is considered a person's greatest asset" (*CultureGram*). Their society is group oriented, and individuals are expected to sacrifice their personal interests for the benefit of family and community (*CultureGram*). Sharing, especially with those less fortunate, is a part of everyday life.

Clothing in Malawi has changed with Western influence, but it remains somewhat traditional. Although poverty shrouds their desire to present themselves in the finest way, "Malawians strive to be clean, neat, and modestly dressed in public" (*CultureGram*). Men wear pants, shirts, and suit jackets; women wear dresses, skirts, and blouses. During Banda's rule, there was a law restricting women from wearing pants or mini skirts. Today, there is no longer a national ruling against pants and mini skirts, but cultural expectations are for women to wear long skirts. Some of the urban areas are changing to more modern dress, but since most of Malawi is rural, most Malawian women still wear traditional dress. Along with their normal dresses, blouses, and skirts, Malawian women wrap a *chitenje* around their waists (to protect and preserve their skirts). A *chitenje* is a 7-foot-long, multi-purpose piece of African-print cotton fabric used for anything from a baby carrier, to hot pads or rags (*CultureGram*).

As with most countries, even less-developed countries, cell phones have gained incredible popularity throughout Malawi over the past few years. In 2007, there were around 175,000 telephone main lines in use throughout the country (about 1 line per 100 people), and over 1 million cell phones (roughly 8 phones per 100 people) (*The World Factbook*). For Malawians, cell phones are a perfect way to keep in touch with the highly valued family network (Miller). It is popular to "flash" a wealthier friend or relative by dialing the number and letting the phone ring a couple of times. The wealthier friend or relative is expected to promptly return the call. For those who are literate, texting is also a popular communication tool.

Other communication tools include radios, TVs, and the Internet. The country has 3 Internet service providers, 107 Internet hosts, and nearly 140,000 Internet users. The country also has AM and 5 FM radio stations (around 2.6 million radios), and two TV broadcast stations. The government runs one TV station and the Roman Catholic Church owns another. Another station, Joy TV, owned by former President Muluzi, has not received its license. Although Malawi has TV stations, few people own TVs. TVs continue to gain popularity, but the country lacks a developed communications network, so growth is slow (*The World Factbook*).

Health

Along with most of the African continent, Malawi is plagued by AIDS. Approximately 14.2% of Malawi's population (900,000 people) is estimated to be HIV/AIDS positive, making it one of the most infected countries in the world (*CultureGram*). The average life expectancy for Malawians is 43.45 years (43.74 for male, 43.15 for female) (*The World Factbook*). The high occurrence of AIDS leads to decreased life expectancy and lowered total population growth rates as well as increased infant mortality and a heightened overall death rate. In 2003, it was estimated that 84,000 Malawians died of HIV/AIDS. Less than 3% of Malawi's population is 65 or above. The infant mortality rate is 90.55

deaths for every 1,000 births. Malawi's maternal mortality ratio of approximately 11 deaths per 1,000 live births is one of the highest ratios in the world (Lee). The country's population is growing around 2.4%, with the average number of children born to each woman between five and six (*The World Factbook*).

Another issue relating to health in Malawi is malnutrition. Malawi suffers from severe drought that leads to food shortages. In 2002, Malawi and neighboring African countries faced severe food shortages (*World Info Zone*). Malawi's government was "accused of worsening [the] crisis through mismanagement and corruption, including selling off national grain reserves before [the] drought struck" (BBC). Malawi faced another severe food shortage in 2005, during which the agriculture minister announced five million Malawians needed food and aid. In 2006, Malawi grew a surplus of maize, which they were able to export to Zimbabwe and Swaziland (BBC).

Malaria is also rampant throughout Malawi. About one million people die each year from the disease, and over 90% of these deaths occur among young children and pregnant women in tropical Africa. Malaria is the leading cause of death for African children under five years old. Malaria is a health risk in many countries in the southern hemisphere, but the majority of cases are found in the poorest 20% of the world's population (Kahn).

Malaria is a parasite vector disease carried by the *Anopheles* mosquito. Although certain high altitude areas of Malawi are declared malaria-free, and in some places malaria is seasonal, there is risk of getting malaria most anywhere and anytime in Malawi. Thus it is important to take a malaria prophylactic while visiting Malawi. Using DEET bug repellent and mosquito nets can also help protect from mosquitoes.

Symptoms of malaria include a headache, flu-like aches and pains, a rapid rise in temperature, a general sense of disorientation, and nausea and/or diarrhea. Malaria usually takes between 9 and 30 days to incubate, but it can take months before it develops. Female *Anopheles* mosquitoes spread the disease when they bite an infected person and then bite a healthy person. Since malaria is transmitted through blood, it can also be spread by infected blood transfusions or contaminated needles. Along with the major health crisis of AIDS and the prevalence of malaria, other sicknesses like Hepatitis A, typhoid, and diarrhea are common in Malawi (Briggs 90).

Conclusion

Like the warmth of a sunset over Lake Malawi is the warmth exuded from this country's inhabitants. The "Warm Heart of Africa" is a proper description of Malawi, because of the warmth and zest of those who call this elongated country in southeast Africa "home." Just the raw facts present Malawi as a tiny land-locked country, void of natural resources, densely overpopulated, impoverished, and overcome with AIDS. Malawi's history relates years of toil through bloodshed and corruption. Current statistics report an average lifespan of less than fifty years, an infant mortality rate of over 90 deaths per 1,000 live births, and an AIDS prevalence of over 14% among adults. Yet Malawi's heart goes beyond textbook figures. It is Malawi's heart—her people and their culture—that gives this country the unique title of Africa's Warm Heart.

When David Livingstone first explored Malawi, his vision was to establish the three Cs of Christianity, colonization, and commerce in the land. His ambition was partially fulfilled years ago as slave trade was abolished, mission schools and hospitals were built and staffed throughout the country, and Malawi eventually gained freedom from Britain after its colonization. Malawi has potential for great development in years to come. Perhaps the basics of Livingstone's goals were met, but there is still more growth necessary to develop Malawi.

Malawi may be a small land-locked country, lacking natural resources, but it is full of people of great potential. Just as a sunrise signifies the beginning of a new day and a new start, so life gives hope for change and development. Livingstone was right with his goals for Malawi. A developed view of "Colonization" would be a healthy, stable government. Livingstone's "Commerce" goal could translate into a new goal of increased economic health, increased exports, and decreased foreign aid. Livingstone's third "C," Christianity, is the most important. Living as Christ's followers will yield blessings for Malawians in every area of life. Where there is life, there is hope, and Christ gives eternal hope for living. In Malawi, there is still hope that Livingstone's three C's will one day fully permeate the entire country, granting its inhabitants hope beyond their country's statistics, beyond the grave.

Postscript

Walking off the plane into the hot sun at the Chileka airport on my trip to Malawi was like flipping open the preface of an amazing book on Malawi.

I missed ice cream and chocolate, and laughing with my family around the Sunday dinner table, but I loved Malawi. I loved watching the sun rise over the Shire River, walking to the market to buy fresh produce, learning to value currency based on its exchange rate to the US dollar, meeting new friends, and experiencing life in such an unfamiliar setting.

I wore *chitenjes*, bought scarves at the local market, bargained for curios, used “squatty pot-ties” (long drops), tasted baobab fruit, and feasted on giant avocados that cost less than 25 cents. I also witnessed the peaceful election and inauguration of Malawi’s new president (Dr. Bingu wa Mutharika). My language helper welcomed me into her village home, where we walked to the river to gather water, cooked *ugali* (maize patties) over a smoky open fire, tried to explain our cultures to each other, and chatted as we shared a Coke from the local mini-shop. I slept under a mosquito net, faithfully took my prophylactic pills, and still managed to catch malaria. I lay in bed, thousands of miles from home, weak with a fever, under the watchful care of my friends. And I still loved Malawi.

Reading about Malawi provided an excellent backdrop for the experiences I encountered on my trip. When I arrived in Mangochi and moved into the small guesthouse, I looked at the scenery and felt as if I were living in the pages of a *National Geographic* article about Africa. There were bicycles rolling along dirt paths, monkeys playing in trees, green papayas hanging from palms, children laughing and running everywhere, music blaring in the distance, and street vendors calling as they passed. Parts of Malawi were just as I imagined, but there were parts for which I was not prepared. I was unprepared for all the attention I drew. Wherever I went, people called “*Azungu! Azungu!*” because I was a foreigner. In the villages, I felt like a reality TV show for all the locals! Young children were scared of me, because of my white skin. Adults also viewed me as a novelty, but most were more than happy to hear my faltering ChiYawo greetings, and practice their feeble English on me.

One day, we bumped our way over rugged terrain, through rivers, and across sand to some villages about three hours away. On the return trip, we were joined by a Malawian woman in distress. As we approached town, her cries intensified. She birthed her firstborn in the vehicle as we reached the hospital. I felt as if I were living in a missionary biography.

Nothing I read prepared me for the day I shook hands (in the proper cultural way) with an elderly woman who rattled something to me in ChiYawo. I looked into her eyes, and sadly tried to tell her I could not understand her. She looked back at me and said, “*Nyaa, nyaa, nyaa,*” as if I were a baby. We stood looking into each other’s eyes, unable to communicate, because of the language and cultural barriers between us.

I had heard about African food before, and even tried a little when I had the opportunity, but no picture or description is quite like the real thing. My first authentic Malawian meal was *ugali*, *lponda*, and goat meat, served in old tin dishes set out on a grass mat on the dirt floor of a small brick house in a village. I sat next to a window, which lacked glass, but was covered by an old sheet-like cloth. We washed our hands in the customary way, under a little drizzle of water from a pitcher. After the meal, a tiny piece of soap accompanied the pitcher of water to wash the sticky *ugali* from our hands.

I came home from Malawi with many stories, and a heart full of experiences that altered my life perspectives. I treasure the experiences I had in Malawi. When my plane flew over American soil and I looked down at the land below, I saw my homeland in a new way. Everything looked so American. I came home to the same place I have lived over twenty years, but I saw life differently. I was sickened by the American drive for money and fame, pointing people away from what really matters in life. I came home motivated to live simply, to be a channel for God’s love wherever I am, and to point others to Jesus, the ultimate reason for living. Though in some ways my return from Malawi could be viewed as a closed chapter, I choose to see it as the beginning of the next chapter of my life.

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