Not “Just Staying”: How Health and Development Programming is Reshaping the Past, Present and Future for Rural Youth in Malawi

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Anthropology
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Abstract

Drawing on ethnographic and visual anthropological data, this dissertation explores the anticipated and unanticipated effects of youth-targeted health and development programmes in rural Malawi. Contemporary development programmes are anticipatory in nature: they are focused on managing health, behaviour, education and social relations today in ways that are believed to open opportunities for some distant and better future. Working with rural youth who “just stay,” an idiom youth use to describe their “failure” to make progress towards desired futures, I show how discourses and ideals espoused in anticipatory programmes including human rights, education, gender and love are slippery concepts. As they percolate through this particular social, political, historical and demographic context and into the imaginaries of young people, these discourses often become something new and unexpected. In particular I show how: i) a discursive elision occurs between the rights discourse and other markers of modernity and youth take up their “right” to wear modern clothing and drink commercial alcohol, ii) selfish behaviours including alcoholism and womanising surface in boys’ self-constructions as innate
tendencies rather than part of a socially produced and constantly shifting construction of masculinity, iii) audit cultures, critical to the operation of anticipatory programmes, reduce gender equality to something “countable,” which, in turn, alters programme activities, leads to performances by participants and filters into youth subjectivities, and iv) discourses on modern and “healthy” loves, free from HIV/AIDS, lead to re-arrangements in romantic relations and friendships that provide new and positive opportunities for women not always available in customary marriages. By privileging the future over the present and the past, programmes overlook numerous structural barriers to improving the lives of the youth who “just stay.” I argue that the unanticipated effects of these programmes constitute and give rise to several invisible forms of violence. On the other hand, however, some effects are generative of new and positive subjectivities and relationships that are egregiously overlooked by programmes. This ignorance prevents programmes from building upon positive effects to generate desired change and sometimes even undermines their own stated goals.
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Introduction: Meeting Desire

The more furiously the rain beat down on the corrugated steel roof, the more relaxed I felt. Rainstorms at night in Malawi always granted me a reprieve from the stream of young visitors that otherwise flowed to my doorstep. The deep gullies formed by heavy rain on sandy soil roads impeded everyone’s progress through the streets. One rainy night, however, there was a dull thud on my door that was barely audible over the downpour. As the storm had stolen the electricity hours before, I used a candle as my guide to unlock and open the door. A blast of wind-driven rain blew out my candle, leaving me squinting into the darkness and calling out, “Is anyone there?” I caught a glimpse of someone or something running down the road; I could not be sure who or what it was. Later, I learned it was Desire fleeing in the unelectrified rural darkness.

Striving to be as faithful a listener and recorder of youth voices as possible, I unwittingly invited into my life a constant flow of youthful visitors whenever I stayed alone in my rondavel in town. Both boys and girls visited me regularly. While the girls tended to be over 17 years of age, the boys were sometimes as young as 11 or 12 years old. Desire was a 17-year-old boy who appeared often. About half the youth who stopped by my home came from town and half from surrounding rural villages. Most of these young people had some confidence conversing in English. Sometimes so many youth would come at once that all my tea cups would be in use and I would have to serve tea in my soup bowls and plastic containers. The savvy children of neighbouring houses quickly caught on to how much sugar all these cups of tea required and would linger around my house, peering into my windows and hoping that this time I would
choose them to run to the market for a bag of sugar. In recompense, I invariably allowed them to buy a sweet for themselves. As youth whose visits accidentally overlapped with others tried to outstay their peers so they could speak to me, and most importantly make their requests of me in confidence, I would often find myself preparing dinner and snacks well into the evening. This custom afforded me hours of engagement with youth dreams, fears and desires while providing significant insight into how some youth constructed themselves as worthy recipients of my attention and support away from families in rural villages. It also surrounded me with displeased neighbours: the night I was robbed by two young men, many neighbours, most of whom were Malawians, felt that I had invited this intrusion by being so welcoming to greedy and ultimately dangerous male youth.

A little shaken by the mysterious knock-and-run in the moonless darkness of the night, I quickly locked my door and secured all my windows. I attempted to prepare dinner but with all my windows tightly secured, the roughly soldered coal burner I had dragged out of the rain quickly filled my little home with smoke. I conceded defeat and went to bed on an empty stomach. When I woke to the safety of the bright and busy Malawian morning and opened up my door to expose my smoked skin to the earthy post-rain air, I noticed a package on my front step labelled:

To
Lauren Classen
From
Desire

The package was wrapped in March 2007, torn from the annual calendar produced by the Synod of Livingstonia Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian (CCAP), part of whose mission statement remained legible:
...Synod strives to provide spiritual, physical, mental, economic and…development of the society in Malawi by itself and in partnership with others…emphasis is on holistic approach, and shall provide and uphold…values and spirit of good stewardship in which the synod…”

While I was never able to find someone who could fill in the gaps precisely, many development workers at the Synod told me that “social development” and education, especially for girls, are primary objectives and that the first line would have read something like, “The Synod strives to provide spiritual, physical, mental, economic and social support and education towards the development of the society in Malawi by itself and in partnership with others.” Whether intentionally or not, the packaging was uncannily connected to its contents in a way that became clear to me only much further into my research and which will unfold chapter by chapter in this dissertation. Inside March 2007, Desire had carefully wrapped a photograph he had taken with the words, “MY JOY” printed in neat capital letters across the back. A method I developed and piloted with 118 youth called Photo-LENS, which combines ethnographic fieldwork with interviews structured by photographs taken by informants, was central to this research.

Throughout this dissertation, youths’ voices are intertwined with examples of the photographs they captured; this is probably why Desire chose to use a photograph to gain my attention.

The photograph featured a big, new house that I frequently passed en route to Mzuzu, the largest urban centre in the region and the major site of trade and commerce for youth like Desire and their parents. The house in the photograph was located on a barren plot of land on the very edge of the tarmac that slices across the country from north to south, connecting the otherwise culturally, religiously, infrastructurally and politically divergent Northern, Central and Southern Regions. The highway, like smooth silver duct tape from tip to tip, links the 16 languages spoken in the earthen homes of the disparate villages in which nearly 90% of the population resides
(DFID 2004; Lewis 2009). It also enables tourists to slide quickly through the coast-less, lion-less rural poverty, saving their money for bigger surf and safari adventures in other parts of the continent. Many of the Malawian youth I worked with had in fact never seen a tourist up close. Their interaction with foreigners was limited to Synod volunteers providing development in the villages.

Long and narrow, the house in the photo could have been modelled after the highway’s modern, clean lines. Inside the house, according to Desire, is the kind of life boys and girls, as well as young men and women, seek in their future: a life that has come to be known as umoyo wachizungu, or English/white life. Unpacking the assemblage of desires encapsulated in the photo of this house, chapter by chapter this dissertation examines how health and development programmes are reshaping the lives of youth in rural Malawi and feeding aspirations for a particular construct of “‘modernity.” I examine the extensive work youth do today in anticipation of coveted futures – futures characterized by money, material goods and “membership in the new global order” (Ferguson 2002; Ferguson 2006; Piot 2010: 162).

Youth-targeted interventions, most of which are administered by or in collaboration with the Synod whose mission statement wrapped this house, play a profound role, both explicit and implicit, in rural youths’ imaginings of “modernity” in this context. While their educational programming and activities explicitly aim to transform youth values and behaviours, the perceived example set by young, foreign and local volunteers who deliver much of the programming implicitly influences youths’ ideas about modern life in unanticipated ways. Several studies have already demonstrated how the discourses espoused by such campaigns, including those involving education and human rights, dovetail with neoliberal ideals of individualist, self-helping citizens. In turn, the programmes can lead to feelings of
disempowerment and guilt when children, for instance, attempt to take up their “right to go to school” in a context of increasing poverty and state withdrawal of community services (Cheney 2007; Englund 2006b). Others have looked at how youth are turning their backs on modernist ideals of education, forging new models of “modernity” achieved through engagement in illicit activities (Ndjio 2008) and, if only temporarily, through new styles of dress (Cole 2008). In Malawi, where divergent routes to “modernity” are also emerging, my research found that rather than reject modernist ideals, many youth embraced aspirations for individualism, human rights, education, gender equality and the models of love advocated by youth-targeted health and development campaigns and more broadly in national policy and global media. As ideas around individualized human rights, empowerment, gender equality and love meet rural realities however, they are recast in unanticipated and surprising ways. Thus, the primary aim of this dissertation is to explore how youth-targeted health and development programmes, as one of the few sources of global media and information reaching rural villages, influence how youth conceive of umoyo wachizungu or English/white life. It examines how the discourses and ideals espoused in youth-targeted programmes are creatively re-interpreted in more meaningful and consequential ways given their contemporary social and imaginative lives. Chapters 3 to 6, specifically, show how rights, education, gender and love are slippery concepts – as they trickle their way down this particular social, political, historical and demographic context and into the imaginaries of young people, they often become something new and unexpected.

Children and youth increasingly constitute the majority of the population in Malawi, as is the case in many countries across Africa. The associated shifts in the social architecture of African communities are unprecedented. Global ideas about youth as “dangerous” or “in danger” (Brooks 2003: 3; Durham 2000; Tilton 2010), take on new importance in these contexts, as youth
emerge variably as potential “gifts” or “burdens” to future societies (Cheney 2007). Youth, and particularly young girls, become productive loci for what Adams, et al. (2009) call “anticipatory interventions,” a concept I explore in greater detail later in this chapter and in Chapter 2.

Anticipatory interventions are those motivated by “the palpable sense that things could be (all) right if we leverage new spaces of opportunity, reconfiguring ‘the possible’” (ibid 246). In other words, these interventions are focused on managing health, behaviour, education and social relations today in ways that are imagined to open opportunities for some distant and better future. In contemporary Malawi, these programmes take the shape of youth-targeted peer-education\(^1\) programmes carried out predominantly by faith-based organizations (FBOs). They aim to create leaders with moral authenticity and physical integrity through messages about human rights, independence, agency, formal education, women’s empowerment, gender equality, and abstinence (the “A” of the ABC [abstinence, be faithful, use condoms] HIV prevention campaign) (Watkins and Swidler 2012). In Malawi, as in many African countries, transnational development programming burgeoned with democratisation in the early 1990’s. Many of these interventions are, or at least started as, interventions to halt the spread of HIV/AIDS. Certainly, HIV/AIDS appears to influence youths’ imaginings of the future, notions of morality and sense of risk associated with so-called “modern” living. Moreover, HIV/AIDS has been a central optic through which many practitioners, including anthropologists, understand contemporary Africa (in Malawi, for example see Bryceson and Fonseca 2006; 2003; Kaler 2004a). By delving

\(^1\) Peer education is deemed most effective for change in youth sexual behaviour, based on the rationale that individual behaviour is strongly influenced by peers, that peers can more easily access groups marginalized from formal healthcare settings, and that they can more easily broach sensitive topics such as relations and sexuality (Medley, et al. 2009). In Malawi, youth are engaged as volunteer participants in the project of educating their peers as well as elders in their respective villages about human rights, the risks of HIV/AIDS, and appropriate sexual and moral behaviour for reducing risk. In exchange youth volunteers frequently feel an increased status among age mates and receive financial remunerations for workshops and trainings (see also Englund 2006b for similar findings with human rights organizations in central Malawi).
beyond the AIDS paradigm to how prevention of HIV/AIDS is tied to the human rights framework, individualism, and ideas about formal education, women’s empowerment and gender equality, I find HIV/AIDS to be only one of many vectors that converge to influence how youth organize their social and sexual lives.

The National Youth Council of Malawi (NYCM), which coordinates and monitors the various youth-targeted interventions in Malawi, reported in 2010 that there were 143 youth organisations registered, spanning all 28 districts. These organisations frequently hosted youth clubs in several villages, making youth-targeted interventions more ubiquitous and accessible than secondary schools to rural youth. As Rankin, et al. (2008) have noted, in Malawi, “a country where most of the population lives in rural areas, [FBOs] provide the only reliable infrastructures reaching the villages” (3). These interventions find a warm and welcome home in Malawi, where an unfavourable political and economic climate has extinguished hope for an idealised rural past and has never afforded tangible benefits in the present. They are also one of the few sources of “global” information reaching rural villages (tourists, as noted above, quickly move on), and thus play an exaggerated role in youth constructions of self-worth, their understandings of “human rights” and “gender,” their aspirations for “modern” romance and marriage, and their intergenerational relations in the village.

The rural villages in which my research was concentrated thus emerged as “zones of awkward engagement,” to use Tsing’s (2005) terminology, where “words mean something different across a divide even as people agree to speak” (Tsing 2005: xi). Tsing (2005) elaborates the metaphor of “friction” to describe the interplay between different actors and processes in the context of contemporary globalisation to generate new and unexpected understandings of dominant cultural practices and ideas in such zones. As Tsing (2005) argues with global
capitalism, I argue with global health campaigns: as opposed to making assumptions that global health discourse traverses national and cultural boundaries unscathed, “we need to find out how it operates in friction” (12) at the interface with local realities. In Malawi, global health messages intersect not only with a particular historical, political, economic and social context, as I will show, but also shift in interesting ways as they are translated by what Swidler and Watkins (2009) have called “brokers,” the army of volunteers trained to deliver programming (also see Lewis and Mosse 2006). These messages, as Watkins and Swidler (2012) describe, change significantly as “brokers,” the majority of whom are educated youth in Malawi (Englund 2006b), adapt them to “work” in local contexts. Tsing’s (2005) work aims to rethink anthropological theory in an effort to account for how the global and the local interpenetrate in the contemporary context of globalisation. I build on these concepts to show how the contemporary space of African youth, since it is increasingly imbued with “potential” for the salvation of the continent (Weiss 2004), is especially fraught with “friction” as youth urgently seek their role in determining new futures.

In as much as youth-targeted “anticipatory interventions” have intended and unintended consequences, there is a critical disjuncture between pedagogical programming targeting Malawian youth and the reality of their rural lives today. This ethnography will demonstrate the possibilities, identities, hopes, pains and social relations generated in the depths of this disconnect. The youth stories and photos herein presented will show that by promoting in young women and men a sense of hope for future health and prosperity contingent upon identities and behaviours only partially realisable in this rural setting, youth-targeted interventions justify certain forms of violence in the present by accepting these as the inevitable costs of “preparedness” for an anticipated future danger. Specifically, I argue that this anticipatory
regime works to (1) obscure new vulnerabilities for young, rural boys and girls (2) both engender intergenerational strife and undermine the senior generation’s ability to address and manage this strife and (3) miss the mark when measuring project impacts, overlooking strategies young men and women develop, often despite programming, for challenging hegemonic femininities and masculinities in ways that start to rebalance gender inequalities. Blindness to the incongruities between youth-targeted programming and the realities of rural youths’ lives prevents organisations from effectively helping young people. I will also show, however, how the suffering unintentionally caused by youth programming can in some cases be generative of new and sometimes very positive social relations, joys and achievable desires. As Weiss (2005) has shown in his work with young men in Tanzania, sharing their sufferings strengthened bonds among men and led to the development of new social relations and sources of support and joy. As Tsing (2005) would put it, “this is the realm of friction: Unexpected alliances arise, remaking global possibilities” (12) sometimes in ways that work out. Each chapter that follows peels back another layer, exposing the variably destructive and generative interactions among youth-targeted interventions, the new forms of subjecthood they engender, and the lived experience of modernity of rural youth.

This dissertation is informed by and speaks to four emerging and overlapping bodies of theoretical and ethnographic literature: (1) the quickly burgeoning literature on the anthropology of youth and globalization, which has tended to neglect rural youth; (2) anticipatory interventions as a mode of global health and development, particularly as mobilized in sub-Saharan Africa; (3) “audit cultures” as they accompany anticipatory interventions to shape gender relations in rural Malawian villages; and (4) the novel yet developing anthropological literature on love, and

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2 This is the title of Strathern’s (2000) edited volume.
especially young people’s aspirations for “modern” marriages. I take each of these up in turn in the following sections.

**African Youth in Crisis and Anthropological Responses**

“In short, ‘youth’ stand for many things at once: for the terrors of the present, the errors of the past, the prospect of the future. For old hopes and new frontiers.”

(Comaroff and Comaroff 2005: 20)

Youth have been represented in both popular and scholarly discourse as being in crisis, justifying significant intervention in their lives. They emerge variably as “in danger” and “dangerous,” (Brooks 2003: 3). African youth, in particular, emerge as “in danger” because they face what Sharp (2002: 19) calls the “double burden in Western interpretations of their lives”: as youth, they are seen as helpless victims, and as Africans, as trapped geographically in societies that threaten children’s lives with poverty, starvation, HIV/AIDS and war. And yet, Cheney (2007) reminds us that “Despite acknowledgement of the political and structural factors that precipitate many youth problems, African youth are most consistently cast as ‘disruptive and violent’” (13). Together these characterisations justify a transnational scramble to intervene in youth beliefs and behaviours to protect African futures.

Several factors heighten the urgency around youth “risk,” real or perceived. One factor is the sheer number of youth relative to other segments of the population in many African countries, including Malawi., German sociologist Gunnar Heinsohn (2003) has been instrumental in the development and spread of the youth bulge theory (first discussed by Herbert Moller 1968), which holds that large youth cohorts make nations susceptible to armed or violent
conflict. According to the 2008 Welfare Monitoring Survey in Malawi (WMS 2008: 16), 48% of the total population is under 14 years of age and 25% falls between 15 and 29 years of age. In comparison, in Canada in 2010, 15.5% of the population was 0 to 14 years of age and 13.6% fell between the ages 15 and 29 (Statistics Canada 2012). High birth rates combined with a reduction in infant and child deaths as well as a hollowing out of the middle generation due to HIV/AIDS, have contributed to this situation in Malawi as in other African countries (De Boeck and Honwana 2005).

The rapid urbanisation of predominantly youthful populations in many African countries compounds concerns. Marc Sommers (2003:26), in a chapter emerging out of a forum sponsored by The Comparative Urban Studies Project at the Woodrow Wilson Center highlights, “almost inevitably, signs of a rapid concentration of youth in African cities raise the spectre of expanding youth unemployment, discord, and unrest.” As examples, he points to South Africa where over half of the youth are unemployed (Guardian 2001:1 in Sommers 2003: 26) and to Tanzania where the Minister of Youth Hassan Diria’s 1993 admitted that less than three percent of youth were formally employed (Maunya 1993:1 in Sommers 2003: 26). Unemployed, frustrated youth are said to be more inclined towards violent behaviour and revolt. Using statistical modelling based on demographic data from all sovereign states and politically dependent areas from 1950-2000, Urdal (2004) did not find a significant relationship between a “youth bulge” in a population and conflict, but he calls its combination with poor economic conditions “explosive” (16).

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3 The report is entitled “Youth Explosion in Developing World Cities: Approaches to Reducing Poverty and Conflict in an Urban Age.”
Across sub-Saharan Africa, youth aged 15-24 have the highest risk for HIV/AIDS, with female youth at substantially higher risk than their male counterparts. In Malawi in 2004, 12% of the population aged 15-49 and 6% of youth were living with HIV/AIDS (MDHS 2004).

Breaking down youth prevalence by sex, female youth are four times more likely to have HIV/AIDS (9%) than male youth (2%). Whereas there is a slight difference between rural and urban rates overall, among youth no difference in prevalence rate was found (MDHS 2004). Since the majority of the population lives in rural areas, the greatest burden of disease is in rural communities in Malawi.

When other family members are infected with HIV/AIDS, the impact on the lives of youth can also be profound. Children orphaned by HIV/AIDS in Africa are commonly defined as children under the age of 15 who lost one or both their parents due to HIV/AIDS (Monasch and Boerma 2004). In Malawi, 22% of children under the age of 18 had lost one or both parents according to the 2004 Malawi Demographic and Health Survey, and they predicted a rise in this number of orphans in the coming years (MDHS 2004: 11). Orphans have been shown to have limited access to resources (White and Morton 2005), are less likely to go to school than other children (Boler and Carroll 2003), are often charged with caring for younger siblings (Beard 2005), commonly suffer extreme psychological or emotional distress (Atwine, et al. 2005) and experience a loss of agricultural and health knowledge due to disruption of in intergenerational knowledge transmission (White and Morton 2005). As a result, AIDS orphans in Africa are highly vulnerable to food insecurity and poor health. As family members die of AIDS or other ailments, ideas about the life they might have lived can fall apart and send them reaching far and wide for alternative imaginaries of the future.
It is particularly because of such deplorable physical, economic and social conditions that African youth are thought to be at “risk” of enticement by the “global youth culture.”

Globalization of youth culture is often perceived as a one-way transfer of some of the most negative aspects of Western youth culture to developing countries. Youth, by virtue of their life stage, tend to more readily experiment with new ideas and styles and are more readily enticed by new commodities (Cole and Durham 2008; De Boeck and Honwana 2005). A report entitled “Using Global Media to Reach Youth: The 2002 MTV Staying Alive Campaign,” produced by YouthNet, a five-year, USAID-funded initiative by Family Health International that aims to use global media to fight the spread of HIV, illustrates the popular perception of the dramatic impacts of the prevailing winds of globalization on youth cultures:

Twelve-year-old boys in Kiev, Dakar, and Bangkok sit in cyber cafes playing Mortal Kombat. Girls in secondary schools in Kathmandu change from saris to blue jeans after seeing the latest fashions on MTV India, and they listen to other girls telephone and e-mail their questions about love and sex to a weekly show on the same station.

Internet chat rooms track the popularity of rock stars with viewers worldwide. Teenagers in São Paulo say they are hooked on the popular American television sitcom Friends. Teenagers in Beijing, Nairobi, and Mexico City download still photos from the movie Lord of the Rings as computer screensavers. Young people throughout the world saw Cable News Network (CNN) images of the capture of Saddam Hussein. The media landscape for youth is progressively becoming a global one, unhampered by geographic boundaries (Geary, et al. 2005: 3).

This passage exemplifies the widely-held sentiment that a hegemonic youth culture, characterised by unabashed consumerism of everything from blue jeans to Hollywood movies is being adopted unquestioningly by youth around the world. Such assumptions about the passivity and lack of critical thought and culture construction by children and youth have been challenged
by recent anthropological studies. Growing social research on African youth identities and cultures in the context of “globalisation” has emphasized cultural mixings and creative appropriations of global culture by African youth. These studies take as their starting point that contemporary globalization is characterized by increasing flows of idea-laden goods and people, but also by significant heterogeneities in the experiences of and with these flows (also see Appadurai 1996; Sassen 1998). Studies exploring youth culture-making in such contexts have thus done the important work of discounting assumptions about the homogenising experiences and tendencies among young people in an increasingly globalised world. However, as Cole (2010) argues in the introduction to her recent ethnography on youth in Tamatave, Madagascar, precisely “because this research focuses primarily on youth’s experience of crisis in the present, it tends to leave unexplored the actual relationships between their actions and temporality more broadly – young people’s ongoing and varied relationships to the past, present, and the future” (7). In so arguing, she points out that this research can overemphasize “youth” “as a united group naturally predisposed to be agents of radical change” (9).

As I review anthropological work on children and youth below, I take this argument further to show that the tendency to associate youth with a fundamental breach from the past systematically overlooks the cultures and practices of young people in rural villages and those embedded in the social context of their families and communities. I follow Cole (2010) in exposing the much more complicated relationship young people have with the past and performance in the present and add to contemporary research by focusing specifically on African youth living with their families in rural villages. I also build on the recent work, by Cole and Durham (2007a) and Cole (2010), to show how global discourses affect intergenerational relations and are affected by them in a remote rural context. In particular, I seek to understand
not only how youth-targeted “anticipatory interventions” (Adams, et al. 2009: 252) (which, in this context intertwine messages about human rights, education, women’s empowerment, gender equality and HIV/AIDS) affect relations among generations. By focusing on rural youth, I also counter the notion that much anthropology has perhaps inadvertently perpetuated, through a focus on urban youth – that urban youth are more susceptible to new ideas, a concept Mannheim’s (Mannheim 1952) calls “fresh contact.” For Mannheim (1952) “fresh contact” is experienced by youth, in particular, because they are not perfectly socialized into adult cultures by virtue of their different social and historical position. It is this different experience with the social context which Mannheim (1952) argues leads youth to adapt the cultural knowledge they have received, engendering new, fresh, ideas and values. I aim in my research to resituate “fresh contact” as something that is fundamentally interstitial: in the context of my research it is located not only between generations, but also between rural and urban, between the local and the global imaginary, between desires for the future and memories of the past, and between youth resistance and youth acquiescence.

A long history of childhood and youth studies in anthropology since as early as the 1920’s with Margaret Mead (1928) and Bronislaw Malinowski (1929) has assumed children to be empty vessels into which “culture is poured” (Gottlieb 2000; Hirschfeld 2002: 612). Drawing on structural functionalist theory, children emerged in these studies as passive recipients of adult culture and knowledge. As Harris (1998) writes, however, “A child’s goal is not to become a successful adult, any more than a prisoner’s goal is to become a successful guard. A child’s goal is to be a successful child” (in (Hirschfeld 2002: 615). More recent studies of childhood, informed by Bourdieu (1977), De Certeau (1984), and Ortner (1984; 1989), also challenge the
dominant view of children as powerless recipients of adult culture. These studies take up themes of power, youth agency and resistance (Bucholtz 2002).

Research that has examined youth as culture-makers began, most notably, with youth research coming out of the Birmingham school of cultural studies. Hedbige (1979) and then Hall and Jefferson (1976), for instance, showed how working class youth in Britain rework stylistic items borrowed from the dominant consumer culture to express new subculture values (also see Valentine, et al. 1998). Willis (1977) makes the important point that youth resistance can actually feed into the reproduction of class structures (e.g. the working class boys resist school and the oppressive authority of teachers and this eventually limits any upward mobility they might have had). Although the work of the Birmingham school is incredibly important for representing youth as culture-makers rather than as passive recipients or targets of socialisation, one important critique of the school is its unrepresentative emphasis on the exceptional, the deviant, or the resistant sub-groups of youth (Wulff 1995).

The youth-centered research inspired by the work of the Birmingham school is extensive. Prominent studies that have also challenged universalist views of children include Stephens’ seminal edited volume (1995) Schepers-Hughes’ (1996) research with child soldiers in Sierra Leone (also see papers in Schepers-Hughes and Sargent’s (1998) edited volume), Hecht’s (1998) ethnography with street children in Brazil, and Diouf’s (1996) examination of political resistance by Senegalese youth. Several recent studies have furthered this theory by showing how young Africans are simultaneously “makers and breakers of society” (De Boeck and Honwana 2005:...
Studies have looked at youth as perpetrators and victims of war in Sierra Leone (Peters and Richards 1998; Richards 1996), Angola (Honwana 2005), Mozambique (West 2000) and Liberia (Utas 2005a; Utas 2005b) and of violence in Freetown, Sierra Leone (Abdullah 2005) and the Western Cape, South Africa (Reynolds 2005). Others have examined youth agency and exploitation in sex trade in Madagascar (Cole 2007), and Malawi (Poulin 2007). My research follows anthropologists who explicitly endeavour to give voice to youth in order to understand their own views of their social worlds (Cheney 2007; also see papers in Honwana and de Boeck 2005). By using a creative combination of ethnographic and visual anthropological tools to help youth articulate their own stories, the research for this dissertation contributes to understanding youth agencies and contributions to social and cultural processes.

While research on “agency” and culture creation are urgently needed, the persistent emphasis on the violent and the desperate in anthropology tends to reinforce the pervasive representation of youth as in crisis and to push into further obscurity the reality of most poor youth around the world—that is, rural and liminally situated between their aspirations for modern lives and the likelihood that they will become farmers. Durham (2008) explains how the contemporary focus on youth “agency” self-selects for youth who are “marginalised” in conventional senses, by more powerful adults, or in national and international politics. Durham (2008) argues that “agency” in social research has come to be defined as “the small refusals, the foot dragging” that James Scott (1985) suggests are the “weapons of the weak against domination” (165). Durham argues that this definition obscures “agency” also visible in the

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4 In the introduction of their edited volume “Makers and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa,” De Boeck and Honwana (2005) explain, “[a]s ‘makers’ of a society, children and youth contribute to the structures, norms, rituals, and directions of society while also being shaped by them...On the other hand, they appear as ‘breakers’ in various ways: as risk factors for themselves through suicide, drug use, alcohol, and unsafe sex; by breaking societal norms, conventions, and rules...” (3).
“more mundane dimensions of everyday life,” (Hansen 2005:4 in Durham 2008:165) among youth who are not, for instance, violent or victims of HIV/AIDS and war (also see Sharp 2002 for similar arguments).5

My research departs from this focus on youth who are disembedded from family and community or at the “margins of life” (Sharp 2002: 19). The youth who were the subjects of and assistants to my research were, for the most part, firmly embedded in family life, even as they often struggled with intergenerational relationships and incurred much anger from their elders. They were all from rural areas, another category that is neglected in the anthropological literature despite population statistics gathered by the United Nations in 2010 indicating that 60% of Africa’s total population lives in rural areas (United Nations 2010a). Malawi is itself one of eight African countries in which less than 20% of the population live in urban areas (the others being Zambia, Reunion, Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia and Burundi) (United Nations 2010a). As a long, lean, landlocked country characterized by rural indigence, Malawi has an estimated 65% of its population living below the poverty line (UNDP 2006), 88% living in rural areas and 90% practicing subsistence agriculture (DFID 2004). Secondary school graduates are extraordinarily rare in Malawi where less than three percent of the small fraction who ever attend secondary school complete their schooling (MDHS 2010). Thus, the majority of the population is comprised of children and youth who live with their extended families, eking out a meagre living sowing small plots of poor quality soil in rural villages. The youth in this study were embedded

5 Stambach’s (2000) work with secondary-school youth is an important exception to the focus on youth who are “dangerous” or “in danger.” She shows how school-going youth are perceived variably by elders as creating, nurturing and reproducing “modern families,” and turning their backs on their families they perceive as traditional and backwards (3). School-going youth, however, are also a minority in Malawi.
in the social obligations of rural families, did not tend to go to secondary school or work outside of agriculture—these are the youth who frequently self-identified as those who “just stay,” a seemingly simple phrase that can literally mean just staying in the village, but simultaneously has a wide range of subtle moral connotations suggesting failure to achieve the markers of modern progress. By focusing on rural youth I am also interested in the mundane, everyday spaces of life that persist even amidst political-economic shifts, health disasters, and grinding poverty and inequality. The rural youth in my study are not dramatically resisting global orders and enduring massive catastrophes. Thus, my research reorients our gaze toward the more subtle “frictions” that play out in everyday settings.

The reality of rural poverty in Malawi means that there is neither the commercial incentive nor the infrastructure required to facilitate the flow of the “information and idea-laden commodities” traditionally associated with contemporary patterns of globalization (Cole and Durham 2007b: 3; Comaroff and Comaroff 2005; Diouf 2003; Weiss 2005). Arguably, this kind of youth, who are not disembedded from social obligations and family, who do not have electricity and thus have little to no access to mass media and who receive a very limited and specialised access to global knowledge, are likely the majority of youth in sub-Saharan Africa. This presumed majority, therefore, bases its notions of “modernity” on everyday interactions with the highly limited and fragmented bits of global information finding its way into the language, practices and imaginations of youth in various and even “awkward” (Tsing 2005)

6 While I noted above that over 20% of children under the age of 18 are orphaned by the loss of one or both parents (MDHS 2004), these orphans are normally absorbed by extended families, often leaving youth cared for (or caring for) grandparents and thus these youth are still heavily embedded in the context of the rural family.

7 This, I hope, helps me neither to reify nor glorify children’s agency as purely matters of resistance or marginalization and prevents me from overlooking the ordinary spaces of everyday life where resistance and acceptance are enfolded in intergenerational interactions as appropriations of the so-called global order.
ways. As noted above, in the case of this research context, youth-targeted global health and development programming played a particularly important role; as such, this research has a larger resonance with rural areas increasingly inundated with youth-targeted health programming.

In working with youth who are deeply embedded in the context of the family, recent calls by anthropologists to broaden research on agency and culture creation by and among children and youth to address how practices and desires emerge and are negotiated amidst intergenerational relations become particularly relevant (Cole and Durham 2007a). These works resurrect a notion first discussed by sociologist Karl Mannheim (1952) that generations are meaningful beyond mapping genealogical or kinship relations since they also tell us something as cohorts, tied to a particular time in history. In other words, particular groups of people born about the same time at a particular point in history share not only genealogical relations but also certain values and styles. Research that advances Mannheim’s arguments about generational cohorts or “units” by looking at African children and youth in the context of contemporary patterns of globalisation have been especially revealing. Several have demonstrated how conflict arises when persistent poverty and unemployment “invert” the “generational contract,” effectively preventing young people from escaping dependence on older generations and delaying or preventing transition into social adulthood (Roth 2008) or conversely necessitate children to work to support their parents and siblings (Kyaddondo 2008). Durham (2007) complicates this by showing how ideas of “empowerment” espoused in transnational campaigns targeting youth in Botswana can be accepted by youth only as negotiated in the context of others, their households and communities. Cole (2004) has also shown that in Madagascar a
susceptibility to new ideas among youth might also enable “old” practices, in this case
transactional sex with Europeans, to be seen with new meaning. She explains,

    generational change is not only about the loss of some practices and the adoption of
others. Sometimes youth draw on old practices, but their enactment in new circumstances
changes the effects of those practices, so that even the reproduction of practices with long
histories in a region can entail change (576).

These studies remind us that youth are not empty vessels into which “culture is poured”
women in the city of Tamatave, Madagascar, further shows how youthful cohorts are not
naturally occurring products of a particular time in history, but are also cultural representations.
She argues that in “their everyday lives, actors draw on the metaphors of human growth and
change to interpret and transform their historical circumstances and life course…Once we think
of generations in part as representations rather than as natural groupings, we can begin to
understand that there is a politics to how representations and perceptions of the life course work”
(15). For instance, she shows how the pervasiveness of public discourse condemning sex work as
a way to get ahead, a path which is by no means practiced by everyone or even most young
people, reframes this as a viable path to “modernity” for young women which, in turn,
popularises such strategies.

    As noted above, my research contributes to this emergent body of work by seeking to
understand how ideas about and desires for “modernity” are negotiated with elders in relatively
isolated, rural Malawian villages. Cole’s (2009) research with urban youth in Tamatave,
Madagascar shows how “jeunes,” or young people with a certain, sophisticated style, feel that
“modernity” is the preserve of urban youth. Her informants said that “young people in the countryside had no youth, bound as they were…to a miserable life of planting rice, with nothing else to do and no knowledge of progress.” Thus, they felt “rural people do not know enough to desire” something new (93). In contrast, many of my rural Malawian informants, though similarly bound to a “miserable” life of planting corn, saw themselves as belonging to a new and “modern” class. I show how the “new” and the “modern” emerge and are embraced at the intersection of rural livelihoods and of global ideas and local cultures and values in rural households.

Much of the literature on youth agency and resistance, gaining momentum since it burst onto the scene in the early 1990’s, serves also to critique the theories of the modernisation of Africa emerging out of the Second World War. Such theories were derived from a teleological understanding of historical trajectories, brimming with optimism about the power of Western technology and political systems for delivering Africans from the confines of “tradition” and “backwardness” through “progress” to “modernity.” As Geschiere, Meyer and Pels (2008b) point out, “such optimism appears increasingly unwarranted, as everyday life in Africa is increasingly marked by a gap between people’s dreams of a better life and their actual disconnection from the structures on which the materialization of this dream depends” (1). The resulting frustration in African contexts is particularly visible among youth who respond variably, in some cases engaging in violent revolt (see papers in Bay and Donham 2006) and in others, forging new, alternative modernities (Cole 2008; Ndjio 2008).

The perseverance of modernisation theories among Western donors, African elites and among youth in rural villages, however, is striking. In the 1950’s and 1960’s as African countries gained independence, modernisation theory flourished with the thinking that with
independence, politics and economies would rapidly develop in the image of the West. With the realisation that this was, in fact, not coming to fruition, the route to “modernity” changed, but its linear concept of progress has not. As Geschiere et al. (2008a) note, “In the context of globalization and neoliberalism…intellectuals close to policy-making circles revived modernization theory in a different guise: one that focused on civic society reforming and developing the African state rather than the state developing (agricultural) society” (1). The persistent focus on civic education by the burgeoning NGOs and faith-based health and development organisations since the early 1990’s in many African contexts both reflects and perpetuates this modernisation narrative. While this begs anthropological attention to the forms and effects modernisation and desires for “modernity” take as they are translated, transmitted and actualised in African contexts, it also makes “modernity” slippery and difficult to pin down in academic thinking and writing.

Several scholars attempt to dislodge “modernity” from its grasp by the Western ideal, paying attention to its multiplicities and ambiguities in African localities (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993b; Deutsch, et al. 2002). For instance, Brian Larkin (1997) has shown how Indian romance films play into Hausa social imaginaries, an example of non-Western media influence on modern desires in Nigeria creating what he calls “parallel modernities” (406). Charles Piot (1999) explains how “traditional” village life in Togo is as much an artefact of globalisation and modernisation as it is indigenous. Piot (2010), among many others, further demonstrates that “tradition” is a constructed phenomenon to the same degree as the “modern.” Linguistic anthropologist, Debra Spitulnik (2002) takes up the translatability of the term “modernity”

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8 Several examples of the invention of tradition as a technology of power by the Malawian state are available in the literature, see for instance Chirambo (2010), Forster (1994; 2001). Gilman(2004) speaks specifically to the “traditionalization” of women’s dancing in Malawi during the Banda regime (33).
among the Bemba in Zambia to argue that the lack of direct linguistic translation spawns a polyvalent language around modernity in Zambia that reflects its diverse “constellation of practices” (Spitulnik 1998; 2002). Thus, our challenge as anthropologists is, as Knauf (2002) writes, to understand “the paradox that people in different world areas increasingly share aspirations, material standards, and social institutions at the same time as their local definition of and engagement with those initiatives fuels cultural distinctiveness” (2). However, we might question the utility of “modernity” as a concept at all, precisely because it “signifies both too much and too little” (Spitulnik 2002: 198). Ferguson (1999; 2008) further warns that speaking of “multiple modernities” risks conflating equal “modernitities” with equal economies in the West and among the rest; he calls for renewed attention to the inequalities that persist amidst “modernity.” Absent from this work, as van Dijk (1998), Cole and Durham (2008) and Piot (2010) have all recently argued, is an understanding of how the future also haunts the present, a recent anthropological orientation taken up in this dissertation and discussed in the following section.

Anticipation and Youth-Targeted Interventions

Adams, et al. (2009) argue that today, in the West, “The present is governed, at almost every scale, as if the future is what matters most” (248). While pointing out that a sense of the

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9 Religion, spirituality and witchcraft have proved particularly productive loci for understanding how the past revisits the present in contemporary makings of the ‘modern’. Comaroff and Comaroff (1993a; 1999), Geschiere (1997), Piot (1999), Sanders (2001), and Smith (2008) have all demonstrated how witchcraft is not simply a piece of the past that lingers; rather, it “addresses Africa’s modern predicament…the magical lure as well as the anxiety about the modern world with its capitalist relations and unimaginable wealth” (van Dijk 2001:98-99). Please also see other papers in Moore and Sanders (2001).
future has long played a role in the management of everyday life, Adams, et al. (2009) contend that this is intensifying. The significance of “anticipatory regimes,” they point out, is evident all around us: in the primacy of speculative finance and the sale of agricultural commodities before they are sown based on conjectured “commodity futures,” in the growing importance of fetal analyses and medical intervention for conception and before birth (also see papers in Browner and Sargent 2011; Casper 1998; Edwards, et al. 1999; Franklin and Roberts 2006), and in fervent preparations to minimize vulnerability to future environmental disasters (Adams, et al. 2009: 251). Regimes of anticipation are intensified with advances in technoscience. Fetal medicine and disaster simulation technologies “ratchet-up” hope and fear as affective conditions in the present, temporally oriented towards the future (Adams, et al. 2009). This, they say, “[raises] the stakes for analysis along temporal, epistemological and affective logics,” calling for attention to the “varied and specific forms anticipation takes as both an effect of political economies and a feature of them” (248). In particular, they urge us to pay attention to the new ways in which social relations, transnational connections, and financial commitments become moral imperatives for protecting an anticipated future. This dissertation responds to this call by exploring regimes of anticipation as they emerge in a rural African context. I discuss how whereas for interventions anticipation exists in a space characterised by forecasts and speculation (Adams, et al. 2009), for their subjects in Malawi it engenders a liminal space – a state of being “in-between situations” where there is “uncertainty regarding the continuity of tradition and future outcomes” (Horvath, et al. 2009: 3). In turn, anticipation requires significant maintenance on the part of youth in ever-shifting ways, to keep desired futures on the horizon. I also show how the ways in which youth interpret and engage some of the discourses central to the anticipatory regime – including human rights and gender equality – are affected by the particular historical, political, economic and
cultural context in rural villages. The result are a number of gendered and intergenerational effects that are variably problematic and generative of new, positive subjectivities.

Adams, et al. (2009) point out that one of the ways regimes of anticipation are carried from the West to sub-Saharan Africa by transnational organisations is through what they call “anticipatory interventions.” With advances in technoscience, measurable and calculable “anticipated ‘crises’ become the model and the ‘event’ that demands immediate response…” (Adams, et al. 2009: 252). “Emergent illnesses” is one example of such a calculable, anticipated crisis that implicates “transnational response regimes” focused on prevention activities including pedagogical interventions into the health behaviours of a target population. These interventions, emerging since the 1990’s across the African continent (Piot 2010; Weiss 2004) carry new agendas that are largely immaterial, focus on developing human potential and, as Piot (2010) puts it, “gesture” towards a “future unknown” (Piot 2010). In turn, Piot (2010) finds among Togolese today, a “refusal of tradition and hybrid culture” (8) and a real willingness to “trade the past for a future still unknown” (16). In Togo, “Africanity is rejected and Euro-modernity embraced; futures are replacing the past as cultural reservoir” (Piot 2010: 16). This represents a significant departure from post-colonial anthropology, which emphasised cultural mixing and hybridities amidst globalisation. Piot (2010) contends that,

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10 Piot (2010) and others have also shown that anticipation is particularly visible in urban African contexts where new, Evangelical religions are flourishing. As van Dijk (1998) explains, a central element of African Pentecostalism, for example, is a “rupture with the past [which] is intimately linked to an overwhelming orientation – one might say, a rapture – for the future” (157). It is “marked by a rejection of any form of personal, communal or cultural nostalgia” (van Dijk 1998:161; also see Meyer 1998 for similar discussion about Pentecostalism in Ghana). As reaction to the veritable failure of the modernization agenda, Africans are compelled by the Pentecostal rejection of the “old structures of authority and mediation” (Piot 2010:62). Among village youth in the relatively isolated and more sparsely populated northern region of Malawi, Pentecostal churches do play a role in sustaining hope among youth for new futures, but youth attendance and commitment to Pentecostal churches tended to be intermittent and shifting (see Cole 2010 for a similar finding in Madagascar). Rather, youth in this context were faithful followers of youth-targeted health interventions, of peer-education models and behaviour-change for HIV/AIDS, and committed significant time and energy to attending volunteer training and teaching activities, which were often funded and organized by churches and Christian organizations.
A commitment to rupture need not preclude appreciation of those continuities that persist during transitional times. Thus, authoritarian strains and cultural hybridities remain etched into Togolese political and popular cultures. Indeed the ensuing chapters on political culture, on charismatic Christianity, on occult imaginaries in the villages are testimony to the complex culture mixing that endures amidst transformation (14).

He also writes, however, that “Despite the continued presence of such hybridities – of the cultural mixing that is emblematic of the postcolonial moment and celebrated by the postcolonial theory- this is nevertheless a world that has turned a new page” (14). “Today, a diffuse and fragmented sovereignty is replacing authoritarian political culture; tradition is set aside and cultural mixing is looked down upon” (Piot 2010: 16). In Malawi, I saw more continuities and blending between “old” and “new” in what comprised youths’ imaginings of the future than Piot (2010) did in Togo. This is particularly obvious in Chapter 6 where I look at how young women form modern friendships outside of the context of the family, but which mimic, in many ways, the expectations for gifting and reciprocity embedded in traditional kin relations. However, I learned from elders and youth alike that youths’ temporal orientation with the past and the future has changed since the coming of democracy. Youth are increasingly saying “Today is a new social life. You can’t teach us of the past.” Thus in this dissertation, I heed Piot’s (2010) call to anthropologists to take seriously “the wages of people [in this case youth] willing to trade a past for a future still unknown” (16).

11 Van Dijk (1998) launches similar critiques of anthropologists’ treatment of African religion. “Prognosticism” is overlooked, he argues, by anthropology’s fetish for “nostalgic theorizing,” or, in other words, its obsession with finding elements of old, “authentic” religions remodeled in emerging religious movements. In his paper discussing Born-Agains, a Pentecostal movement burgeoning since the 1970’s in Blantyre, Malawi’s largest urban centre, Born-Again conversion represents a complete turn from the past.
Since the early 1990’s, anticipatory interventions have flourished in Malawi, crowding into the void created as the state was forced by World Bank-stipulated structural adjustment to withdraw. Local NGOs and FBOs translate and deliver transnational agendas, effectively forming a transnational governmentality in the name of humanity and the fulfillment of humanitarian need in Malawi as in many other parts of Africa (Comaroff and Comaroff 2005; Durham 2007; Piot 2010). Piot (2010) points out that these interventions are rarely “community-based.” Rather, the organisations extract certain individuals from the community as worthy of humanitarian intervention. In Malawi, anticipatory interventions extract and “remake” youth.

Anticipatory interventions necessarily implicate younger and younger targets as the goal is the “optimization of future citizens” (Adams, et al. 2009: 247). For example, Cheney (2007) shows how in Uganda, a “nation in its infancy,” after independence from the British in 1962, children emerged as important for creating a national citizenry and for “reimagining the nation;” Cheney summarizes the general sentiment, “if people could raise their children to feel like Ugandans, then children could raise the nation out of underdevelopment” (2). This project of imagining and achieving desired futures in African contexts necessitates several achievements by young people in the present. Cheney (2007) shows how human capital investments in the form of education aimed at improving Ugandan children’s capabilities and morality are critical components of their national and transnational anticipatory projects. Durham (2007), finds that

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12 Also see Fassin and Pandolfi (2010) and Pandolfi (2003) for discussions of the politics of humanitarianism as employed by such institutions.

13 At one point in her ethnography, Cheney (2007) shows explicitly how this logic works with words from President Museveni himself. It was in the context of justifying the three ‘children’s rights’ Museveni prioritized as part of a UNICEF campaign that asked him as well as Ugandan citizens to pledge their commitment to children’s rights. Museveni’s three priorities were education, and protection from war and freedom from HIV/AIDS and poverty.
in Botswana, freeing young people from the confines of tradition and their parents is another important tenet of the anticipatory mode. Nongovernmental programmes in Botswana focus on *empowering* youth to become “independent, self-developing, and individualist people, freed from interdependencies and collective relations that constrain them as liberalist citizens of a nation or the world” (104). For instance, she shows how, in the context of poverty so terrible that parents cannot afford to feed youth, NGOs together with government programmes, laud micro-credit and micro-enterprise. Rather than committing to ensure youth are fed by their families, Durham (2007) argues, “They are commitments to liberate youth from such dependencies” (120), suggesting “a radically new conceptualization of households and the family aligned with the idea of the liberalist citizen of the developing state” (116). A similar logic – pairing education and individualism for youth – can be found in Malawi. The 1996 National Youth Policy in Malawi reads, “The youth represent a vast human resource potential, which, if properly prepared and tapped can contribute positively to national development. If neglected however, the youth can spell disaster for the nation.” Key to tapping this potential is ridding Africans of their collective and reciprocative tendencies, or as one Malawian coordinator of an orphan care programme put it, of their “economy of affection.” By this he meant that Malawians feel compelled to share money with their extended families and, in turn, fail to save for their futures. In an interview about health and development programming for youth, he explained that from his perspective the reason Malawi is not “developed” is:

> Culturally Malawians are focused on reproduction rather than production. The primary function of marriage according to the sociology of Africa is reproduction. In *mzungu*

Cheney (2007) reiterates Museveni’s explanation, “By educating every child, we are investing in our children. By investing in our children, we are empowering our people. By empowering our people, we shall fight and eradicate HIV/AIDS and Poverty.”
[English/white] culture, children are thought to be independent at the age of 18 and are given wealth [through inheritance]. According to African culture, what destroys us is the economy of the relationship or of affection. People give too much and then have problems. But this promotes laziness because some people live as dependents. Our culture deters our development. We have a spirit that is not viable for development.

A focus on the family is seen as antithetical to development by this man, his project focusing on making youth independent in ways that mimic the liberal and prosperous West. Contemporary programmes rely on “extracting individuals from local attachments” and replacing them with “new dependency relations” as Piot (2010) describes it, “toward Euro-American aid agencies…replacing those that are known and face-to-face by those that are virtual, distant, and unknown” (161). Human rights are an essential component of the anticipatory package for they provide justification for children and youths’ education and individualism even when education does not in reality translate into valued employment and better economies. Human rights function as a kind of NGO governmental technology to do the work of “extraction” of youth from their communities and families in this context (Piot 2010).

Several anthropologists have dismantled the universal logic behind children’s rights and have shown that it, too, is full of blind spots (Cheney 2007; Englund 2006a; Merry 2005). Recent critiques have drawn our attention to how human rights, in general, comprise part of the toolkit for governmental power and, in particular, serve to reinforce neoliberal, capitalist forms (461). Englund (2006a), based on long-term ethnographic research in central and southern Malawi, shows how an obsession with political and civil rights or “freedoms” (to vote, for instance) shields the government from critique for not also providing adequate food. Protecting

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14 Discussing a UNICEF campaign asking Ugandans to pledge allegiance to the ideology, “all children should be free and should grow up in a healthy, peaceful, and dignified environment,” Cheney (2007) asked herself, as Piot (2010) does below about children’s education, “how could one disagree with such a statement?” (50).
from abuse, and, as others have also shown, ensuring children’s right to free and accessible education (Cheney 2007). Studies such as these are tremendously important, calling for renewed attention to other political possibilities and to “whether and how the centrality of human rights discourse might render those other political possibilities more faint” (Brown 2004: 462).

As much as the human rights discourse has anticipated and unanticipated, or at least articulated and unarticulated, political effects, it also has a real and punctuated presence on the ground in sub-Saharan Africa as people take-up, employ and resist the discourse. Such highly individualistic ideas about rights, especially when applied to children, can have numerous and often destructive social effects. Cheney (2007) shows, for instance, that children’s rights do not translate readily into local practice, where children are socialised through the fulfillment of responsibilities that violate children’s right to freedom from labour (Cheney 2007; Kyaddondo 2008). Similarly, the definition of sexual abuse in the children’s rights framework, which includes “witnessing adult sexual acts,” are complicated in contexts where poverty confines whole families to single-room dwellings (Cheney 2007: 63). One result is feelings of guilt and shame among parents who cannot afford different dwellings or to send their children to school (Cheney 2007). In Malawi, as my research shows, parents vehemently oppose the pervasive human rights campaigns that target children with highly individualistic ideas about their rights. The parents believe these campaigns encourage children to abandon practical pursuits such as carrying necessary firewood and instead walk two hours each way to and from the nearest school where they share a classroom with over a hundred students to receive an education that provides no guarantee for future employment. I also show, however, that behaviour that is seen as antithetical to proper social reproduction in rural villages, or village “culture” as elders put it, is sometimes blamed on “rights.” The ways in which youth employ their “rights” are enabled in
large part by demographic changes that have nothing to do with the rights rhetoric but rather with the HIV/AIDS epidemic. It is the ways in which the anticipatory mode intersects with other factors which renders its current manifestations in this context.

While anthropological research shows how the highly individualistic children’s rights discourse employed in local contexts does not fit and, in fact, can have highly demoralising effects on parents and young people, I respond to Hunter’s (2010) recent call to pay attention to how rights discourses are sometimes re-organised so that they are meaningful and applicable to different and unexpected ends locally. For instance, Hunter (2010) found in his research in South Africa, that young women employed human rights language to insist on protection during sexual relations, but also to assert their gender “right” to have many intimate partners, a “right” most frequently claimed by men. While human rights discourses may not “empower” Africans in conventional ways, they are sometimes employed in different ways that are unexpectedly (and from some perspectives distastefully) empowering. In Chapter 3, I highlight how youth, as the main targets of the human rights rhetoric in Malawi, claim their “freedom” to pursue elements of umoyo wachizungu, which becomes the “right” to certain behaviours in an attempt to achieve their desires in the context of their homes and villages. In so doing, I show, as Hunter (2010) does, how rights are sometimes “spectacularly turned on their head” (9). The rights rhetoric conspires with other factors to give hope for something new (contributing to the new temporal orientations to the future), re-orders social hierarchies and creates new cleavages in rural villages. All the while, it simultaneously claims an intimacy with morality that deflects critique.

Not only do anticipatory regimes implicate younger and younger targets for human capital investment, they also, at least in the African context, tend to be gendered, focusing much more discursive and financial capital on girls, or, to employ anticipatory logic, the mothers and
middle-class workers it is imagined they could become (McRobbie 2007: 721). “Educate women, goes the argument, provide them with alternatives, and they will develop their independence by having and making choices” (Durham 2007: 123). In particular, since the 1990’s, advancing the education and preventative health behaviours of “poor girls” has been deemed the “greatest investment” both for future potential earnings and because of the relationship between education and future fertility (Adams, et al. 2009:253, emphasis added). Concerns about girls’ risks of contracting HIV/AIDS add to the urgency with which calls are made for investments in girls’ “empowerment” (Esacove 2010). Enabling the “agency” of young women to plan their families is a central component of anticipatory development framings.\textsuperscript{15} The rhetoric itself deflects criticism for, as Piot (2010) exclaims rhetorically, “who would stand against the education of children?” but, as he also cautions, as with human rights, “such a uniform set of commitments is not without its blind spots” (147).

One such blind spot to which Piot (2010) draws our attention, and that I take up in Chapter 4 is the impact of this focus on the future potential of educated girls and not of boys. While Piot (2010: 148) surmises that this focus on the education of girls might be responsible for a “recent dramatic increase in domestic violence across the [African] continent” or the “gendered atrocities that have accompanied its recent civil wars,” my research shows that more subtle impacts are widespread in Malawi. As will be obvious throughout this thesis, such highly gendered tropes related to the behaviour and future potential of girls significantly affect bodies and subjectivities of young Malawians, both boys and girls. For example, education has lost its status among some youth in Malawi, as has been shown in other African contexts, since it has

\textsuperscript{15} Sen (1999) uses the word ‘agent’ to mean “someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives” (19).
proved itself of little value for actually securing employment (see Cole 2008 for an example from Madagascar; Ndjio 2008 for Cameroon). Among others in Malawi, it is venerated as a route to better futures in Malawi via an unexpected logic. Its merit in some cases in Malawi is maintained by a dramatic re-positioning of its meaning, particularly for boys. Schooling is seen by both girls and boys, as noted above, as a mechanism for achieving human rights, regardless of the relationship between education and employment. For rural Malawian boys, however, schooling is also bound up in their self-construction of self-worth. I show throughout the dissertation, as others have in other African contexts, how girls’ empowerment programming emphasises girls’ responsibility for respecting and protecting themselves from the threat of boys, rather than seeing gender inequalities and empowerment as relational (also see Hayhurst 2012 for an example from Uganda). In Chapter 4, I argue that the emphasis on girls has left some boys with the impression that they are inherently prone to “bad” or immoral behaviour. One result is that whereas girls automatically perceive themselves as deserving of development efforts, boys feel they have to prove their worth. After all, educating boys has failed to generate new futures, as the incessant focus on girls in contemporary health and development campaigns make plain (Hayhurst 2012). In turn, I argue, boys have come to see their participation in school, as well as in youth programmes and sport activities, as worthwhile neither for the prospect of employment, nor for the potential contribution they may make as educated citizens to the future of Malawi, but because they prevent temptation to be “immoral.”
Auditing gender equality in development

Another blind spot is the impact of monitoring and evaluation frameworks that donors impose upon interventions to account for—by “counting” – their effects on girls. If anticipation is increasingly a feature of transnational and global interventions in Africa, a key feature of its operation is “accountability.” In Chapter 5 of this dissertation, I follow Macintyre, et al. (2008) in asking, “to what extent do corporations, reviewers, etc. participate in a cultural change, one in which complying with the needs of an audit becomes an end in itself?” (106). I show how interventions in Malawi, due to demands for accountability to international donors, effectively reduce gender equality to something “countable.”

As Marilyn Strathern (2000) describes in the introduction to the volume she edits titled “Audit Cultures,” the accountability frameworks and audit tools that were once managerial tools in financial institutions and are now part of broader neoliberal logic. Resting on a common language of anticipation for a preconceived future, they demand continuous assessment and evaluation of progress on the path to a foreseeable future. Examples of how audit cultures work as a technology of power “instilling new norms of conduct into the workforce” (Shore 2008:283 citing Foucault 1977, 1980 and Rose 1999) can be found in diverse corners of the world. Much of the research on audit cultures has focused on contemporary accounting in Western education systems (Shore 2008; Shore and Wright 2000; Slagter and Forbes 2009; Strathern 2000). Macintyre, et al. (2008), however, have shown how multinational mining corporations carry the audit culture to Papua New Guinea, similarly demanding evaluations of community development schemes that reflect the growing emphasis in the past two decades on management systems that “they believe will (if adhered to) produce predictable, consistent, high quality outcomes in areas as diverse as production, occupational health and safety, and community development” (101). In
an era where governance in developing countries is transnational, development programmes are also increasingly subject to audit cultures (Karim 2001; Karim and Leve 2001).

In several ways, audit cultures “actively [transform] the environments into which [they] are introduced – often with dire, unforeseen consequences” (Shore 2008: 281). Since an audit relies on quantifiable measures of institutional processes, it “distorts the character of what it claims to measure. What these statistics demonstrate is merely the extent to which targets have been met” (Shore 2008: 287). In a Women’s Studies Programme in the US, Slagter and Forbes (2009) show, for example, how quality of education and general contributions of feminist scholars to the academic experience and institution have been supplanted as the method for measuring scholarly validity by counts of enrolment in the programme. Macintyre, et al. (2008), when attempting to assess the social development goals of the mining company in Papua New Guinea, found that where qualitative or dichotomous yes/no assessment was not appropriate, they felt pressure to quickly synthesize complex qualitative findings as “technocratic and quantitative measurements” (107). Audit culture leads to “a system of project evaluation in which what is really being evaluated is the procedural efficiency of action in terms of the agency’s mission rather than its substantive impact on the lives of human beings” (Gledhill 2007: 341). Further, Nguyen (2009) argues that “technologies of accountability” deployed to meet demands of Western donors generate “operational” statistics which provide self-validating evidence (205). As Nguyen (2009) puts it, “Programmes are in fact massive multi-sited laboratories where implementation produces evidence that drives further implementation” (211, also see Shore 2008). In Haiti, the concern for accountability means that Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) are subject to audits prior to receiving support, which leads to the depoliticisation of community organisation as those CBOs with political activity are not selected
for support (Vannier 2010). In the case of Malawi, I argue that the greatest tragedy of reducing “gender equality” to a quantitative measure is that evaluations miss some of the remarkable strategies and strides of young men and women towards challenging deeply rooted gender inequalities – strategies that could be built upon to create more appropriate programming in this context. While in Chapter 4 I discuss how some young men are challenging hegemonic masculinities in Malawi with behaviours that may open spaces for greater gender equality for women, in Chapters 5 and 6, I demonstrate further how men and women are challenging inequalities through an exploration of manifestations of “modern loves” in this context.

Modern Loves in African Contexts

“Love” and romance have emerged as particularly productive avenues for exposing heterogeneities and hybridities in formulations of the “modern” around the world. Recent anthropological literature has examined changes in many parts of the world toward companionate relationships in which “individual fulfillment and satisfaction” are primary goals (Wardlow and Hirsch 2006: 4). This reflects a much larger social and cultural transformation, for following a Western model of romantic love is tied up in ideas around the making of a “modern” individualized identity (Holland and Eisenhart 1990; Wardlow and Hirsch 2006). The manifestations of this ideal, of course, take multiple forms. Whereas in Mexico, courtship and marriage are centered on individual, affective goals (Hirsch 2003), Smith (2006) found in Nigeria, intimacy and emotion during courtship shift to an emphasis on reproduction and kin

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16 I follow Thomas and Cole (2009) in my use the terms “affect” and “emotion” “fairly interchangeably…as in common parlance” (30).
obligations after the marriage ceremony. Similarly, whereas loving, companionate marriages are strictly characterized by monogamy in some areas, they co-exist with polygamy in others (Wardlow and Hirsch 2006).

The burgeoning Western foreign media in newly liberalized African economies have had particularly profound effects on desires for romantic love in these contexts (Cole 2009). Of course, media have long played an important role in constructions of love in African contexts, and not always foreign media from the West (see chapters in Cole and Thomas 2009). For example, Laura Fair (2009) demonstrates how Bollywood films served as fodder for much discussion on tensions between individual and familial goals in romantic love in Zanzibar in the mid 20th century. According to elders in the part of rural Malawi where I worked, however, ideas about “love marriages” have emerged largely since the democratic transition in the 1990’s when, as some elders explained, “things were revealed from where they were hiding.” They are referring not only to how market liberalization enabled material goods and advertising to flow into Malawi but also how it enabled the birth of a new batch of health and development programmes focused on human rights, gender empowerment, gender equality and “healthy love” for the prevention of transmission of HIV/AIDS. In rural areas, these programmes represent some of the only sources of “global media” reaching young people.

In Malawi, it is not only modern “love” that is desired, but specifically the modern “white wedding ceremony” which has come to stand for emotional, moral, health, gender equality and class aspirations all at the same time. In Chapter 6, I discuss how the “white wedding” desired by rural Malawian youth today emerged at the intersection of programmatic discourse on “healthy love” (Esacove 2010) and a long history of customary and Christian marital ideals that imbue the marriage ceremony with particular significance. I follow Thomas and Cole (2009) in their effort
to pay greater attention to the “deeper history of how people in Africa have deployed and reworked ideologies of love” (16) but also closely consider the role marital ceremonies have played in the initiation of different marriages.

Whereas I argue that a particular historical, political, and social context fosters the desire for the “the white wedding” and all it symbolises, I also show how, in response to rising aspirations for this kind of love in rural villages, youth must work to shape their personal economic and social conditions to support the practice of new, companionate marriages. This is because “love” can also mean different things to different people in the same context and conflicting aspirations of love can lead to unmet expectations. While unrealised expectations can engender significant frustration and a sense of complacency, in Malawi they also generates innovative strategies for filling gaps in “love marriages” by re-arranging extra-marital and extra-familial social relations.

Explorations of the intersections between “love” and money have been particularly useful for highlighting contradictions and heterogeneities amidst “loves” in specific African contexts. Some ethnographic literature, for example, suggests that providing money is a means of showing love and that women, in particular, expect gifts of money as expressions of love, while other ethnographic literature suggests that expectations of money are seen as venal or instrumental and thus raise uncomfortable suspicions that a relationship is not about “true love.” Hunter (2010), for instance, shows how in South Africa, amidst poverty and unemployment, two different kinds of modern loves emerge, “romantic love” based on sentimental ideals discussed above, and “provider love,” based on intimate relations that are “simultaneously material and meaningful”
Cole (2009), however, shows how ideas about intimacy and exchange, encompassed in the Malagasy term *fitiviana*, are challenged when money enters the equation in Madagascar. Today, some call for “clean *fitiviana*,” uncontaminated by financial expectations. In Malawi, similar concerns about money corrupting “true love” are heightened in the context of HIV/AIDS, where trust and fidelity are particularly vaunted. Whereas the inseparability of love and material exchange in Nigeria leaves some women feeling particularly anxious about whether men’s professions of “love” will be backed with the appropriate material gifts (Smith 2009), I found more anxiety among boys in Malawi who worried about whether girls’ expectations for money dilute the emotional component of “true love.” For boys, the kind of “modern” love characterized by “modern” gifts – from school fees to fashionable clothing – conflicts with ideas about “healthy love” (Esacove 2010) and protection from HIV/AIDS. Girls, for their part, rather than worry about what their husbands would provide, sometimes found new ways to find money and material goods in the absence of the “provider” element of love in their relationships.

Gender equality is increasingly seen as a central element of “true love” by women in sub-Saharan Africa. Like Smith (2009) did among the Igbo of Nigeria, however, I find in Malawi that love in intimate relations is also frequently inadequate for securing gender equality. Smith (2009) found that although relations between a man and a woman are often relatively egalitarian during courtship, they can very quickly become skewed once the marriage is concluded. Moreover, Igbo women in love marriages can find it particularly difficult to confront husbands who are unfaithful because questioning men’s behaviours can threaten trust, which is the very foundation upon which loving relations rest. Igbo women have strategies for preventing their husbands from spending money on extra-marital sexual partners, such as drawing on narratives

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17 This, Hunter (2010) argues, is a major factor fuelling the spread of HIV/AIDS in South Africa.
about their husbands’ role in maintaining and providing for his family. In Malawi, I again found that some of women’s most important strategies lay in how they re-organized their social lives outside of their intimate relationship. I argue that “modern” love in intimate relations in rural villages may be part of a broader shift in social relations to include “modern, loving friendships” among rural, non-kin.

The chapters that follow take up these literatures as they speak to and inform my findings in the contemporary space of rural Malawian youth. In the following section, I outline some of the key historical, political, economic, and social features of this context.

**Situating this study**

My research sought to understand how rural Malawian youth in 2008 and 2009 in small, rural villages at a point of dramatic political and social change engage socially, politically and temporally with the developing new world. Youth in Malawi have known their homeland in an era of democracy and human rights, in an era of HIV/AIDS, at a time when youth are the majority and the “most at risk,” and in an era when rural youth in particular are simultaneously perceived as “orphaned,” “vulnerable” and “backwards” as well as “dangerous” and “modern.” As such, they have entered the world at a point in which several new groups compete to shape and control them, or even capture their potential power. Yet, in rural villages, life is surprisingly stagnant amidst dramatic ideological change. While recording 24-hour activity recalls for over 100 youth, I learned an average day for a 14 year-old Malawian boy, for instance, consists of:
R: *Nkhwauka 6:00am* [I woke up at 6:00am]. *Nkhaluta ku kudimba kukadikita* [I went to the garden to dig]. *Chinyake mbwe nkhaluta kwa nyirenda kukagula mafuta* [And also, I went to Mr. Nyirenda to buy cooking oil].

L: *Kugeza yayi* [Without taking a bath]?

R: *Nkhageza* [I bathed]. *Nkhati nafuma kudimba nkhaluta da kudambo kukateka maji. Nkateka maji mbwe nkhu nkhufuma kudimba kuuyu nkhateka maji mbwe nkakhazikapo maji pamoto. Nkhatola sopo nakunyamula maji nakukageza.* [After coming from the garden, I went to the river to draw water. I drew water then I, I came from the garden at, I drew water then I put it on the fire. I took soap, picked up the water and went to take a bath]. *Nkhavyala waka malaya nakutola ndalama nakugula mafuta.* [I just put on clothes, take money and go to buy cooking oil].

L: Aha what did you do when you got back?

R: *Nkhasanga waphika sima.* [I found nsima ready]. *Nkhalya nsima na mphangwe.* [I ate nsima with vegetables]. Wakathilako mafuta [They put cooking oil in it]. *Tomato kukaweyva* [There were no tomatoes]… *Panyumba mbwe nkhasewelanga waka.* *Tikanchayanga bawo.* [At home I was just playing. We were playing Bawo (a game played with seeds or stones)].

L: Aha chinyake? [Aha what else]?

R: *Mbwenu* [That’s all] *Mbwetikayendanga waka.* [Then we were just walking about].

L: *Kuyankhu*? [Where were you going]?

R: *Tikaluta uko tikiza kuno.* [We went there, we came here]. *Mbwetikawela.* [Then we went home]. *Mbwetikayamba waka kutchaya bola.* [Then we started playing ball (football)]. *Mbwenu kukawa kwafipaso.* [Then it was dark]. *Likawa zuwa lanjila sono.* [The sun was set at this time].

R: *Unyumba mbwetikachezganga wakambwe tikakazinganga ngoma.* [At home then we were just chatting and we were roasting maize]. *Mbwe sima yaphya.* [Then nsima was ready]. *Dende mphangwe* [The relish was vegetables]. *Wakathilako waka mchere. Mafuta kukaweyye. Tomato kukaweyye.* [They put in only salt. There was no oil. There was no tomato]. *Nkhagona 9 koloko.* [I slept at 9 o’clock].

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18 *Nsima*, a porridge made from maize flour, is the staple food in Malawi.
L: *Ukakhala kusukulu?* [So yesterday you didn’t go to school]?
R: *Nkhakhala mayiro.* [I didn’t go yesterday].
L: *Chifukwa?* [Why not]?
R: *Malaya nkhachapa cha!* [I did not wash my clothes].
L: *Malaya yose ngakubinkha?* [All the clothes are dirty]?
T: *Muh* [Yes].

The elements that this boy highlighted as significant to his day included mundane activities like eating, wandering about, playing games and doing chores. Girls’ days often involved less playing and more cooking, but were similarly uneventful. Sometimes youth went to school, sometimes they did not. Frequently, if they had finished primary school in the village, they did not walk the two hours to town for secondary school. Older boys engaged in more money-making activities such as chipping stone at the local quarry or moulding and burning mud bricks for construction. Older girls were usually married. Many youth over the age of 16 frequently spent much of their day attending workshops or engaging in youth activities with various organisations. While the promise of democracy and development, discussed in Chapter 2, appears to have been very slow to deliver to rural villages, youth imaginations are ignited and hope abounds amidst the stagnation.

A piece of a recent headline in the UK national newspaper, The Guardian, sums up the political climate of Malawi since gaining independence from Britain in 1964: “Malawi: Africa’s ‘warm heart’ feels chill…” (Smith 2012). The “warm heart of Africa,” a designation achieved mostly due to the friendliness of Malawians towards foreigners, also speaks to Malawi’s relative peacefulness among nations on the African continent. From colony to Independence, from dictatorship to democracy, and from the first elected president to the second, the warmth of
optimism abounds in both national and international rhetoric. As history would warn, however, the persistent threat of resurrection of a despotic past is chilling.

As the British colonial state of Nyasaland came undone, in the early 1960’s, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda was appointed the Prime Minister of Nyasaland and over the next four years worked to declare himself the President for Life of an independent Malawi. He subsequently retained his authoritarian rule for the 30 years. Banda is credited for economic growth and infrastructural improvements, as well as a hardworking, unifying spirit that Malawians respected (Chirambo 2010). The regime was also, however, highly repressive. Strict dress codes, physical displays of modesty among women and unity among Malawians were enforced: men and school-going children were legally required to maintain short haircuts and women to wear skirts below the knee. Alliance with the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) was enforced through threat of persecution or death (Chirambo 2010). Much of Banda’s brutality was enacted by trained young militants.19 By the early 1990’s, international and national communities openly denounced the repressive regime, eventually leading to Malawi’s first democratic elections in 1994. While the peaceful election of Bakili Muluzi and the United Democratic Front (UDF) for two consecutive terms earned Malawi much praise from the international community as a “beacon of democracy” (Smith 2012) in Africa, autocracy was not to die easily in this nation. Muluzi capped his second term with an attempt to change the constitution allowing him to hold a third term in office. When this grab at power failed, he ensured his replacement would be Dr. Bingu waMutharika (commonly known only as Bingu), through whom he intended to wield power. Bingu, however,

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19 Late historian Leroy Vail has argued that unity and nationalism espoused in Banda’s regime had lost meaning in Malawi long prior to the dictatorship; authoritarian structure was necessary to maintain the façade of unity in the Independent Malawi. Rather in 1994 he found extensive ‘tribalism’, with the Tumbuka and Ngoni peoples of the north, in particular, feeling abandoned by the dictatorship and segregated from the central and southern regions.
while widely feared to be a mere puppet to Muluzi, surprised everyone and pleased many by switching political parties after he was elected and asserting his independence from Muluzi. Enthusiasm in the nation subsequently waned, however, as Bingu began increasingly to style himself after the former life-president, Banda, and pursue the former dictator’s policies. His ambitions to power were thwarted when his personal intentions of life-long dictatorship became apparent. The return to autocracy and then political instability inspired the aforementioned article in the Guardian (Smith 2012).

The economic climate echoes the political one with enthusiasm consistently betrayed, particularly among the young, rural majority. State withdrawal, stipulated by the World Bank and IMF [International Monitory Fund] coupled with neoliberal economic reform to produce a declining rural economy. National and international efforts to stimulate the Malawian economy, including the liberalisation of agricultural markets beginning in the 1980’s, the promotion of higher yielding (but also higher-input) hybrid maize and burley tobacco,\(^{20}\) and the complete liberalisation of the price of fertilizers\(^{21}\) by 1995, served in practice to reinforce Malawi’s dual economy,\(^{22}\) causing poor farmers to suffer (Englund 2006a; Frankenberger, et al. 2003). Furthermore, high mortality from HIV/AIDS has depleted the labour pool and increased the dependency ratio, exacerbating the subsistence farmers’ plight (Frankenberger, et al. 2003). Increasing restrictions on migration between South Africa and Malawi, the latter in an attempt to curb the growing rates of HIV, virtually eliminated migration to South African gold mines since

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\(^{20}\) Both crops are heavily reliant on chemical inputs and have led to significant soil erosion (Frankenberger, et al. 2003).

\(^{21}\) In 1983 the process of gradually phasing out fertilizer subsidies began.

\(^{22}\) Policies which transferred land to estate owners who were given the exclusive privilege to grow burley tobacco, Malawi’s most profitable export crop, created this dual economy. Although policy changes allowing smallholder farmers to grow limited amounts of burley tobacco, the high cost of inputs continue to make it inaccessible to Malawi’s majority.
the 1990’s, formerly one of the only economically productive employment options for rural youth (Frankenberger, et al. 2003). Commitments made repeatedly in campaign speeches to provide money and opportunity to rural youth have yet to materialise. As I departed my fieldwork, another campaign promise was eagerly anticipated by youth: in the run-up to the 2009 elections, Bingu committed three billion Malawian kwacha\(^23\) to support youth employment and entrepreneurship.\(^24\) But, alas, in an email I received on February 1\(^{st}\) 2010, the only youth I worked with who has communicated with me electronically since I completed my fieldwork, wrote:

> Are you still on earth Lauren? Why so silent? How is life going on and when are you planning to come and see us again? What successes are on your way this new year? As for me, still struggling to get a job in this poor country, worse still the president is turning his back on our region. Anyway I hope God will make things possible one day.

> Wishing you all the best.

While the money never made it to rural youth I met in the Northern Region, the same year the state did manage to buy 6 Alpha, 4-door, 4WD, SUV Automatic H3 Hummers, whose estimated cost was about 40 million Malawi Kwacha, or 263,460 USD (Phiri 2009). The result, as the boy’s email above demonstrates, is feelings of abandonment by government among rural Malawian youth.

> A geographical divide based on ethnic group in Malawi is very strong, and political favouritism towards the Central and Southern Regions since independence further exacerbates feelings of anomie in the North. The ethnic regionalism in Malawi dates back to the colonial

\(^{23}\) This was equivalent to about $20,500,000 USD at the time.

\(^{24}\) MK 3 billion Youth Enterprise Development Fund
period, when “Divide and rule was to be the British policy” (Vail and White 1989: 164). During independence, Banda emphasised his Chewa identity, strongly associated with the Central Region and began what has been an “attack” upon the north, which is predominantly Tumbuka in ethnicity (Vail and White 1989: 183). In what is frequently referred to as the Cabinet Crisis in Malawi, Banda dismissed several of his cabinet ministers from the Northern Region, and in protest several others from the north resigned from their positions. This together with the abolition of Tumbuka as a national language in 1968 engendered feelings of neglect of the Northern Region that are still very present in everyday discourse. Whether warranted today or not, people frequently comment that, again and again, it is evident that the government has forgotten the peoples of the north.

Ethnic or, as people say locally, “Tribal” history also significantly influences how youth interact with global ideas about the future. The rural youth involved in my research identified themselves with six ethnic groups, Tumbuka, Ngoni, Nkhonde, Tonga, Chewa, and Yao, the first two being predominant in the research area. While the Tumbuka, Ngoni, Nkhonde and Tonga are most common in the Northern Region, the Chewa and Yao are migrants from the Central or Southern Regions. The Ngoni and Tumbuka practice patrilocality and patrilineal kinship, meaning that land is passed down to males from the father’s side at marriage and that girls access land through their husbands when they move to their husband’s village upon marriage. Although the Chewa are matrilocal by tradition, all of the youth who self-identified as Chewa living in the Northern Region were from a Chewa parent married to a Tumbuka parent and they practiced

25 In fact, Vail and White (1989) show how the Tumbuka ethnic identity was actually invented as part of this colonial mission; a once highly diverse and disparate group, the Tumbuka identity was consolidated by the colonial administration which, based on assumptions about ‘tribal’ primitiveness, imagined Africans to live in small, homogeneous ethnic groups ruled by chiefs and saw it politically expedient to maintain and even reinforce these imagined groupings.
patrilocality and patrilineality. This has important implications for agricultural resource allocation and thus significantly affects how youth define their goals and weight their challenges.  

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**Health and Development interventions targeting rural youth**

I quickly learned that for rural youth in the context of my research, one of the most important sources of global information – of new and dramatically different ideological positions, and of hope, intimidation and desire – were youth-targeted interventions. As noted above, NGOs and FBOs fill a vacuum opened when the state abandoned the provision of services in rural villages. Whereas villagers feel that “the president is turning his back on our region,” they could hardly say that of humanitarian organisations. As Watkins and Swidler (2012) have delineated, efforts are elaborated by international NGOs who often work with local NGOs and by a variety of “freelance altruists.” They explain,

Some were church groups; others were Mom and Pop altruists, such as a Scottish couple who collected school materials during the year and then brought them to Malawi in the summer; others were individuals, like a retired school teacher who had invented a better wheelbarrow, and a charlatan who was promoting his cure for AIDS (199).

The region where I conducted this research, as Watkins and Swidler (2012) also found, was home to multiple, overlapping health and development programmes targeting rural villages. On a typical day, several white SUVs are released from the hospital and local churches, sometimes

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26 For instance, a boy without strong relations with his father’s side of the family may not be able to access land and labour resources typically available. Boys in this situation often feel that access to agricultural resources is a significant challenge and tend to seek find employment in urban areas more often then boys with strong ties to their fathers’ families.
carrying food or agricultural supplies for participating rural households but always chock-a-block with multiple discursive tools of transnational health programming, often aimed at youth. So pervasive is the symbolic association of the white SUVs with knowledge, power and success that the posters featuring a young woman with her white nursing uniform matching the bright white of her wide smile and the SUV behind her need no words to convey their meaning. The keys in her hands are both those of the 4x4 SUV and of modern success in a global world (see Chapter 1, Figure 2 for an example). This is clear in the ways both boys and girls volunteer their time with these organisations almost compulsively; while the volunteer positions provided very little in terms of tangible benefits in the present, they offer and demand a hope for something neither the past nor youths’ parents can offer in the present.

The youth-targeted programming in the context of this research was “complex, chaotic, and frenetic,” (Watkins and Swidler 2012: 199), funded sometimes by international NGOs, organised and run through local NGOs, the local hospital, and the Synod of Livingstonia, Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian (CCAP) and a number of individual philanthropists. Programming includes Sexual and Reproductive Health, HIV/AIDS prevention and Voluntary Counselling and Testing Services, Peer Education Training, Life Skills Training, Radio Listening Clubs, a Child Empowerment Programme, “Harmful Cultural Practices” Discussion Groups, Gender Discussion Groups, the Lay Training Centre where “orphaned and vulnerable youth” are taught vocational skills, and so on. Regardless of whether the goal of the programme or the day was HIV/AIDS prevention or women’s empowerment, the emphasis on “training” was pervasive (Watkins and Swidler 2012). Reflecting the peer-education approach employed by much of the youth programming in Malawi, several programmes in the region established youth clubs in villages through which certain ideas or behaviours were disseminated by key youth leaders to
peers and elders (Englund 2006b; Watkins and Swidler 2012). A survey conducted in 2009 by the Ministry of Youth Development and Sports (MoYDS), through the National Youth Council of Malawi and funded by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), summarized youth-targeted coverage across the country (Government of Malawi 2012). This study indicates that rural areas in this region closely reflected rural areas nation-wide, with just under 50% of youth reporting that they access youth-targeted services, 31.6% of those being sports and recreation activities, 24.7% general health or sexual and reproductive health services, and 12.7% “asset building programmes” (37-38). The latter were defined as programmes “designed to help young people develop the skills and tools they need to avoid risky behaviour, stay in school, prevent pregnancy, find employment, and empower them to make decisions about critical life experiences” (34).\(^\text{27}\) In my study villages, these services were somewhat more concentrated than elsewhere due to their proximity to the Synod of Livingstonia Mission Station. Every youth involved in my research had access to youth-targeted services. This breakdown of activities, however, did not appear to accurately capture the multifaceted programming targeting youth. In a section of the report that provided details on the 45 programmes included in the assessment, the descriptions of their activities tended to read as such:

> To assist the young people to actively participate in Human rights, SRH [sexual and reproductive health], environmental rehabilitation, sports and recreation thereby alleviating human rights suffering and contribute effectively to the development of the country (73).

\(^\text{27}\) A further example of the anticipatory discourse around youth development, this report lamented that the bulk of activities were not human capital development, a necessarily anticipatory category. Referring specifically to these “asset building” services, they report, “In an ideal scenario, a large proportion of youth services would be dedicated to these types of preventive activities.”
This is a Community Youth Organization striving the community to work towards a community with a better livelihood by coordinating and facilitating a reproductive health, gender, food security, Human rights and gender (81).

These statements closely reflect the complex missions and activities of the programmes I became familiar with. In particular, I focused on the overlapping programming from two sizeable youth-targeted initiatives, each of which had a youth club in the villages in which I concentrated my fieldwork. Youth-targeted activities and trainings elaborated by individual philanthropists and short-term courses organized by international charities also informed my research. Importantly, I refer to the collective programming targeting youth in the villages as “PEERS” throughout this dissertation because the ideologies, objectives and activities in the youth-targeted programmes overlapped significantly (and also to maintain my commitment to confidentiality). Both of the main projects identified as programmes focused on the “prevention of HIV/AIDS” and on “Sexual and Reproductive Health services for youth” though sports and recreation, gender equality programming, and human rights promotion were critical components of both initiatives. The programme activities, and in particular the activities of individual youth clubs, were funded by various donors including the Presbyterian World Service and Development, the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, the National AIDS Commission of Malawi (NAC), the National Youth Council of Malawi, (NYCoM), PLAN Malawi, and individual philanthropists. NYCoM partners with the United Nations Food Programme (UNFP) and The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) to develop training materials that are disseminated to youth organizations and programmes nation-wide. UNICEF’s human rights programming is the most ubiquitous.
Style and Organization of this Dissertation

Style

I used pseudonyms not only for youth programmes, but also for everyone included in the research. I aimed to remain true to the common names in the area, including English names (like Lonely, Desire, Dilemma, Gift, Joyce, Arthur, and Orland) and Tumbuka, Chichewa or Ngoni names which also frequently had recognised meanings. Examples include Shupo meaning “trouble,” Chowananga or Mphatso meaning “gift” and Temwa meaning “love.” People often select a name for their children that reflects salient events or occurrences in their lives. A family might choose the English name Lonely or the Chichewa name Masozì meaning “tears” if a loved one had passed away just shortly before the birth of the child, for instance.

Just as many people choose English names, many also prefer to speak in English today, particularly youth and elders. Many youth learned English in late primary or secondary school and found it a “shorter language” or, in other words, they found it easier to express ideas more efficiently using English than chiTumbuka. Many elders, on the other hand, learned English in early primary school under the colonial government and enjoyed practising it, or displaying their knowledge. Still, some of my interviews, particularly those with young women who tended to have the lowest levels of education, were conducted in chiTumbuka. In these cases, I was sometimes able to conduct the interview myself, but in most cases my research assistant and I shared in asking questions and she translated the answers to be sure I understood everything properly. Throughout this dissertation, I translated chiTumbuka quotes to English, but made every attempt to provide the chiTumbuka word(s) for cases where it may be interpreted to have more than one meaning. In a few cases, I have included the full quote in chiTumbuka as well, to
remind the reader that some of the interviews were conducted in another language and to give the reader a sense of what that language looks and sounds like.

**Organization**

Photography is esteemed for its ability to “empower” and “give voice to” to marginalized groups in social and health research and to produce material with policy relevance. Discussion of analytical and interpretive complexities and challenges of photography, however, are generally absent in the literature. Filling this gap, in the first chapter (Chapter 1), I discuss the successes and challenges of using photography in my research. I developed, operationalised and evaluated photo-LENS, a visual tool employed as part of the ethnographic process, with a critical eye to the processes of translation and consumption of images.

Chapter 2 unpacks the photo of the house that Desire left on my doorstep, discussing the appeal of youth-targeted programming, which, in turn, strongly influences the imagined lifestyles Desire and many other youth ascribed to such houses. It also shows, however, that anticipation emerges as highly unstable among rural youth, requiring significant work, often discursive and imaginative, on the parts of youth to keep distant futures visible on the horizon. Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 enter this house, looking more closely at the work youth do to keep futures in sight. In these chapters, I aim to understand the “friction,” as Tsing (2005) has come to call it, that occurs when discourses about modern, valued lives (ones characterized for instance by human rights, “modern” love and certain kinds of gender equality and morality) escape their moorings in health and development discourse and recreate themselves in the context of the rural villages of northern Malawi. Specifically, these chapters show how rights (Chapter 3), gender (Chapters 4 and 5), and love (Chapter 6) are slippery concepts: as they trickle their way into the imaginaries
of young people they often become something new and unexpected with variably destructive or
generative results.

Each of these chapters, however, also does much more. Chapter 3 demonstrates how the
human rights discourse, a key weapon in the “anticipatory intervention” arsenal, is targeted
toward and taken up primarily by youth. I demonstrate a discursive elision that emerges such that
“rights” become associated by youth with consumerism and individualism, which in turn
opposes “rights” to “culture” in elders’ minds. This leads to significant intergenerational discord.

If Chapter 3 looks at how youth are targeted and elders abandoned by anticipatory
discourses, Chapter 4 turns to the impact of the primacy of girls’ (and not boys’) potential in the
anticipatory regime. Whereas there is a pervasive focus on the power of girls to improve whole
societies, as evidenced by Plan Canada’s “Because I am a Girl” campaign among many others,
boys are seen to be, and feel themselves, inherently “worthless.” As I was frequently told, “if you
educate a girl you educate a nation; if you educate a boy you educate an individual.” The result is
that boys believe themselves to be destructive and prone to immorality. Thus, this chapter
contributes to thinking about the implications of a focus on girls, showing also how boys
internalise and struggle against assumptions about their self-destructive tendencies.

As human rights are an important tool of the contemporary anticipatory regime in
Malawi, so, as Chapter 4 showed, is gender empowerment. In Chapter 5, however, I
problematis how gender-related achievements are measured. A key feature of contemporary
programmes is “accountability.” I show how this “audit culture” reduces gender equality to
something “countable” and, in so doing, not only shift attention away from pressing gender
inequalities, but also obscures strides towards gender equality made by girls and boys, young women and men.

In the final chapter, I take a close look at the ways in which young men and women are approaching “modern” interpersonal relationships both in intimate relations and friendships. I show how the “white wedding” is imbued with weighty potential to predict lives that meet emotional, health and class aspirations. By looking at the experiences of boys and girls who do not obtain all that is promised by the “white wedding” I show how women, often with the support of men, re-arrange their social lives to help fill the social and material gaps in their lives. This, I argue, signals truly innovative mechanisms devised by women for addressing inequalities both between women and men and between youth and elders. The ways in which boys support these mechanisms implies significant potential for overturning certain gender inequalities in the future, potential that programmes would do well to consider.
Chapter 1: Picturing Youths’ Lives

“Talk to me, please!” I buried the scream, grateful it had not escaped my lips. In yet another interview with a young person in a rural village I had recorded nary a word. During preliminary research I visited rural villages with a Malawian colleague who had organized numerous focus groups with village elders and interviews with personnel from youth-targeted HIV/AIDS programmes working in the villages – all of whom had much to share with me about youth misbehaviours. Interesting as this was, I was curious about why this colleague had not organized any focus groups with rural youth themselves. After all, my goal was explicit: to understand agency and culture creation by and among youth in the contemporary era of globalization. It did not take many interviews with rural youth – during which I found it difficult to get them to tell me their names, let alone personal details and opinions – to understand why he had arranged for me to speak with elders. Rural youth, it seemed, had little to contribute to the understanding of their own lives.

While rural youth and children comprise the majority of the population in Malawi, lauded in policy documents as “the leaders of tomorrow,” and “foundations of the future,” (Ministry of Youth Development and Sports 2007), this modernist trope confronts a more powerful trope about generational hierarchies in rural villages, where youth are regarded as unable to contribute valuable ideas and opinions until they reach social adulthood. When seeking permission from
parents to speak to their children.\textsuperscript{28} I often received sentiments in reply like, “these ones, they are not having any decisions in their minds as of yet. They are guided by parents” and “For those who are still chinyamata [youth] you must tell them [what they think] because until they have passed that time of being chinyamata they can’t have a deciding mind for themselves.” I found it to be true that as boys transitioned into adulthood, especially upon marriage, their opinions were increasingly taken more seriously by others, which in turn boosted their self-confidence in interviews. The median age of first marriage for men, according to the 2004 Malawi Demographic Health Survey, is 22.9 years with 22\% marrying before the age of 20 years (MDHS 2004: 96). This was not always true for girls, however, who frequently passed from the authority of their fathers to that of their husbands (something I demonstrate in detail in Chapter 5; also see MDHS 2004). The median age of first marriage for women is much younger than for men at 18.0 years with 77\% before the age of 20 and 51\% marrying before the age of 18 years (MDHS 2004: 96).\textsuperscript{29} I found that only some women gain respect and freedom to share their opinions, usually only much later in life – frequently in old age and after their husbands have passed away. Such local cultural sentiments – that youth do not have socially valuable experiences and viewpoints – mean that these youth, especially the girls, are tremendously shy. Eliciting stories, opinions and perceptions from this group of youth necessitated a very creative and dynamic approach that encouraged, motivated and engaged youth as agents in the research. Literature on appropriate methodological approaches for engaging young people in social

\textsuperscript{28} I worked predominantly with young people between the ages of 11 and 30 years. I sought permission from the primary caregivers of young boys and girls whenever appropriate – i.e. for all young people below the age of 15 and some below the age of 18 unless the elder(s) in their household were too ill to be able to make such decisions; in such cases the young people acted as primary caregivers for their elders and made independent decisions about their lives and those of their elders and siblings and it was thus inappropriate to ask permission of their elders.

\textsuperscript{29} I worked with a broad age range of youth (11-30) in an effort to capture differences among unmarried, married, widowed and divorced young men and women as well as the specific circumstances of young single mothers.
research, however, was of limited assistance to me due especially to their lack of specificity on how to analyze some of the data produced using child-friendly approaches.

Visual tools have received some recent attention for their variable success in engaging children and youth in social research (Pink 2012). Among the most common visual tools employed in social research are community mapping, craft, photography and video. Anthropologist, Lisa Mitchell (2006) for instance, found drawing and body mapping activities with children effective for eliciting “children’s own perspectives, their ways of making meaning, their priorities in social relationships, their contributions to the social lives of their communities and their forms of resistance and accommodation to local, national and global forces” (Mitchell 2006: 60; also see Wagner 1999 for examples with photography).

Anthropologists have also recently argued that introducing photographs from the field into the ethnographic text helps connect readers with disenfranchised populations. In recent photo-ethnographic work with homeless injection drug users in San Francisco, anthropologist Philip Bourgois and photographer Jeff Schonberg argue that the “visceral, emotional response” elicited by a “strong” photograph, “can provide the impetus for critical thinking fuelled by personal interpretation” (Schonberg and Bourgois 2002: 388). In Joao Biehl’s (2005) ethnography about the treatment of the mentally ill in Brazil, “Vita,” the photographs by artist Torbin Eskerod, capture the lived experience of the routine “social abandonment,” engaging the reader in what Biehl refers to as the “poetics of death in life” (Dominguez 2010).

Employing visual and especially photographic approaches in social science research is not, however, without challenges. Several practitioners have experienced technical issues such as cameras not functioning. Others have found that visual tools do not always help young people
open up or express their feelings. Mosse (1994) reminds us that visual tools can serve to inhibit knowledge rather than enlighten it for things that are more difficult to “picture,” such as spirituality and emotion. Wright, et al. (2010) found youth to experience significant difficulty trying to decide what to capture in photos or drawings when the assignment was left open with the express intention of allowing them to guide the research direction.

Considering these challenges, I developed and piloted a visual tool that built on other approaches and addressed these in particular by employing photography to seek youths’ personal experience with and feelings about key concepts/values in discourse on youths’ lives, emerging from ethnographic research, and drew heavily on the ethnographic research in the interpretation of the photos, elaborated further below. Youth had clear instructions on what kinds of things they were being asked to capture in the photographs, making the overall assignment clearer than other studies have. Combining ethnography with photography also meant that I had significant data with which to triangulate the findings from the photographs, which helped to ensure things that are more difficult to capture in a photo were not overlooked overall. I call this method “Photo-LENS [Life-Experience Narratives of Significant concepts] for it involves asking research informants to take photos that, in some way, represent personal life experiences with key or significant concepts identified through ethnographic research in a particular location and then to narrate those experiences using the photograph as a launching point. The Significant Concepts that emerged in my ethnographic research and were later formulated into photography assignments were youth’s challenges, goals, understandings of health, and conceptions of how to maintain healthy relationships. After much experimentation with the different linguistic possibilities for describing these concepts, youth were asked to capture in photographs “what most makes you suffer,” “what most brings you joy,” “someone who is healthy,” and, in some
cases, “examples of love.” Photo-LENS was exceptionally effective for engaging and eliciting experiences from youth in this context. While young people in rural villages frequently said almost nothing in interview and group discussions, nearly every youth provided with a camera took photographs related to the key constructs assigned, and later articulated their experiences of “suffering” and “joy” and understandings of “health” and/or “love” in oral discussions or interviews centered on the visual images. The images also served to launch discussions on various other topics as I used things in the background or things unintentionally captured in the photos to probe about family life, agriculture, politics, religion and much more. Further, youths’ personal experiences – and their understandings of “suffering” and “health,” in particular – often differ profoundly from the assumptions made by elders, transnational health programs, and government institutions.30

An additional concern with visual tools, such as photography, is that analytical and interpretive complexities and challenges associated with their use are generally overlooked in the literature (Catalani and Minkler 2010). Some research papers detail who took photographs and how they took them (i.e. number of days each participant had a camera and the challenges encountered with deciding which images to take), but ignore challenges and inconsistencies associated with interpretation of photographs by different audiences. As Bourgois and Schonberg put it, “Letting a picture speak its thousand words can result in a thousand lies” (Bourgois 2009; Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Schonberg and Bourgois 2002: 388). It is for such reasons that Lisa Mitchell (2006) calls for more critical research that interrogates “not only the content of an image, but also the circumstances of its production, circulation and consumption” (63).

30 I first decided to use photographs after seeing how interested children and youth were with my camera and then finding I learned a lot about their lives through the photos they chose to capture with it.
In response, in this chapter I endeavour to make explicit the technical, ethical, and analytical processes employed in this research, thus building on other studies employing photographic methods. Following Rose’s (2012) “critical visual methodology” I attend to the processes of translation of photographic image contents to oral and written narrative by different audiences, including the researchers, photographers, and various adult audiences in dissemination and advocacy efforts. After outlining the history of photography in social research and discussing how photo-LENS differs, I will discuss 1) the importance of the language used in photographic assignments; 2) the embodied and emotional aspects of image production; 3) the analytical processes used to translate image content into oral and written narrative; 4) the importance of seeing photographs as a “lens” for seeing the socio-cultural and political contexts of identity production as opposed to realist images of everyday life; 5) the interpretation and representation of “invisible” and “unspoken” aspects of photographic images; and 6) the circumstances of photo circulation, consumption and interpretation by broader audiences.31

Photography in social research

Photography has long been used in social research. Early uses of photography employed a realist perspective; images in photographs were seen as objective data used to stimulate discussion on subjects in the photographs (Wright, et al. 2010). Collier (1967) was the first to discuss photography as a tool in ethnographic research. In a method that he and his son developed together, called “photo-elicitation,” images produced by the researcher are introduced

31 For the purpose of this research, consumption refers to non-reflexive relationship to an image whereas interpretation refers to the ways in which consumers sometimes read into an image to give it meaning.

Photography has since been used in social research for a variety of purposes, and the benefits cited by academics from across the social and health sciences are many. Photography is used for eliciting rich data (Catalani and Minkler 2010; Collier and Collier 1986; Keller, et al. 2008; Kolb 2008; Pink 2012), getting close to intimate spaces of peoples’ lives (Hernandez 2009), preventing “awkward silences” by mediating oral communication (Banks 2001: 68), encouraging participants to become engaged in the research as collaborators or owners (Castleden, et al. 2008; Strack, et al. 2003), enabling target groups to define the research direction (Keller, et al. 2008; Wang and Burris 1997), and communicating results more easily and more effectively to a variety of audiences (Schonberg and Bourgois 2002), including influencing relevant policy change (Wang and Burris 1997; Wang and Pies 2004). Giving cameras to participants, it has been argued, leads to “deeper” data by providing space for a different way of knowing and communicating (Lury 1998; Pink 2012), countering shyness (Prins 2010), uncovering context (Keller, et al. 2008), establishing trust and reversing unequal power relations between researcher and researched (Gotschi, et al. 2009; Kolb 2008), engaging disadvantaged groups in social research (Kolb 2008), giving recognition to and increasing the pride of women (Prins 2010), and facilitating marginalized groups to “come to voice” (Hooks 1998:28 in Wright, et al. 2010:542).

Photography has recently been hailed for its ability to make research “participatory” or “empowering” (Wang and Burris 1997). The most common participatory photographic approach
is “photovoice.” Photovoice is guided by three main goals, “(1) to enable people to record and reflect their community’s strengths and concerns, (2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through large and small group discussion of photographs, and (3) to reach policymakers” (Catalani and Minkler 2010:424 drawing on Wang and Burris 1997). Photovoice as conceptualized by Wang and Burris (1997) draws on three bodies of literature: critical pedagogy, feminist theory, and community-based photography. “Feminist theory suggests that power accrues to those who have voice, set language, make history, and participate in decisions” (Wang and Redwood-Jones 2001: 561). Thus photovoice aims to engage women and marginalized groups in critical dialogue, breaking the “culture of silence” (Wang and Burris 1997 drawing on Freire 1970). For instance, Spence’s (1995) community-photography equipped lay people with cameras to photograph scenes, including “illness, social injustice, explorations of sexuality, and joyful events” with the aim of inspiring social change (Wang and Redwood-Jones 2001: 561).

The ability of photographs to facilitate research dissemination, and especially to promote policy change, is commonly cited as one of the most important benefits. Drew, et al. (2010: 1685), for instance, say,

In presenting the images, we as researchers become less of a conduit between raw data and final interpretations because audience members can quickly become engaged in viewing, assessing, and analyzing the data themselves. This illustrates success in relation to our goal of wanting the voices and perspectives of young people to be heard throughout the research process and dissemination of findings.

In recent ethnographies by Bourgois and Schonberg (2009) and Biel (2005), intertwining text with powerful photographs from the field, it is argued, simultaneously engages the reader in the lived experience of social suffering and draws attention and critique to the larger structural forces
that shape such experiences. As Biel put it in an interview with the American Anthropological Association’s president, Virginia Dominguez (2010), the photographs in his book “Vita” “bring singularity into ethnography” while the text “restore[s] context to the lives deemed not worth living.”

The potential problems with photography in ethnographic research are rarely discussed. Anthropologist Lisa Mitchell’s (2006) experience with children’s drawings, reminds us that displaying visual data can take voice away from children, as adults take over the telling of the meaning of the photos. To counter this, Dennis Jr., et al. (2009) suggest only using photos that have photographer-narratives attached, as compelling as some other photos may seem. While Schonberg and Bourgois’ (2002) work uses photographs by professionals rather than informants, they concur that in published work, “[c]aptions and narrative or analytical text…can be essential to engage the dialogue between the image and the reader to clarify political, cultural and social meanings” (388). The consumption and interpretation of photos by broader audiences, including policy-makers, and the use of photographs disembedded from ethnographic text with the emotional, embodied, social and political consequences of such, deserve much more attention.

The technique of photovoice is generally informed by an inductive research approach. Whereas photo-elicitation (Collier and Collier 1986) involves sharing photographs taken by the researcher during interviews, in photovoice research informants are given cameras in an effort to engage them in the process of defining the research. It is often employed to capture descriptive information such as peoples’ experiences of place (McIntyre 2003), home (Bukowski and Buetow 2011), the environment (Kolb 2008) and health (Catalani and Minkler 2010; Kolb 2008). Commonly a select group is provided a disposable camera with which they are asked to take photographs of their communities or lives. Minimal instruction is often seen as valuable,
allowing participants to guide the direction of the research and to elicit “naturalistic” perceptions of key issues (Catalani and Minkler 2010; Wright, et al. 2010). In photovoice, the photos are then used in group discussions using the SHOWeD mnemonic to spark critical dialogue; SHOWeD questions are: What do you see here? What is really happening? How does this relate to our lives? Why does this problem or strength exist? What can we do about it? (Wang and Redwood-Jones 2001: 562). Finally, key photographs selected by participants are shared with influential local leaders and policy makers in an effort to facilitate social and policy change in the direction articulated by participants.

Several practitioners have expanded photovoice in various ways. Most photovoice projects use group discussions of the photos (McIntyre 2003) and some have even handed cameras to organized farmer groups to take collective photos (Gotschi, et al. 2009). Others, however, have drawn on Collier and Collier (1986) to conduct individual, photo-elicitation interviews using the participants’ photos as guides (Drew, et al. 2010; Wright, et al. 2010). Castleden, et al. (2008) recommend adding a “feedback loop”, “seeking input from the entire community at regular intervals throughout the project” (1401). They argue that this feedback loop combined with a prolonged period in the field (6 months in their case) helped to build trust between researchers and the Huu-ay-aht First Nations peoples in Canada, the importance of which, they argue, is overlooked in many photovoice initiatives and is necessary given “Indigenous peoples’” criticism of academia regarding power, trust, and ownership in Indigenous research” (1403). “Photo-mapping” as employed by Dennis Jr., et al. (2009) used

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32 Some examples of the kinds of instructions provided in “photovoice” projects include Wright, et al.’s (2010) project with inner-city black youth in the UK who were instructed “to take pictures of “family, friends and anyone else who has been a source of support and people they enjoyed being with” over the course of three months. However, they were not told what to photograph, thereby leaving both the content and process to the young person to decide” (544).
GPS to integrate narrative interviews with photovoice data in research with children in Madison, Wisconsin. Adding the quantitative, spatial element to the analysis enabled the researchers to create a map of children’s interactions with health and place and to make policy recommendations regarding infrastructure for promoting healthy environments (Dennis Jr, et al. 2009).

**Photo-LENS**

Photo-LENS (Life-experience Narratives of Significant concepts) differs from the inductive approach of photovoice: participants are asked to think of their personal experiences and interactions (or life-experience) with key constructs around which there is a social, political and/or institutional discourse. Photo-LENS borrows from photovoice and Most Significant Change (MSC) participatory tools. MSC is a participatory evaluation tool intended to “deliver a rich picture of what is happening, rather than an overly simplified picture where organisational, social and economic developments are reduced to a single number” (Davies and Dart 2005: 12). It can help to identify local understandings of and interaction with the “impact” of a development programme and draw attention to unexpected change, provide data easily understood and discussed by various project stakeholders, and improve local capacity for self-evaluation by project participants (Davies and Dart 2005). Significant change stories are elicited from project participants, and various stakeholders are asked to read the stories, identify the “most significant” stories, and discuss their overall significance to the project. “When the technique is implemented successfully, whole teams of people begin to focus their attention on program impact” (Davies and Dart 2005: 8). In my research, I used the technique more broadly to
examine the lived experience of important or significant concepts embedded in transnational discourse around youth “challenges” and “health.” Eliciting stories without photographs was ineffective in engaging youth who are not accustomed to being asked to voice their stories and opinions. With photography as a tool, I was also able to understand the extent to which programming addressed the “needs” that youth identified as most pressing in their lives. Thus, youth were asked first to photograph an example of “what most brings them joy”, “what most makes them suffer” and “someone who is healthy.” These photos were then used to facilitate their significant and personal stories related to abstract concepts of “joy”, “suffer” and “health.” These stories were later used for youth advocacy workshops to facilitate discussions among youth and with parents, teachers, health workers and policy makers about the most significant barriers to achievement of youth joys/goals, or overcoming sufferings/challenges and to understand how youth prioritize health decision-making.

**Analytical Approaches to Understanding Visual Data**

Although detailed description of the analytical process used to “decode” the visual data is often absent in research papers, making it difficult to evaluate the “rigour” of visual approaches (Castleden, et al. 2008; Catalani and Minkler 2010), what is available indicates significant variation in analytical approach. Wang and Pies (2004) argue that “as a participatory methodology, photovoice requires a new framework and paradigm in which participants drive the analysis—from the selection of their own photographs that they feel are most important, or simply like best, to the ‘decoding’ or descriptive interpretation of the images” (Catalani and Minkler 2010: 442). In photo-interviews, however, Kolb (2008) suggests researchers use things
in the background of photos to probe for deeper and more detailed information. Also, after participants tell narratives related to the photos, Kolb (2008) describes an analytical scientific interpretation stage, where "researchers analyse the data - photos, interview transcripts and observations" (3). Kolb (2008) herself notes, however, that “questions remain concerning how images should be framed, either with methods of observation or interpretation” (6). Rose (2012) suggests that three different aspects be considered when analyzing visual data, the production of images, the image itself and the audience. As noted above, “participatory photomapping” involves analysing photos with reference to the spatial location in which they were taken. Mapping the location of participant-captured photos of food outlets, for example, enabled researchers to understand interactions between food environments and health (Dennis Jr, et al. 2009). Wright, et al. (2010) in a sociological study which equipped marginalized black youth in the UK with cameras to understand their lived experience of identity, employed Goffman’s “dramaturgical model” (1959) to analyse visual and narrative data. A dramaturgical model, they argue, urges us to consider what photos tell us about how youth choose to present themselves to different audiences and at different times (Wright, et al. 2010).

Using the analogy of the theatre or the stage, [Goffman 1959] also argues that a front stage is where one presents a publicly accepted self; while backstage allows a place for aspects of self which must be separated, hidden or controlled in interaction. However, though the backstage gives space to prepare, it must also be carefully managed (546). Wright, et al.’s (2010) study paid attention to youth performance of identity in photographs of public spaces or the front stage33, such as schools, parks, and streets and to performances on the

33 “One of the important features of the performance is that not only is it dramatized, it is idealized (Goffman, 1959). Therefore, individuals will attempt to present themselves in the best possible light and will adhere to roles that are compatible with the cultural expectations of identities at that point in time: “His [or her] performance will tend to
back stage such as in family homes, bedrooms, living rooms, and relationships with friends where “negotiation and management of their public identity” occurs (Wright, et al. 2010: 546). Doing so showed the particular importance of back regions for young people. In particular, it showed how various people in the back stage helped them get through experiences of social exclusion. Age and gender have been shown to be important grouping variables for understanding photographs taken by children and youth (Coad 2007), and Prins (2010) reminds us also to consider the way researchers influence photographs in the analysis. “As an imagined audience, researchers inevitably shape participant actions in subtle, if unintended, ways” (429). Finally, Pink (2012) warns that the goal is not to translate visual data into verbal or written data, but to pay attention to the relationship between them. The latter necessitates the introduction of visual data into ethnographic text (Pink 2012).

**Methodological Challenges and Ethical Dilemmas**

The more critical analyses of the use of photography in social research tend to focus on methodological challenges and ethical concerns around taking and displaying photos. Using photography is time consuming to organize (Drew, et al. 2010), and can encounter technical challenges, such as the failure of some photographs to develop (Wright, et al. 2010). Additionally, although images have been shown to help children open up in interviews (Wagner 1999) and to articulate life experience (Drew, et al. 2010), some practitioners have noted photographs are “not as conducive to discussion as hoped” (Wright, et al. 2010: 551). Children in

incorporate or exemplify the officially accredited values of society and more so, in fact, than does his [or her] behaviour as a whole” (Goffman, 1959: 45)” (Wright et al 2010: 546).
particular do not always open up about their images (Mitchell 2006 for an example with children's drawings). Drew, et al. (2010), who used photography to help Australian youth living with a chronic disease articulate the lived experience of illness, found that the majority of youth required “coaching” from project staff or parents to finish their films because photographing experience of illness challenged ideas youth had about photography being used to document celebration (Drew, et al. 2010: 1683). Pictures also capture what is visible at a particular moment (Wright, et al. 2010). With forethought and planning feelings can be captured visually according to Drew, et al. (2010), but they note that this may still be difficult for some children, depending on their cognitive maturity.

Ethical dilemmas range from participants misunderstanding consent, to the affective consequence of reflecting on one’s own and others’ photos. While many studies found participants to find visual tools such as drawing and photography to be very enjoyable (Mitchell 2006; Wright, et al. 2010), photos can also produce “feelings of longing for past relationships” (Wright, et al. 2010:554). Drew, et al.’s (2010) study similarly found that photos by youth with a chronic illness challenged coping mechanisms used by chronically ill youth. As one mother of a girl with cystic fibrosis in their study explained,

Now and then she will really tell me, but rarely because she knows it breaks my heart. . . . She knows that if she opens up emotionally to me, I’d be a mess. So that’s why we have this, ‘Let’s just keep it not too emotional,’ because then we’ll all just break down and be a mess, and we have to survive in this world (1685).

In a study of a Salvadoran adult literacy programme, Prins (2010) found participants to be embarrassed to take photos, as others sometimes ridiculed them or became suspicious of their actual purpose. Her experience in El Salvador, where photography has the “countervailing
potential as a technology of surveillance and a way to recover subjugated knowledge” serves as a reminder that the meaning, value and effect of photos, and thus potential ethical concerns, are mediated by the socio-cultural and political setting (Prins 2010:427; Pink 2012). Key ethical issues to discuss with participants prior to engaging in photo-research are thus loss of privacy and consent, the possibility of images exposing embarrassing facts, placing people in a “false light,” and the potential use of photos for profit (Keller, et al. 2008; Wang and Redwood-Jones 2001). Trust and rapport between the “researcher” and the “researched” have been cited as prerequisites for these reasons (Wright, et al. 2010).

**Photo-LENS, Part of an Ethnographic Process**

With a critical eye towards photography, I employed Photo-LENS as a component of a much broader ethnographic process. In total I conducted 178 interviews. The interviews took about 2.5 hours to complete. One-hundred and eighteen were interviews with youth between the ages 11 and 30. One-hundred and three of the youth-interviews were conducted as part of photo-LENS. These youth were asked to photograph “what most brings you joy”, “what most makes you suffer” and “someone who is healthy” and in some cases, “love”. The stories accompanying over 500 photographs were elicited in semi-structured interviews guided by the photographs. The photographs also served as launch pads for talking to very shy youth about their families, school performance, boyfriends/girlfriends, best friends, children, marital ideals, etc. 34, 35 Many other

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34 Of youth with whom I employed photo-LENS, 24 were with youth “peer educators”, 52 were with youth in the two rural villages in which I spent most of my time, 7 were with youth from town, 7 with youth who had moved from the rural villages to major urban centres in Malawi. The majority of the interviews I conducted together with my research assistant who provided support with translation and comprehension. Sixteen photo-LENS interviews,
youth contributed to my understanding of youth lives in different ways. Twenty-five gender and age-segregated focus groups engaged youth in mapping and drawing activities and explored key topics emerging in the research, including love, gender relations, human rights, technology, HIV/AIDS and *umoyo wachizungu* or “white/English life”. Fifty youth were engaged in group activities to prioritize the themes emerging from the photos to include in the survey and to organize the advocacy workshops and community-level discussions about the results of the research delivered between June and August 2009. Some youth became close friends of mine, some participated in advocacy activities, and others still spontaneously wrote stories, poems, songs and dramas about their lives to help me “write my book/thesis.” All of these interactions with youth served to triangulate my research findings from stories and photographs.

Sixteen youth also participated in “peer research” activities, which involved training in photovoice and interview techniques. These youth were then asked to take digital cameras to two youth who were “different from one another” and who they “would like to interview” and ask them to photograph their “joy” and “suffering” and then record the stories attached to those photos. These “peer researchers” often identified youth to interview in order to make a point in the research that they, themselves, felt needed to be emphasised, e.g. several youth who live with caregivers other than their parents were chosen because the interviewers wished to make the

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35 I also conducted fifteen interviews with girls working in bars in town. For these I followed the advice of colleagues and friends at the hospital and in youth-targeted programmes in town and did not employ photo-LENS. Bar girls have little privacy or control of property. We feared putting the girls at risk of abuse and losing the cameras to sale or theft. Conversations with bar owners indicated that they would feel uncomfortable with girls taking photos in the bars. They explained that men in the bars feel they are there in secrecy (from their wives) and so would not appreciate being photographed.

36 As a 30-year-old, unmarried woman, I was also considered a youth and invited to participate in structured and unstructured youth activities through churches, schools, youth clubs/groups and personal gatherings, dinners, parties and weddings.
point that youth with caregivers who are not their parents have less access to agricultural resources than youth who are cared for by patrilineal kin. Thus, these interviews also served to triangulate the prioritization of “suffer” themes in the photos taken by youth in general and engaged 16 youth more intensely in the research. They did not, however, gather representative data on youth.\textsuperscript{37}

\textbf{Table 1.1: Interview breakdown}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N =</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth Interviews</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As part of Photo-LENS</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-educators</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural villages</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Centres*</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducted by youth “peer-researchers”</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar girls</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar patrons (male)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol brewers (female)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Elders</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Youth</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{37} The logistics of training peer researchers to train others in digital photography and then loan the cameras for a couple of days and return them to download the photos and then carry printed photos back to their selected interviewees for further discussion proved extremely difficult and time consuming. For these reasons, I did not continue beyond the initial 15 peer researchers and 30 peer interviews.
| Development and Sports, youth programme staff and teachers |  
| --- | --- | --- |  
| Tobacco growers |  
| Total = 178 | 3 |  

* These are youth who came from the two rural villages but had moved to town for school or in search of employment.

My research assistant and I drew kinship diagrams for each rural youth engaged in photo-LENS (whether living in the village, town or urban centre at the time of the interview). Kinship diagrams indicate youth kin relations and are colour-coded to indicate with whom youth resided and from whom they received primary care, since relationship to patrilineal kin influenced resource access, especially by male youth, and thus influenced how male youth pictured their futures and constructed their goals. Interviews with village elders (n = 15); key personnel from the Ministry of Youth Development and Sports, schools, and non-government organizations working with youth in Malawi (n = 7); alcohol brewers in rural villages (n = 3); bar patrons (n = 5); and tobacco growers helped to locate rural youth in their social and political environments.

I also conducted a monthly survey of market prices and food availability in the villages and in town. As it became clear that gender and marriage both played significant roles in determining access to food regardless of market availability, I employed a survey to get a better sense of connections between gender relations, HIV/AIDS, body image, nutrition and health of young married girls. Using culturally appropriate drawings of women’s bodies I asked 50 girls and boys, young men and women, about preferred female body image and desires. In February 2009, I employed a dietary diversity and food security survey with 213 youth, randomly selected
from 9 village areas in the region of my research to test the applicability of some of my findings to the situation of youth in the broader catchment area and the relationship between the suffering experiences identified by youth in interviews and health outcomes using dietary diversity as a proxy measure for bodily/physical health (FAO 2007). This food and nutrition security data serves to help elucidate the relationships among gender, generation, love and provision of basic needs, and especially to triangulate some of the findings gleaned through my ethnographic and visual data throughout this dissertation. It is, however, also taken up more fully in a separate publication (Classen, et al. Forthcoming 2013).

**Analytical Process**

This research aimed to understand the visual data in dialogue with the oral narratives by youth (Pink 2012) and observations, interview and focus group information gathered in this research. The analytical process employed for interpreting the visual data in this research thus comprised of five overlapping phases: 1) collecting youth-articulated narratives of the images, 2) eliciting additional data by probing with the photographs to learn more about youths’ lives, 3) facilitating focus group analyses of photos in dialogue with condensed narrative transcripts, 4) analysing the photo and transcript data together and with respect to key grouping variables emerging as relevant throughout the research, and 5) paying attention to the ways in which the photos were consumed and interpreted by others and what this says about how youth relate to others.
Each participant was given 3-4 days with a digital camera to take assigned photographs and as many unassigned photographs as they desired. Approximately 15 of age and gender-determined participants had the cameras at a time. Usually we met to play sports or cook something together (depending on the age and interests of the given group of participating youth) on the day of gathering the cameras and chatted about the photography process. Youth were also encouraged to take extra photos that I printed for them. Returning to town where I had access to electricity, I downloaded all the photos into password protected files coded to indicate the photographer for each group of photos, recharged camera batteries and cleared the memory cards on the cameras. After returning to the homes of the village, I arranged interviews during which youth viewed the photographs they had taken on my computer screen and indicated to us which three they had taken as the assigned photos. While all youth were prepared to indicate the three photos they had taken as part of the assignment, eliciting explanations of the photos took varying amounts of probing. Often simply asking what the photo was about elicited explanations, but not always. Following elicitation of the reason for or story about a particular photo I took advantage of the less relevant or un-discussed aspects of the photo to learn more about whom youth lived with and how they spent their days, often commenting on houses or family members in the background of the photos. Each participant was also given the opportunity to choose two photos that I would print and deliver to them. At the end of the interview my research assistant and I opened up a conversation about the potential use of the photos and asked how the youth felt about the use of the photos for research, presentations and publications as well as how they felt about us seeking permission from any visible faces in the photos. While youth frequently gave

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38 Altogether I used 15 digital cameras that were donated to me by friends and colleagues.
39 Immediately when the interviewee indicated one of the assigned photographs I changed the name of the file to indicate whether it was a “joy,” “suffer”, “health” or “love” photo, to keep track of them.
permission for both, I used my discretion in several instances, particularly when photos used an image of someone to discuss abuse or alcoholism in the family not to use the visual image.\footnote{It was often very difficult to track down people represented in the photos to seek their permission. When this was not possible, the photo was used for my own analytical purposes only and not used in group analyses or for advocacy purposes, workshops, presentations or publications. In three cases my research assistant and I re-produced abuse or alcoholism photos using youth volunteers as actors so that the images could be used for group analyses and advocacy without compromising my ethical commitment to my participants.}

A group of 15 key participants were later organized into a focus group and presented photographs and condensed versions of transcripts associated with each photo to discuss their interpretations and prioritizations of various themes emerging under each topic. Using these for advocacy purposes (discussed below) opened opportunities to examine how these photos were viewed by others.

The final interpretive analysis of the photographs was conducted in conjunction with ethnographic data and with key variables in mind. Nvivo 8 qualitative analysis programme facilitated this analysis allowing me to assign attribute values to individuals’ transcripts and photographs and cross-analyse the visual data in conversation with the written transcripts, my own fieldnotes and focus group transcripts. Key variables emerging as relevant throughout the research, included gender, age, kin relations, caregiver relation, marriage, engagement with youth programming, school attendance, ethnicity and religion. Prioritizing the conversation between visual and transcript data was possible only by the mixed-method ethnographic approach employed for this research and also necessitates that throughout the thesis visual data is presented in conversation with other forms of data (Pink 2012).
Photographing Personal Pain and Suffering

As others have found, giving young people cameras elicited many examples of struggles that were different from predominant discourses on youths’ lives. Youth and elders alike tended to know the rhetoric about youths’ lives and recite easily what they saw on government endorsed posters targeting young people, had heard from teachers and “Life Skills” text books, and knew from advocacy by local youth clubs and other youth-targeted development initiatives.

The true benefits of photography became obvious one dry-season morning several months into my field research. Preliminary interviews (conducted in the absence of photographs) asked both young and old about the “challenges” facing young people in rural villages. The list of challenges spilled out like a well-known song whether sung by village youth, village elders, youth workers, school teachers, religious leaders and government ministers. Rhythmically and formulaically people responded “early marriage, drug and substance abuse, orphanage, school drop-out, poverty, HIV/AIDS,” and sometimes, “prostitution, and laziness.” A month into the research I wondered if I had learned all there was to know about rural youth struggles when I shared prickly cucumbers and a conversation with Adada Nkhosi and the intermittent company of various family members who popped in and out of the discussion. Adada Nkhosi’s age, which engulfed him in a puddle of wrinkles against the sunny side of his mud brick home, slipped off him like a satin-lined coat the moment he began to speak. A perky and articulate English41 flowed from his toothless smile; excitedly he reiterated the expected list of challenges facing youth beginning in the middle, “School drop-out, poverty, orphanage, mahule [the Tumbuka

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41 Elders who were elementary-school educated during the Banda regime (1963-94) were taught in English immersion and were often thrilled to recall their own youth in the language of their youth, thus many of the interviews with elders were conducted in English.
and then he seemed a bit stumped. Slowly receding back into his wrinkles, he added “democracy” to the list, to which a son perched on a nearby wooden block gave an awkward laugh, his mouth full of prickly cucumber and, with an exaggerated roll of his eyes and a twirl of his finger near his left ear, justified, “the old, this is the way they think,” implying that age had gotten the better of his sense. The elder, before returning completely to the slump against the house, called his granddaughter, Chimwemwe (Happy), who was 24 years old and married for her second time but who was simultaneously active in her local youth club and self-identified as a “married youth,” and explained to her the question I had asked. She was able to fill in the blanks with the formulaic terms the elder had forgotten: “early marriage” and “drug and substance abuse,” she said flatly.

Many months later this girl shared photographs of “what most makes her suffer” and “what most brings her joy.” In the follow-up interview guided by her photos, I learned that she had never used any drugs or tasted alcohol, was surrounded by her parents, grandparents, and extended family and, by implication, was not an orphan, and had never worked in sex-trade. Having married for the first time and birthed first child at 15 years old\(^{42}\), this meant that she had been an elementary “school drop-out.” What most made Happy happy, and those things which most made her suffer, were related to engagement with her in-laws and the limited resources she can access, both things associated with being married. Neither “early marriage” nor “school drop-out” were things she articulated as challenges in the ways assumed by the discourse on youths’ lives espoused in these campaigns. Alcoholism by her father-in-law was an important challenge. Food insecurity and difficulties providing for her children was another. In a

\(^{42}\) According to the WHO (2007) early marriage is marriage under the age of 19 years.
photograph of “what most made her suffer,” Happy spoke about the couple featured in the photo standing on their front porch, arguing.

Q: Why did you take this picture?
R: It makes me suffer when the parents are disagreeing.
Q: These are your mother- and father-in-law?
R: Yes.
Q: What are they doing?
R: They were disagreeing.
Q: What were they disagreeing about?
R: I don’t know.
Q: Why does it make you suffer?
R: Because when the parents are disagreeing it means they cannot advise us on how to live as husband and wife…when the parents are doing this then we have a bad picture of them.
Q: Do they often disagree?
R: Yes.
How often?
R: Two times a week…I think it’s because he drinks so much.
Q: Does he help with farming?
R: No…
Q: And what do they [men] do when they drink beer?
R: Nothing because they tend to be addicted to beer and they can’t do anything.

Chimwemwe’s concern was one I heard many times thereafter. Alcohol consumption leads to laziness among men, who consequently do not labour on the farms, contributing to a severe and painful hungry season for their wives and children. A version of this story was a common suffering story among many young women I worked with, frequently also featuring physical abuse by “drunkard” husbands.
What most made Happy happy, was the love her nieces and nephews on her husband’s side showed her, especially when they asked her to bathe or feed them. Speaking to the second photograph that Chimwemwe indicated she wished to discuss when we opened her file of 16 photos at the start of her interview,

L: Why did you take this picture?
R: It is my joy because these are my sister-in-law’s children and they love me so much. They live near the house because their mother is married near so they often come and even spend a night at my home…they like coming to my home and they love me so much as I do to them.
L: How do you know that they love you?
R: When they come they are very often open and they could ask me to bathe them or give them food.

Poor relationships with in-laws can cause much stress for women, especially newly married women, who are still finding their place in the new village and family. As Durham (2005a) has also shown for Botswana, in Malawi, acts of cleaning and feeding are important expressions of love by women within rural households. Just as the young Herero men in Durham’s study “often bring their clothes to a lover to be washed and ironed, even though they might clean them themselves,” giving the women an opportunity to express their love (Durham 2005a: 197), Chimwemwe’s nieces and nephews gave Chimwemwe the opportunity to express her love and appreciation of them by coming to her for bathing and feeding. For Chimwemwe, her acceptance and love by her nieces and, by implication, the wives of her husband’s brothers, bring her much comfort amidst abuse by her father-in-law, poverty and food insecurity.

The assigned photographs, by obliging youth to take time to contemplate their own situation, identified challenges/barriers which underlie those most often cited in policy and programme discourses. “School drop-out” is an oft cited “challenge” facing youth, especially
visible in government posters and youth-programme rhetoric. Unlike the policy and programme rhetoric, youth “suffer” photos and stories captured personal instances of pain and illuminated the conflicts, connections and contradictions they encounter as they try to stay happy and healthy. For example, a key conflict which caused much pain and angst among rural youth was between their love for their families and commitment as care-givers to aging or infirm parents, grandparents and siblings, and their desire for education and employment. Going to school requires money in the form of school fees that could otherwise be used by their families, and both education and employment require youth to depart rural areas and effectively abandon their care responsibilities.

The power of photographs for helping to disentangle discourse from personal experience and perception was especially notable with photographs of “someone who is healthy.” Similar to youths’ general responses to my questions about the challenges they face, when youth were asked about health without photographs, their responses were almost exclusively limited to two elements of health: 1) the consumption of healthy foods, and 2) abstinence from sex, both reflecting current campaigns around the importance of good nutrition for successful uptake of antiretroviral therapies and the prevention of transmission of HIV/AIDS. The NGO litany has become so engrained that it takes effort to get youth to ponder their own experiences more reflexively and to articulate them in a more personal way.

Photographs of someone who is healthy, however, elicited stories in which youth identified “social,” “moral,” “physical,” and “environmental” factors affecting health (see Appendix 3 for a list of the factors youth identified as important for maintaining good health).
They also showed how youth were forced to prioritize certain factors over others, in some cases protecting “social health” at the risk of contracting HIV, for instance.43

As enlightening as these photos and associated narratives of rural youth suffering and health were relative to the rote list of challenges or the highly limited definition of health youth provided in the absence of the photographs, I am cognisant that neither the photographs nor youths’ associated narratives represent realist images of everyday life (Rose 2012). The fact that the photos elicited a very different set, structure, and organization of challenges facing youth and understandings of factors affecting health in this context than those routinely cited by health and development programmes and youth themselves, gives me confidence that youths’ stories and narratives emerging from their photographs reflected something closer to the realities of their intimate lives in the moment of this research than assumptions embedded in the NGO discourse. In addition, combining Photo-LENS with extensive ethnographic fieldwork, numerous focus groups, other participatory activities, interviews with youth-targeted programme staff, parents and grandparents, and a survey with over 200 youth over a broader research area, helped me to understand youth narratives and contextualize them. I was often able to identify performances by youth who potentially perceived me as a donor from whom they might benefit if they told me the “right” story of suffering, for example. In these cases, ethnographic research enabled me to follow up on questions (either through observation or conversations) that emerged as I recorded youth narratives, when I returned to their villages and stayed with their families. That said, what was important for this research was not to distinguish “real” from “imagined” stories of

43 This reflects Mitchell’s (2006) findings with children’s photos. “When adults in the community are asked about child health problems, they list diarrhea, fever, and hapo (asthma, coughs) as the most prevalent. Yet, children’s body maps, in conjunction with their descriptions of the drawings, record other types of suffering and being-in-the-world: aching teeth attributed to lack of brushing and “too much sweets”; feet cut by walking without adequate footwear” (64).
suffering, joy and health or to identify “wrong” stories and “right” ones. Rather, Photo-LENS was employed in this research to help identify the ways in which resources available through national and transnational programmes, including their discourses on youths’ lives, are i) taken-up in the context of rural Malawian villages, ii) used variably by different youth and their parents and, iii) sometimes irrelevant to youth as they struggle to find their way in, or out of, as the case may be, village life. As Anthony Simpson (2009) reminds us in his recent ethnography on masculinities and HIV risk in Zambia, drawing on a quote from Plummer (1997), “Whatever else a story is, it is not simply the lived life. It speaks all around the life…but it is not the life, which is in principle unknown and unknowable” (1997: 168 in Simpson 2009, 11).

The extra photographs that youth took and I printed for them unexpectedly also provided important insights into youths’ personal lives and helped to triangulate the data emerging from assigned photos. I had not intended to use these in the analysis, but they usually ended up pinned to the earthen wall of their bedrooms and, as I found myself gazing up at these photos from the sleeping mats I shared with girls, I came to notice that these extra photos depicted “ideal” rural life in Malawi. Affirming Mitchell’s (2006) experience with Filipino children’s drawings which depicted their communities as places of beauty and order, young girls (11-15 years) often photographed themselves standing in their best skirt and blouse next to flower bushes, or the rare glass window in the village. Some of the water they carried each morning went to maintaining aesthetic aspects of the village, the importance of which I had not noticed before seeing these pictures. Pictures boys above the age of 15 took of themselves featured clothing I had never seen them wear in the village and explained how desires for cell phones and stiff, second-hand T-shirts displaying “50 cent ‘In da club’” tempered the odium for rock-chipping. In this research, photos thus also made visible how “children see things in environments that we may have
forgotten to see, let alone understand” (Aitken’s 2001:8 in Mitchell 2006: 64). The juxtaposition between these photos and the assigned photos, in which people were more often than not clearly captured without prior warning, often engaging in what I came to recognize as everyday work or play activities in rural villages, also adds to the legitimacy of the representativeness of at least some of the youths’ photos of the intimate spaces of their lives, hopes, fears and goals.

Snapping Anticipation

The “joy” photographs similarly captured very personal and often unexpected factors which make youth feel happy (see appendix 1 for a complete list of joys), but most striking in these photographs was the tendency among young people to find joy in dreams and desires for the future rather than objects or people in their contemporary lives. This was particularly salient when compared to how elders spoke of everyday life. Whereas elders’ memories and stories placed the present in constant comparison with an idealized past (also see Kaler 2004b), youth tended to compare the present with an idealized future, a future of prosperity and productivity, of umoyo wachizungu or English/white life. Elders spent hours reminiscing their own youth, explaining, as Orland, a 75-year-old grandfather had, how proper girls and boys of the past were. Speaking about his own wife, Isa, who was alone much of the time as Orland traveled for work, he explained that she was as good a wife in the village as she had been a good young girl.

From the time she could walk, Isa was consumed with carrying water from the river with her sisters, at first playfully in her own miniature pumpkin-shell jug and later more seriously in a large clay pot, collecting firewood with her mother, and playing close to the house with growing numbers of siblings and cousins. To walk far to go to school had never been appropriate for girls,
so Isa had never even considered it. Isa had never spoken to her elders about personal issues, so when on her 14th birthday she noticed a tiny trail of blood streaming down her left leg, Isa ran home from the river, and straight to her grandmother, for a “grandmother was like a sister” and therefore could not be angry with her, Orland explained. She was instructed that during menstruation she must stay at home and never cook with salt. (When I asked why not cooking with salt was a ritual, the answer was invariably, “It’s just part of our culture”). The problem with today’s youth, according to elders I spoke with, is “[youth] say today is a new social life, you can not teach us of the past.” Youth today are inquisitive and tradition is often inadequate as a rationale for continuing cultural practices. “Today,” Orland explained, “girls go to school when they menstruate and frequently cook with salt.”

Heeding every piece of advice received, Isa also never uttered a word to any males, a rule today’s “loose girls” will break for few tambala [coins] “or even a cold mandazi [donut],” Orland said with a dismissive wave of his hand. In fact, Isa hardly spoke to a male outside of her family until the day she met, married and moved in with her husband. Isa, having caught the last part of Orland’s story, confirmed,

In those days we [girls] were just staying [at home]. We didn’t have early relationships. Not with boys. We hardly even spoke to other girls [never mind!!]. We just didn’t have the desire. Girls in the past, we never danced [had sex] in front of our fathers.

In other words Isa, when she was young, would never have had sex in exchange for money, or before she was married and moved away from her father’s compound. Girls of the past were quiet, followed tradition and had no desires for something new.

“Joy” photos taken by youth today, showed a very different orientation. Comparisons youth made between their own lives and the lives they desired tended to emerge in photos of
houses, like the one Desire had dropped on my doorstep that stormy night. Inside these houses resided their desired lives that they often aimed to approximate in preparation for, and to perceive themselves as worthy of, such an existence. The ways in which these lifestyles become embedded in youthful subjectivities of “love” and “gender equality” is discussed in following chapters. While this dream was common among girls and boys from all different types of households, it was most frequent among boys who lived in their mother’s home village and had limited access to land and productive resources. While for all youth access to land and a viable income from agriculture is highly precarious, for these boys it is nearly impossible.

**Interpreting Photos**

Photographs themselves do not automatically resist capturing predominant discourse or socially accepted meaning. Photo-LENS requires specific attention to the language used when telling youth to take certain kinds of photographs that capture personal experiences rather than popular discourse. In this research “what makes you suffer” tended to capture more personal experiences than “challenges you face,” which sometimes elicited photos of posters and publicity speaking of challenges facing “youth” in Malawi. The importance of language was most apparent, however, when asking about “health.” Knowing that youth were inundated by health messages in nationally endorsed UNICEF posters and church calendars, as well as by youth programme staff, hospital staff, government youth-workers and individual foreign philanthropists, I endeavoured to capture how youth defined “health” in the context of rural villages and what was necessary to be or stay “healthy”. When asked to capture “health” in a photograph, however, participants expressed difficulty knowing what to take. Some expressed
desire to take more than one photograph to capture this term. Others took photos of the posters. Asking youth to photograph “someone who is healthy” helped to solve this conundrum as this allowed them to explain the multiple factors that would lead to “health” in Malawi, but it did not solve all of our problems. Much experimentation with how to word “health” in chi-Tumbuka, however, also led me to ask youth to photograph “someone who will live a long life.” The word “healthy” is most often translated to umoyo uwemi or “good life” by local, Christian organizations. Thus, embedded in this definition is a strong Christian moral sentiment that influenced the way youth described “health”; often youth photographs and stories emphasized that it meant going to church and abstaining from sex. For this reason we chose to use the translation umoyo utali or “long life.” Although prayer and abstinence were still often mentioned as factors influencing one’s probability of living a “long life,” they were combined with discussions around avoidance of jealousy and witchcraft, the importance of maintaining strong social connections with paternal kin, dancing, chatting, and playing games to forget one’s worries, which were never mentioned in the context of speaking about umoyo uwemi or “good life.” Discussing how to protect oneself from witchcraft could not be a factor of “good life” according to local Christian values.

**Embodied and Emotional Aspects of Image Production**

During pilot research it was obvious that engaging very shy, rural youth in story-telling would be impossible without a more dynamic way of engaging them in the study. The 15 digital cameras necessitated significant one-on-one training which, combined with the material value of the cameras, helped to build a very strong sense of collaboration and trust between the youth and
Additionally, youth felt very proud of their ability to take photos, and this confidence showed in the interviews. Many interviewees made comments such as, “Even my husband was surprised that I could do this! I liked it, to be able to take snaps. I never knew. I thought I would be unable.” Also, using cameras gave youth time in the absence of the researcher, to think about joys, sufferings and health. Loaning the cameras for a few days extended the period of engagement youth had with their ideas/perceptions far beyond what would be required by conventional interviews. The digital camera allowed youth to change their minds over these couple of days and to delete unwanted photographs rather than being forced to show them and justify them in an interview, which gave them significant control over the research data. The result was a very high level of interest and commitment to the research, evidenced by the many written stories and poems youth wrote and shared spontaneously, long after we discussed their photos.

Youth emotion and affection for fellow community members and peers was also evidenced and further engaged in different ways by Photo-LENS. The connection between youth happiness and well-being and the happiness and well-being of their family and friends was often visible in photos. For instance, youth took photos of the spot where a father sleeps without blankets, a mother sitting in a poorly thatched home or, as in the case of Valerie below, a photo of children swollen with hunger. Seeing and discussing photos taken by fellow youth also engaged youths’ affective capacities, sensitizing them to the struggles faced by other young people. Photos of ailing grandparents, empty granaries, and poorly thatched houses, for instance,

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44 In future, however, I would not recommend using donated cameras. The one-on-one training was very time consuming and could have been expanded to group training had all the cameras been the same. Also there would have been less competition among youth who preferred to have one camera over another and likely less camera maintenance/breakdown.
also inspired much compassion from youth who related to the struggles of others, something more difficult to achieve in discussion around stories alone (the dangers of this for research efficacy however, are taken up below).

The extensive time required for camera training and to download and organize the photos prior to gathering Photo-LENS stories, however, was a trade-off for the unique and high quality data they brought to light. It was impractical to print all (sometimes hundreds!) of the photos youth took with the cameras, so during the interviews we looked at them on a laptop computer screen. Recharging camera and computer batteries required a several-hour walk to the nearest town with electricity. The economic value of the cameras also inhibited their use with more transient groups of youth with whom I was unable to create the same kind of friendship and connection, such as young girls involved in the sex trade or some rural boys who lived or worked part time on the streets of urban centres. In these cases, I relied on the interviews and on long-term observation and conversations for fear that I would lose the cameras if I loaned them for a couple of days.

**The Limitations of Photography for Capturing Complexity**

Although the photographs provided access to personal experiences of youth that was near impossible to elicit without the visual material, the images in absence of the text do not begin to approximate the complexity of the lived experiences represented by the photos. This has very important implications for photo interpretation and the use of the images for participatory

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45 At the end of each interview the interviewee was given the opportunity to select two photos that I printed and carried back to them.
discussion and advocacy. Two “suffer” images and stories demonstrate the gendered lenses youth used to speak about very similar sets of joys and struggles and the complexity inherently absent in the photographs (Figures 1.1a and 1.1b below). This is only one of several sets of overlapping and interacting challenges identified by young people.

Figure 1.1: Interactions among food insecurity, alcoholism, heavy burden of responsibility on youth, HIV/AIDS, and gender inequities

This photo was taken by Marcus, a 14-year-old boy currently in his seventh year of primary school. It shows two men drinking unregulated, locally brewed alcohol from pink plastic cups in a bar demarcated by sparsely thatched walls. Marcus is the youngest and only male among his siblings. He lives with both parents in his father’s home village, a village he has never spent a night away from. In his story, Marcus starts by speaking abstractly about men who drink. He said, “When [the man in the photo] is drunk and he is going home . . . he can shout all the way, and is quarrelling and fighting with people when he gets home. When they are at home,
he quarrels with his wife.” Later he speaks about his own father who drinks. “My father was beating me sometime back . . . Aaa, it was so painful to me, if I could have been an adult I could have been fighting him back. [Instead] Aaa, I was just running away.” Marcus’ joy photograph contrasts this image by showing a man he admires who “finds for himself - he doesn’t even have time to be at somebody’s house for begging.” “Drunk men,” he said “beg, for money and then for food when they run out.” He continues by explaining that “beer drunkards” also have many girlfriends on the side and that this puts them at risk of HIV/AIDS. “It is about AIDS.” Pointing to the man in his “joy” photo, Marcus continues, “[this man] is not in any relationship or courting, he is not in any courtship [does not have a girlfriend on the side].” Marcus connects an alcoholic father, physical and verbal abuse toward him and his mother, embarrassment for the family, and additional responsibility on him and his mother to provide food for the family, with hunger, infidelity and AIDS.

b.

Valerie is 25 years old. She married while in primary school and acknowledges she knew little about her husband when she married him. Valerie’s “suffer” photo is of her children and niece standing with a backdrop of their thatched tobacco shelter. Her first comment is that her
husband is lazy. “This is the biggest problem to the children, because as of now when the food is not enough then you will find that children will start to swell.” She connects his laziness to alcohol consumption and alcohol to her husband’s infidelity, which contributes to the family’s hunger by necessitating that her husband spend household resources on his new girlfriend/wife. Her husband’s extramarital relations also put Valerie at risk of HIV. “Maybe he does not even know the girl, how she is, and then he comes from there to me. That can make our life short because we don’t know each other’s movement.”

The stories above demonstrate the complexity of “suffer” themes emerging from the photographs. Reducing either photograph to a single “main” theme, such as alcoholism, food insecurity, gender inequalities, abuse, rural poverty, morality, etc. would significantly undermine the complex nature of “suffer” experiences. The photos in and of themselves, without the stories, also undermine the significant overlap between the stories of some girls and boys, and younger and older youth. The differences in the photos demonstrate the gendered nature of problem construction among rural youth in Malawi, but not necessarily differences in the overall experiences. Marcus’ photo was taken a thirty minute walk from his house in a bar where women brew and serve and men consume quantities of unregulated liquor. This is a social role Malawian masculinity would expect Marcus to reproduce as he shifts from youth to adulthood. Valerie’s photo was taken close to her house, of children, her primary domain of care. Despite these differences, however, the challenges that the two photos were intended to communicate overlap significantly.

Working with a broad age range of boys and girls (11-30 years) was important for allowing me to see how age and gender shaped the lenses through which youth “pictured” and
chose to “picture” their lives. While the majority of the youth I worked with were unmarried, some were married, widowed and divorced.

**Understanding and Representing the “Invisible” in Photographs**

The photographs in and of themselves did not visibly capture all of the main “joy” and “suffer” themes identified by youth. Some of these themes such as “violence against women,” “discrimination towards rural youth,” and “access to agricultural resources” were invisible in the photographs. The cases of Marcus and Valerie above illustrate the hidden theme of “violence against women.” Important barriers to overcoming invisible themes were often systemic or structural in nature, part of what Paul Farmer (2004) (borrowing the term from Gultang 1969) refers to as “structural violence.” He uses this term to describe “the ways historically engrained, large-scale, political-economic forces wreak havoc on the bodies of the socially vulnerable” (Bourgois 2009: 18). These included the inaccessibility of secondary schools by rural youth, favouritism towards older people and urban applicants for jobs, inheritance patterns favoring boys over girls, etc. Thus, for policy purposes, the “invisible themes” in the photographs are as important as the visible themes, and they risk being overshadowed in focus groups or advocacy meetings in which the photographs are used to stimulate discussion. These examples clearly illustrate that the photos cannot be analyzed simply by looking at the visual image, which has important implications for participatory/collaborative analyses. In this research initial theme recognition was done in collaboration with only three youth who were hired as assistants/transcribers and thus were very familiar with both the visual and oral, interview data.
For use in focus group discussions and advocacy events, we then dramatized illustrative photographs to convey invisible themes.

**Understanding and Analyzing the “Unspoken” in Photographs**

Whereas above we discussed the representation of ideas coming out of oral stories but not visibly obvious in the photographs themselves, in some cases the opposite situation occurred. Sometimes youth expected the photographs to speak for themselves and did not verbalise the relevance to their personal life. In these cases, I was often able to understand the photographs after staying with the photographer and watching him or her interact with the person they had photographed. A key example was a photograph taken by an 11-year-old girl of her mentally challenged brother. I assumed it would be a “suffer” photo when she first selected it. This was not the first time someone had photographed a mentally challenged sibling, and previously the photographer had used it to speak about the difficulty they experienced with caring for the subject. In this case, however, the girl said it was a “joy” because he was smiling. I did not understand what exactly she meant until I met her brother when I stayed with her family for a few nights. Her brother was perpetually happy. He smiled incessantly and his happiness was infectious in the household. Youth frequently cited worry as an important determinant of health in their photographs and stories, and explained that chatting, resting, and not thinking about one’s worries are factors said to alleviate stress and lead to good health for a whole household.
Resting, smiling and chatting were all this brother did, and his sister loved that. I suspect she wished she felt as happy as her brother.  

**Advocacy, Consumption and Interpretation**

Photo-LENS played a critical role in the dissemination of preliminary findings in this research. In July 2009, I collaborated with several key youth-targeted programmes in the area, in hosting a three-day “Rural Youth Advocacy and Networking Workshop” based on the preliminary results of this research. The purpose was to highlight some of the personal objectives of rural youth in the Mzimba district of northern Malawi and to identify action points towards removing the key barriers to their achievement of those objectives. To facilitate discussion, nine youth collaborated with me and a digital design artist to design and print six, six-foot vinyl banners that represented the main “joy” and “suffer” themes identified by the youth accompanied by a diverse example of quotes from various youth who shared similar stories. The photo-story displays (Figure 1.2) attracted much attention and elicited much emotion among stakeholders of various ages and in various positions. Following our initial Advocacy Workshop, we were invited to share the displays at several other community and policy meetings throughout Malawi. Policy makers and programme leaders alike referred directly to photos and the feelings of

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46 Whereas participatory tools are often praised for speeding up the research process, employed in “participatory rapid appraisals” for instance (Chambers 1994), story-telling and photography in research with a diverse group of people not previously engaged with a participatory initiative is not a rapid process. The time and expense was worth it, however, in this context because of the very different information made accessible through the photos and accompanying stories.

47 Funding for this workshop came from the Church of Scotland, Geneva and Christian Aid Malawi (CHAM) and Lauren Classen.
sympathy, sadness, and disbelief they conjured in the group discussions. Many youth workers congratulated us on “finding a way to make Malawian youth known.”

The attention and respect commanded by the photos was in part due to their equivalency in format to the posters endorsed by the government and national-level health and development initiatives. In the photos in Figure 1.2, the similarity of our posters to national advocacy posters and the interest garnered by the photos is visible.

**Figure 1.2: Youth-targeted posters and Photo-LENS advocacy banners**

*In the first photo above, nationally distributed posters are on the right and the banners youth made with their photos are on the left. The second photo shows youth sharing the banners and their feelings with their elders.*

These displays were thus used to facilitate several smaller workshops/discussion forums in the two case-study villages and at a Youth Development meeting in the Nkhata Bay District. A short television broadcast aired twice on TV Malawi in August 2009 about the workshop and two youth and I later developed a radio programme and another youth and I a rap song which was aired several times while I was in Malawi on the national station. Although the displays attracted much attention, and the invitations for the youth and I to share the findings were many throughout the country, my limited funding as a doctoral student unfortunately did not allow me
to stay on to coordinate participation in these meetings. The banners stayed with local youth programmes and are hopefully being used to facilitate further discussions in that context.

Despite the excitement around the photos, for advocacy purposes the youth photos alone were inadequate for sharing data representative of youth perceptions and articulations in this research. Significant facilitation was required to prevent misinterpretation of youth photos. Combining key quotes with the photos on displays helped to show how single photos encompassed many interacting themes and ideas. Staged photos, taken by the three girls involved in identifying these sets of interacting themes, helped to fill the “invisible” themes with a visual image such as for the theme “Violence Against Women.” Despite this, however, there were still times during the advocacy meetings where “adults” interpreted photos in ways unanticipated by the youth collaborators. Adults sometimes focused on what they considered inappropriate clothing in a photo intended by the photographer and by youth in the workshop to show the importance of friendship and “love” to youth happiness. When discussions turned to the inappropriateness of youth clothing, it undermined the value of youth contributions in the workshop.

Additionally, when the radio and TV broadcasters put together short documentaries about the main Advocacy Workshop, they relied on adult articulations of the meaning behind various photos, choosing to interview youth workers and policy makers rather than asking youth to tell their stories. Inevitably the stories were reduced to those which “fit” the photo image, rather than those behind the image, as the youth had originally told them. In this way, visual images can serve as a mechanism through which to marginalize youth voices.
Using research photos for public advocacy, teaching and report writing has important ethical concerns beyond that of potentially disempowering the voice of marginalized photographers. It is difficult to know if research participants can fully appreciate and anticipate the potential future applications of social research data when giving consent. The potential danger of misinterpretation on the part of the participants is heightened with visual data. For instance, in this research, the unanticipated reaction of adults during the Advocacy Workshop to the clothing the youth were wearing in a photo caused a photographer to regret having given permission for their photo to be used in that forum. Thus, particularly with photos, the (mis)interpretations are difficult to anticipate by participants, affecting appropriate ethical procedures for sharing the photos beyond the photographer. While in this circumstance the photographers and I decided that the best solution was first to organize a discussion with the workshop participants on the intended meaning of the photograph and how they would expect that message to be visually represented for future and then to remove the photograph from the banners for future use, this experience made me much more cautious in my own selection of photographs for display in this dissertation and other arenas, regardless of having received participants’ permission.

Actively engaging emotional capacities of youth and adults in the research also raises expectations that may not be fulfilled. Unlike a survey, various people are left with a visual image of barriers youth face to achieving their goals. The concerns of raising expectations with visual research tools are particularly salient with graduate research initiatives which often lack time and funding to follow-up with programmes to address challenges identified, prioritized and discussed elaborately by research participants.
Conclusions

Photo-LENS foregrounds young voices in a way that both the survey and interviews failed to do. It did this by engaging analytical and affective capacities simultaneously, by providing space for youth to contemplate their own lives in the absence of the researcher, by building a strong sense of trust and collaboration among the youth participants and researcher, and by helping youth to focus on their own experiences rather than on the routinized litany of “challenges” articulated by NGO campaigns. However, these findings confirm that of many others, that visual methods must be triangulated with other qualitative tools to ensure accurate interpretations of the data (Kesby 2000). This is important not only for understanding the complexity of youth narratives, but also the representativeness of their stories (to tease out performances for my benefit and biases related to their feelings at the moment of capturing the photograph).

Whereas Mayoux and Chambers (2005) argue that robust participatory assessments can be quantified, attempting to quantify “suffer” and “joy” themes in this research reduced them in ways that undermine the most important contribution these stories make to theory on youth well-being – the complexity and multiplicity of interacting factors youth actively consider and negotiate in everyday life. Although I was able to verify the representativeness of some of the data by incorporating some of the “suffer” and “joy” themes youth identified into a survey (e.g. the prevalence of alcoholism in rural households), the complex interactions among youth understandings of these concepts and the ways in which youth photos and the variable ways in which youth articulate their stories through age- and gender-determined lenses are unquantifiable. Additionally, I was unable to prioritize different “suffer,” “joy” or “health” themes relative to others in focus group discussions about the photos since the themes were so
tightly bound to particular situations and interactions they could not be separated from one another. Pulling apart these intertwined themes served only to abandon the more “invisible” elements which were usually political and structural in nature.

Important concerns remain about fulfilling the expectations raised by engaging emotional interest among youth in this research. Additionally, ethical considerations about misinterpretations which might arise from the photos and misunderstandings of the possible implications of the use of photos beyond the field research necessitate much more critical thinking about appropriate approaches to seeking consent for visual data. Significant facilitation is required to guide interpretations of images (Schonberg and Bourgois 2002), ideally in the context of Photo-LENS, facilitation by the photographers themselves. In cases where Photo-LENS is used with a highly marginalized group of people, as in this research, the participants may not be comfortable facilitating discussion around their photo in a large-group setting.
Chapter 2: Redefining Youth in the Present in Anticipation of the Future

Figure 2.1: Joy Photo: A boy’s hope for the modern life

The photograph Desire dropped off on my doorstep was his unsolicited effort to participate in my research. When I tracked him down to discuss his photograph, I found him living in a tiny, unelectrified shelter in a crowded peri-urban quarter. The shack was constructed of a combination of chopped cement pieces, steel, wood, cotton sheets and other materials someone scrounged together. He had been renting the space and living there for three years, since he first moved to the city at age 14 to work and put himself through secondary school. He said, reflecting on his natal home in rural a village, several days’ walk away,

This, you know, the time I was there [in the village] I thought a lot about what to do and these things stiffened up my mind. I felt like “how can I do this, ah!”… I was thinking a lot more things there [when I was in the village] about my life. How am I going to turn my life? How am I going to live? How am I going to find work? So it worried my life. I was worrying this and that – of all the necessities [lacking] over there. When I am in this
condition I feel like I am no longer a man. I am no longer a person in that condition. It means I am no longer a human, you know?

For Desire, the house in the photograph he left for me was his goal; for him it symbolized not only prosperity but equality and even humanity. When Desire said that living in the village had “stiffened up my mind” he was referring to a paralyzing sense of anxiety and despair young people in rural villages feel about the prospects of a different future. Several other youth expressed similar sentiments about the “inhumanity” and worthlessness of village life. They explained that “just staying” in rural villages, an idiom I elaborate further below, without work or opportunities for school, “made me to think [or worry] too much,” something that youth felt leads to mental and physical illness. Emma, 21, when asked about her life, stated flatly, “I want to leave this house,” in which she lived with her grandfather. “I think, I want to stay far away, or [if not] then I should just go get a rope and go to the bush [to kill myself] and maybe forget everything.” Enormous tears patterned her smooth skin and slipped off her angular jaw to moisten the cracked earthen floor below. These youth feel a certain loss of personhood associated, to some extent, with the condition of living in rural poverty but especially with being consumed with the anxiety about not being able to escape village life. As youth juxtapose their current living conditions in the village with those they desire below, it is obvious that the material circumstances of village poverty are upsetting and even embarrassing to some, but it is the sense of failure of not being able to change their circumstances, the feeling that life is so much better elsewhere and of being left behind by the world, that cause this demoralizing feeling of inhumanity among rural youth.

Another young teenaged boy who was from a rural village but barely surviving on a city’s edge explained about boys like himself and Desire,
We left the village just to come and search for work [to pay for school fees] because if we go to school, then it might be our sincerest hope that one day in the future we will have a story to tell, but we don’t know when.

This chapter delves into the hope youth feel for a future worth telling about. Here, I introduce the imagined life of umoyo wachizungu by sharing some of the stories elicited by young people’s “joy” photographs. The lives youth hope for tended to emerge in photos of houses, like the one Desire had dropped on my doorstep.

Elders consistently reminded me that youths’ orientation toward the future and especially umoyo wachizungu is new, emerging among youth who have grown up in Malawi’s democracy, marking a change in the way “youth” has come to be defined in the past 20 years. Several social scientists have shown how the kinds of globalization and neoliberalism emerging in different parts of Africa since the 1990’s have disrupted social hierarchies and led to a re-defining of youth in these contexts (Cole 2007; Hansen 2005; Hunter 2007; Vigh 2006). In Malawi, I argue that a new temporal orientation towards the future is increasingly one of the key defining factors of “youth” in this context and that the term “youth” as such is increasingly disassociated with a particular age range – future oriented, forward-looking “youth” is an identity even some elders are claiming. In so doing, I contribute to theory deconstructing the meaning of “youth” (Christiansen, et al. 2006; Cole 2007; Durham 2000; Hansen 2005) and show how the social category of “youth” has expanded beyond that signified by “wachinyamata” or the life stage during which one transitions from childhood to adulthood among the Tumbuka and Ngoni peoples.

By sharing stories of the imagined umoyo wachizungu in context with the feelings of anxiety expressed by youth whose quotes opened this chapter, I also demonstrate in this chapter
how precarious the anticipatory mode among youth really is and thus how different it is from the ways in which youth-targeted interventions invoke anticipation. For the interventions, the anticipatory mode “enable[s] the production of possible futures that are lived and felt as *inevitable* in the present” (Adams, et al. 2009: 248; emphasis added). For youth, desired futures are hardly inevitable. Whereas for interventions, anticipation exists in a space characterized by forecasts and speculation (Adams, et al. 2009), for their subjects in Malawi, it engenders a space characterized by liminality – a state of being “in-between situations” where there is “uncertainty regarding the continuity of tradition and future outcomes” (Horvath, et al. 2009: 3) – requiring significant maintenance in ever shifting ways to keep desired futures on the horizon. This condition of liminality takes shape among my informants as they slide in and out of what they termed “just staying,” an idiom which describes a state in which youth feel unable to move towards meeting their future goals. Here I argue that “just staying” or being forever on its verge, is a condition which necessitates especially hard work on the part of youth imagining potential futures and trying to keep these always in sight. In the following chapters, I unpack the nature of this anticipatory “work,” showing how youth engage with the discourses of rights and “freedoms” in the new democracy and how they imagine and work towards modern gender relations, loves, and self-worth. Here, I show how four processes in particular help to sustain youths’ hope that the imaginative and physical work I describe in the following chapters, will, one day, yield rewards: 1) youths’ interaction with youth-targeted “anticipatory interventions” that compel youth to hope and imbue them with a special status that sustains hope despite the odds that their dreams will not come to fruition, 2) Christian morality, which urges youth to wait patiently for God to deliver them prosperity, 3) success stories that circulate about rural youth who “made it,” and 4) philanthropic support from foreigners specifically to youth who are “needy” but not “greedy.”
Finally, this chapter also begins an argument that I carry through to the following chapter: while elders complain bitterly about the new “social life” (as youth describe the various social, economic and political factors leading to their increased “nostalgia for the future,” [Piot 2010]), youths’ modern desires and anticipations of a particular type of future are largely in step with village elders’ values. What elders object to is youths’ ability to embrace modernity outside the boundaries of their families’ influence. Given the highly precarious socio-economic circumstance of rural youth, the means by which elders’ feel “modernity” is best achieved differs in some ways from that which programmes seem, to elders, to promote – and here I emphasize seem because, as the following chapters all show in one way or another, what is intended by programmes often takes a very different shape as it is interpreted and employed by youth in rural villages.

**Defining and Identifying “Youth” in African Contexts**

In a special issue of Anthropological Quarterly on “Youth and the Social Imagination in Africa,” Deborah Durham (2000) explains why anthropological studies of youth in African contexts might benefit from a shift away from seeing youth as a specific age cohort, associated with particular physiological characteristics, to seeing youth as a “social shifter.” She borrows this term “shifter” from linguistics, to show how referring to someone as a “youth” is to position him or her in terms of a variety of social attributes, including not only age but also “independence–dependence, authority, rights, abilities, knowledge, responsibilities, and so on” (593). In other words, “shifter” implies that the category of youth “shifts” depending on context or usage; it “combines the idea that youth is relational with the insight that invoking youth is a
political, or pragmatic act” (592). Examining youth as a “social shifter” in Malawi affirms Durham’s (2004) finding in Botswana that “youth are understood in multiple ways” and that the category of youth is “highly contested” and “rapidly changing” (592).

Several anthropologists have shown how the forces of globalization and neoliberalism emerging in different African contexts since the 1990’s have disrupted social hierarchies and led to a re-definition of “youth.” Hansen (2005), Cole (2007) and Hunter (2007) describe a situation for Zambia, Madagascar and South Africa respectively in which economic insecurity has made it more difficult for youth to marry (Hunter 2007) and establish households (Cole 2007; Hansen 2005; also see Vigh 2006). One result, it is argued, is a prolongation of the life stage between childhood and adulthood, during which youth remain dependent on their parents (Cole 2007; Hansen 2005). To escape, some youth migrate to urban centres (Thorsen 2006) or engage sexual economies in new ways (Cole 2007; Hunter 2007), sometimes redefining what it means to be youth. In Malawi, I show how both of these responses are part of a general shift towards “anticipation” among rural young people.

In Malawi, age, body size or strength, social interactions and marital status, level of dependency or responsibility, hygiene, dress, and particular engagements with the future are all employed variably at different times and in different socio-political contexts to categorize and give meaning to the population between childhood and adulthood. As Durham (2004) found in Botswana, claiming the space of “youth” in Malawi is “an ongoing political struggle” (601). It is my intent below to examine the shifting limitations and productive possibilities of identifying as, with and in contrast to “youth.”
While categorical age would appear to be the most important factor in identifying youth for national and transnational programming, in rural villages the transition from childhood to adulthood, called *wachinyamata*, is marked most strongly by changes in social interactions and responsibilities. Increasingly, the meaning of the category “youth” is no longer firmly attached to a particular age range or life stage; rather, it is now associated with aspirations for a particular lifestyle and class position within society. Rural villagers often use the English word “youth” rather than “*wachinyamata*” to index this change. “Youth” is associated with being “active” in bringing about the future, even if that activity is largely imaginative and it is associated with “thinking well” and “setting an example” of a new way of life. Below I outline the indicators of “youth” employed by policy and programmes and conventional indicators of *wachinyamata* in rural villages before presenting my evidence of this change.

**Youth Defined by Policy and Programming**

The Malawian National Youth Policy, written in 1996, defined the category of “youth” as falling between 14 and 25 years of age. Later, human rights and HIV programming would be directed at this group, though in practice youth-targeted programming is frequently extended to young people between ages of 10 and 30 or more years. Since young people frequently mistake their ages, other physical characteristics are also sometimes used to identify the appropriateness of various programmes for particular young individuals. At a weekend workshop for Life Skills training organized by PEERS (the term I use to refer to both of the two long-term programmes targeting youth in the context of my research), one staff member explained, “At Life Skills trainings we sometimes select youth by age but also height to determine the appropriateness of
Life Skills maturation material. If they are of medium height then it is OK.” I was instructed to expel any attendants who did not fit “medium height,” as they were either intended for a more “mature” topic of discussion or were too young to hear about “youth” problems.

In Malawi, as Durham (2004) finds in Botswana, from a policy perspective contemporary “youth” are also defined as those who take up their “rights to be on an upwardly mobile track” and the opposite, those who fail to do so.

To be in the space of youth, according to national policy, is to be able to claim certain rights and abilities, as well: rights to be on an upwardly mobile track leading to white-collar or bureaucratic employment, rights to government empowerment initiatives and grants to youth groups, and the ability to work for national goals and to combine work and play in youth choral and drama groups and sports. And, according to the policy, the space of youth is also filled with those not taking up these rights or obligations: the unemployed, street children, those living entirely at home, and those just playing with sex, drugs, and consumable goods (599).

These youth are frequently characterized as “good” youth and “bad” youth. As youth programmes are elaborated in rural areas, however, there is significant leeway in their definition of “good” youth for those who are unemployed and “just staying” at home. As I elaborate below, anticipation emerges in rural Malawi in a highly liminal space. The rural youth who “just stay” in Malawi are considered youth who are “taking up their rights” because they hope and believe that prosperous futures will eventually transpire as a result of their self-discipline, patience, moral behaviour, and future education. It is these ideas that are seeping into and displacing the meaning of wachinyamata or the life stage between childhood and adulthood in northern Malawi.
**Wachinyamata**

The Tumbuka term *wachinyamata* is most often used in rural villages to describe young people in a transitional stage between childhood and parenthood. The transition from childhood to *wachinyamata* and *wachinyamata* to adulthood for both boys and girls is marked most strongly by changes in social interactions and responsibilities. For boys and girls, confidence in speaking to elders, the initiative to bathe, and the quality of the clothing they wear were three of the most important indicators of the transition from childhood to *wachinyamata*. For girls, washing their own clothing was also important. During one of my first stays in the village, a young girl walked up and greeted Sella, my research assistant and good friend, and me in the shade next to the school. She wore a long-sleeved green velour dress with a white eyelet collar that was badly stained. She told us she was in Form 5 and was 10 years old. When I asked my research assistant whether this was still a child, she responded, after a brief deliberation, “[she is a] child because she looks away when we look her in the eye.” Learning, as we chatted with her, that although the girl bathes herself she does not wash her own clothing, assured Sella that she was still a child. In interviews, this relationship between *wachinyamata* and a concern for physical appearance was re-affirmed. At first, I tended to work with young people between the ages of 16 and 25. It was not uncommon during this time to wait for over an hour for these youth at scheduled interview times. They nearly always arrived with freshly washed hair and clean clothes, stiff from the line. Later, as I started to work with younger boys and girls, I found I had to adjust my schedule as they were often waiting for me, running their small, thin bodies straight into the interview from the football field where they were playing ball, or from the river where they were fishing with friends, with their hair, bodies and clothing dulled by a thick layer of dust. It became clear that children cared far less about their appearance than *wachinyamata*. 
For boys, the capability of listening to and understanding advice and reason from parents is also an important indicator of wachinyamata, as is the tendency to resist parents’ authority. When ages were associated with such social changes, they would differ, sometimes significantly, with wachinyamata beginning anywhere between 14 and 15 and ending between 21 and 30. As one female elder explained,

Aah we differentiate [male children from wachinyamata] in the way of living and performance, because the performance of the boy who is 15 [munyamata wam’ma 15] it’s like that of a young child [nimwanako mudoko], but when reaching around 24, 25, ah you can tell that this one now has done what? Has reached his maturity – maturity in his performance and listening to advice. Whatever you say he listens, its like he does well when you say do such and such a thing. He listens saying, ‘ah father’ [nodding]. But those [boys] around 15, they are like young children who are still growing. It is the behaviour/performance [nkhalo].

In nearly the same breath, however, this woman also said,

But when he has passed 15 coming to 17 is when he does not listen. Then you know that it’s now rudeness…rudeness just because now he knows everything that an elder person [knows].

In other words, besides being marked by a particular age range, male wachinyamata unlike children, have the capacity to listen and understand parental advice and also to resist parental authority.

Adolescence, on the other hand, is a term understood locally to refer to physical changes as a person ages. As one young woman (21) explained,

Adolescence? I began to start adolescence at Form 2 to Form 3. This is when the menstruation cycle started. I was 16… But I did everything on my own from Standard 5
– to wash clothes and bathe alone. I did this early because I didn’t live with my real mother. I was 12 years old. Before this, when I was dirty I would have to re-bathe with my mother. If you have got your real parents, becoming youth [in this case used interchangeably with wachinyamata] is delayed.

This quote also demonstrates that one can be mature or wachinyamata before he or she has reached adolescence, signalled by the start of menstruation for girls. Whereas adolescence is determined by physical changes in the body, the age at which wachinyamata begins is highly dependent on the social circumstance. Young people who do not live with their biological parents may be forced to be wachinyamata, or responsible for bathing and washing their clothing, earlier than other children.

The transition from wachinyamata to adulthood is marked most specifically by marriage for boys and by childbirth for girls, but also by a shift in bodily strength. In a conversation with one female elder (76) she said,

R: *Tikuwamanya na nthena, uyo wandatole ndiyo tikuti mnyamata so uyo watola tikuti ni doda na.* [We know them like this, the one who is not married we regard him as a youth, so the one who is married is regarded as a man].
L: So kumsungwana? [So what about the girls]?
R: *Kumsungwana para watengwa tikuti ni ntchembere.* [For girls, if she is married, [she] is regarded as a mother].

Another female elder explained,

R: *Wachinyamata* are adult when they propose a girl and want to marry.
L: What about for females? Is there a difference?
R: A female is an adult when they have married and have a child.
Thus, while marriage is an important indicator of adulthood, until a woman has borne a child, thereby securing her marriage, she is not yet an adult.

For males, again, independence from parental authority is an important part of this transition.

He decides himself because he has passed that time – the period of being *chinyamata* [a youth]. As soon as he has passed that period, well I have nothing to say to him [laughs]… Yes, but for boys you can tell them when they are still more the “*chinyamata*” group [youth age], but once they have passed out that 21 years of age, we leave them like that they have to decide themselves. We say now he is grown up, he has got a deciding mind of himself.

In other words, before reaching social adulthood, *wachinyamata* are thought to be incapable of making decisions without the guidance of elders. As others simply put it, *wachinyamata* “still need instruction.” It was this understanding that made it difficult for me to seek opinions and experiences from youth when I began my research – adults frequently felt quite perplexed as to why I wanted so badly to speak directly to youth, who do not yet have valuable experiences and opinions to share, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Increasingly, however, elders in rural villages are seeing a change in young people – a shift in their values and desires – that has led to a certain gap in understanding between young people and their elders.

**Mayouthi**

As young people take up this new orientation towards the future, the term *mayouthi* and sometimes just the English word “youth” is increasingly employed by youth and elders alike to
call attention to this change. Hansen (2005) found something similar at work in Zambia, where the formulation “us youth” is employed by youth who were engaged at a vocational training centre in Lusaka, to indicate how they are “active persons, hardworking, still learning, and with lots of aspirations and desires” (13). In Botswana, Durham (2004) finds that old Twansa terms for youth are largely not in use. The ubiquity of the English term “youth,” or as it is commonly pronounced in Botswana, “oyouthi,” she argues, “suggests that this age status may be saturated with ideas coming from the government, the educational system, and international NGOs, all of which use English as a main language” (594). This is certainly the case in Malawi.

Malawian grandparents frequently lamented youth values in their villages. In particular, they felt frustrated by youths’ rejection of custom and lack of interest in stories of the past. Mary was a 78-year-old grandmother with whom I spent several afternoons sitting straight-legged on the mat in her cool, dark, earthen home chatting about young people today. She felt so frustrated and confused about youths’ priorities today that she could go on about it for hours at a time. She explained, “they say ‘we are the mayouth’ and they say that, ‘we have been raised in English life, so you can’t teach us of the past,’” she complained sourly. In this case she noticeably employed a version of the English word “youth” and not wachinyamata to describe young people who say they cannot be taught of the past. While this was not a hard and fast rule and elders sometimes, in interviews conducted in Tumbuka, attributed similar characteristics to “wachinyamata of today,” it is striking the frequency with which elders speaking in Tumbuka used some version of
the English word “youth” [mayouthi or mayouth] when they were complaining specifically about the way they perceived young people to behave differently today than in the past. 48

Mary did not entirely disagree with youths’ engagement with the future; in fact, she said, “It’s [proper] for a child, to be doing school [and] thinking about the future life.” Her concern was one that many elders felt with regard to youths’ values in this “new social life” – that the ways in which youth take up their new orientation towards the future fails to reproduce social values in rural villages. Thus while elders also hope for new futures, how they feel youth should best move towards this differs in many ways from the route national policy and programming seems to encourage, a distinction I elaborate below.

When I asked Mary why she felt youth are thinking this way, she shook her head, to say that she was not sure. “We old ones also wonder.” After a few moments she offered, “Aaaa, maybe it was [started] around 1992. They just move about anyhow [do what they want]… But when we ask our children now [why], they say there is English life nowadays.” Elders frequently attributed youths’ changing priorities broadly and especially to their desire for umoyo wachizungu or English/white life, to the democratic transition in the mid-1990’s.

Not all “old ones” wonder, as Mary does, about why youth are enamoured with the future. As Durham (2004) also found in Botswana, increasingly people in their 30’s, 40’s and even older are also claiming definition as a “youth” in Malawi. Some members of youth clubs are in their late 30’s or early 40’s. In other cases, elders simply claimed that because of their behaviour one could see they were either “still youth” or had become mayouthi in their older age.

48 Similarly, none of the health and development clubs for young people were ever referred to as anything in chi-Tumbuka for instance. Everyone, even those who did not speak English, call them “youth clubs” or sometimes “mayouthi,” a localized plural version “youth.”
For example, early in my research, a village headman made a list of the “youth” in his village which included several community elders. When I asked him about this potential misunderstanding, he justified it by saying, “I am active and a participant in these programmes [HIV/AIDS programmes] and in thinking about our community and its development. I feel this in my body and so I, too, am a youth.” When I asked for more detail on exactly what he could feel in his body, he reiterated, “The feeling of doing what is good for the development of our community and our country.” I took “development” to mean the “improvement” or change of the community in the future. This example thus emphasises my point that “youth” is increasingly associated with new priorities and, in particular, engagement with ideas and activities that are seen to be forward thinking, modern and preparatory for a new future. Furthermore, while many elders see this type of “youthfulness” as foolish, some apparently find it desirable or, at least, advantageous from the perspective of potentially accessing resources available to the right kinds of “youth.” From this perspective, whereas the old wachinyamata were thought not to be fully formed and incapable of making proper decisions about their lives on their own, the new “youth” are seen as agentive, powerful and important, not only to their community but also to the future of the nation (of course, increasingly this potential for the economic future of the nation, is reserved for young girls, as I take up in Chapter 4). This chief’s claim may, in this case, have been partially in an effort to capture of my attention. Certainly elders in their 50’s or even 60’s sometimes claimed to be “orphans” an effort to access some of the resources targeted for specific sub-groups of youth, in this case youth who had been orphaned by the death of one or more parents by HIV/AIDS. But many elders claimed to be “youth” because of their attitudes. Being a “youth” was more about feeling youthful as the English term has come to imply in today’s Western context than about a particular age range (also see Durham 2004).
At the same time, there is a recent movement in Malawi towards going back to secondary school in one’s late 30’s or 40’s to obtain school-leaving certificates or to improve grade scores. In a conversation with a number of teachers for the night school programme at the government-run community school they said, “ah, the youngish ones at open [night school] they are just playing there but those who are older and coming back – and there are many, many these days – they are very serious about improving their grades and making better futures for themselves and their families.” As one elder, Loveness, said to me, “we older ones are better examples of the youth than the young ones.” By this he meant that older men and women can be more seriously committed to improving the future for themselves and their families than younger “youth.”

The term “youth” is thus increasingly disassociated with age per se and is used, rather, to point to a particular attitude towards the future and behaviours that demonstrate how actively they are working towards that future in the present. This opens significant space for re-imagining forms of social adulthood in rural villages as well. Rather than see a prolongation of the life stage between childhood and adulthood in Malawi (as others have noted in other parts of the continent), I see a dissolution of generational hierarchies and increasing status to those who claim to be thinking about and working towards their individual and Malawi’s collective future. Both “youth” and “adulthood” must be thought of as “social shifters” in this circumstance.

**Fostering Anticipation**

Several anthropologists have described how the twinned processes of contemporary globalization and neoliberalism, especially since the 1990’s, lead to feelings of abandonment, frustration and disillusionment in African contexts. Structural adjustment policies have stripped
communities of government-led social services and development, a process exacerbated by neoliberal market policies which hand services once offered by governments to private companies (Englund 2006a; Hansen 2005; Piot 2010). Employment levels have fallen in several countries, and the excitement about the prospects of education for future employment has faded (Cole 2007; Hansen 2005; Ndjio 2008). Simultaneously, as markets open, many countries have seen an influx of global commodities, but these remain out of reach of the majority population (Bryceson 2002; Cole 2007; Cole and Durham 2008; Hansen 2005). In Malawi, this has been the situation since the democratic transition completed in 1994. As Mary, a 78-year-old grandmother noted above, these changes coincided with the time youth began to look to the future, to seek umoyo wachizungu and to forget where they came from.

The changes in youth attitudes are not chance, but contingent on the wider social forces at play. State withdrawal from, and abandonment of, rural villages, in particular, has stripped rural Malawian life of much political meaning and moral appeal (Frankenberger, et al. 2003). This is a climate in which flourish what Adams, et al. (2009) term “anticipatory interventions” – interventions focused on managing health, behaviour, education and social relations among youth today in ways that are imagined to open opportunities for some distant and better future. Youth are drawn to anticipatory interventions by their promise that the future will be better than the present.

These interventions are not the same as the development interventions of the past. “No longer focusing, as during the 1970s and 1980s, on material inputs – investment in infrastructure (roads, bridges, hospitals, schools) or on rural production (fertilizer, ploughs, irrigation) – those projects with traction today are more concerned with youth and human development” (Piot 2010: 147). In Malawi, anticipatory interventions aim to build youths’ capacity to be future leaders
with moral and physical integrity through messages about human rights, gender equality, independence, agency, formal education and abstinence. As Piot (2010) describes for Togo, these campaigns “carried out on a resource-starved terrain… [have] new agendas [which] are largely immaterial, targeting youth and gesturing towards an unknown future, content on developing human potential, whatever that might mean” (147). With no prospect of resurrecting an imagined and often romanticized “traditional” rural past and few resources with which to create a desirable present, youth in rural villages (and some adults and elders as I will discuss below), find themselves drawn to the hope embodied in the development programming. But, this compelling discursive programming in the absence of material advancements leaves youth precariously balanced on a tightrope between a past unavailable and a future unknown.

While in the following section I describe the nature of youths’ desires for umoyo wagizungu, I later show how anticipation emerges in a liminal space in which youth engage fervently in the imaginative and physical work of protecting and trying to prepare for desired and anticipated futures.

“Picturing” the Future: Umoyo Wagizungu

While village elders feel strongly that youth put too much stock in an imagined future and take too many risks in the present in anticipation of its prospect, youth appear to find parental advice, rooted as it is in memories and experiences of the past, unhelpful in this new democracy. “The problem with these old ones,” as 21-year-old Perilla, put it, “They have too much memory.” As a reminder of a sentiment expressed by one of the young boys who left their rural homes to try to put themselves through school, outlined at the start of this chapter, he felt
that only if he left the village and, as a corollary to that, rejected the life trajectory that was assumed by previous generations – marrying and inheriting land, farming with parents and wife – could he sincerely have hope that he will, one day in the future, “have a story to tell.”

An important feature of youths’ constructions of their futures in this new, democratic, English life is its contrast with the lives of rural youths’ parents. Discussions with youth about desires for the future often started with a photograph of the house they want to escape. One 19-year-old boy who lived in a rural village with his family and volunteered as a peer educator with the youth health and development organization, PEERS, in town, shared his biggest fear for the future.

About future? Maybe I will not finish school because of fees problem and I will live here [pointing to a picture of his father’s crumbling home shown in Figure 2.2] and my father and brothers will all come to me [and depend on me for financial support].

“What is your dream job?” I asked him.

“To be an electrician,” he replied, a job which would inevitably carry him far away from the village. No electrical lines cross the skyline in these photos.

**Figure 2.2: Suffer Photos: A father’s current home and a boy’s fear for the future**
Many young boys and girls and men and women also drew on “suffer” photographs to illustrate other aspects of their rural life and explained the hunger they and their families endured in rural villages (which I may add, they plan to escape, enjoying “English/white foods” in their futures). Some examples of “suffer” photographs that led to stories about hunger and illness showed (clockwise starting at top left in Figure 2.3): empty storage granaries and fertilizer bags; wilting, dying maize crops; families eating what have sometimes been called “survival foods” in the absence of adequate maize; and piglets so hungry they had begun to cannibalize one another in their rickety wooden pen.

**Figure 2.3: Hunger is suffering**
These photos were accompanied by stories explaining: “The main problem to our family is lack of food. We have a very big field but we yield very little, of which half is consumed while the maize is still in the field and the remaining half doesn’t even last for more than three months.” Youth told of days spent foraging for something to bring home for dinner, of nights spent with hunger, and grandparents begging for salt. Similarly, the multiple “suffer” photographs of the elders for whom youth feel responsible (see following chapter, Figure 3.4) provide a marked juxtaposition to the futures they envision for themselves. Many boys and girls, young men and women, used the photograph of “what most brings you joy” to share stories of their desires for “modern” houses and the kinds of lives they imagined to be lived in them.

Figure 2.4: Joy Photo: A boy’s hope for the modern life

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49 A dietary diversity and food security survey I conducted in 10 villages during the pre-harvest season in 2009 indicated especially significant food insecurity and low dietary diversity among the youth in the area of my research. Over 50% of the youth surveyed indicated that in the past 30 days they ate a small amount of food and did not get satisfied due to insufficient food, and 44.1% and 48.4% indicated that they ate fewer meals due to food shortages and found no food in the house for an entire day respectively, at least once in the past 30 days. Poor nutrition among youth is an expected outcome. Youth surveyed consumed an average of 4.28/14 food groups on the Individual Dietary Diversity Scale (FAO 2007) during the 24 hour period prior to the survey, with 41.7% of married girls experiencing between 0-3/14. Youth diets during this season consisted almost exclusively of cornmeal supplemented only by small amounts of steamed leafy greens and wild fruits harvested while herding or collecting firewood. Little to no protein and no vitamin A-rich vegetables, tubers or fruits were consumed by any of the youth surveyed. While the gendered patterns of food consumption are taken up more fully in the Chapter on Jenda, it is worth noting that patrilocal marital patterns pose special barriers to access to diverse foods by young, married women.
Nineteen-year-old Benson’s “joy” photo and story is a typical example (see figure 2.4).

L: Tell me, why did you take this picture?
R: Okay ah, I took this because my aim is to build a house like this. I think if I can have a house like this I can be at a very good place.
L: Where is this house?
R: In town…What I want is to change my life [from the one] at my home there [gesturing to his earthen and thatched natal home where I had stayed several times since arriving in Malawi]. As you see there the house like my mother is living in, she is living in a very, mm, maybe, I can say it’s a dirty house to my heart. As I am looking at my mother, I see she is very shy [embarrassed to live in this house]. So, I want to build a house like that [pointing to the picture] so that I can share a room with my mother.
L: And what is it about this house that you like?
R: I look at town life and I know every part of this life because, sometime back, I was moving around [hanging around] this place and it is a very good place to me. Then the house [in the picture], it’s a very good design. It’s not a local design. It’s not like a church [pointing to one of the new, plain Evangelical churches in the village]. A church, it’s like a straight line. The corners are maybe, four. A church doesn’t have a veranda like this [pointing to the picture]. It’s simply flat.
L: OK, and what else?
R: And I like this house because the toilets are not outside. And the water taps they are inside again. It also has a kitchen [inside] there…I also like it because of the design of the windows. And what I like is the iron sheets, there on the roof. And I want it.

Such houses were also often described as containing nice furniture. One 11-year-old girl, Stefani, explained that her house in town would have many features her family home most certainly did not have. While the house would be painted, with timber, and glass windows, she added, “looking inside…like sofas, chairs, beds.” Others included, “okay, like, sofa sets, toilets inside, TVs, big radios, beds, mattresses, those things.”
Lives in such houses are characterized by much pride in their elevated status which attracts and comfortably hosts many guests.

There [pointing to her photo] is a house. The house brings me joy because people stay in there and also sleep in there, and also use the same house to store many things like plates, clothes, water, and we can also receive some visitors because of this house… This is [my] uncle’s house. Many visitors are accommodated in this house because it is well roofed, well ventilated and also has cement and so most of them feel at home because of the house [girl, 14].

Chawanangwa (29) similarly emphasized the status associated with the “good life” lived in his desired house, “on the tarmac near the city.”

It has got everything inside the house and when you come with friends to this house, saying, “this is my house,” they are saying you are staying a good life. Just looking at the house [it’s obvious] people living in the house are living a good life.

He later asked rhetorically about his own house, “Can visitors come to this house?” He shook his head is if to say, “obviously not.” The “good life” Chawa describes is characterized by wealth and the ability to eat modern foods, the foods of umoyo wachizungu.

L: And why do you say they are living a good life?
R: Because the – just imagine, just looking at the house you know that these people have got money. They can have everything. They can eat good food. A poor person cannot live in such a house – a person who has got no money cannot live in that house. Only those who have got money and have got everything, they are living in this house. So, if you are having money, you enjoy life, yeah.

L: How does money make you to enjoy life, what can you do with money that makes you enjoy life?
R: Okay, money [makes you] enjoy life because you eat good food.
L: Like what kind of food?
R: Ah, bread. Bread, rice, meat. Food that you buy, that we don’t even know. That people produce from factory. They are good because they are tested by Malawi bureau of standards, those [people] who look to see that the food is good. Yeah, they are safe because you find some are sealed, they are in packets.

To a certain extent, youth are already engaging in modern foods. Mary, for instance, explained,

In the past we know only nsima. What else could we eat? Today, they are there, the English [foods], for the ones who have got money, they buy them because they are linked with those [the styles] of nowadays. The English food [youth] say, there is now bread; there are Fanta bottles, Coca Cola, and many things that are eaten today. We were not seeing them during the past days.

To be sure, white sliced bread, more often than not lightly peppered with deep green mold, was frequently purchased on the special occasion that I was staying with a family and proudly served with tea, milk and sugar for my breakfast, but typically starches are limited to sweet potatoes and corn grown by the family. Food is the most accessible of the new, foreign commodities linked to the style of “nowadays” and thus one aspect of English life youth enjoy in the present and imagine having much more of in the future.

New lifestyles determined by access to inexpensive technologies are another imagined inevitability of the anticipated future among youth. In a discussion with a group of female and male peer educators who ranged in age from 19 to 26, about cell phones, computers, TV and digital music players in Malawi, they argued strongly against the church perspective that this technology does more harm than good.

L: How do you feel about all this new technology in Malawi?
R1: The church says that technology has brought more bad than good.
R2: But technology in general is good. From TV, we can learn more, more especially we can learn more from preachers internationally, but at the same time we can also watch pornographic. This is the abuse of technology [laughing].
R1: It is the right of the customer to choose how to use the technology.
R3: We will be as prosperous as your country soon. Sometimes keeping our culture clashes with a type of technology, so we must adapt.
R4: In the olden days we used to have a communal dish where we ate together but now because we live in technology advancement with heath issues, each and every person must have a certain plate.
R3: When we are eating nsima we use bare hands, but in the near future we will be eating with forks and spoons.
L: What do you think of this?
R3: That is good because we can have some infection on our hands and we eat with an infection.

The relationship between “advancement” or “modernity” and “health” and particularly sanitation was persistent, reflecting the fact that youth-targeted health interventions play a significant role in shaping how youth imagine the future and their expectation for its realisation.

In sum, umoyo wachizungu or English/white life is characterized by nuclear families; certain kinds of loving relations (discussed further in the following chapters); living away from rural villages; having modern amenities, such as electricity and indoor plumbing; eating store-bought foods in modern packaging and are certified by the Malawi Bureau of Standards; and, consequently, having many friends, high status, happiness, and good health. These aspirations for lifestyles characterized by particular material standards and consumption practices are increasingly shared by people in many parts of the world seeking equality and “membership in the new global order” (Ferguson 2002; 2006; Piot 2010: 162). But these simultaneously fuel a myriad of different behaviours and styles even within Malawi among youth and between youth
and elders, as both the past and the future variably haunt the present in different ways, at different times, for different groups (for examples from other countries see Cole 2007; 2010; Comaroff and Comaroff 1993b; 1999; Geschiere 1997; Piot 1999; 2010; Sanders 2001; Smith 2008).

Education and professional employment were the ways Malawian youth felt they were most likely to achieve these goals of living individualist lives in modern houses. The careers youth said they would have when they lived in these houses were particularly ambitious. As Mary noted above, most youth, especially those under the age of 20, said they would have professional careers. Benson (19) said he would be a lawyer, Stefani (11) a nurse, Alex (18) a journalist, and Masozi (14), a mechanic. The future, however, is highly precarious, requiring significant imaginative work on the part of youth to keep “modern” futures on the horizon. Chawa (29) said, “Did I tell you? It was my plan when I was in school just to be a doctor, but I have passed that time.” Chawanangwa had failed his final secondary school examinations, the girlfriend he was courting became pregnant, and he had to farm with his parents to look after his new family. But still, he hoped for a modern life beyond the village. “Just, I need to leave here to start a small business in the city,” he explained. Similarly, Steven, who was 27 years old, found that he had to change his career plans when the first did not work out.

I’ve done my secondary and technical education to become a qualified mechanic; I am just staying with my papers at home. The vehicles are too expensive to buy and few manage to do so. This has contributed to there being few vehicles in our country; making it too difficult for me to find work…I am just seeking fees maybe to become a driver [get my drivers license to consult for local NGOs].
While the prospects of education translating to jobs that would enable *umoyo wachizungu* fade, these youth seem to continue to find hope in the prospects of the neoliberal dream that self-determination and hard work together with formal training and certifications, such as getting one’s driver’s license, will position them to thrive in the free market. But it is not always easy. In the coming chapters, I describe some of the work youth do in the present to sustain hope for anticipated futures.

**The Liminal Nature of Anticipation in Rural Malawi: In and Out of “Just Staying”**

For the interventions, the anticipatory mode “enable[s] the production of possible futures that are lived and felt as *inevitable* in the present” (Adams, et al. 2009: 248, emphasis added), but the anticipatory sentiment emerges differently among the youth in my study. For youth, desired futures are hardly inevitable. Rather, as the youth whose quotes opened this chapter expressed, the fear of not achieving their goals, can leave youth feeling “not human.” Rural Malawian youth have to rely largely on their imaginations and tiny bits of evidence gleaned from their surroundings, instead of econometric studies and impact analyses to sustain hope. In other words, for the anticipatory interventions anticipation is characterized by economists’ forecasts that are strong and enduring, while for their subjects in Malawi, it is characterized by uncertainty and hope that are vulnerable and shifting, requiring significant maintenance effort.

In this section I draw on a definition of liminality provided by Horvath, et al. (2009) in their introduction to the special issue of the journal International Political Anthropology: “liminality refers to in-between situations and conditions that are characterized by the dislocation of established structures, the reversal of hierarchies, and uncertainty regarding the continuity of
tradition and future outcomes” (3). In this issue the authors draw on the original concept of
liminality as discussed by Arnold Van Gennep (1960 [1909]) and elaborated by Victor Turner
(1969) and show how the explanatory power of the concept has moved beyond initiation rituals
to explain similar feelings of being “betwixt and between” (Turner 1969: 95) emerging
especially in the contemporary context of globalization.

In interviews, when I asked youth if they went to school, a common response was a shake
of the head and a muted mumble, “I’m just staying.” While looking at photographs youth had
taken of their mothers pounding maize in the heat of middle of the dry season or their fathers
hand-sowing tobacco in the early rains, the response to my question, “what are they doing?” was
almost invariably “just staying.” When a Malawian friend sent a text message asking me for
financial assistance for a driving course, he justified his request by imploring me, “pliz, Loreen, I
jst stayn.” “I’m just staying” appeared to be the rural youth mantra in northern Malawi. “Just
staying” seems to indicate a kind of passivity or stasis, or failure to make forward progress, but it
certainly does not imply lack of hard labour.

I frequently struggled to pull my aching body out of the entanglement of itchy woollen
blankets on the earthen floor of my host family’s home at 5:30 each morning only to realize that
the young girls I shared bedding with had already started what seemed to my academic
sensibilities another day of grinding physical labour. Often by 6:00am girls had carried water
from pumps or rivers several kilometres away and were heating it for bathing. Others had swept
the compound, chopped firewood and begun to prepare our breakfast of freshly harvested sweet
potatoes and tea. Boys were often already preparing the pools of mud for moulding clay bricks,
chipping stones at a local quarry, seeking greenery with a herd of goats, or digging out the next
day’s breakfast. A sponge bath and sweet potato later, my aching neck and I would find
ourselves stumbling to the far hills, beyond the three rivers, in search of firewood, all the while hoping that soon we would get to experience some of the “just staying” life.\textsuperscript{50} Just staying had nothing to do with being inactive or lazy (though I sometimes wished it had) and usually it had nothing to do with whether youth were practicing agriculture either. Just staying, rather, implied not being employed in the formal economy and usually not going to school. It also encompassed a certain sense of failure among some youth to change their situation combined with patience and persistent hope for and an expectation of better futures – it is a liminal state.

Farming tobacco was sometimes an exception to “just staying” for young men and in rarer cases for young women. Some youth, who were fortunate enough to be able to afford the labour and input costs of growing this cash crop, took significant pride in growing it. When I asked 19-year-old Kondwani if he was working, he said proudly and a bit to my surprise, “Ah, I was just staying for some time because you know no school fees. But now I am a farmer.” He explained, “My parents, they have died, but then when my mother died [the year previous] my uncle gave me two bags of fertilizer for \( \frac{1}{2} \) acre of tobacco that I have planted this year. Next year it will be an acre…” Here Kondwani felt excited and hopeful about the growth of his cash-cropping business.\textsuperscript{51} Often, however, tobacco farming was also seen as a means to achieving

\textsuperscript{50} I also felt a little defensive when youth labeled hard working agriculturists like themselves and their families “just staying”. In early interviews with youth AIDS programme participants in town, before I started spending most of my time living with families in rural villages, I found myself correcting responses to my question “what do your parents do?” When youth said, “they’re just staying,” I retorted “but they are farming, no?” to which youth usually responded with an air of obviousness, “yes” – as though “just staying” and “farming” were one in the same. I came to see that they were indeed the same, at least from the perspective of Malawian youth.

\textsuperscript{51} I only met one young woman in a similar circumstance. She was in her early 20’s and had divorced her husband and returned to her home village with her two children. Her parents had also passed away, but, just like Kondwani, one of her uncles gave her some land and inputs to grow tobacco. She too was very excited about the prospect of tobacco bringing her and her children “to a good point,” as she put it. Three years later, however, she had had a falling out with her uncle who had used witchcraft to cause her to fail to save enough money to re-invest the inputs and she told me she was “just staying.”
their goals of owning a small business in town rather than an end in and of itself. Farming tobacco is extremely labour-intensive, and the desired umoyo wachizungu was generally associated with more leisure time and less labour. Furthermore, it was highly precarious, especially at the stage that Kondwani was at when we spoke. A failure of his crop in this first year could leave him unable to plant again next year and he would inevitably feel himself “just staying.”

While some youth found themselves in and out of “just staying” and others were permanently “just staying” for the duration of my research, nearly all rural youth experience this state at some point or another. When youth were not “just staying” but rather were putting themselves through school, they feared a life of “just staying,” for they were often only 500 Malawian Kwacha (the equivalent of just over $1 USD with today’s exchange rate) away from the stagnancy of that state once again. This sense of never being securely out of the clutches of “just staying” means even these youth who are going to school frequently feel “neither here nor there” or “betwixt and between” (Turner 1969: 94).

Desire was precisely in such a circumstance as this – just a dollar away from “just staying.” One week day, during the day, I happened to be passing by Desire’s neighbourhood and I found him there at home, not in school. When I asked why he was at home, he explained, “The teacher has chased me because there is a fee for fixing the chims (short for chimbuzi, meaning outdoor latrines). I didn’t have the 500 MK so I have been chased. I am just staying at home and looking for that money here and there.” Many youth are often sent home with little or

52 Youth in this circumstance would often reflect on Tommy, a young man who was well known to have started out with a small plot of tobacco from which he eventually saved enough money to buy several small grocery shops in town, a taxi, a mini-bus and several other small businesses. When I departed from the field in late 2009, Tommy had just married his girlfriend and was building a house many youth found very enviable in town.
no notice for not coming up with additional funds for school maintenance. Others manage to find a sponsor or a loan to pay school fees for one term and then fail to pay the following term and end up “just staying” once again.

Even youth who have employment can feel “neither here nor there” (Turner 1969: 94). Employment is often not commensurate with personal abilities or education and was not enabling them to meet their goals. Cromwell, 24, visited me one evening. He was married with two young children and was working with an electrical company on year-long contracts that he had been able to renew twice thus far.

You see, I’ve come to you today because my biggest problem for me is that I am using my MSCE certificate [high school diploma] for my work and not my community development diploma. So, you know, it is my goal to go back to school, to Chancellor College [a university in southern Malawi], to study social sciences. That is when maybe I can be using my certificate to find work far away and more secure because you know, with these contracts I don’t know and with my two childrens they need to go to school…

I had to wonder whether the emphasis on studying, and especially on studying in the social sciences, was said in an effort to please me, who was doing my research for a PhD in the social sciences, but I couldn’t be sure. What is important to me in this story, however, is that it shows how this youth also feels a sense of instability in his work and frustration with his inability to meet his goals. He continued, “And you I’m happy just to find you here and so this can give hope to me that anything is possible. One day I will be building my house.” In this case, his visit to me, however remote he felt the possibility might be of me providing him funds to go to back to school, he said helped him to continue hoping.

He added,
You know, we have to be meeting our goals here in Malawi because you know I left the village to go to school and am working. Now, if I go back there and just build a small house, one like my parents, they can all be laughing saying that ‘what have I done working there and having nothing’.

Here Cromwell expressed a common fear among boys, including Desire, who had left the village to go to school. They feared that they would be humiliated if they went back to the village because, after having sacrificed a lot to put themselves through secondary school, people would have high expectations for what they would be able to show for it. Cromwell could not bear the thought of going back to the village and living like his parents. Thus, while Cromwell may have been performing for me when he said that he wanted to achieve a university education, and especially to study in the social sciences, his commitment to making for himself a different future was as real and visceral as was his fear of his failure. Thus, the state of liminality I describe here is pervasive. There are almost no rural youth who escape it entirely, whether “just staying,” on the verge of just staying, or employed but earning little and working below their potential – the lives of rural Malawian youth are characterized by a sense of liminality and it is within this state that anticipation is generated and sustained. For the remainder of this dissertation, I thus refer to all of the youth who feel they are not progressing towards their desired futures, whether employed or going to school at the moment, or not, as the youth who “just stay.”

Of course, not all young people from rural villages are in a state of involuntary suspension between an unavailable past and a desired future, a space in which youth are peddling fast, physically and especially imaginatively, in neutral. The construction of and engagement with desires for a particular kind of modern life among youth was pervasive, regardless of how they envisioned achieving it. Some rural youth, however, are not waiting as patiently and hopefully as those I described above. “Street boys” and “mahules” (prostitutes) are two examples of youth who appear to have given up on the prospect of sustained hope, education and formal employment for providing modern futures in Malawi. These youth follow a different path to umoyo wachizungu which is highly stigmatized by youth-targeted programmes and the Malawians and foreigners alike who work with them. From time to time in this...


Sustaining Hope

Throughout the rest of this dissertation, I demonstrate, among other things, what kinds of imaginative and physical work youth do to help sustain hope for imagined futures. Here, I wish to mention four external factors that also played an important role in helping to sustain anticipation in this context. This liminal space in which youth work to sustain hope is characterized by tenuous proof that investing as they do in the future is worth the effort. Youth see the value of investment in their education, not in broad-level econometric studies that show the value of investments in their human potential for future generations but rather in their limited interactions with or access to: youth-targeted interventions, the Christian emphasis the future, success stories of other youth, and philanthropic support from foreigners to specific types of youth.

One key factor sustaining hope is the nature of youth-targeted programming in Malawi which, due to donor fixation on “sustainability” of activities after the project has ended, focuses on “empowering” young people to take it upon themselves to develop themselves and their communities (Swidler and Watkins 2009). Deep-seated concerns about dependency in development have led to a donor obsession with sustainability. In turn, “[m]uch of the emphasis of development today…is on individual responsibility and initiative” (Piot 2010: 160). One of the often cited benefits of the youth peer education model employed in Malawi for health and development programming is that it empowers youth to take development into their own hands.

dissertation I draw on the interviews I conducted with street boys and mahules as a point of comparison with the youth who “just stay,” but these were not the focus of this research.
Using a peer-education model, youth volunteer peer-educators are called upon to be “witnesses in hope,” as one peer educator described to me, borrowing from the Protestant “witness in Christ” – to inspire fellow peers to mimic their “good” and “moral” behaviours. This sentiment was strongly internalized by youth in this research. In a conversation with the Good Future youth club in one of the villages, for instance, some participants explained that in their club they teach youth that they must be active in improving their lives. “In this club we work ‘with our hands’,” one boy emphasized, pushing his two strong hands in my face. “It means that we are not just going to wait around for God to deliver things, we must do it ourselves, with our hands.” And while this shows how youth are expected to care about their own “development,” in this context, they are also given the task of developing others around them. When I visited a private secondary school to chat with young girls, I asked them what they plan to do during their upcoming Christmas holiday. Several young girls said something similar to this girl, “When I go home I want to visit my grandparents, I want to teach other girls who are ignorant or who are not ambitious. I will tell them that they need to have goals in life to hope for the future.” A key factor influencing hope is that current behaviour-change programming targeting young boys and girls, whether through Life Skills classes in school or youth-targeted health and development programmes, obliges youth to see themselves as leaders for and even agents working to improve their communities. Whereas Fassin (2010) notes that humanitarian actions “have long been considered as an exclusive prerogative of Western institutions and nations” (239), I found that in the context of youth-targeted health and development in Malawi, programmes aim to develop a youthful nation of humanitarians – young people who will sustain development initiatives, creating the conditions necessary for imagined futures long after external funding dries up.
Humanitarianism has thus become a new subject position which Malawian youth can mobilize to feel deserved or worthy of the futures they imagine and thus hopeful.\footnote{Anthropologists have recently drawn attention to the power of “humanity” mobilized in contemporary national and transnational governance (Feldman and Ticktin 2010). One arena in which the power of “humanity” is particularly visible is the arena of global suffering. “Humanitarian agents are present on battlefields and in refugee camps, in the aftermath of earthquakes or floods, and in clinics for undocumented immigrants and homeless citizens. They treat the wounded and the sick, they develop food supplementation projects against malnutrition in African villages and risk-reduction programs for drug users in American inner cities…” (Fassin 2010:239).}

While the youth in the Good Future youth club are not waiting around for God to deliver things, the Christian discourse that God will deliver things to good, moral and patient people, helps to sustain hope when persistent poverty and “just staying” becomes too much to bear. Desire once took me to meet someone he referred to as the most important person in his life. It turned out to be a middle-aged man who went to the same church as Desire – Assemblies of God. When he introduced him to me, Desire explained that this man was the most important person in his life because he advised him to be patient and to wait for the opportunities to come his way.

R: He advises me to stay away from the worldly things…walking in the righteous sort of ways it’s good [to believe in God]. You have to stay away from worldly things.
L: From which kind of things?
R: Worldly things – these sorts of things like smoking, drinking, [and] stealing, of course.
So these are the things that I have been advised by this man. Only, he doesn’t help me financially and the like, but he helps me actually by supplying support with, his good alternative sources of behaviour. So he gives them [the advice] to me to say if you lead this life, this life will help you may end up, um, you may [stalled for several seconds, thinking] um, live long. Yah, for you abstain from a lot more things rather than being involved in peer pressures what, what, what.
Desire was not the only youth to mention the role of Christian faith in helping to sustain patience and hope. When Emma (21) described how the feeling of being trapped in village life had led her to contemplate suicide, I asked her what had prevented her from doing it. She responded, by pulling up her “joy” photo. It was a picture of a big rock in a rather secluded part of the village area in which she lived.

The bible encourages me and I just take a bible [to this rock] and read the ujeni [what] the word it is proverb, proverb 15 verse 26, [yes] proverb 15 verse 26. It encourages me just because, um I have I just forget the words itself but I can get a bible…

Proverbs 15:26-28 reads,

The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD: but the words of the pure are pleasant words. He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live. The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things.

These verses reminded Emma, as they did other youth, that there is virtue in waiting patiently for better futures—greediness gains nothing and the humble prosper. Youth drew on similar Christian discourses when they felt particularly dismayed about the prospect of their futures.

Several success stories which circulate about youth who were “just staying” but remained dedicated to the project of anticipating opportunities in the future and the improvement of their communities were rewarded also help to sustain hope in times of doubt. One particularly salient one was the story of William Kamkwamba. This description of William Kamkwamba’s book, “The Boy who Harnessed the Wind,” provides the gist of various versions of this story I heard many times while in Malawi:
William Kamkwamba was born in Malawi, a country where magic ruled and modern science was mystery. It was also a land withered by drought and hunger. But William had read about windmills, and he dreamed of building one that would bring to his small village a set of luxuries that only 2 percent of Malawians could enjoy: electricity and running water. His neighbors called him misala—crazy—but William refused to let go of his dreams. With a small pile of once-forgotten science textbooks; some scrap metal, tractor parts, and bicycle halves; and an armory of curiosity and determination, he embarked on a daring plan to forge an unlikely contraption and small miracle that would change the lives around him.

The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind is a remarkable true story about human inventiveness and its power to overcome crippling adversity. It will inspire anyone who doubts the power of one individual's ability to change his community and better the lives of those around him.55

The story of William Kamkwamba, while one of the more distant success stories I heard (several other success stories about youth who my informants knew personally are discussed for other reasons in the coming chapters), is the perfect embodiment of a youth who, despite “just staying,” was psychologically poised for a great future and, in turn, was rewarded. Surrounded by poverty, William did not have the fees to go to school, but he resisted ridicule from fellow villagers and “refused to let go of his dreams.” With his “armory of curiosity and determination” he was able to “overcome crippling adversity,” changing not only his life, but also the lives of those in his community. As youth recounted this story they remarked on how William is not only an accomplished author, but that he has traveled to South Africa and the United States to study and his “good future” is very secure.

http://books.google.mw/books/about/The_Boy_Who_Harnessed_the_Wind.html?id=hXUC7BOLpwIC&redir_esc=y (access date April 27, 2013).
Finally, philanthropic support that seems to seek girls and boys hard at work on their futures further perpetuates their hope that such a future will transpire. As one girl wrote in a letter to me, “Please mother, I come here with my hopelessness that you are going to help me so show your [sweet] heart.” Other foreigners who received similar letters of request often told me that they gave small amounts to youth, who were, as they described, “hardworking” and “earnest in their commitment to invest the money in their futures.” Further, while foreign philanthropists often felt that they did not have enough money to give everyone what they needed, they found this call to sustaining hope nearly irresistible and gave out between 200 and 500 MK (the equivalent of about 50 cents to 1.50 USD at the time) to “needy youth,” as they put it, here and there – after all, “hope is all these youth have,” one young medical intern once told me.

**Conclusion**

Identifying as “youth” in the Malawi has complex and shifting meanings and implications as is the case elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa (Cole 2007; Durham 2000; Durham 2004; Hansen 2005). While *wachinyamata*, loosely translated as “youth” is associated with long-standing expectations about increasing capacity for decision-making and increasing responsibility on the part of young people in rural villages, the English term “youth” is employed in villages to signal a change in the nature and values of young people today. Namely the new “youth” is characterized by what Piot (2010) described as having a “nostalgia for the future” (title, 20). The “modern” future rural Malawian youth imagine is concocted from the highly fragmented bits of global ideas and commodities reaching their villages, much of it transmitted through youth-targeted health and development programming burgeoning in the new democracy. It is
characterized by modern houses in which youth imagine living independent of their extended families; eating modern foods; and enjoying modern amenities, a high status among friends, good health and equality in an increasingly global world. The following chapters, by showing what youth strive for in preparation for this life, provide further insight into the particularities of umoyo wachizungu as constructed in the imaginaries of my young informants.

While Piot (2010) argues that in Togo, this orientation towards the future is accompanied by a rupture with the past, and a “refusal of tradition” (8), it emerges somewhat differently in Malawi. In this dissertation, I demonstrate several ways in which youth call upon the past and tradition to justify their actions today and show conflicted feelings about responsibilities associated with Tumbuka and Ngoni village tradition and desires for change. Nonetheless, rural Malawian youth simultaneously exhibit a similar orientation towards the future. They also show the same hopefulness that today’s development programmes, with their focus on building human potential, will deliver new futures, which Piot (2010) describes as “breathtaking” in the Togolese context (152).

This hope, however, is very precarious among rural Malawian youth. Whereas for interventions, anticipation exists in a space informed by projections and statistics that make imagined futures seem “inevitable” (Adams, et al. 2009), no one in the villages in which I worked seemed to think these futures were inevitable. Rather, youth, and some elders, engage in the anticipatory mode but often without faith that the coveted future will transpire. This is because anticipation emerges amidst remarkable uncertainty in rural villages more generally. Access to schooling and employment are highly limited and even those in school or employed feel very insecure about their next year, next term, or even the next day. Hope thus requires significant maintenance effort in ever shifting ways to keep desired futures perceptible. Both
having interventions around to continuously remind youth of their special status with regards to Malawi’s future and Christian morality, which helps engender patience as youth find themselves “just staying,” help to sustain hope. So too do success stories which circulate widely and demonstrate how determination is sometimes enough for success, and small rewards of money to “worthy” youth who demonstrate a commitment to investing in their future potentials. But if there is one thing many youth seem certain of, it is that acting as if desired futures will transpire is necessary (if not sufficient) to make them a reality.

Amidst the kind of economic insecurity that characterizes rural villages, elders frequently feel rather ambivalent about whether education and the right kinds of moral training of youth will bring about futures desired by the nation and those desired by elders in rural villages. While the contemporary national and transnational logic of progress opposes “tradition” and “the future” – “hail[ing] youth and leav[ing] elders behind” (Piot 2010: 20) – it fails to notice that elders are in fact their best assets in Malawi. Elders, too, want something new for the future and it is through elders that rural youth, who comprise the majority of the population in Malawi, must negotiate spending scant resources on things like school fees in hopes of achieving their goals. By seeing the opposition between “tradition” and “futures,” and thus “elders” and “youth,” as an inevitable cost for the salvation of the future, programmes thus engender a sort of “invisible violence” in rural villages (Bourgois 2009). Philippe Bourgois (2009) refers to this type of invisible violence as “normalized violence” or a “routinized and unconsciously legitimised” atrocity (20). Anticipatory interventions and policy in Malawi legitimise discord between elders and youth by positioning it as the only way to help youth break free of the confines of rural Malawian tradition. As in the words of one Malawian health and development programmer featured in the introduction to this dissertation, “Culturally Malawians are focused
on reproduction rather than production…Our culture deters our development.” This violence is seen as inescapable for Malawi to move forward.

I show this argument more strongly in the following chapter by exposing how youth, in the absence of structures and institutions for claiming their legal “rights” take up their “rights” against their families in rural villages. This, in turn, leads to significant intergenerational conflict, leaving elders without ability to address and manage this strife, and youth without anywhere to turn when their rights claims fail to generate desired outcomes. The elders in the following chapter give a suggestion for an alternative route to modernity that no one seems to hear.
Chapter 3: “Democracy is double-times bad”: The Death of Discipline and the Rise of Rights

“I am 76 years old,” his life story began, “and I’ve lost 7 children because of modern life…” Hunched and pushing an imaginary, motorized hand-tiller around his crumbling sitting room, the old man hesitated from his saliva-spewing, “putt-putt-putting” dramatization for only a moment to shout over the palpable rattle of the make-believe tiller, “Young Pioneers was not military…they were afraid of youth and that’s why they say it was militaristic, they were afraid of youth power.” I shifted to remove my glasses and clean the saliva from the lenses just in time for him to pick up the drama and continue furiously pushing the invisible tiller, showering me over and over again with each lap he made around my chair.

Mr. K. is Ngoni by heritage and the telltale droopy holes in his ears provided glimpses into Ngoni traditions. Like long-time dog owners who begin to resemble their pets, Mr. K. was the spitting image of his home. Their assertive state of disrepair made it difficult to imagine that he had once had so many immense and varied experiences far away from his home and this village, explained below. In fact, Mr. K. had lived elsewhere for most of his adult life, and while his impassioned opinions reflected those of other village elders, his experiences instilled in him a sense of responsibility for guiding policy and programming to a better path for youth than he felt had been ushered in by democracy in Malawi. This responsibility manifested itself in Mr. K.’s production of endless, hand-written documents on youth policy and hours upon hours of sharing his ideas with me. What Malawian youth need, according to Mr. K., are discipline and dignity, the latter of which he felt might well come in the form of motorized tillers. The best route to
future prosperity for youth and their families, according to Mr. K., was through modern agriculture.

Youth discipline and dignity have been eroded and largely lost over the past 20 years, according to accounts of elders like Mr. K., while the proportion of youth in Malawi has skyrocketed. Mr. K. believes that since the democratic transition in 1994, the fear international donors, national politicians, and health programme staff have of youth power has caused a kind of collective paralysis; rather than empowering youth with economic opportunities in rural areas, their programmes are exclusively discursive in nature, or as Piot (2010: 147) has put it, “striking in their vagueness and lack of specificity,” focused on targeting individual attitudes and behaviours rather than providing agricultural/appropriate training and opportunities. Mr. K. explains:

Youth have expectations that need to be fulfilled – like finding a job after they finish school. Fulfilling these activities could be NGOs or missionaries or the government. I will give 10 acres of land to such a program [to encourage them]… Not these, AIDS, AIDS, talking and talking about . . . you know, they [youth] will not have AIDS if they are working so they [boys] will be tired and can’t be looking for girls. I said, [to my nephew who works with youth programming], train them in skills. But those who direct [him] don’t know, so they don’t direct.

In other words, the natural resources necessary for viable agricultural livelihoods are available – Mr. K. and others are willing to gift land to any NGO willing to provide the training youth need to take advantage of these resources – but youth programme directors, who themselves are bound by donor interests in behaviour-change programming for youth, take little interest in what Mr. K. has to offer. Rather, programme emphasis is on “individual responsibility and initiative (Englund 2006; Bornstein and Redfield 2011) – with the onus on individuals to discipline themselves”
(Piot 2010: 160), even when it comes to HIV/AIDS. For Mr. K., however, all this “talking, talking” without organized activities to keep idle youth physically and mentally occupied, actually puts youth at higher risk of the virus. Echoing Mr. K.’s sentiments, another village elder asked me to help fill this gap in training and economic opportunity in rural areas:

Please, [if] you can, ask your government [to help] so these young ones can be doing [something]. They should be trained in laying chickens. This is good so they can marry and support their wives. But capital to buy chickens and pigs is a problem. If at home you have friends who can support him [pointing to the boy he identified as an orphan under his care] to take a course [in chicken laying] I can be very grateful.

According to these elders, as Durham (2004; 2005b) has also noted in Botswana, youth have gone from “just staying” in rural villages to “just playing” in contemporary youth-targeted initiatives. These elders ask for real opportunities for youth to be educated in topics relevant to the rural Malawian context and which simultaneously, as the above quote also demonstrates, reproduce social values of marriage in the village and male breadwinning.

The result is a collective nostalgia on the part of elders for the first president of the independent Malawi, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda and the key tenets of his regime – discipline, hard work and unity. Banda’s Malawi Young Pioneers Programme (MYP) provided agricultural training to youth, albeit together with forced indoctrination and loyalty to the autocratic regime. A significant political ideological shift from discipline to human rights or “freedom,” as it is often translated and interpreted (Englund 2006a), accompanied the democratic transition in 1994, and the old agricultural training gave way to contemporary behaviour-change and human rights programming, which elders feel provides little real opportunity for youth and in certain ways pits them against their families (Englund 2006a). The convergence of this political shift with other factors—such as the declining rural economy and increasing prevalence of HIV/AIDS—leads to
significant intergenerational conflict, even as youth and elders have the same hopes in new prospects for the future. The construction of the human rights discourse in Malawi gives ordinary people few opportunities to operationalise it outside of the home. As youth, instead, claim their rights highly individualistically with respect to their elders (Englund 2006a), elders feel that their abilities to discipline youth are eroded, leaving youth with little guidance and dwindling respect. What elders appear to fear most is their loss of control over whether youth’s quest for prosperous futures coexists with proper social reproduction according to rural village custom. The corollary of programmatic focus on youth for Malawi’s future is, as Piot (2010) has pointed out, “an implicit abandonment of Africa’s past and its over-thirty generation” (147). Whereas programmes seem to ignore the impact on elders of youth “empowerment” through education and employment away from their natal households, this chapter shows how Malawian elders are responding.

The feelings of frustration among elders stemming from the widespread dissemination of a particular interpretation of human rights in this particular historical, political, economic and cultural context result from two factors: 1) the concept of “rights” has become associated with globalism, freedom, democracy and modernity, which makes it extremely powerful and 2) youth today, unlike those just 20 years ago, appear to have the freedom, discursive tools, ideological justifications and financial capacity, however limited, to take up their “right to look nice.” This chapter will show how the human rights discourse, in the context of subsistence poverty and eroded discipline, has become discursively elided by other markers of modernity – especially consumerism – so that aspirations for things of umoyo wachizungu quickly become the “right” or “freedom” to behave in ways that will enable them to obtain desired things. For example, youth often cited their “rights” to drink alcohol, to wear the clothing elders deem immoral, or to choose
boyfriends/girlfriends without the advice of or intervention by elders. Youths’ nearly exclusive monopoly on rights discourse, and on the financial resources to put “rights” to work in rural villages, in turn further appears to damage relations between young people and their elders.

**Anthropologies of Human Rights**

The ascendancy of human rights discourses and programming since the democratic transition in Malawi reflects their trajectory across much of the African continent; their rapid emergence in these contexts, and ubiquity in political rhetoric around the world, has spawned an emerging scholarship of human rights. This follows a rather ambiguous history between anthropology and human rights. After anthropologist Melville Herskovits (1947) refused to legitimate what, the following year, became the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) on several grounds – including that anthropology finds moral and cultural systems to vary extensively, and, as such, the universality of the human rights is incompatible with anthropology’s commitment to cultural relativism (Goodale 2006) – anthropologists largely avoided engagement with human rights. Goodale (2006) has argued that calls by Ellen Messer (1993) and then by Carole Nagengast and Terrence Turner (1997) for anthropology to engage in an applied, or “emancipatory” anthropology of human rights – to “use their knowledge of specific cultural processes and meanings…to reinforce specific projects for social change, to help prevent further encroachments against particular marginalized populations” – was seminal to anthropologists’ re-thinking of their relationship with human rights (Goodale 2006: 3). It was not until the mid-1990’s, however, that anthropologists had begun to take an ethnographic
interest in human rights, paying attention to the “empirical, contextual analyses of specific rights struggles” (Cowan, et al. 2001b:21; Goodale 2006; Goodale, et al. 2006).

Recent critiques of human rights have drawn our attention to the ways in which human rights comprise part of the toolkit for governmental power and, in particular, serve to reinforce neoliberal, capitalist forms (Brown 2004; Englund 2006a; Golder 2013; Merry 2005). As rights discourses trickle down to the most micro-levels of societies, however, they often take on new meaning as people take-up, employ and resist the discourses, sometimes in ways that have positive effects. As Wilson and Mitchell (2003) put it in the introduction to their edited volume, “Human Rights in Global Perspective: Anthropological Studies of Rights, Claims and Entitlements” human rights have a “social life” (1). The papers in this and Cowan, et al.’s (2001a) edited volume, “Culture and Rights: Anthropological Perspectives,” show how the “universal” rights are employed differently in different contexts and for different ends. Sally Engle Merry (2005) similarly notes in her book on transnational networks of human rights and the regulation of violence against women in various parts of the world (she draws on examples from India, Fiji, Hong Kong, China and Hawaii), human rights are most often adopted, in adapted form, rather than imposed. For this to happen, however, human rights must be “remade in the vernacular” (1). Englund (2006b) has shown that in Malawi, local staff persons for NGOs often play a critical role in the initial translation process, and then further adaptation occurs as communities and individual subjects reframe and resist the discourse.

My approach is to explore in detail how human rights functions as a trope in rural Malawi, contributing understanding the social forms that proliferate from the sometimes fecund site of the human rights discourse as it is taken up and made local in Malawi. I highlight how youth, as the main targets of, and the most deeply enamoured by, the human rights rhetoric in
Malawi, assume their “freedoms” in their homes and villages, providing an example of how rights are “spectacularly turned on their head” (Hunter 2010: 9). In this context, the rights rhetoric combines with other factors to give hope for something new, contributing to the new temporal orientations to the future, discussed in the previous chapter. It also inverts intergenerational power dynamics, empowering youth for better or for worse where elders are ill-equipped to challenge the primacy of “rights”.

**From Discipline to Rights**

Mr. K. has a reputation for being a curmudgeon. Whereas fellow villagers, particularly youth, cut him a wide berth on account of his assertive, rapid, “too much talkativeness,” about all the things he felt needed changing in Malawi, this is precisely what drew me to him. Normally confronted with a timidity that required much time, patience and creative probing during interviews, I found it a relief to be able to show up and be told about Malawian history and politics from his perspective until my hand was aching from my mad note-taking and I began to look for a way out.

This man, who initially approached me with much caution, embraced me as a daughter and his student about half way through my research, eager to share his wisdom and to mould an accomplice. After our first few sessions he recalled a conversation he had with his son about me, “I grew up with Banda [that is, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, Malawi’s 30-year dictator, from independence in 1964 to the first democratic elections in 1994], and we learned to be very cautious about who we speak to and about what. I do not like to go [speak to someone] until I am very prepared. I said to [my son], ‘We like Lauren, but we need to know more’.” I was never
allowed to record our conversations, but on the day that Mr. K. professed readiness to share openly with me, I picked up my red notebook and my blue ballpoint pen and began taking notes. As a self-proclaimed “expert on youth development” and the “only living memory” of the Malawi Young Pioneer Programme (MYP), a youth development initiative established during Banda’s rule, Mr. K. soon saw me as a potential protégé. “I have been back in this village for 26 years. I was dismissed from my employment [with MYP] in 1982. But I have plans. I care about the youth,” he told me. “I am now ready to give my knowledge so I am ready to go to heaven at any time,” he explained.

The stories and opinions Mr. K. proceeded to share with me help to contextualize the contemporary obsession with human rights in Malawi, by exemplifying just how different this is from the very aggressive governmental approach to youth that preceded it. This rapid shift from a focus on discipline for youth to freedom and human rights is one of several factors that intersect to make the particular interpretation and application of rights visible among rural Malawian youth today.

Mr. K.’s mission was to convince the president at the time, Bingu wa Mutharika, to “empower youth.” As a political dissident, however, he was banished to his rural village, from which his only method of fighting was to write policy documents intended to guide the formation of a national youth service, not unlike the early days of the Malawi Young Pioneers Programme (MYP). “In the city, I would be killed,” he explained. It was his hope that I would make his words fly from the village to state offices in the capital and onward to foreign governments and friends.
Born on the earthen floor of a home next door to the one he now occupies, Mr. K.’s story began long before his mother folded like an accordion to the ground, let out a long, low croak and pulled him from between her legs. Rather than cry, he started talking politics - at least this is the birth story his granddaughter, Emma, whispers to her friends, showing her allegiance with their skepticism of this man with “too much talkativeness.” Mr. K.’s struggle for youth is one in a long history of struggles to captivate young, unmarried men and women in Malawi and usurp their power. In the late 1800’s it was the Catholic, Presbyterian and Anglican missionaries who vied for control over young people in the region, which in 1907 was declared a British Protectorate (van Dijk 1998; van Dijk 1999). Through the establishment of schools, the churches disseminated moral and technical training necessary for the establishment and development of the colony. The Tumbuka, the largest ethnic population in the area of my research, were the most devoted attendants to such schools in the Northern Region, the effects of which are still visible today. In the 1800’s, the Tumbuka peoples resided in scattered villages under the authority of independent village headmen. As historians Leroy Vail and Landeg White (1989) explained, the Tumbuka were a loosely organized group that was easily defeated by the Ngoni who arrived in Malawi in the mid-19th century after fleeing conflict in South Africa. Tumbuka cultural practices and tradition were actively suppressed by their conquerors: quickly the patrilocal and patrilineal kinship patterns and bridewealth payments 56 employed by the Ngoni replaced the matrilineal traditions of the Tumbuka. The Tumbuka language, however, is the prevailing language of the peoples in northern Malawi today, precisely because of the respect it received, even by conquering Ngoni, as the language of those most highly educated in the mission schools in the 19th century. The relatively high levels of education attained by the Tumbuka, Vail and White

56 While this was most commonly paid in the form of cattle, called “lobola” (Vail and White 1989) today it is frequently paid by both Tumbuka and Ngoni families in cash.
(1989) explain, occurred for several reasons. While skepticism among the Ngoni of the mission teachings led them to keep their own children at home, the Ngoni masters sent the children of their Tumbuka subordinates and slaves to the mission schools. The Tumbuka perceived the mission to be politically neutral, and thus alliance with and support from the mission schools appealed to them (Vail and White 1989). A few decades later, however, the elders in Malawi fought to re-capture control over youth from the missionaries. With youth away at boarding schools, concerns grew among elders and elites that schools were diminishing the submissiveness of young people by instilling a new cultural ideology about the backwardness of village life and by asserting a claim on youth labour (Vail and White 1989; van Dijk 1998). With independence in 1964, the young were successfully brought back under gerontocratic control and turned into “the nation’s ‘workhorse’ [and] the ‘spearhead of progress’” in agricultural communities (van Dijk 1998: 170). Mr. K. himself played a significant role in forming one of the two national youth organizations founded as a consequence, an experience that significantly influenced the means by which he felt youth should be empowered today.

In 1959, just prior to independence, Mr. K. at 27 years of age, was trained to be a teacher. At that time it was a short training programme, and so that very same year he became the headmaster of a school in the Central Region of the country and stayed there until Malawi achieved independence. Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda established the League of Malawi Youth, a political wing of the one-party state, and Malawi Young Pioneers (MYP), the latter of which, Mr. K., due to his ambitious and erudite nature, was selected to help initiate. MYP was informed largely by the Ghanaian Young Pioneers programme set up by the first president of independent Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah (1957-66) and the Israeli National Service Brigade (Phiri 2000), though also by youth programming in the US and UK, according to Mr. K. “I was transferred
and trained here [at a private school in the Northern Region] by Israelis to introduce youth programmes – civic education, young farmer’s clubs, physical education,” he counted out on his fingers. “In 1966 I was sent [to the United States] by the government, sponsored by USAID, to learn about youth development participation. I was there for 6 months of training. In 1970-71, I went to the UK for 6 months of training on physical education for schools - sponsored by the Commonwealth… after the UK I went to Israel for one month.”

Upon returning to Malawi from Israel, he first put this training to use by helping shape secondary school curricula, teaching teachers the art of “youth development.” Later, he was promoted to working with the government to expand the MYP to include “commercial development of youth” for out-of-school youth. “As part of the Youth Training Programme sustained by the Commercial Unit in Youth Training, my title was the ‘Group Personnel Manager’,” the old man explained.

MYP had a dual economic and political purpose, the first of which was underlined as the most important by Mr. K. Mobilized for national development, MYP provided agricultural and technical skills training to out-of-school youth, numbering some 10,000 each year. Unlike youth-targeted programmes elaborated by NGOs today, the MYP equipped youth with skills that are more easily translated into wages instead of equipping youth with discourse and engaging them in behavioural change. Addressing the public in Lilongwe in 1975, Banda said,

I organised the Young Pioneers so that the youth would make useful citizens of the country. I did not want our youth to roam the streets of Zomba, Blantyre, and Lilongwe,

57 In between these points, Mr. K. would throw in short experiential narratives on international travel, like his experience with airplane food, or point to the tattered page torn from an old magazine displaying an airplane on a runway in a snow-covered country and toss me a “you-know” expression that suggested he rarely found others who shared such experiences in the village.
loafing with their hands in their pockets . . . parasites leaning on their parents, depending on their parents to give them everything while they just sat and ate, doing nothing. No, they had to be taught first and foremost, discipline and respect for their elders; then respect for manual labour (Banda 1975 in Phiri 2000: 2).

Mr. K. echoed,

The major aim of youth must be to empower them economically. Must make them the driving force of economic development . . . Economic development was the major aim of Kamuzu Banda. Youth [of Banda’s time would] go to camps for 10 months to train them towards self-reliance – to empower them economically! Youth can be self-employed [in farming].”

Trained young pioneers were deployed to different areas throughout the country, where they facilitated rural development schemes. “We had [at the time of Banda] estates for tea, macadamia, rice, tobacco, coffee. Youth ran these. Once per week, whether in school or not, they would collect and finish development projects [in their communities] by themselves.” Mr. K. continued to explain that youth would identify community needs and then spend “a whole day or a week” working collaboratively to complete different tasks.

The political role of the MYP was to be exemplary supporters of Kamuzuism – “the ideology that Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, as Father and Founder of the Malawi nation, was the fount [sic] of all wisdom and always knew what was best for the nation” (Phiri 2000).

Propagating the four cornerstones of Dr. Banda’s nation-building strategy – Unity, Loyalty, Obedience, and Discipline – was an important part of this (Phiri 2000). Gradually the MYP changed from being exemplars of Kamusuism to being its enforcers: as watchdogs for public observance of the four cornerstones, they were authorized to harass and persecute those who did not conform to the autocracy. Eventually, they turned into a full-fledged military wing. Trained
in the use of small arms and intelligence gathering, they emerged as competitors to the national army and police. By 1989, MYP-trained youth “served as a ‘third security force’ that was particularly zealous at policing party meetings, markets, bus stations” (Englund 1996; Phiri 2000; van Dijk 1999). Together with the police, the some 45,000 youth trained as Young Pioneers throughout the country were a major force supporting and enabling Banda’s dictatorship and terrorism, helping to make the regime one of the most repressive in Africa (Phiri 2000). Youth were the epicentre of Banda’s repression, as van Dijk (1999) put it, “the political-leadership model, from independence in 1964 onwards, held the youth captive, in terms of both discourse and practice” (166). The notions of independence and freedom associated with the human rights movement that came suddenly at the collapse of Banda’s dictatorship – and were targeted towards youth – thus stood in stark contrast to this regime of discipline and subservience to elders.

Approaching the democratic transition, once again a struggle for youth surfaced in Malawi. Ardently supported politically and financially by Western liberal democracies at the outset, by the 1990’s pro-democracy forces backed the dismantling of the MYP (Phiri 2000). As Van Dijk (1999) points out, “suddenly the churches were able to move back again into a central position where youth was concerned; even in the most remote places youth were included in PAC [the Public Affairs Committee established by the churches which ran the multiparty campaign] programmes” (173). These church-run youth organizations were focused on civic

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58 Van Dijk (1998, 1999) points out that the “father” model often used to describe Banda’s gerontocratic control in Malawi is inaccurate. Banda, who identified with the matrilineal Chewa ethnic group predominant in central Malawi, called himself in chiChewa, the language spoken by the Chewa, “Nkhoswe Number One.” “Nkhoswe” literally means the mother’s brother in Chewa culture. According to Van Dijk (1999), “the reference to nkhoswe for the state leadership made clear the implications this model held for the structurally subservient position of the younger generation in society. On the level of national political culture the young was forced into a highly subservient role vis-à-vis local party structures dominated by elderly people” (166).
education, and trained youth were deployed to rural villages to train their elders in the benefits of democracy (van Dijk 1999).

While youth remained an important political target throughout and immediately following the democratic transition, the tools thought to equip youth to lead the future democracy—rights discourse – were very different from the tools—discipline, obedience, hard work and self-reliance – thought to lead to stability during the autocratic regime. Elders miss the discipline and respect instilled in youth by the MYP. Mr. K. said to me one day, “[Democracy] must be combined with discipline… with the 1994 multiparty [elections], discipline died. For 13 years [now] youth have been drinking kachasu [an unregulated home-brew distilled from sugarcane] and smoking. They are lost.” Like an angry parent scolding a child, Mr. K. shook his broad finger at me and continued pointedly,

Kamuzu Banda said ‘A human being is not to be brought up like a monkey. They need discipline’. In Germany when I was there the walls in the houses were white. They were not touched by one finger of a child – because of discipline.

I followed his gaze to look at the once white walls of his humble home in the village, now marred by holes, cracks, chips and many finger prints.

Rather than strategically designed to improve the health and well-being of youth, the civic education programming, according to Mr. K., suggests that national and transnational forces feared the power youth gain when they are trained and economically successful. He feels the democratic government is characterized by greed, selfishness, and wariness about programs that might actually empower youth. “Then a minister stole a lot of money and this programme closed. Malawi failed to pay the 3 million Malawian Kwacha in loans. I went back to my position as the head of Youth Training. Then I lost the job.” Mr. K. spoke of the first
democratically elected leader, Elson Bakili Muluzi, as “crafty,” meaning thievish. He said that “Muluzi disassembled the youth programme because he saw the youth saving money, and he wanted to make sure all the money went to him.” Since the democratic transition, according to Mr. K., selfishness and fear, combined with corruption and theft, have rendered youth hopeless and him jobless, and left them both “just staying.”

While Mr. K.’s self-assured assertiveness is one that Malawians generally deplore, his opinions about what he termed “this modern life” that came with the first multi-party elections – characterized by human rights, freedom and a general political neglect of agriculture and rural development – reflected those expressed by many elders in more subtle ways. The death of the disciplinary state, however, is not the only factor which has influenced elders’ ability to support and control youth. Democracy is “double-times bad” according to elders because while it abdicates government responsibility for training and disciplining youth, it simultaneously arms youth with human rights or “freedoms” in ways that undermine the authority of older generations.

**Human Rights in the Context of the Family**

During my fieldwork, human rights discourse often felt as ubiquitous as air. It was on posters in nearly every rural home and at the entrance of clinics and schools. It was featured on stickers coating bus windows and on roadside billboards. It was discussed on morning radio programmes and was the topic of a weekend insert called “Young and Free” in the most popular national newspaper. Not surprisingly, it was also a key feature of the youth-targeted
programming proliferating in rural villages since the democratic transition (also see Englund 2000).

The most common human rights poster, developed and sponsored by UNICEF, showed a child’s hand print on a blood red backdrop shout the message “STOP CHILD ABUSE: RESPECT THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN.” When I asked a group of children to draw pictures of the most important things in their lives they consistently and repeatedly reproduced these posters by tracing their own hands. 59

Figure 3.1: Child Rights Campaign: Stamp

Among political elites, the human rights campaign is perceived as progressive and modern. The sentiment that human rights are progressive finds its way into youth-targeted discourse and training programmes for volunteer, youth peer educators. As I toured a rural village with a youth peer-educator on first arriving in Malawi, I marvelled at the enormous

59 These children did not appear to be abused by their parents, as far as I could tell. Whereas I once witnessed a father hit his teenage son, and examples of physical abuse to young women by husbands abounded in rural villages, I suspect the children drawing these posters were simply reproducing an image which surrounds them. It is tempting to also read this as an expression of these children’s approval of this campaign since it can, as I discuss below, come across as meaning adults should not discipline their children, but these children were young and I am not certain that their reproduction of this image was anything more than reproducing the familiar or, perhaps drawing something they felt would be of interest to me. For many people, I am perceived as a descendent of those people who made up human rights and who helped carry them to Malawi.
packages young girls carried around the village. Baskets full of sweet potatoes, clay urns of river-water, sacks of maize kernels, even suitcases on wheels floated smoothly on the heads of young girls. I noted in my field notes, however, that my young, self-appointed tour guide frequently turned to me with a long, drawn face, shaking his head in shame that parents made their children carry heavy loads. “But now we have the right of freedom from child abuse in Malawi,” he called out to one girl to remind her parents of “ufulu wawana” (meaning “child rights”). The girl shyly and slowly twisted her eyes and package away from his piercing stare and continued on her way. Some Malawians take pride in this example of forward-thinking, heightened consciousness that child labour is a violation to the rights of children. 60

Importantly, I am speaking of these campaigns against child abuse here to demonstrate how ubiquitous the human rights discourse is in Malawi, from nationally endorsed posters to the language of programme staff. This definition of abuse, in many ways, does not perfectly map onto Malawian childrearing norms. It has been noted in several African contexts that some activities deemed to be child labour by international rights campaigns are seen as important in the proper socialization of children in Malawi. Levine (1999), for instance, discusses that in South Africa, “Farm labour organizes household economies, crystallizes gendered divisions of labour among siblings, and creates special bonds between mothers and daughters,” not to mention, some children express enjoying the work (140). I suspect that the peer educator’s disapproval of the girl carrying sweet potatoes was as much a performance for me, who he assumed would deem this abusive, than it was an expression of his beliefs.

60 Concerns about violations to child rights by child labour practices in Malawi have strengthened in response to several recent studies noting that 20.3% of children aged 5 – 14 in Malawi are engaged in economic and unpaid, household and agricultural labour, particularly harvesting and curing tobacco (NSO 2001).
In a focus group with girls aged 11 to 15 in a rural village, 9 out of the 14 participants identified as members of a local youth club. When I asked why they joined, the resounding answer was “they teach us about ufulu wawana.” One of the most prominent youth organizations in town managed youth clubs in many of the surrounding villages. “Good Future” was the club in their village to which they belonged. Each of the village clubs had a youth leader from the village who was trained in town as a peer educator. Peer education is frequently cited as the best approach for effecting change in youth sexual behaviour, based on the rationale that individual behaviour is strongly influenced by peers, that peers can more easily access groups marginalised from formal healthcare settings, and that they can more easily broach sensitive topics such as social relations and sexuality (Medley, et al. 2009). The overarching goals of the youth organization were to a) provide a “safe space” in the communities for providing HIV/AIDS information and b) to promote behaviour change among youth to prevent HIV/AIDS infection. Related goals had to do with improving reproductive health of youth and encouraging youth engagement in national development. The organization supports a diverse range of activities towards achieving these goals, including HIV testing and counselling services, sports activities, drama, music and videos. Its primary function, however, is to provide peer education training so that messages about appropriate behaviour for protection from HIV/AIDS reach youth in remote villages. The goals of peer educators, an organization leader explained, were to “find out the problems of rural youth, promote positive behaviour change among youth, and to establish more youth clubs.” Civic education on human rights is one of the key mechanisms through which youth education, engagement and health are thought to be encouraged by this programme.

During a youth advocacy workshop I hosted in collaboration with PEERS, a working group identified numerous rights and associated responsibilities of youth (listed in Figure 3.2).
While these reflected the UN-sanctioned entitlements, this is not how the rights discourse is taken up locally. Youth tended to employ the rights rhetoric in ways that implied individual rather than collective rights.

Figure 3.2: List of youth-relevant rights during a Rural Youth Advocacy Event, 2008

1. Right to education without fear.
   Responsibility to study, to find a place to stay, to attend classes, to obey school rules.

2. Right to voice their concerns and to be heard.
   Responsibility to encourage openness of others, differentiate fear and respect, taking part in activities.

3. Right to employment.
   Responsibility to look for and apply to jobs, be prepared, look for a loan and pay back loans, to know accounts, and to be disciplined about money.

4. Right to vote.
   Responsibility to be registered and take care of cards, obey laws and participant in voting.

5. Right to good, healthy life.
   Responsibility to protect oneself from infectious diseases, practice good hygiene, do not take drugs excessive alcohol, eat a balanced diet, drink safe water, and protect oneself from malaria mosquitoes.

6. Right to be raised by their parents and extended families.
   Responsibility to try to accept given situations, and to try not to judge caregivers.

7. Right to marry at 18 plus. Right to marry whomever they choose and when they choose.
   Responsibility to be sure that you are mature, to know that you can handle family issues, to know who you are marrying, and to know what marriage is.

8. Right to food and to receive fertilizer coupons.
   Responsibility to work hard in gardens and to ask for coupons.
Every “right” listed by the young girls in the focus group, in contrast, was either something they could assert in the context of their family, or something their parents might list as their familial responsibilities: right to listen to parents, sweep the compound, carry water, cook nsima, cook *chicondumoyo*[^61] with bananas, have tea before going to school, sit together with friends, tell a friend a secret, eat together with friends, prepare water for their parents to bathe and the rights to read and to go to school. It struck me that a right to schooling was perhaps the only one listed by these girls that overlapped with the legal rights of children and youth in Malawi. This deployment of “rights” as responsibilities - their unquestioning absorption of their parents’ interpretation, or reordering, of the rights discourse – is an indication that this group of young girls are still children. Older youth, whose use of the rights discourse is equally surprising, understand rights very differently. As will be discussed further below, a key feature of becoming a *chinyamata*,[^62] the Tumbuka term for “youth,” is the tendency towards using the rights rhetoric to assert freedom from their parents, tradition and the village, rather than rights to listen to parents. In other words, the rights discourse is appropriated at a certain age and is then deployed to argue for a wide range of freedoms—from individual mobility to choice of partner, to choice of personal appearance or style.


[^61]: A type of bread/cake made from corn flour, *chicondumoyo* literally means, “bread of life.”
[^62]: *Wachinyamata* is the plural form of this word meaning “youth” or “youthful ones.”
[^63]: *Ufulu* is a Chichewa word. ChiChewa, a Bantu language also known as Chinyanga, is the national language in Malawi. The same word is used in chiTumbuka to mean “right” and “freedom.”
that whereas in Zambia human rights investments focused on facilitating networks of people who can support rights claims, in Malawi national and international assumptions about the ignorance of a largely illiterate population led to tireless investment in civic education on the abstract notion of human rights. One consequence to this has been limited investment in developing the networks and institutions through which one can claim rights (Englund 2006a). Thus, human rights have little legal leverage in Malawi, giving them a somewhat illusory quality, despite the pervasive discourse that would suggest otherwise.

Cheney (2007) found similar paradoxes about human rights in her research in Uganda. There she shows how the word *ddembe*, used for “rights,” is most closely translated to mean, “you are free to do what you want” (Cheney 2007: 60). The Ugandan parents she worked with frequently felt resentful about “what they have come to see as foreign impositions that overturn traditional social hierarchy in destructive ways: when children have *ddembe*, they start to disobey their elders” (ibid 60).

As is the case in Uganda, while the human rights discourse ushered in by the democratic transition in Malawi in the early 1990s provides very few resources for claims to entitlements (Englund 2006a), it did free youth, conceptually, to assert their individual right to diverge from tradition and culture, as well as familial, political, and religious allegiances. This, in turn, challenges elders’ wisdom based on experience with the past and their authority. Elders often absolved youth of direct responsibility for challenging their authority implying that youth, as an

\[64\] Englund (2006b) argues that this condescending assumption emerged, at least in part, from a report based on a study conducted by the Human Rights Resource Centre/Danish Centre for Human Rights, which “rather than being content to list the empirical results from a survey on Malawians’ awareness of democratic rights, [speculated] on their intellectual capacities to gauge the idea of human rights in the first place” (127).

\[65\] Youth in particular, for they are the most targeted and most enchanted by the possibilities encapsulated in the rights rhetoric (Englund 2006a).
indication of their growing maturity or youthfulness, naturally challenge elders and are also susceptible or adaptable to new ideas.

What frustrated elders, rather, was democracy. Democracy carried with it a youth-focused civic education on rights as freedoms that youth inevitably use against their parents. In other words, human rights as disseminated and understood have brought in a new set of attitudes and assumptions among youth about what is normative and/or permissible behaviour. In a focus group discussion with 5 village headmen, one man asserted, “Democracy is bad, times two! Very bad. Because these children do not respect elders and are not giving way to the families.” Another chief added, “Democracy brings civic education. They say ‘I can do everything’, not knowing if it is good or bad, just because of this freedom.” When I asked other elders about this disrespect they also said, “[Disrespect is] because of the referendum whereby they said each and everyone has their rights!” [female elder]. The result is that youth assert their “right” not to listen to elders.

“Rudeness [is due to] lack of guidance from parents and the “freedom” of today. Now, youth say they have the ‘right of freedom.’ ‘I can do everything, whatever I want,’” opines a male elder. His peer, upon overhearing this last comment, elaborated, “Freedom brings a lot of problems. When parents send a son or daughter to someone with a message they fail to deliver it. Later, we meet and they say ‘I have the right of freedom.’” These two men, continuing the discussion together, reasoned “Democracy can be good to one who knows the meaning. It can be bad to one who doesn’t know the meaning.” Examples of good applications of rights are, they explained, “freedom of making things which are profitable, like for those who have cassava gardens and support their life” and “freedom of education.” During an afternoon I spent with a group of elderly men in a village bar I similarly learned,
Democracy has destroyed our country in Malawi. I’m telling you. When you try to chat with boys they say, ‘ah, we have democracy now’. I don’t mean democracy is bad. It is good, very good, but in America. It’s [democracy is] human rights [implying that it is little besides human rights]. Here, the youth, they do what they want; they say it is their right. Some do what they want and even if they are wrong they say ‘it is my right’. Human rights give power to a person, no matter old, young, doesn’t matter.

This “power” to assert human rights or “freedom” in the context of the family is afforded to youth due to several overlapping circumstances. In some cases, despite the absence of institutions for supporting rights claims, the ability of elders to discipline youth in the household was affected by youth threats to file legal claims for their right to freedom from abuse. Some parents felt they were unable to control children or youth because the threat of rights reprisal prevents them from being able to physically discipline their children. A traditional leader explained, “They [youth programmes/clubs] are bad. Their activities are bad. They [youth] learn these things in youth clubs and some come home and say if you beat me I will sue you!” Other elders had similar comments, explaining,

[Today there is a] misunderstanding between parents and children and poor guidance of parents. Children are rude. They do not give respect to their parents. In the past, parents would beat children and girls and boys were more respectful to the elders. Now, because of democracy, … [Dilemma, a youth leader from one of the local youth clubs interjected, uncomfortable with the distaste his elder was exposing for democracy, but the elder ignored him, forging on…] with democracy in 1994, they [youth] think of doing good or bad. If you beat children they threaten to go to a human rights organization.

Clearly, the older generation is both exasperated with and intimidated by the rights discourse, and they feel incapable of disciplining children in the ways they think are necessary for children’s proper development into mature adults. By prioritising youth over elders, anticipatory
interventions further chip away at elders' authority by damaging their confidence in confronting “proud and boastful” girls and boys.

Youth at Home in the “Field:” Civic education, Youth Status and the Damage to Discipline

One of the reasons youth are able to employ rights discourse somewhat successfully in confrontations with parents is that youth engagement in civic education and health research imbues youth with a certain status in comparison to other villagers. Dilemma, Mr. K.’s son, was employed by the town hospital as a youth coordinator. As I approached Dilemma one of my first days at the hospital in town and asked what he had been up to that day, he said, “I was in the ‘field’.” I assumed he meant an agricultural field. In this instance, however, Dilemma was not referring to his agricultural fields. Later, I learned he had spent the day in his home village where he lives with his wife, two children, father, uncles and grandparents, but was not engaged in farming. Rural youth in northern Malawi who are actively involved in youth-targeted health programmes often refer to their homes as “the field.” This is because their homes have become “the field” for civic education, health (and anthropological!) research. Newly attuned to this use of “field,” I heard hospital staff, youth programme staff and peer educators alike use the term almost daily.

The practical knowledge of and discursive fluency in human rights is largely confined to youthful populations in rural villages, many of whom speak English and participate in human rights programming in their villages and nearby towns. The bulk of education on human rights is transmitted back to rural villages by youth volunteers whose training in human rights discourse
arms them with the language, networks and confidence that empower them vis-à-vis their families. Youth workers, youth peer educators, and some club participants are engaged in the project of educating their peers and sometimes their elders about human rights, the risks of HIV/AIDS, and appropriate sexual and moral behaviour for reducing risk. One of the most significant consequences of this emphasis on educating youth about rights discourse is that it affords them a status beyond reproach by elders.

Like Englund’s (2006b) findings with a human rights organization in central Malawi, my observations also showed that certain individual characteristics emphasized in educator trainings to help build the self-esteem of the peer educators simultaneously created new status markers that differentiated youth volunteers from their communities. Since English is the predominant language of civic education, English-language proficiency was among the most important of these markers. In addition, cleanliness and smartness of dress were also emphasized (Englund 2006b). While youth dramas integrated vidokoni or traditional folktales into their acts, other youth appropriated and re-interpreted old songs, dance and traditional costumes to “attract elders with something familiar,” but simultaneously teach them something new (see Figure 3.3). Elders have become part of youths’ “field” of research and experimentation on how best to edify their families and neighbours in modernity. This positions elders as inferior or backwards and in need of being educated, modernized, and developed and thereby reverses structural relationships between young and old in Malawian villages. Youth emerge as the more knowledgeable, or what elders call “boastful.”

66 Importantly, Englund (2006b) notes how the links between formal education, personal hygiene and status are not new but rather are a continuation of the legacy of colonial civilizing missions in Malawi as in many other parts of Africa.
Figure 3.3: Peer educators performing an old song appropriated for educating village elders about HIV/AIDS

These youth, elders complain, are too proud (kujitemwa). “[Youth today] are boastful [kunyada], they may even have nothing [no money].” According to one 80-year-old man, in the face of this pride, parents today feel shy to advise young girls in particular.

When she [his granddaughter] does not listen then we know that everywhere she will go, there will be problems because …to me as a parent I have failed, I have failed to talk…whatever I say, she doesn’t listen, then how is she going to listen there [to her husband when she marries]? Eeh? Aaah, then her’s [her result] is death…

In other words, this man is ashamed that parents do not discipline their children. According to him, parents should accept at least partial blame for the challenges undisciplined children face as they grow. In particular, this man was commenting on his son whom he blamed for his granddaughter’s death from AIDS this year. While, like other elders, he finds girls today to be too proud to listen to the advice of their elders, he also lamented that his son had not put forth more effort to protect his child.

The perceived erosion of elders’ authority is yet further exacerbated by significant economic decline, which means that not only are parents robbed of the “stick” they would like to
wield against wayward children, but also the “carrot” that might entice obedience and respect from youth.

**Economic Decline, HIV, and the Erosion of Elders’ Authority**

The rise of human rights discourse, which pits youth against their families, has been accompanied by diminishing socio-economic well-being among the rural poor since the 1980’s, seriously limiting elders’ ability to command youths’ respect or to help youth to achieve financial security. As noted in the previous chapter, the hunger and desperation in rural villages leaves some villagers feeling that they are “no longer a person…no longer a human.” This level of poverty leaves elders with little power to offer alternatives to youth seeking modern, urban careers far from their elders.

Changes in family structure due to HIV/AIDS, combined with poverty, influence behavioural discipline in rural households. More and more children are living with sick parents or with grandparents, as the middle generations are hollowed out by HIV/AIDS. The multiple “suffer” photos by both boys and girls of elders for whom they felt responsible but for whom they were often unable to provide, illustrate these circumstances.

**Figure 3.4: “Suffer” photographs of grandparents for whom youth feel responsible**
For example, the photographers explaining these photos said, “She is too old to work. She was farming in the [past], but since 2008 she didn’t do anything…me and my young sisters we grow maize. One acre, one acre of maize” (boy, 15 years old). “[I took this photo because] it makes me suffer…this is my father’s bedroom, and it has a single bed which he shares with my brother, and he has no blankets or a mat[tress] under the bed… my sister’s husband don’t want to help my father, and we didn’t have enough fertilizer, and my father has no job” (boy, 19 years old). One 21-year-old girl who photographed both of her grandparents (below) said, “I feel pity with him. It sticks to my heart. When I took this snap, my grandmother was out begging for salt.”

As one girl said succinctly, living with grandparents, “is not very fine, just there is no [choice] because old people are the only people we remain with.”

While the role of grandmothers in caring for children in the context of HIV/AIDS is well-established, youth showed how this dynamic of care is often reversed as grandparents become too elderly to work or provide for themselves and others. Their photos affirmed the findings of the food security survey I carried out, which showed that girls living with their grandparents more frequently reported eating fewer meals because of food shortages (75%), and both boys and girls who live with grandparents scored significantly higher on the Insufficient Food Intake
Score (4.96 vs. 3.34). Boys and girls living with one or both grandparents worry about food insufficiency (54.6%) significantly more often than youth staying with biological parents (32.3%). Since grandparents cannot provide for youth, youth see it as their responsibility to provide for them.

The ability to provide for youth is not the only thing grandparents feel they are lacking. They also lack the authoritative power to make sure these children behave and go to school. As I was told repeatedly, in Malawi, whereas parents are to be feared, grandparents conventionally cannot discipline youth. Grandparents effectively become youth again, as they become partially dependent. “They are like brothers and sisters to youth.” That is why if a girl is pregnant, she would first tell her grandmother, not her parents, because a grandmother cannot scold her. As Prospect noted, elderly people “cannot become angry.” Prospect ponders the potential future effects of children caring for grandparents.

Yah, so it becomes difficult to me and there… I can say that I feel pains when I am seeing my community especially my village there. Just imagine these young people – they don’t want even to go to school, so just imagine, so how could the village be developed while these young people don’t want to go to school… so it pains me so much I don’t know even. They don’t want to bath or be doing what [or to do anything].

The situation of severe poverty in households in which a grandparent is the primary caregiver further diminishes respect and discipline.

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67 Further research on gendered consumption patterns of youth compared to relation to caregiver is needed during seasons of food security, when such patterns are likely to be more visible than during periods of significant food shortages.
Consuming Freedoms

Just as subsistence poverty plays a role in weakening elders’ authority in rural villages, so too does reliance on money in villages diminish discipline. This occurs in two stages. First, poverty in rural villages today means both limited access to fertilizers, employment, and money, and greater reliance on purchased, often food-based commodities (Manda 2005). Youths’ greater access to money today, in turn, enables the discursive use of “freedom” by youth in rural households. During the same focus group with village headmen discussed above, while the men said that “democracy is bad times two” precisely because “it brings civic education” and ideological “freedom” to youth, they also associated “freedom” with access to money. These respected elders elaborated that, “[Youth today] have more freedom to do things now [because they have money]. We didn’t have money when we were young.” Similarly, during interviews both men and women explained in similar ways that,

In the past money was – it was not there. They [young people] had no way of finding some money, but as of now there is much money... At first, when we were young, we didn’t have freedom of doing things on our own. There were not ways of finding money on our own.

Today, not only is there money, but youth have more money than elders because they have relatively greater ability to engage in paid labour. Youth find money by “growing cassava,” “making bricks and selling [them],” “chipping” rock at a local quarry, and perhaps most importantly, “producing tobacco,”68 the headmen explained. While growing, harvesting and curing tobacco is extremely labour-intensive, tobacco also requires significant expensive

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68 Prior to 1990, tobacco production was restricted to estate farms predominantly in the Southern Region; in 1996 restrictions were lifted and smallholders were permitted to grow and sell tobacco at auction. Prior to these changes, the opportunities for farmers to make money were highly limited.
chemical inputs, the cash for which young men and some young women obtain through other, labour-intensive jobs in villages, such as rock-chipping and brick-making. The money they earn helps to support their deployment of rights discourse.

While elders often question what youth are willing to trade for very small amounts of money, the basic necessity of it in a village today simultaneously makes elders’ criticisms difficult to defend. Some elders expressed frustration with young peoples’ attraction to money today, saying,

[In the past] there was no money. There was no money (laughs). We should just say that they had no money. We should give a reason. The reason is that even those who had money, even if they gave it to the girl child [in the past] she was not taking it because girls were respecting themselves. [They would ask themselves,] ‘Why has he given me [this money]?’ [Laughing]. Nowadays they are just rushing to receive it. The big deal is money [Mary, 78].

According to this woman, money has become so attractive that girls are willing to take money from men, who will likely demand sex in return, without thinking about these consequences. Other elders commented that this, in turn, can put girls at risk of HIV/AIDS. For Mr. K., however, the need for money is hardly the problem, as this is the way of the modern world; it is the collective refusal by the government and transnational programming to help rural Malawians access money that makes him furious. He shouted with such fury it lifted both of us out of our chairs:

It’s likely my children died of AIDS! It spreads as a question of poverty because [youth] are wanting money. They [HIV/AIDS projects] are not doing enough because they are not empowering the youth economically. Although they are doing this programme [AIDS
education and behaviour change], it is not empowering youth. Most have finished school. Poor men, they can’t make decisions.

Mr. K.’s explanation of how seven of his children died, questions the imbalance between the ideological freedom to want in Malawi and the lack of money to enable freedom to act on those desires, particularly in today’s context where money is necessary for survival in rural villages. Of course, poor youth are making decisions, though not often ones their elders agree with. In this quote it is clear that at least some elders uphold the idea that empowerment of youth is important. As noted in the previous chapter, elders want youth to work towards a better future. What they bemoan, as noted above, are the effects of youth empowerment discourses when they encourage young people to invoke their “rights” against elders’ authority or in ways that neglect obligations to extended family.

One rendering of this imbalance between the freedom to want and the lack of money to enable freedom to act in ways thought to make desires a reality is a sort of discursive elision or blurring which takes place between the rights discourse and other markers of modernity. These markers of modernity include the consumption of beer and clothing, but also individualism, in particular in sexual and marital relations. Aspirations for things of umoyo wachizungu become, for some young people, the freedom to pursue those things, which then become the “right” to behave in ways that will enable them to obtain desired things. Two examples, one from each gender, illustrate how rights become discursively elided into other markers of modernity – especially consumerism.

Boys and young men would sometimes assert their “right” to BMW, a desire I did not fully appreciate until the dry day that a BMW was chased by a thick cloud of red dust through the village. It undoubtedly carried a donor who wanted to see the fruits of his investment through
the tinted windows of his air-conditioned vehicle. The BMW slowed to take a better look at the group of children hanging around me that day, allowing us a good look at our own reflections in its shiny black coat. One boy, whose English was remarkable for his age, suddenly screeched with excitement, “It’s the car of the Ngoni people, BMW – Beer, Meat, Women.” While B, M, and W were repeatedly associated with Ngoni culture by many Malawians, in reality alcohol and polygamous relations were characteristic of both Ngoni and Tumbuka masculinity. Many boys and young men asserted their “right” to identify with such markers of masculinity. This is an application of the rights discourse of which some elders seem to approve.

When I asked Redwood, a 22-year-old peer educator who spent much of his time teaching his peers in his home village how to, in his words, “prevent from destroying their futures” to explain what most makes him “suffer,” he drew on a photograph of a group of children and one adult in a room in the village, passing spirits. He explained that he is deeply saddened by all the parents who not only fail to discipline their children, but who encourage them to drink.

R: I am very sad with this one [pointing to an older man in a white jacket in the photo]. He is a parent but he is encouraging these young ones to drink beer. He is **encouraging** these younger ones [shaking his head in disapproval]. I know that they have not any goal for their future.

L: Hmm, why do you think they do this?

R: Because of sometimes lack of messages - lack of messages about the dangers of beer of drinking beer, lack of information about the dangers.

L: What about their own parents? Do they have their parents?

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69 As the children chased the car that simultaneously represented their heritage in “BMW” and also their desired futures characterized by material goods and consumer lifestyles, it sped up and lost them in a cloud of their eroding top soil.
R: They have them, yes, but their parents, they are not shouting to them [disciplining them].

L: Why is that?

R: Aaah [shaking his head] they [the youth] are saying that drinking beer is our culture. Drinking beer is our right. I am trying to encourage my chief [village headman] to discourage these younger ones so that they can continue in education.

Another reason parents may support alcohol consumption by youth, as the one adult did in Redwood’s photo, is that drinking is part of dominant masculinity in this context. While it may not traditionally be associated with youth, boys’ interest in alcohol can be interpreted as them mimicking proper male behaviour. A story prepared by a young man in preparation for a youth advocacy event exemplifies this. He wrote his story in an effort to explain his frustration with general sentiments that boys who drink are “bad” and often not accepted as participants in youth clubs. He entitled his story, “Joys of Drinking.”

Some of the things are taken as bad things to some, but if you can put much effort to understand it, you will discover it as something joyful. Drinking beer is something that brings joy like to the people of Ngoni tribe. They take beer as part of their food. When they take beer they get together, chat, sharing ideas, sharing their joys and suffering and finding solutions to some of their difficult problems. Sometimes when they are in good seasons, they prepare their own local type of beer and then get together and have fun. Beer drinking as of Ngoni tribe is associated with many things that brings joy to many people. There are things like eating, ie: mainly eating good foods like meat, rice, fish, usipa etc. which [are] prepared perfectly. It is also associated with dancing to very good tunes of music. You get associated with many friends that brings joy to me also. So drinking beer brings joy to me. When I am drunk I sleep well.

This sentiment aligns some youths’ claims to their right to drink with socially acceptable forms of masculinity and is sometimes supported by elders; though, this is not always the case.
The type of drinking youth do is frequently different from that of elder Ngoni men. Young men and boys today tend to desire commercial alcohols, purchased and consumed in bars in town, where girls sometimes also drink. A particular status that separates youth from their family and culture is implied by the conspicuous consumption of commercial alcohol. Nkwhima, aged 17, who, like Redwood, said that what most makes him suffer is alcoholism by youth, explained that boys drink mostly commercial, especially bottled beers.

Many young people drinks liquor – [well] not really many, but [of those who do] they want this beer [as opposed to home-brewed alcohol] because when they drink they feel like bosses because this beer is expensive and bought by people who are rich, and so when they are also drinking this beer they feel like they are rich – people who have money.

Thus, while asserting one’s “right to drink beer” might be interpreted as an assertion to one’s “right to be Ngoni,” it is sometimes also an assertion of one’s right to consume expensive commodities and feel rich. Like Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984) petty bourgeois, youth, who lack sufficient means to obtain the lifestyle of umoyo wachizungu embrace “popularized aesthetic forms and commit themselves to activities intended to achieve cultural self-betterment” (Weininger 2005: 94). Whereas youth may have only a little more money than their elders in rural villages, they distinguish themselves from elders by flaunting what money they have through the conspicuous consumption of modern commodities. By making rights-based claims to do so, youth index their knowledge of and competence in contemporary nationalist rhetoric or their “cultural capital” Bourdieu (1984), further establishing their superior social standing relative to their parents. Whereas Pierre Bourdieu (1986) saw the family and the school as being the most important sources for the development of “cultural capital,” in this context where many youth do not go to school and where relationships with their families are increasingly distanced by youths’ disinterest in village “tradition,” I argue that the youth-targeted programmes, and
national, political rhetoric as interpreted and made available through various sources of media, plays the greatest role in determining youths’ “cultural capital.” This is what many elders disapprove of – the ways in which markers of masculinity that are encouraged by parents and grandparents in rural Malawian villages, like drinking beer, for example, change as boys and young men assert their right to identify with them in ways that distinguish them from their elders and mark individualist, modern consumption in a way that seems to elders to reject rather than perpetuate “tradition.”

A very similar deployment of the rights discourse is visible among girls when it comes to dress and clothing styles the older generation disapproves of, though its obvious departure from tradition afforded it less freedom from critique than boys’ drinking. It thus took form more in discourse than in practice, at least in ways visible to elders. When girls actually wore the clothing they claimed was their “right,” it caused quite a stir.

When Ellis was 17 years old and started boarding at the public secondary school in town, I accompanied her on her first visit home to “our” family in the village. When we arrived she greeted her father as expected, on her knees, eyes cast to the ground, and excitedly shared in the typical work and chatter of the family, carrying water, cooking nsima, etc. These things were slightly more difficult in her new heeled shoes, however. Although I did not notice anyone say anything directly to Ellis, in the background whispers about the short length of Ellis’ skirt, the care she took for the cleanliness of her legs, and an unusually pleasant smell about her rounded the brick homes and swirled in the dust funnels around the compound. Some remarks were made in a tone of admiration, particularly by younger girls. Others’ remarks seemed to hint at

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70 Ellis was one of my Malawian “sisters”. Her family was the first family that I stayed with in the village and as such, I was frequently referred to as part of that family.
resentment or frustration. Gazing at Ellis’ new clothes across the compound, several women chatted. The eldest woman of about 60 years started by asking rhetorically: “Mmm, what has brought this desire for money this time?” Responding to her own question she continued, “[It] is that everybody needs to dress nicely.”

“Then it is the same democracy,” her first-born daughter said.

“So, as of now it is because of the freedom which has come, everybody has the desire that ‘Aaah I should look nice’,” the mother added.

“Has the right to look good, to look smart,” her daughter corrected.

While the daughter seemed to agree with her mother’s disapproval of this “right” to look smart, frequently shaking her head in unison with her mother, this exchange is a prime example of the slippage which takes place between the rights discourse and other markers of modernity. In this dialogue, the daughter corrects her mother, explaining that today youth have the “right” to look nice, another example of how the younger generation discursively transforms a desire into a “right.” Again, the desire, or “right,” to look “nice” justifies the “right” of rural girls to engage in a cash economy in ways that the elder generation judges reprehensible. The disapproval this daughter expressed of girls’ claims to their “right” to look smart in the presence of her parent was also somewhat common among girls who, in the absence of their parents, unwrapped their chitenjes [long wrapped skirts] to reveal their faded jeans to their peers. As Hansen (2005) has also shown in Zambia, girls differentially align themselves with particular styles of dress in different social arenas. The daughter’s disapproval in this context may not reflect her own feeling about dressing smart when her parents were not around.

This exchange also demonstrates another argument I made earlier about how youth, more adept at the modern language associated with the socio-political context today, are able to refine
or correct their parents, expressing their more robust “cultural capital” (Bourdieu 1986) relative to their parents and inverting conventional generational hierarchies of knowledge and experience. In this situation, the daughter refines her mother’s language on two fronts. When her mother calls attention to changes in relationships with money in rural villages and with desires for global commodities like clothing, her daughter reminds her that this change is also called “democracy.” And, when the mother repeats that people today have a “desire” to look nice, her daughter is able to remind her mother that correct word is, in today’s political language, a “right.” This undermines elders’ ability to refute eloquently enough youths’ claims to their supposed rights, such as the “right to look nice.”

Modern clothing choices often became a focal point for elders’ opprobrium. Hanson’s (2004) contention that “of all objects of everyday life in Zambia…clothes are among the strongest bearers of cultural meaning both for people who wear them and for those who perceive their dressed bodies,” (166) rings true in Malawi as well. The extent to which elders disapprove of this dress became acutely apparent to me during an advocacy event in which we displayed youth photos of their “joys” and “sufferings” to engage policy-makers, school teachers and other youth workers in northern Malawi in a dialogue about youth needs. One “joy” photo showed a young couple wearing their favourite clothing at a school dance. As Hansen (2004) describes for Zambia, these youth, dressed in their second-hand clothing purchased at the selaula (the travelling second-hand market), showed that they were “mov[ing] with fashion” (173). The youth had been thrilled at the thought of displaying their photo at the event. (In every case the photographs displayed at the advocacy event were done so only with permission from the photographers and anyone displayed in the photos.) Rather than being an instigator for dialogue on spaces and opportunities that bring some happiness to the lives of young rural Malawians,
however, the girls’ dress in this photo inspired a four-hour, heated discussion among elders and a few, brave youth at the event about the morality of young girls. It became a platform for discussing elders’ disapproval of girls’ state of dress, or undress in this case, and youth seeking sexual and marital relations in the absence of elders’ advice or intervention today. In particular, the elders condemned the short length of the girl’s skirt. This is perhaps not surprising, for as Adeline Masquelier (2005) reminds us, quoting Hollander (1975, 83), “the more significant clothing is, the more meaning attaches to its absence” (2). Hansen (2004) argues that whereas “controversy has arisen over African women’s use of cosmetics, their hairstyles and their wearing of swimsuits in beauty contests…outcries over a variety of African women’s dress practices come together…in controversies about the length of their skirts” (164).

I madly recorded the discussions that day. What I managed to capture is reproduced below. At some point I was unable to keep pace with the speakers and indicated only whether the speaker was an adult or a youth. Speakers stood to make their points, beginning with the elders in the room. A respected, male school teacher in town began,

We the older ones know, we were in the Kamuzu Banda era. But the coming of the human rights [shaking his head]… but most of the youth have taken this idea of “human rights” as its whole self and it’s so irritating! It is irking or tickling the older ones. They [youth] say “we have human rights and should be allowed to do everything” without really thinking about it.

“Yes, sometimes you see how the girls dress and you can’t talk to them…You have no power over them,” a woman who worked at the hospital added. Here, this woman affirms what village elders have said about lacking the authority to discipline youths’ engagement with “modern” commodities like dress:
Even in dressing, you can see these days that our youth are dressing in indecent dressing. They say, ‘It’s my right’ to put on a mini-dress and trousers. How do I [explain] it? Our youth do not understand about the human rights. Not every right is quality. Even in upper schools the youth [violate] the rights of others, like putting stones on the road, while they know they are [violating] somebody’s rights. Rather than pushing their frustrations on the proper authorities, they push their rights on us, innocent people.

This sentiment that youth are directing the rights rhetoric on the wrong people when they assert their right to drink and wear clothing their elders deem immoral is a very strong one. This woman seems to suggest that the way youth employ of the rights discourse actually violates the rights of their parents, a point that comes up again below.

A key Synod representative then stood to add,

With the introduction of videos and TV’s you find the youth behave in quite a different way. For example, it is very common for youth to get/be influenced. Like in videos, they can see kissing, they see people wearing or half-wearing [wearing very little clothing], and all that comes to influence. So that new culture I think is also misleading our youths. We are copying from Western culture.

We begin to understand some of the rationale behind elders’ frustrations. Girls’ “half-wearing” or dressing in skirts above their knees such as the girl in the photo wore, are opposing Malawian “culture.”

A female teacher and mother to two boys continued,

71 I am not certain why youth might put stones on the road – this respondent may have been referring to the ways in which people pile on the roads, the stones chipped at local quarries while they await a sale but he may also have been providing an example of the ways in which youth, who ostensibly believe in “human rights” are destructive of other’s properties and perhaps care little about the rights of others.
The youth see this as modern and we, as parents, look at them as not in-line with our culture, that is why we just think of our youth as useless. If we look at advances and things [referring to TV and computers, etc.], I think they are contributing a lot to the way youth are behaving.

While mini-skirts were legally banned in Malawi during Banda’s regime and girls are taught to wear a *chitenji* wrap over their skirts to cover their lower back, buttocks and thighs in modesty when performing work or other activities which might lead to exposure of these areas (also see Hansen 2004 for a similar description of conventional dress in Zambia), this could hardly be thought of as general Malawian culture today. Even between 2006 and 2013, it is obvious to me that women who work in formal employment increasingly wear modern suits with short skirts or trousers to work. This dressing is increasingly an important symbol of money and status in contemporary Malawi, as one young participant notes below.

A nurse from the hospital added, “When girls dress in a mini they are imposing their rights on others. In the West, they value breasts. Here it is thighs. If a man sees a thigh, they go into the sky. A thigh is nakedness.” In other words, this nurse felt strongly that by dressing in ways that attract men, women are taking up their rights at the expense of others, in particular men, who then must struggle to fight their attraction to them. A younger man countered, “We are discussing issues of culture, of attitude, *et cetera*. It is about changing the attitude of parents…for example, when a white lady puts on a mini-skirt do we call her a *mahule* [prostitute]?“ In other words, this man suggests that perhaps adults need to change their attitude about what is considered appropriate youth behaviour.

In this exchange a highly reified concept of rural Malawian “culture” is posited by elders as, in some fashion, incompatible with rights. In their comments, elders disagree with the notion
of rights as individual freedoms of self-expression, critiquing the framework from the perspective of how it makes others uncomfortable precisely because it clashes with their “culture” and “tradition.” Forms of social change associated with modernity are espoused by youth invoking their rights but are simultaneously seen as offensive and threatening to adults. As rights become discursively meshed with markers of modernity by youth, “rights” are being discursively opposed to “culture” by elders. Interestingly, this closely reflects an old anthropological argument about human rights and cultural relativism (Goodale, et al. 2006; Merry 2001). The concept of universal human rights was seen by anthropologists to oppose and impose upon cultural “traditions” in many parts of the world (Goodale, et al. 2006). What Merry’s (2001; 2005) work reminds us, however, is that “both concepts [human rights and tradition] are fluid and changing, theoretically as well as empirically” (Merry 2001: 31).

One male youth, the author of “Joys of Drinking,” stood to advocate on behalf of youth, “But times are changing. We must embrace that change and support the youth anyway.” Another male youth added, “These are our rights. We have rights to everything – to dress, to food, to expression. If you take these from us, then you are constricting us. You must guide us.” This latter comment infuriated some of the adult participants, to which one male elder retorted, “But what about your right to food? Do you take alcohol as food?” Here he was referring specifically to the tendency of young boys to proclaim their right to drink alcohol, seeking to weaken the concept of “rights” by counterposing it against “necessity.”

A representative from the National Youth Council of Malawi (NYCoM) stood to dispel the tension. He reasoned with the adults in the room,

Youth are moving faster than us. If you don’t keep up with them you will lose them. I want my child to be raised as I was raised 10 years ago. But I think, as parents, we need
to loosen up a little bit and take time in a family to talk about family values. What are the issues that mean the most to us as a family? If she knows that I feel bad because she is showing her thighs, then she might understand and not dress like that because she would hurt me. We are struggling with past and present at same time. There is globalization [that is the cause of this].

This inspired a female school teacher and parents in the room to say,

I think, somewhere as parents, we are accepting some of these things…During my time, my parents could not be having [accepting of me having] a boyfriend. But this time, my daughter has a boyfriend. My son has a girlfriend. You are seeing at time that we have changed. But [we say to ourselves], eh, HIV/AIDS testing, risks of pregnancy [causing us to question our acceptance of these changes]. Our friends [foreigners/Westerners] sleep with their boyfriends before marriage. In our time we never did that. It did not happen, but today…

Another male adult responded,

What has been mentioned is very important. We [adults/parents] are changing somehow. [For instance] I could not imagine me let[ing] my son bring my daughter-in-law to be. In December, my son came with a girlfriend. ‘Mom, dad, this is the girl that will be your daughter-in-law’ [he said]. But what we are saying, somehow there are human rights there, with limitations and with responsibilities. Let’s talk in the families.

This man seems to signal the other half of Merry’s (2001) admonition that “human rights” are or need be no more static than “culture.” He suggests that talking in families can help youth to think of rights “with limitations and with responsibilities.”

While some parents may be speaking more openly with their youth, another adult reminded us that change is slower in rural areas. “This happens less in rural areas. Youth do not talk to parents.” Parents clearly find youth assertions of their “rights to everything – to dress, to
food, to expression” highly problematic, but difficult to contest because it is a symptom of the changing times that they feel obligated, to some extent, to accept. Furthermore, as the last quote suggested, some parents may even find “rights” useful when they are able to guide how youth use them and may find elements of “modernity” or foreignness attractive.

Certainly the use of fashion to display social connection and status is not new in Malawi. There are several “traditional” styles, each with their own implications. “National wear” – women’s suits made of matching blouses, skirts and head wraps – are outfits frequently worn by women in the government, church or non-governmental sectors and indicates their higher status, for example. Clothing indicates not only status, but also social connection and alliances. Bingu wa Mutharika, the second elected president of Malawi, was famous for mixing “modern” or Western clothing with “traditional” clothing, in the latter instances explicitly asserting his link to Malawi’s first independent president and 30-year-dictator, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda. A February 15th, 2012 article in the Guardian stated:

Bingu has new friends to turn to, however. Chinese contractors have built Malawi’s parliament building, national conference centre, presidential villas, school and university buildings, the five-star Golden Peacock hotel and a 60-mile road, with the national stadium and agriculture technology centre to follow. The president has even taken to wearing Chinese collar suits, flouting parliament’s dress code.

The issue adults have with the way girls are dressing is precisely the way in which the rights rhetoric seems to give youth the power to disregard elders’ opinions and advice, to act independently and selfishly.

When I assert that a kind of discursive elision or imbrication is taking place so that “rights” become associated with and linked to consumerism and individualism, I should note that to my knowledge there are no explicit messages telling young men that they have a “right” to drink or telling young women that they have a “right” to look nice. However, there are subtle
ways in which these two domains do become linked. For example, walking into the local HIV testing centre, I was greeted with the images in Figure 3.5.

**Figure 3.5: Human Rights Discourse and mixed messages in HIV testing centres**

![Image of HIV testing centre with a poster and a television]

The poster hanging above the television reads:

Client H/workers-rights:
- right to access health care.
- right to choose and second opinion
- right to respect/dignity
- right to self environment
- right to privacy (confidentiality)
- right to have guardian
- right to complain about health services

A South African music video played on the television in which a young woman danced in front of a young man in explicitly “modern” clothing that bares her stomach and legs. While the “right to look nice” is not on this list, arguably a link between human rights and modern music, dress and femininity is implied by the combination of this poster and the video. The youth resource centre is a primary source of information on human rights for youth. It is also one of the only places that many youth have access to watching modern music videos and films, implying,
however inadvertently, that those who know about “modern” ideas like human rights are also the same people who dress and act in “modern” individualist ways. Although this message is communicated in indirect ways, some people clearly do make the connection as evidenced in the stories above.

**Conclusion: From Rights to Freedom to Anticipating Something New**

As the strict, autocratic regime that mandated military discipline and training of youth gave way to human rights as a tool for shaping youth into moral leaders of the new democracy in the mid-1990s, so too were the disciplinary patterns in rural households re-worked. Youth who are indoctrinated in the rights rhetoric and have the fluency and finances to put “rights” to work in rural villages, use this rhetoric to assert their freedom to act immorally in the eyes of elders. Increasing rural poverty erodes elders’ ability to confront youth, as elders have few resources with which to command respect. Moreover, with the disciplinary and conceptual freedom to seek new lives, youth engage in highly consumptive behaviours that further frustrate elders. Youths’ deployment of the rights rhetoric to justify this behaviour, however, puts these consumptive behaviours ever further beyond reproach by their parents and grandparents.

While the discipline and respect during Banda’s regime lingers sweetly on the tongues of elders, increasing poverty together with an influx of new, global ideas and commodities has left youth feeling collectively abandoned by their government and their elders. There is a long history of projects, campaigns, and interventions directed at youth in Malawi. The difference today, however, is that many of the campaigns, as is the case across much of the African continent, are about targeting attitudes and behaviour, not about providing vocational skills or
economic opportunities or making it easier for more youth to access and graduate from existing schools (Piot 2010; Weiss 2004). While elders cling to memories of the past as guidance for the future, youth compare the present to an anticipated future, one characterized by money, equality and umoyo wachizungu. In this context, the rights rhetoric conspires with other factors to give hope for something new, contributing to the new temporal orientations to the future, discussed in the previous chapter. The “right” to modernity and equality constitutive of umoyo wachizungu slips easily into the language of the “freedom” to pursue it, not only in matters of alcohol consumption and dress, but also in matters of love and gender relations, taken up in the coming chapters.

Elders are not all or entirely opposed to human rights as a guiding principle. They oppose the ways in which the rights discourse encourages individualism that leads to the disintegration of village culture. Inherent in the process of translating and appropriating human rights for a local context lies a paradox according to Merry (2005). “In order to be accepted, they have to be tailored to the local context and resonate with the local cultural framework. However, in order to be part of the human rights system, they must emphasize individualism, autonomy, choice, bodily integrity and equality, ideas embedded in the legal documents that constitute human rights law” (Merry 2005: 221). Whereas some elders during the advocacy workshop suggested that parents could guide youths’ application of the human rights rhetoric, many elders in rural villages feel that their authority in relationships with their children and grandchildren has degenerated to a point that this is nearly impossible. The perceived erosion of elders’ authority is yet further exacerbated by significant economic decline. As noted in the previous chapter, I see this as a form of “normalized violence” (Bourgois 2009: 20) enacted on the part of policies and
programmes campaigning about human rights, for it pits rural youth against their elders to whom ultimately they have to turn as hopes for education and urban employment do not materialise.

Whereas in this chapter I examined the effects of anticipatory interventions targeting youth with the highly individualized discourse of human rights, as they aim for the “optimization of future citizens” (Adams, et al. 2009: 247), in the following chapter I look at the effects the anticipatory focus on the future potential of girls and as a corollary, not boys in this same context.
Chapter 4: The Girl Effect and the Gendered Construction of Worthiness

After returning from my fieldwork in 2009, I was struck by the omnipresence of ‘Girl Effect’ advocacy and marketing on the streets in Toronto that had emerged since I had left in late 2007. On the sidewalk near the University of Toronto one day, a young male campaigner for Plan Canada beckoned me:

Did you know that 70% of the world’s population living in poverty are women and that the majority of them never had the opportunity to go to school? Do you not care about girls?

As I walked away he called after me,

Because you are a girl, I thought you might care. Do you have a minute to hear about Plan’s ‘Because I am a Girl’ campaign?

I turned back, curious. After citing several more grim statistics about girls’ highly limited opportunities for education and employment and their experience of abuse around the world, he opened the folder in his hands to show me pictures of the types of girls I would be “giving a chance to change the world,” as he put it, through a donation to Plan Canada. Several of his photographs depicted girls in African countries. He paused on a photo of a Ghanaian girl, whose picture looked like she might have been about 10 years old. He commenced a story that was clearly familiar to his tongue with the rapid-fire way he rattled it off. It was about why the girl in the photograph was his favourite girl. “Her situation is desperate. She is denied the opportunity to go to school just because she menstruates. It is the tradition in Uganda, well, I think the story is from Uganda…” He flipped back in his notes to check on the details of the sad story he was
sharing, betraying that the Ghanaian girl in the picture stood for every African girl in his mind. The fact that he was telling a story that he had presumably been provided by Plan, of a Ugandan girl, as though it belonged to this Ghanaian girl posed no problem for him. “Yes, Uganda, but the situation applies,” he continued, as he caressed the face of the Ghanaian child in the photograph. “It is tradition for girls to use dirty scraps of cloth when they are menstruating. These scraps can easily fall out at school leading to much embarrassment, as you can imagine – a situation that can be rectified so easily by providing proper menstrual pads to African girls.” While it may be true that some girls find it more difficult to go to school when they are menstruating, the picture this young man was painting of African girls did not resemble the Malawian situation as I had come to know it. For one, the girls I knew did not use “dirty scraps” as menstrual pads. That said, it was hard to be wholly critical of a campaign that attempted to draw attention to the atrocious inequalities faced by girls. The horrendous violence and offenses towards rural Malawian girls that deserve national and international attention are discussed in the following chapter. Here, I wish to discuss the mechanisms by which “the girl” has become vital to anticipatory regimes as promulgated through health and development campaigns (Adams, et al. 2009; Piot 2010) and some of the consequences of the fixation on the potential of the girl for African futures. The previous chapter showed how the contemporary emphasis on human rights, aimed most assertively at youth who emerge as Malawi’s future salvation, has left elders feeling that human rights oppose village “culture.” Here, I look specifically at how anticipatory regimes are gendered and show how this, too, has various and unintended effects – particularly on boys – as their messages filter through existing narratives on masculinity in rural Malawi.

While the Girl Effect is a rapidly growing movement, there is little academic research on this type of girl-focused advocacy and programming. Hayhurst’s (2011; 2012) work with a Girl
Effect initiative in Uganda, which used sports as a mechanism for girls’ empowerment, is a notable exception. While she notes several ways the project successfully increased girls’ confidence and assertiveness, she also identifies several problems. For one, she finds that by focusing strictly on girls, the programme failed to address inequalities that are “relational” – inequalities that must be negotiated between men and women. She also draws on post-colonial feminist theory to argue that colonial discourses re-emerge in Girl Effect programming. In particular, she argues that the language of Western salvation of developing countries through “global sisterhood” embodied in the Girl Effect reinforces old colonial hierarchies and power inequalities (545). Furthermore, the programme, she argues, “seemed to (perhaps unsurprisingly) frame empowerment within the neo-liberal development order, where the ability to take charge of one’s own well-being (healthism)…was considered fundamental” (Hayhurst 2012: 175-176). This emphasis on the individual girl puts remarkable pressure on girls and distracts attention from government responsibilities for making sure policies encourage equality for women. But what about boys?

In Chapter 5, I echo Hayhurst’s (2011) critiques with respect to the highly individualistic nature of gender programming in Malawi, and, in particular, of the flatly quantitative means of assessing “increases” or “decreases” in empowerment or equity by, for example, counting girls’ individual participation in trainings. Throughout the dissertation, I also provide examples of how gender-empowerment tropes, which dovetail with discourses on “freedom,” position girls as responsible for self-development, reinforcing neo-liberal notions of the self-helping citizen (also see Esacove 2010). In this chapter, I will pay closer attention to the possible impacts of the global tendency towards explicitly promoting the potential of the girl and not of the boy.
Three things were immediately striking about this endorsement of “the African girl,” by the Plan campaigner, the analysis of which makes up the structure for this chapter. First, and most obviously, the campaign homogenized the experiences of Third World girls, or at least African girls, in a way that is profoundly problematic, abstracting them from their social and cultural contexts and enabling a potential donor or consumer, as I will discuss below, to imagine that simply investing in menstrual pads can save Africa. This is not new: international aid and charity have long relied upon “a scripted suffering other” (Richey and Ponte 2011: 57). However, as girl-focused campaigns such as Plan’s “Because I am a Girl” join forces with corporate marketing campaigns such as Nike’s “Girl Effect” campaign, a donor’s requirement to understand the complexities of poverty in African contexts and possible solutions is even further reduced – all one has to do is shop, or “be consumers of ‘cool Africa’,” as Richey and Ponte (2011: 58) put it.

Second, the campaign imbued the Third World girl with enormous potential in Western minds. It was not even 15 years previous to the advent of the Girl Effect that developing country women were seen by economists and politicians to be poor economic investments. In 1997, Rekha Mehra, the vice president and director of economic analysis at the International Center for Research on Women in Washington, D.C., wrote in an article that “Development policies and programs tend not to view women as integral to the economic development process. This is reflected in higher investments in women’s reproductive rather than their productive roles” (Mehra 1997: 136). In 2009, when I spoke to the Plan representative it seemed everything had changed. In an overcrowded subway car on my way home that same day, I stood across from a printed advertisement for Plan International’s “Because I am a Girl” initiative. Their campaign claimed, “When a girl is educated, nourished and protected, she shares her knowledge and skills
with her family and community, and can forever change the future of a nation. It’s that powerful….It only takes ONE girl to change the world.”

The girl, and by implication not the boy, emerges as productive – as transformable and transformational. Given the opportunity the girl automatically uses her education and health to improve the lives of her community and indeed the world. This argument is, of course, based in a voluminous econometric literature generated since the mid-1990’s that demonstrates the value of girls’ education and literacy for the health and economic well-being of future generations. I will argue below, however, that the relationship between girls’ education and the well-being of an entire society is highly complex and context-specific. Nike’s Girl Effect and its adherents make often inaccurate assumptions that oversimplify this relationship raising questions about the value of blanket investments in African girls’ empowerment.

Third, the campaign’s endorsement of the potential of the girl echoed sentiments that I heard expressed by development workers, volunteers and young Malawian girls and boys alike during my field research. Specifically, they believed that girls were inherently more likely to do “good” with their money and schooling than boys. I thus also endeavour in this chapter to understand, what unexpected work the Girl Effect (as I refer collectively to all of the girl-focused campaigns such as Plan’s and Nike’s) does in rural Malawi. I argue that the Girl Effect movement perpetuated by health and development initiatives, foreign volunteers and visitors, and global marketing campaigns by corporations, produces beliefs about inherent differences in “worthiness” between girls and boys in rural Malawi. As I will show below, the assumption that girls are innately more nurturing and less destructive than boys mirrors a sentiment that boys themselves feel: namely that they must work very hard to control what they are told, and thus

72 Also see http://plancanada.ca/becauseiamagirl/ access date: August 09, 2011.
increasingly believe, are their tendencies towards immoral, unproductive, and dangerous behaviour. The latter part of this chapter deals with how the beliefs espoused in the Girl Effect about the inherent “worthiness” of girls and, as an unspoken corollary, the “problem” that is boys (or as boys put it themselves, their inherent “badness”) supports gendered differences in the construction of self-worth.

**The Girl Effect “Brand Aid”**

Plan is not the only foundation focused on girls as a catalyst for health and development. In fact, the Girl Effect movement is a global phenomenon. For example, Kathy Calvin, Chief Executive Officer of the UN Foundation called “Girl Up,” announced at their celebrity-endorsed launch in Washington, D.C. in September 2011, "We know that when you help a girl, you make a positive change for the future of a community or entire nation." The Girl Up launch was picked up by “Diplomatic Connections Business Edition, 2011” where their title page featured an Ethiopian girl carrying water to her thatched home next to the slogan “Educate a girl and you are educating an entire village.” In Malawi, after adopting her second child, the singer Madonna exclaimed, “It is with tremendous joy that I return to Malawi to lay the first brick in the Raising Malawi Academy for Girls. By educating girls we will rebuild this community and raise this nation.”

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73 Richey and Ponte (2011)
74 (http://www.metrolyrics.com, access date: April 25, 2010.
Abstraction from Complexity to Consumerism

This girl-focused mantra, as we know it today, appears to have started as a corporate marketing initiative launched by the Nike Foundation in 2008. They called it the “Girl Effect,” a label which is often applied more broadly today to refer to similar corporate and non-corporate initiatives popping up all over the world, and refers to “the idea that girls hold the answer to the development problems of our time” (Hayhurst 2011: 532).75 The Girl Effect suggests that “girls are the most powerful source for change on the planet.”76 This is because “girls are catalysts capable of bringing ‘unparalleled social and economic change to their families, communities and countries’ and ‘can unleash the world’s greatest untapped solution to poverty’” (Hayhurst 2011: 532).

The Girl Effect draws justification for its tenets from voluminous and complicated econometric data. Emerging in the 1970’s, the Women in Development or WID movement77 called for special attention to women’s issues in development, based on a belief in women’s under-recognized economic contributions. Danish economist, Esther Boserup (1970) argued in her book entitled, “Women’s Role in Economic Development,” that women’s domestic and paid labour contributes significantly to national economic growth. Boserup (1970) further demonstrated how women’s education contributes to their productive potential and she among others called, not only for gender-neutral policies, but for the tailoring of policies to encourage equality for women (also see Collier 1988).

75 The Nike Foundation’s Girl Effect is remarkably compelling. Launched by the Nike Foundation in 2008, the “Girl Effect” youtube video had had nearly 3 million hits in September 2010 (http://www.girleffect.org/).
76 www.girleffect.org (access date April 13, 2013).
77 WID was later updated to “Gender and Development” or “GAD” to recognize the importance of engaging men in the process of empowering women.
Since the early-1990’s health and development economists have aggregated national-level statistical data from around the world to show girls are actually better “investments” in developing country economies than boys – an effect that was referred to, by a recent World Bank report, as “the girl-effect dividend” (Chaaban and Cunningham 2011: title). These economists argue that even modest investments in the human capital of women and in particular the education of girls leads to significant returns in terms of individual wages (Shultz 1993; 2002) and, in turn, to national economic growth (Chaaban and Cunningham 2011). In contexts where women have lower levels of education than men, the rate of return in terms of wages is higher for investments in women’s education than men’s, they argue, even when accounting for the numerous statistical biases and that can occur in such calculations (Shultz 2002). One study cited by the aforementioned World Bank report shows that while boys’ attainment of primary education increases their income by an estimated 4-8 percent, the same educational attainment by girls increases their rates of return by a much higher 5-15 percent (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos 2002 in Chaaban and Cunningham 2011, 2). In some African countries, the estimates of the rate of return to women’s education are as high as 25 percent (Shultz 2002). In addition, women’s education has been associated with a number of social benefits including the reduction in early marriages and adolescent pregnancies, a reduction in fertility and greater investments in the health and education of future generations (see Lloyd 2009; Shultz 2002 for citations and reviews of the numerous studies upon which these claims are based).

Other research shows that women have been severely disadvantaged in terms of human capital investment (education, access to healthcare, etc.). As the World Bank report also cites, “Approximately one-quarter of girls in developing countries are not in school (Lloyd 2005) and one quarter to one-half of girls in developing counties become mothers before age 18 (United
Nations Population Fund 2005)” (Chaaban and Cunningham 2011: 2). In northern Malawi, only 3% of women have completed high school (MDHS 2010: 13). Young women are four times as likely to have HIV/AIDS than young men (MDHS 2004) and married women face a host of abuses including extreme limits to decision-making power (Population Reference Bureau 2011) and often brutal physical abuse discussed in more detail in the following chapter. To substantiate its claims and legitimise its existence, the Girl Effect relies on these twinned sets of data showing that a) investment in girls will pay off and will pay off much more than investments in boys and, b) girls face innumerable inequalities and human rights abuses.

Of course, the finer details of how investments in girls’ health and education lead to “better futures” are glossed over by aggregate econometric studies and further reduced by sweeping statements by the Nike Foundation, Plan and the UN among other international organizations. Cynthia Lloyd at the Population Council points out in a 2009 paper entitled “New Lessons: the power of educating adolescent girls” that there is significant inter and intra-country variation in what level, quality and aspects of education lead to the lauded positive effects. They cite one study by Levine, et al. (2004) that found literacy was most strongly linked to child health outcomes and another by (Behrman, et al. 2009) showing how in Guatemala, the “cognitive skills” of women at first birth told us more about child health than years of educational attainment (Lloyd 2009: 40). Furthermore there is very little qualitative research on this topic, which would tell us more about how the quality of education attained by women, women’s job prospects, the education and health of extended family members, and broader social and political conditions, affect the outcomes of investments in women’s human capital.

These economic studies leave unanswered the questions of “better futures” for whom and as defined how exactly? Former World Bank economist, Elaine Zuckerman, has criticized the
Girl Effect for equating gender equality with economic growth (Provost 2011). The statistics are interpreted to back the neoliberal agenda, she argues, regardless of the potential cost to women. What happens, for example, as women take up wage labour while the deep-set gender inequalities between men and women in the home are left unaddressed in a country where one in three women experience physical violence, mainly at the hands of husbands as is the case in Malawi (MDHS 2004: 266)? According to the Malawi Demographic and Health Survey, “Women experience domestic violence irrespective of their education levels, employment status, economic status, number of children and their husbands’ educational levels” (MDHS 2004: 271). If these finer considerations are glossed over by the aggregate of econometric studies, they are even further ignored by Nike as it exploits this data as a branding strategy.

The Nike Foundation’s Girl Effect represents an example of a burgeoning form of public-private partnership in development aid which Lisa Ann Richey and Stefano Ponte (2011) refer to as “Brand Aid.” Brand Aid is a phenomenon that “brings consumers and branded corporations into international development through celebrity mediation” (17). “It is ‘aid to brands’ because it helps sell branded products and improve a brand’s ethical profile and value. It is ‘brands that provide aid’ because… a portion of the profit or sales is devoted to helping others” (10). It is, as Richey and Ponte (2011) point out, in line with current “sought-after model of aid efficiency” (6). Like Product RED78, the example of Brand Aid analyzed by Richey and Ponte (2011), the Girl Effect and related girl-focused initiatives are private initiatives which provide funding to large-scale, public-private organizations which in turn direct money to organizations that have,

78 Product RED is a cause-related marketing initiative launched in 2006 by Bono, the lead singer of the Irish band U2, which compels iconic brands78 to produce RED-branded products from which a portion of the proceeds go to supporting the purchase of anti-retroviral drugs (ARV’s) for “women and children with AIDS in Africa” through the Global Fund (Richey and Ponte 2011, 7).
as is noted on Nike’s Girl Effect website, proven their capacity on the ground to “bring about massive change.” The Nike Foundation, for example, partners with NoVo, a philanthropic organization founded by the investor Warren Buffett’s son, Peter Buffet, and works with the UK Department for International Development (DIFD), the United Nations (UN) Foundation, the World Bank and several others to identify worthy projects to fund. The UN Girl Up Campaign receives media endorsement and funding from Ivanka Trump Fine Jewelry. Proctor and Gamble have partnered with UNICEF through their Always keeping Girls in School Campaign which donates some proceeds from the purchase of their “Always” brand menstrual products to “equipping girls with sound knowledge, motivation and essential Always sanitary protection…help[ing] vulnerable girls stay in school across South Africa and beyond.” These brands do little to address the questions posed above about whether increased economic growth at the national level actually makes women’s everyday lives better, but rather seem to consider them irrelevant.

Nike, Plan, UNICEF, the UN and others all adopt similar campaigns in which brutal economic thinking and “evidence” is dressed up for potential donors. The discourse changes as it moves from a research paper into a media appeal. When this kind of statistical research is deployed by NGOs and then propagated by various forms of media, it generates increasingly broader, sweeping claims. For example, the UN in a Joint Statement on the rights of adolescent girls in 2010 said “we are convinced that educated, healthy and skilled adolescent girls will help build a better future, advance social justice, support economic development and combat poverty.” They justify,

79 http://nikeinc.com/pages/our-work (access date April 1, 2013).
Many of 600 million adolescent girls living in developing countries remain invisible in national policies and programmes. Millions live in poverty, are burdened by gender discrimination and inequality, and are subject to multiple forms of violence, abuse, and exploitation, such as child labour, child marriage and other harmful practices....

And they further claim that “[Educated girls] will stay in school, marry later, delay childbearing, have healthier children and earn better incomes that will benefit themselves, their families, communities and nations” (United Nations 2010b). Following the vote by the United Nations general assembly to adopt October 11th, 2012 as the inaugural International Day of the Girl Child, several public media sources stated, “For each year that a girl stays in school”—any girl, in any context, in any African or Third World country, at any grade, in any kind of school—“her income will rise by 10 to 20%”—again, any girl, any level of education, any context, any country (Cubarrubia 2011).

These campaigns then proceed, through stories and images like those described at the outset of this chapter, to make potential donors (or consumers) feel pity for Third World girls while also making them feel that their small donation will have a significant impact. After all, girls are portrayed as an untapped resource supposedly needing something as uncomplicated as a menstrual pad to help them overcome obstacles and realize their immense potential.

Campaigners like the Plan representative who stopped me on the street rely on exceedingly simplified stories of developing country suffering that deftly abstract individuals from their

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historical, social, political and geographical context in ways that enable donors to imagine their collective donations of money as the missing link between poverty and a prosperous future.

These over-simplified snapshots, whether visual, written or oral, of developing country suffering are not unfamiliar. The photos and stories used by the Plan campaigner, are what Ruddick (2003) finds typical of media portrayals of the Third World. She says,

This is the tight-shot close-up photograph of a single child—usually (apparently) not older than ten or eleven, looking, wide-eyed, directly into the camera. This photo is not a portrait: it does not communicate distinctive characteristics of the child. This “Child” comes to stand as the universal child of developing nations, disconnected from context, with few clues as to his or her culture or background. To the extent it is included, context simply signifies excessive and incessant labour and/or poverty (Ruddick 2003: 341).

Such portrayals of African children, absent from their context, are deeply problematic for several reasons. They allow us “to think of the wholesale ‘gift’ of modernist structures as the ‘solution’” (Ruddick 2003: 342) overlooking the West’s role in poverty in Africa. Simultaneously, they distract us from their egregious creation and perpetuation of stereotypes (Richey and Ponte 2011: 57). They allow poverty in Africa, much as Richey and Ponte (2011) argue that the RED campaign does for AIDS, to be “made into something that you can know from a distance” (57).

While such depictions are not new, how these calls to charity have become intertwined with corporate marketing is new. The linkage between individual action in the West and problem-solving in Africa is even more problematic with this commercial form of aid. If in the past one had to donate to charities that in turn could “save” Africa by transplanting “modern” education systems, for example, today one has only to shop to save Africa. Africa has become “stylistically cool” as Richey and Ponte (2011: 57) write, and donors today have only to be “consumers of cool Africa” (Richey and Ponte 2011: 58). For instance, to support African girls
through the UN Girl Up Foundation, one has only to buy Ivanka Trump jewellery. On the Girl Up website it reads:

A diamond may be forever, but so is the lasting impact of supporting our sisters in developing countries, ensuring that girls everywhere are educated, healthy, safe, counted, and positioned to be the next generation of leaders! So get your Girl Up bracelet today at store.GirlUp.org and show that you are part of a (fashionable!) movement of girls committed to elevating the status of adolescent girls around the world [emphasis in original].

Purchasing a Girl Up bracelet is not only a fashionable way to “elevate the status of girls around the world,” it also creates a sense of solidarity between girls in the West and African girls without requiring any truly meaningful contact. As the quote above indicates, Western girls and developing country girls are “sisters.” The construction of the bracelet itself, as described on the Girl Up website, pushes this idea of solidarity between girls all around the world.

The Ivanka Trump Fine Jewelry Girl Up Bracelet… consists of a sterling silver chain and a coral silk cord along with the Girl Up logo and the Ivanka Trump logo. The bracelet’s construction embodies the Girl Up campaign’s motto of uniting girls to change the world.

Not only is it unnecessary to know anything about Africa to be able to envision the solution to African poverty today (Ruddick 2003), but it is also unnecessary to know anything about which organization or institution is delivering the aid. Today, shopping is all that is necessary to create the affective conditions necessary to connect to the poor and see consumption as the solution.

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84 http://www.girlup.org/blog/girl-up-bracelet-launches-fashions-night-out.html (access date April 1 2013).
Below, I will concentrate on what the Girl Effect means for boys who are not perceived to have the same potential. Instead, boys emerge in Malawian discourses as natural hindrances to their own futures and those of the nation.

**Masculinities in sub-Saharan Africa**

While gender studies in Africa have long focused on women’s experiences, a recent and growing interest in men and masculinities in African contexts has emerged (Morrell 1998). Whereas African men are conventionally portrayed as characterized by a fixed masculine identity, Lindsay and Miescher’s (2003) edited volume, “Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa” marked a major shift in gender studies towards an interest in how masculinity is produced in different contexts and under different political and economic conditions. The papers in this edited volume problematise masculinity in Africa and challenge dominant stereotypes about African men. They seek to understand “how shifting meanings of gender have affected African men and how understandings and practices of masculinity have been contested and transformed during the colonial and postcolonial eras” (Hodgson 2003: 1-2). Miescher and Lindsay (2003) and the studies that have followed define masculinity as “a cluster of norms, values, and behavioural patterns expressing explicit and implicit expectations of how men should act and represent themselves to others” (4; also see Brown, et al. 2005).

While most studies find that each society has one or more hegemonic versions of masculinity (Connell 1987), or ideals against which men measure themselves and are measured by others (Ampofo and Boateng 2011; Brown, et al. 2005), there is also a widespread recognition that multiple masculinities can co-exist. These various forms are often determined by age,
gender, generation and other factors (Hodgson 2003). Hegemonic masculinity in Malawi shares many characteristics with dominant or idealized masculine traits in many nearby countries. In Malawi, as has been noted in Zambia (Simpson 2009) and Nigeria (Hodgson 2003) among other places, masculinity has long been associated with marriage, breadwinning and dominance in household decision-making. Amy Kaler (2003; 2004a), who works in central and southern Malawi, has also shown how alcohol consumption and womanising, including sexual relations outside of marriage, are important aspects of hegemonic masculinity (see Brown, et al. 2005 for similar findings in Namibia).

Dominant masculinities, however, are hardly static. Those characteristics commonly associated with the stereotypical African “big man” including dominance over women and having multiple sexual partners in some contexts have in fact been traced to the colonial and postcolonial situation. Hunter (2005) for instance, has shown how in South Africa, Christianity, labour migration and capitalism have threatened the institution of marriage – a previous indicator of manliness in this context – leading to new value being placed on sexual prowess. Based on research in eastern Africa, Silberschmidt (2001) finds that a context of rising poverty and unemployment has left “men with a patriarchal ideology bereft of its legitimizing activities” (657). Not being able to support their families negatively affects men’s self-esteem. As a result, she argues that men increase their association with other cultural markers of masculinity including sexual aggressiveness and having multiple sexual partners. Hegemonic masculinities must thus be understood as historically, politically and socially produced and in constant flux.

New masculinities are being produced in contemporary Africa in particular in response to shifting global influences, neoliberal economics and HIV/AIDS. For instance, Hodgson (2003) demonstrates how among the Maasai of Tanzania certain kinds of “modern” masculinities
associated with an abandonment of the knowledge of pastoralism in favour of the “knowledge of the pen” that came with formal education, once seen quite negatively, are increasingly being seen, even by older men, as the only viable form of masculinity in today’s changing environmental and social circumstances. She writes that “the dominant Maasai masculinity and its negative other, ormeek, [modern] are now being melded into a new masculinity whose meaning and practices are still being formed” (Hodgson 2003: 226). Similarly, Cornwall (2003) shows how changing social and economic circumstances in contemporary Nigeria have led to “fluidity and hybridity” in the ways men work to sustain masculine identities (244). Based on her research in Malawi, Kaler (2003) found that in “men’s spaces,” such as bars and beerhalls, claiming to have multiple sexual partners and in some cases even claiming to be HIV positive functioned to reinforce men’s masculinity (359). The latter she explained, “can imply a sort of masculine prowess in being a lady-killer (quite literally)” (361).

Change, it seems, is frequently initiated by adolescents. Adolescence is thus a particularly interesting life-stage during which to explore the production of masculinities in the contemporary context. While masculinities in adolescence have received significant recent attention, the research has been dominated by the public health field and focused on masculinity and risky sexual behaviours from the perspective of contracting HIV/AIDS (Ampofo and Boateng 2011). Some studies, however, have shown that boys are generally socialized into hegemonic masculinities during childhood and adolescence and that the behaviours associated with dominant masculinities are generally adopted in stages. For instance, Ampofo and Boateng

86 In the context of my research I also found that in some cases, without knowing their status, both boys and girls claimed to be HIV positive. These claims were usually made in front of a group of people associated with a support group for PLWHA (People Living With HIV and AIDS). In these cases it was not about performing masculinities but about accessing resources including sympathy and inclusion offered by some health programmes for HIV positive peoples.
(2011) found that Ghanaian boys between the ages 11 and 15 showed varied levels of adoption of beliefs associated with dominant masculinity in society including men’s roles as leaders of the households, primary decision-makers and controllers of their wives. Thus this is a stage at which some boys can learn to challenge dominant masculinities, for better or worse (also see Morrell 1998). Ampofo and Boateng (2011) suggest that there is room for intervention at this young age, to provide boys with role models for alternative forms of masculinity and “‘safe’ spaces, in which boys can be boys while learning to unlearn certain attitudes and behaviours” (432).

In Malawi, male youth feel particularly insecure about their masculinity. Isugbara and Undie (2008), in a qualitative study with Malawian boys aged 12 – 19 years, found that boys felt their masculinity was continuously threatened. In response, the boys worked constantly to affirm and re-affirm their masculinity by talking about and acting on sexual desires. Their study found that these young boys frequently discussed sex with their peers on the school ground, playgrounds, marketplaces, in bars and at home. Adolescent boys’ narratives about sex “resonate deeply with traditional gender scripts,” according to Isugbara and Undie (2008), and put them at high risk of HIV/AIDS (284). This finding, that young boys eagerly and urgently adopt “risky” aspects of the dominant masculinity in Malawi would seem to support the Girl Effect’s assumption that girls are, in fact, a better investment than boys for Malawi’s future. My own research, however, found many young boys are challenging dominant gender scripts. Below, I argue that the Girl Effect discourse reinforces the notion that hegemonic masculinity is the only valid construction of masculinity when, in fact, some boys and young men are seeking alternatives. Moreover, the Girl Effect’s incessant focus on the immense potential and innate (but blocked) transformative productivity of girls actually acts as a barrier to boys’ quest for a worthy masculinity.
Unworthy Boys

In a conversation with 75-year-old Orland about how male youth are different today from when he was young, he noted how boys are taking up the very behaviours that are normally associated with masculinity among older males in rural villages.

Some [boys] can even join boozy – drinking beer. I have seen this. In those days, liquor was only used by old, old, old [men]. Yes, in those days, but this time [today] a small boy like this [indicating his waist height with his hand], you will find him drinking. Hey [shaking his head], drinking beer, liquor drinking [snorts]. In those days it [alcohol consumption by young boys] wasn’t there.

When I asked Orland why he thought boys were drinking alcohol he explained that today, unlike when he was young, there are many changes in Malawi which influence the way boys think and make priorities.

We have got so many mixed things at this time [today as opposed to in the past]. At first [when he was young] we had only a few, few things…[male] children were only said to look after cattle in those days but today, there are so many things which, which troubles wachinyamata [youth]. So many things…I think very, very many new things have just poked in…Aaah, there are so many things which can see with our own eyes.

As another woman put it, the “freedom” that came with democracy, “revealed things from where they were hiding.” As I have shown throughout this dissertation, the “mixed things” that Orland refers to as having “poked in” are the many changes that came with and around the democratic transition. These include a reduction in youth “discipline” in rural households and dwindling respect for elders; increased access to money by rural youth; and an influx of messages about human rights, the “proper” way to love, gender equality, and “modern,” individualist lifestyles. They also include the Girl Effect. In the face of these forces, Orland seems to suggest that boys
are overwhelmed and cannot help themselves but to engage in behaviours typically associated with activities of older men at a younger age today than in the past. While it is likely a combination of factors, as Orland suggests, that has led to this situation, young boys frequently indicate to me that they are simply innately drawn to such behaviours. This, I argue, is a result of the Girl Effect.

In an online article for Time Magazine entitled, “Global Girl Power: To Fight Poverty, Invest in Girls” published on February 14, 2011, Nancy Gibbs wrote the following statement which reflects much of what the NGOs and Nike are saying:

Consider the virtuous circle: An extra year of primary school boosts girls' eventual wages by 10% to 20%. An extra year of secondary school adds 15% to 25%. Girls who stay in school for seven or more years typically marry four years later and have two fewer children than girls who drop out. Fewer dependents per worker allows for greater economic growth. And the World Food Programme has found that when girls and women earn income, they reinvest 90% of it in their families. They buy books, medicine, bed nets. For men, that figure is more like 30% to 40%. "Investment in girls' education may well be the highest-return investment available in the developing world," Larry Summers wrote when he was chief economist at the World Bank. Of such cycles are real revolutions born.87

While boys are rarely mentioned in Girl Effect campaigns, when they are, it is as above – in such a way as to point out that boys, relative to girls, are less worthy of investment. But, even when boys are unmentioned, one might read between the lines to understand the implication that boys have already had the opportunities that the Girl Effect campaigns are endorsing for girls and they failed to invest in ways that pulled themselves and their families out of poverty. At least, this seems to be how some Malawian boys and young men interpret the meaning of the focus on girls’ empowerment in their communities.

87 http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2046045,00.html (access date April 16, 2013).
One man, the father of three young children whom I had come to know, wrote a proposal requesting funding for a “gender and human rights” project he planned to undertake, and he asked me to “carry this letter to Canada where someone can be interested in donating [to the gender cause].” In the written proposal he justified the focus on gender empowerment by writing: “Our future is in our girls. Our hands, is in our girls. You know, for us, boys, we have failed.” This pained and confessional assertion was more than a strategic means of appealing to possible donors. This man himself asserted that he believed this, and I heard this kind of statement echoed by other boys and young men. Boys who asked me to help them by providing school fees often sheepishly prefaced their requests by telling me that they were asking despite the “fact” that, as boys and girls said repeatedly to me, “if we educate a girl we educate the nation; if we educate a boy we educate only the individual.” Indeed, boys were often highly versed in this Girl Effect discourse and seemed to feel compelled to provide a rather elaborate justification for why they were still worthy of my investment. While girls are celebrated for their potential for their communities and the nation, the local discourse on boys is quite the opposite: boys are seen to have serious character flaws that prevent them from being worthwhile investments.

When I asked one 22-year-old man to help me understand the challenges youth face today, he enumerated many of the same concerns espoused in transnational and national discourse on youth in Malawi, a common occurrence, as I have noted in previous chapters. The way in which he expressed these, however, embedded the sentiment that boys’ actions are inherently self-destructive. The challenges, he said, were:

Lack of food, lack of school fees, lack of clothes, lack of shelter, and HIV/AIDS, more to girls because of poverty they “do things” and then get HIV/AIDS – For boys, they leave school because of school fees and instead of working hard to find school fees they drink
and smoke… “We are forgetting our worries,” they say… They need to put more effort in.

While this young man explained that both boys and girls engage in self-destructive behaviours, girls, he suggested, are motivated by desperation. Undesirable behaviours on the part of boys, on the other hand, are framed as character flaws – I repeatedly encountered people expressing the sentiment that boys could work harder and pay for their school fees, but they do not bother.

Similarly, when I asked the leader of a village youth club with a significant emphasis on women’s empowerment to explain empowerment to me, he said,

R: Women’s empowerment is the support of women to have their own IGA [income generating activity] or business.
L: Why is this important?
R: It is important to empower women to stand on their own because they have many orphans to care for and many are widows and so they need to support themselves.
L: Why are there so many widows?
R: HIV/AIDS
L: Do only the men die? Not the women?
R: Both, but women understand first and so they are widowed because they go to the VCT and the men do not go.

Again, this endorsement of young women’s empowerment hinges on the belief that women both care more for and are more responsible for their own health than young men. In sum, boys’ bad

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88 Interestingly a study conducted by Tawfik and Watkins (2007) in rural Malawi found that, contrary to the assumption espoused in global health programmes (including WHO and USAID discourses in Malawi) and government discourses that women engage in extramarital sex out of financial need and “survival,” women from rural villages in the Balaka District sited several other reasons as well. Tawfik and Watkins (2007) write, women are also motivated by “attractive consumer goods as well as by passion and by revenge for a husband’s infidelity” (1090). Similarly in my research some of the girls I interviewed who worked in the sex trade said they chose to do so in order to avoid having to marry. While they often came from very poor households and certainly also needed the money, it was a combination of motivations – economic need and desires to challenge gendered assumptions in Malawi – that motivated some women to engage in undesirable behaviours from a health and development perspective.
It is due to this perceived (and sometimes real) tendency towards individualistic and even selfish behaviours among boys that elders in villages, too, see more value in girls than boys today. Whereas boys are traditionally valued because they stay with their natal parents after they marry and are ostensibly responsible for caring for their parents as they age, parents increasingly find that girls are reliable sources of support, whether living nearby or far away. In one grandmother’s house, grandchildren swirled in and out of the room until she shot them a cold glance and croaked in her 72-year-old voice, “be outside.” She expressed significant frustration with her situation of having to care for multiple grandchildren, abandoned by her sons whom she had expected to take better care of her. Once her sons’ children were out of ear-shot she explained,

R: You can’t have a desire for a male child [today]. It’s better for God just to give you a female child.

L: Who was loved most in the past, a male or a female?

R: In the past, we loved a male. Today we are living with a man here at our village, it’s our son in-law, and he is the one who is willing to be helping us. [Our sons] they just stay here and drink. That’s what happens nowadays, when a female child finds help [money or support] she sends it. She is also the one who helps the parents. Indeed, more than the male who stays at home [with his parents, even after he marries]. [Even when they are married and live far], children nowadays, female children build houses for us.

This grandmother feels better supported by her female children and their husbands (sons-in-law) than by her own sons. Her daughters, she explained, are sending money to support her in her old age. Today, the best investment for national security according to the Girl Effect and also for old
age security, according to elders, is a girl.

Worthiness

In response to the negative ways in which boys are cast by transnational discourses and elders in rural villages, and indeed see themselves, boys who seek investment from philanthropists or opportunities for volunteer or paid positions with health and development programmes, must invest significant energy into defining themselves as worthy – an imperative from which girls seem to be exempt. This gender difference was particularly striking in the letters I received, in nearly equal numbers from boys and girls, seeking my financial assistance.

In the 16 letters I gathered during the last 6 months of my research in Malawi, eight from boys and eight from girls, there were two striking gendered trends. First, girls asked exclusively for school fees because, “School is like a key to the future,” as one put it. Of the eight letters from boys, however, only one letter from a boy who had completed secondary school and wanted to take a post-secondary course in journalism, and one boy in secondary school asked for school fees. Rather, boys asked for money to travel for HIV/AIDS training in another part of the country, for sports equipment, and, in two cases, for money to record a gospel music CD. The boys’ requests were therefore more for entrepreneurial reasons than for educational ones. Second, a distinct gendered theme in the letters was that boys included details about their personal character which made them deserving of my support. Girls, in contrast, tended to tell stories about their poverty and suffering due to external forces. For example, girls’ requests read like these examples:
Girl 1: The main point for visiting you is to beg you that if you can have money please help me for school fees because the teacher have chased me. At first my [plan] was my aunt who was working as a teacher…used to pay my school fees so the bad position is my aunt had passed away…I came here with my hopeness so show your sweet heart…

Girl 2: As of now I am in form one [first year of secondary school] this year and next year I will be in form two. So I want to help me school fees, school shoes, and school materials like dictionary, note book, instrument box, school bag and so on which are needed at school…[my family] wants you to helm them [with] iron sheets and fertilizer because the soil in Malawi are very poor it needs more fertilizer.

Girl 3: LOOKING FOR HELP:

I would like to apply for the above topic…I don’t have school fees. Madam, I am begging you if you can understand to help me with school fees…I have both my parents but [they] are uneducated therefore my mother, she is at home, while my father is doing some peace work [sic.] to help the family.

In these quotes, girls clearly drew on narratives of loss and poverty to justify their deservedness of funding. None of the letters written by girls contained any attempt at emphasising their personal “goodness” or “worthiness”. These qualities were assumed. Boys’ letters, however, consistently contained lines like:

Boy 1: I hereby write to apply for transport for the above mentioned loan. I am a handicapped person and hard working and enthusiastic team player and able to meet any good things. Amount transport is K4,500 [equivalent to 31USD when the letter was written on August 3 rd 2009] for two people.

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89 In other words, the teacher had sent this girl home and told her she could not return to school until her fees had been paid.
90 I often knew these youth well. The formal tone they use in these letters was what they considered to be appropriate for a formal request like this.
Boy 2: Lauren it’s now almost three weeks without see you. I was [making craft items, some of which he included in a package for me] and selling it so that I can find my school fees. I was also writing exams. I give you these things for the decoration of your house.

Boy 3: I want you to know that I am doing carpentry and joinery…I did this because I was afraid just to [live] at home without doing anything after I wrote my final exams. The list of my examination results…[he outlined his very good grades] It is only a sponsor who can pay my school fees [that I need]…if I can find somebody who can humble himself to pay me, I am sure that I could work very hard.

In these letters, boys emphasise that they are hard-working, active people, and, as the last one suggests most evidently, keeping busy. I received one letter written by a boy on behalf of a girl.

In this letter, the boy outlined the poverty she experiences, saying, “she has no proper house [and] in the raining season faces problems” just like the letters from other girls. However, he also extolled her worthiness of my investment in ways that none of the girls ever did for themselves. At the end of the letter he included a “Comment” section in which he wrote, “Julia is a very good girl. Active and intelligent according to her school reports. Very good conduct. She is still young that is to say she do not know boys because she is still young. She may go to do notorious things if not properly kept.” This, I believe, reflects how conditioned boys have become to having to justify requests for support based on individual worth – while apparently most girls would deem such an additional comment section unnecessary, this boy cannot conceive of asking for investment without it.

As I noted in Chapter 1, sixteen peer researchers were asked to choose two youth that they wished to interview. Those they selected to interview were often selected deliberately to make a point they felt I needed to know about rural youths’ struggles. Several girls chose boys whom they felt were “good boys,” but perhaps were misunderstood and thus deserving of my
attention. For example, the following is the paragraph one of those girls wrote justifying her choice of her interviewee. In it she emphasised the boy’s individual self-worth.

[The boy] is a student at [night school]. He lives with his grandmother…he is in form 3. He is hard working. If he completes school he says he wants to be a doctor. Although he is intelligent he helps his grandmother with household chores. He also goes to the farm…He also believes in God. He is a pure Christian and does not engage himself in such practices like beer drinking, smoking, womanising and so on. What he wants is to be educated and to be doctor in the future.

This paragraph also outlines what a “worthy boy” is, in opposition to beer-drinking, smoking and other selfish behaviours that are not “anticipatory” of their futures.

Many of these boys who wrote letters to me, or whom girls advocated on behalf of, were challenging hegemonic masculinities in Malawi in several ways. The girlfriend of a boy who wrote one of the letters quoted above, told me that she would marry that boy because “he travels up and down for work, but he has said to me that ‘each and every time we will be going for VCT [voluntary counselling and testing for HIV/AIDS].’” His girlfriend appreciated this because it indicated to her that he would not engage in extra-marital affairs while away, for otherwise, “he could not feel so confident that he could be tested for HIV/AIDS.” Other young married men encouraged their wives to go back to school and to work outside of the home and make their own money, and to visit friends. In the following two chapters, I show how some young men are challenging elements of dominant masculinity that undermine women – even if sometimes they fail to overturn deeply ingrained inequalities at the household level.

The compulsion that boys feel to prove their self-worth in letters parallels the sentiment in oral requests by boys, who sometimes started their requests with statements like “As you have seen with your own eyes, I have sometimes partaken in alcohol, just, I am a good boy…” Boys
who wished to forge another sort of masculine identity, one that is “good,” at least from what they imagine to be the perspective of foreigners and transnational health and development programming, must work very hard. They must confront assumptions embedded in cultural and global ideas about Malawian (and African) males and face the assumption in the global Girl Effect that boys are simply miniature models of their fathers. Ironically then, the Girl Effect is a barrier boys must overcome in order to construct new, masculine identities – identities that, in fact, could go a long way towards improving the well-being of and providing new opportunities for women – the very aim of the Girl Effect in the first place.

**Busy Being “Good and Needy” not “Bad and Greedy”**

The self-construction of “worthiness” in letters is not enough for boys to counteract the overwhelming sense that there is something inherently defective about their gender and that they are destined to become stereotypical Malawian males. In the face of this sentiment, boys who wished to capture my attention – and to convince me that they were worthy of that attention – employed a remarkable array of strategies to resist temptations to act in ways that would reduce their perceived value. As I will show in this section, even school, which, in the face of rising poverty and unemployment among educated youth has lost some of its lustre⁹¹ (see Ndjio 2008 for similar findings in Cameroon), is repositioned by these boys as valuable for its role in preventing boys from acting on temptations.

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⁹¹ As 75-year-old Orland commented, “Boys of today, most of them don’t like school…A flock of boys are going for [to watch] videos and not for school…because things like videos are just modern things, so they, they are interested for that.” Education is no longer thought to lead to employment that enables a person to engage in a ‘modern’ lifestyle in the future.
For these boys, school worked to sustain imaginations of better, more prosperous futures in somewhat unexpected ways. Rather than being a mechanism for boys to find employment, school was consistently framed by boys as a mechanism for keeping busy and thus safe from their presumed inherent immoral and self-destructive tendencies. When I asked Mphatso, whose “joy” photo showed friends who advise each other to go to school for their futures, “What is your plan for the future?” he explained,

R: We want to open a shop.
L: What do you want to sell?
R: Sugar and soap.
L: What does going to school have to do with starting this business?
R: Because many young people of my age doesn’t have much things to do, therefore they get involved in things like drinking beer. So this helps to keep myself busy so that I should not be involved in the bad habit. We should close this door [that leads to such bad habits].

Education, for many boys, is as important a strategy for their futures, as a means of keeping them busy and “away from bad things,” as it is for acquiring skills and knowledge necessary for future careers. In combination with going to school, or especially when school fees are prohibitive of boys’ attendance, several other factors can help distract boys from their tendencies to be “bad.” David, for example, requested in his letter that I give him money to record his music to a CD. When he visited me to follow-up on his letter, he justified, “We make music to prevent from bad things – instead of getting into trouble and the bad things, we decided, no, we would start a band and make music – gospel music.”

Desire, who once took me to meet someone he referred to as the “most important person in his life,” justified spending time chatting with this friend in the same way. The friend was a middle-aged man who went to the same church as Desire, Assemblies of God. When he
introduced him to me, Desire explained that this man was the most important person in his life because he helps instil goodness in Desire.

R: He advises me to stay away from the worldly things…walking in the righteous sort of ways. It’s good. You have to stay away from worldly things.
L: From which kind of things?
R: Worldly things – these sorts of things like smoking, drinking, [and] stealing, of course. So these are the things that I have been advised by this man. Only, he doesn’t help me financially and the like, but he helps me actually by supplying support with, his good alternative sources of behaviour. So he gives them [the advice] to me to say if you lead this life, this life will help you may end up, um, you may [stalled for several seconds, thinking] um, live long. Yah, for you abstain from a lot more things rather than being involved in peer pressures what, what, what.

Being bad again here appears to be partaking in activities like drinking alcohol, smoking, and stealing. Bad behaviour can be avoided by chatting with good friends and mentors who advise in good behaviour.

Joining youth clubs and sport activities can also serve the same purpose. I asked one young, married man what he felt about youth clubs in his village, he responded, as many boys and young men did:

L: What do you think of the programmes/clubs for youth in [your village]?
R: They are good because they help pupils to be active rather than staying at home and prevent them from doing nonsense things.
L: Like what kinds of nonsense things?
R: For example, playing sex which can lead them to get the epidemic disease. Youth clubs keep [boys] ever busy. If you have other groups at your home, please, [Can you] ask your government so these young ones can be doing [joining them]?

Similarly, when I asked a 17-year-old boy, Madalitso, why he participated in youth clubs he said, “Because ah, that time I was doing many bad things and I even started drinking beer, so when I
stopped I thought joining a club is the best thing I could do and I may be spending time there…they encourage us in controlling our behaviours.” Recall that the girls in Chapter 3 justified participating in the youth clubs because “they teach us about ufulu wawana [children’s rights].” This gendered difference in rationales for joining youth clubs (girls to take up their right to go to school and boys to keep themselves from bad behaviour) reflects precisely the gendered assumptions embedded in the Girl Effect, that girls are innately worthy of investment that will better their futures and boys are innately prone to “bad” behaviours. Later in the interview with Madalitso, he also spoke about his “joy” photo which showed a small television on a tall stand facing scattered wooden chairs. I recognized it immediately as the television at one of the youth centres in town. He said about TV,

R: When someone is tired of working he may go there to pass the hours away by watching that instead of doing bad things. Your day may even end there.
L: Like what kind of bad things?
R: Sometimes maybe you agreed to go for beer drinking and do something, so, there are even girls [prostitutes] there. So, for you to avoid all those things then you can say that ah, I don’t want that [I want to watch TV].

Interestingly, watching videos in a video showroom in the market would be cast as a “bad” behaviour on the part of boys, but watching the TV at a youth centre in town was cast by this boy as a “good” choice of ways to spend time that would otherwise be riskily idle. Organized sports are another key strategy employed by youth programmes to help boys to control their behaviours, which they fear will lead to HIV. A male peer educator with one organization wrote a poem for the youth advocacy event we hosted just before I left the field. It summarizes how sports are seen as effective in preventing bad temptations among boys.

Boys and Girls
How do you think about everyday life?
Boys and Girls
How do you think about AIDS?
Boys and Girls
How do you think about your goals?

Boys and Girls
Let’s participate in sports, mainly for us the youths
There are different types of sports
Let us take part in sports.

Boys and Girls
Sports is important because it makes us busy
Instead of doing sex we go to sports
Instead of drinking beer we go to sports
Instead of joining bad groups we go to sports

Boys and Girls
Sports to me is important
Before I started taking part in sports
Most of the times I was walking with people who were drinking beer, doing sex and some of them were even smoking (chamba [marijuana])
When I was walking with them I was differentiating myself between the one [who] is drinking beer and the one who is doing sports.

Boys and Girls
I found no benefits from those who I was walking with. Instead I was just wasting my money for nothing. After some time I was defected from the group.

Boys and Girls
Let us think about sport
If we don’t take part in sports
Boys and Girls
We will be caught in the jaws of a crocodile.
Remember, prevention is better than cure.

While the poem calls to “boys and girls” to engage in sports, the “bad” behaviours sports are said to help prevent are exclusive to boys.

Conclusion

Several practitioners have called, as Cornwall, Edstrom and Greig (2011) do, for research and development to:

[A]ddress the hetero-normativity that characterizes much of the work that is done in the name of Gender and Development, and with it the essentialisms that abound about ‘men’ and ‘women’. This has become increasingly urgent, the more that the ‘gender agenda’ in development is transformed to accentuate a long-present tendency in development discourse towards highly reified representations of women and girls as heroines and victims and men as perpetrators, or indeed as shadowy figures who are being virtually airbrushed out of the picture (15).

As Dworkin, et al. (2012) argue, to bring men back into the picture, we must “minimize commonly held beliefs on the ground that engaging men ‘takes away’ from women’s resources or leadership” (114). In this chapter, I reinforce these arguments by showing how, in fact, by not engaging men in Malawi the Girl Effect “takes away” from women’s resources. The Girl Effect, while effectively “airbrushing” men out of the picture, reinforces an assumption in Malawi about boys’ natural tendencies towards the immoral. As young men internalize this the Girl Effect
actually interrupts in a process of change underway in Malawian masculinities led by young men.

Shore (2008), drawing on Burchell, et al. (1991), and Rose (1999), reminds us that “A key characteristic of neoliberal governance is that it relies on more indirect forms of intervention and control. In particular, it seeks to act on and through the agency, interests, desires and motivations of individuals, encouraging them to see themselves as active subjects responsible for improving their own conduct” (284). Hayhurst (2011) argues that the Girl Effect works on and through girls to encourage them to be proper neoliberal subjects. In this chapter, I show how the Girl Effect, specifically by not imbuing boys with the same overwhelming individual potential as girls, also works on and through boys in different ways. In some ways, the discourse reinforces the notion that beer-drinking and womanising are inherent to the male psyche and that this is the only valid construction of masculinity in this context. The problem of idleness and beer-drinking is thus, in turn, attributed to boys’ individual tendencies rather than poverty and unemployment among rural youth. This clearly causes much anxiety among young boys who actively resist these presumed male tendencies toward immoral and dangerous behaviours and fight to construct a self that is worthy of the futures they desire. This is yet another example of invisible violence at work, symbolic violence. Symbolic violence was first coined by Pierre Bourdieu (2000), to refer to “the mechanism whereby the socially dominated naturalize the status quo and blame themselves for their domination” (Bourgois 2009: 17). Inversing the order a bit, boys in Malawi come to naturalize, not what is said or even thought specifically, but what they derive from what’s left unsaid in the Girl Effect. By ignoring such violence, the Girl Effect, however ironically, acts as a barrier boys must overcome in order to construct new masculine identities –
identities that may well challenge inequalities for women, the very aim of the Girl Effect in the first place.
“Five to four girls to boys – we’ve got ‘jenda’!” a middle-aged man called out with an air of pride in the mini-bus. His wink made it clear that this announcement was for my benefit. Conceptualizations of gender equality, termed “jenda” in rural Malawi, (also see Bezner Kerr, et al. 2008) are often reduced to a kind of countable gender equality in health and development interventions which are typically accountable to foreign donors who require quantitative evidence of the impact of their money. Because the effectiveness of gender equality programming is measured as a quantifiable entity, this is often the way it comes to be understood by target audiences and in the popular imagination, as this man’s proclamation indicates. This chapter will show how gender accounting misses the mark on understanding and addressing gender inequities, and is simultaneously blind to the creative ways rural girls are asserting their independence, self-worth and power in relationships with men. Perhaps paradoxically, gender accounting reinforces certain inequalities and leads to performances by tenuously employed staff and youth volunteers who are trying to reconcile the incongruity between the inappropriateness of certain “gender” development activities and the accounting requirements of their foreign bosses. This chapter will also show how quantitative notions of jenda seep into the subjectivities of rural youth, who negotiate a kind of countable equality as part of their understanding of moral and modern relationships.

If anticipation is a key feature of neoliberal economic culture, transmitted globally through various mechanisms including health campaigns, a key feature of its operation is “accountability.” As Marilyn Strathern (2000) describes in the introduction to her edited volume,
“Audit Cultures,” accountability frameworks and audit mechanisms that were once managerial tools in financial institutions, are now a part of neoliberal logic and are increasingly entrenched in a wide range of institutions. They rest on “a common language of aspiration” for a preconceived future, demanding continuous assessment and evaluation of the achievement of set markers on the path to the foreseeable, more hopeful future (Strathern 2000: 1). Dislodged from its moorings in financial institutions, accountability thus takes on more than mere economic efficiency. In institutions, where one organization such as a local NGO must be accountable to another, such as a government donor (Power 1997), accountability is imbued with morality – only through proper accountability of their time, costs, processes, etc. to the public do institutions act ethically towards their stakeholders (Strathern 2000). This chapter contributes to our understanding of the “multiplex, cross-cutting…values and practices promulgated in the name of accountability” (Strathern 2000: 2) by looking at how accountability is taken up by local NGOs and community-based organizations promoting health and development among youth in rural Malawi. In this chapter, I follow Macintyre, et al. (2008) in asking, “to what extent do corporations, reviewers, etc. participate in a cultural change, one in which complying with the needs of an audit becomes an end in itself?” (106). I show how interventions in Malawi, due to demands for accountability to international donors, effectively reduce gender equality to something countable.

Such evaluative requirements can also distort curricula and influence educational activities as they encourage teaching to meet the goals of audit processes, rather than improvements in human experience. Shore (2008) points to examples where some teachers devote more and more time to preparing students for standardised testing in Britain, to the neglect of other topics in the curriculum, and where some teachers have falsified students’ exam
results. Also, as Shore (2008) notes, referring to an instance in which some university
departments allegedly fabricated notes for meetings that were never held, “dealing with the new
performance measures has itself become a ‘performance’ in the theatrical as well as sociological
sense” (290). I will show how accountability to donors similarly shapes and distorts gender
development activities in Malawi. Since community-based development programmes represent
one of the few employment opportunities in rural Malawi, there is added incentive for the
unquestioning adoption of accountability practices and for performances around gender activities
by programme staff (who would like to keep their jobs) and by volunteer youth (who would like
to get a job). This inevitably affects how gender factors into programme logics (systematic and
training) leading to misrepresentation of gender change in programme evaluations, a distortion of
empowerment activities to meet evaluative goals, and in some cases to performance on the part
of youth and programme staff to please donors and keep their jobs.

Despite all the rhetoric of empowering girls through education, protecting their human
rights by preventing “early marriages,” and protecting their health through gender equality
training (during which women are frequently trained in what clothing not to wear to avoid
enticing boys and inviting their own rape), gender inequalities persist. By looking at how youth
construct gender equality in their social and sexual relations, this chapter looks beyond the
immediate effects of audit culture on development activities and the efficacy of evaluation, to
how “countability” has entered the public consciousness in Malawi. People often seem to engage
with jenda as if performing for an invisible, and perhaps foreign, authority figure, suggesting that
the concept has not really been assimilated into daily life. Nevertheless, I will show how, despite
its often performative instantiations, jenda has also come to shape gendered subjectivities among
some Malawian youth. I argue that as programme staff members celebrate the ratio of girls to
boys at a training session, they both reflect and permit blindness to more deeply ingrained and consequential gender inequalities in the lives of rural youth and to the remarkable strides some young women are making in asserting power in their relationships with men. However, whereas perceived links between gender equality, modernity, employment and health within the health and development sector in Malawi lead both boys and girls to express a sense of urgency around achieving the countable *jenda* in their social and sexual lives, talk of addressing more consequential inequalities is often met by shrugs and laughter.

**Abuses and Vulnerabilities of Rural Girls**

In this section I show that the girls in my research are extremely vulnerable to domestic and sexual abuse by men, whether they are male kin or their boyfriends/husbands, which in turn can lead to poor mental and physical health and, should they choose to fight back or leave the relationship, poverty as well. Vulnerability, which starts as a feature of girls’ junior status with parents, becomes a lack of power in romantic relationships. Boyfriends and husbands sometimes use physical force to affirm their power. While throughout the dissertation I have shown how girls are asserting agency in various ways in their relationships with men, here I aim to demonstrate what a remarkable achievement this is given the extent to which submissive and deferential behaviour is expected from women even in the context of the natal household.

Orland, a male elder, speaking about his family, explained that his girls, like others in Malawi while under their parents’ roof, were also under their parents’ and especially their father’s “power.”
Now with, with females [they] are being controlled by us, by us parents…females have got no decisions, but we have to decide what women should do. In our, my case here, my children, I have to make sure that they should go to school first. After school if one has qualified she should go for a job [but simultaneously] I cannot say ‘no you don’t need to be married’, no, I can’t say that [meaning that marriage is as important as school for girls]. I know in Malawi, I think it’s just a custom [laughs] that females have to listen to the parents, to do everything that they say before is that not correct? … And they [females] do understand very well.

Boys, on the other hand, once they reach maturity, make their own decisions.

For the boy [however] I have no decision. Once I have educated him, he should decide himself what to do - to get work, or to go anywhere he wants to go. I have no time to say go to such and such place, no. He decides himself because he has passed that time – the period of being chinyamata [youth]. As soon as he has passed that period, well, I have nothing to say to him…[laughs] there is no dictation but my, my true power is over my daughters. Yes, but for boys you can tell them when they are still more the chinyamata group [youth age], but once they have passed out that 21 years of age, we leave them like that they have to decide themselves. We say now he is grown up, he has got a deciding mind of himself, but with ladies no matter she is 21 or what, provided she is home, she is under the blossom of father and mother.

This pair of quotes represents a clearly asserted patriarchal set of assumptions that, from my observations and according to those of others, translate directly into practice. There is also a higher expectation of girls to perform the household and agricultural tasks that support the family until they marry and pass to the control of their husbands. This is reflected in maps drawn by groups of girls and boys that served to introduce me to the daily activities of youth in rural villages. In total, 12 gender- and age-segregated groups were asked to draw maps of their villages marking the most important things in their lives. Maps drawn by the youngest boys and girls in my research (ages 11 – 16) demonstrate the gendered expectations of boys and girls.
Boys drew maps that indicated the spaces in which they spent time and marked leisure activities, such as the football field, the video showroom and houses in which they danced. Girls indicated many more household chores, emphasising the activities like pounding maize with mortar and pestle, carrying firewood, and cooking, though they did not indicate where these activities took place.

The expectation for women to be submissive extends from women’s relationship with elders in their natal homes to their relationship with their boyfriends, and eventually with their husbands. Girls’ accounts of being unable to insist on condom use because of boys holding their wrists to keep them from running away is one illustration of this expectation as it is felt and practised by both men and women. Following a conversation with three young women (ages 17-21) about condoms, I recorded the following in my field notes on April 24, 2009:

R1: Lauren, it’s hard. It’s impossible to use a condom correctly. You know, to use them there are steps to follow. Almost 10 steps. It is not easy. If they [boys] are rushing, they could open it with their teeth and then that’s not correct.
L: So, why don’t the girls put it on their boyfriends if it’s so difficult for the boys?
R2: It is impossible. The girl can’t have a condom there because she doesn’t know before that they will have sex. The boy doesn’t say, OK, now we are going out, so next time we meet we will have sex. He just does it as surprise.
R1: And for him, he is holding the girl’s wrist, to keep her there because otherwise she will run.

In this conversation, it is clear that girls have a complex relationship of ambivalence toward condom use that is tied up in normative assumptions about sexual relationships. According to these girls, while boys do not use condoms properly because they are rushing, girls are unable to initiate condom use because the sex is being forced by men who pin down their girlfriend’s
wrists. In some cases these boys may be raping these young women. Rape is certainly a feature of heterosexual relationships in Malawi – according to the Malawi Demographic and Health Survey (MDHS 2004), 13% of married women reported experiencing marital rape and 10% of women experienced forced sexual intercourse in the 12 months preceding the survey (273). Much more complicated that this, however, girls also explained that running away from sex sometimes indicates non-consent on the part of girls, but it also sometimes indicates appropriate display of feminine modesty in the face of desire and consent.

Very low levels of education, especially among rural women, may contribute to these circumstances in which women cannot challenge dominant femininities and assert power even when their health is at risk. Twenty-one percent of women in rural Malawi have never attended school (MDHS 2010: 11). While education levels of both women and men are higher in the Northern Region of Malawi than elsewhere in the country, only 3% of all women in this region have completed high school and many of these women undoubtedly came from urban areas (MDHS 2010: 13). While the girls I was chatting with about condoms were friends of mine and quite forthcoming about their intimate relationships with men, girls and young women were often extremely shy during formal interviews. Late in my research, I conducted a focus group with four girls aged 15-19 who had recently married. All of them were from rural villages in the area and only one had completed her elementary school education. In June the weather is quite cool, so we chose to sit on a mat outside in the sun. Three of the four girls faced away from me, their legs spread straight out in front of them in various directions, their straight backs creating an impenetrable wall around me. I had learned early on that these conversations with girls without photographs were futile, but we tried nonetheless. The girls hardly spoke an audible word. At the end of the focus group, my research assistant Sella, commented, “Education is
everything… these girls are like this because they are uneducated and cannot think through their options. No one asks them to think.” While Sella, as an educated young woman, is certainly biased and was being a bit self-congratulatory, it may be true that as school-going women spend time away from their natal household their confidence in their own voices and opinions grows. For, as Orland put it above, at home girls are expected to be quiet, to “understand very well” that “females have got no decisions,” but men “have to decide what women should do.”

Elders sometimes expressed annoyance with girls’ increased confidence as a result of schooling. Again, drawing on a conversation with Orland,

L: And for you what are your concerns for youth in general, for boys and girls, or what are the challenges facing girls and boys today?
R: Aaah, today things have been changed. Because we grew in old days where, where everything was being conducted by parents, but in this time the boys have got their own thinking and that girls have got their own thinking, sometimes we parents do not even understand what she is doing, they [girls in particular] are always annoying us.
L: [laughs]
R: They are always annoying us, because they are doing the things which, which were not done in the past.
L: Ha, like what kind of things?
R: Oooh disobedience, they, don’t, they, don’t, they disobey to what? To, to our commandments [laughs]. I will, lets call them commandments [laughs].
L: They don’t listen?

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92 Sella was from a rural village herself, but by some ironic luck was sent to live with her aunt in town and care for her cousin’s newborn twins after her cousin died during their birth. Although the responsibility for childcare interrupted her schooling initially, she found she could attend night classes since living in town meant the school was nearby. While she failed her final year’s examinations, as most students do, and thus does not have her school certificate, she had completed the secondary school curriculum. At the public secondary school most accessible to the majority of the youth I worked with, one of the teachers pulled up some statistics on student graduation rates and shared with me that in 2008 nearly 100 students in their final year wrote the cap-stone exam. The overall pass rate at 46% was a significant improvement on pass rate of 30% in 2007. In 2008, 46% of the boys who wrote the exam had passed and only 29% of the girls. Sella, who did not pass, was among the majority of girls and boys who wrote their exam that year.
R: They don’t listen, they always arguing, they are always argue, in those days [when I was young] arguments were not there, but this time they [youth] can argue.

L: Aaah why?

R: I don’t know perhaps… Malawi is growing, perhaps, perhaps Malawi is growing that the [girl] children of today are more intelligent than those of that… the past.

This intelligence gained mostly through school and civic education programmes targeting youth comes with a certain confidence according to school-going girls and boastfulness according to elders.

The quiet women in the focus group I described above, being newly married, also had more reason than unmarried girls to be very shy when speaking with me. Wives, especially new ones, often claim to fear their husbands. Domestic physical abuse is common in rural Malawian villages and newly married women in particular may have a hard time predicting how their husbands will react to them engaging in activities outside of the home (including talking to me about their lives). The Malawi Demographic Health Survey (MDHS 2004) shows that 1/3 women have experienced physical abuse by men and that the main perpetrators of violence are husbands (266). Furthermore, the survey results show that insistence on knowing where they are at all times and being jealous or angry if they talk to other men are the main controlling behaviours that women experience from their husbands (57 percent and 50 percent, respectively) (MDHS 2004: 271). Just fewer than 20 percent of ever-married women say that their husbands try to limit their contact with their natal families (20 percent), do not permit them to meet with their female friends (19 percent), do not trust them with any money (18 percent), or frequently accuse them of being unfaithful (17 percent) (MDHS 2004: 271).

Fear of a husband’s disapproval or anger also affects newly married women’s ability to forge ties of support or solidarity. In a conversation about asiki friendships that girls are forming
today (described in full in the following chapter), I asked a group of women why some girls would refuse a friendship with another woman. In some cases, the women described, “She may be afraid of her husband. [He] may be harsh.” In other words, women sometimes avoid friendships in anticipation that a husband will react negatively.

I was often privy to the abuse of women in rural villages. Although the police did sometimes come to the villages where I worked to investigate thefts or destruction of property, police did not tend to deal with cases of physical abuse, which are considered private, domestic affairs. However, on one occasion I saw a youth organization get involved in a case of a young man physically abusing his wife, Chanda. Chanda was 17 years old and had been married for over a year to a man who frequently beat her. On July 15, 2008 I recorded a story in my field notes that I summarize here.

Chanda has one child not yet walking and it is said she is pregnant with another, but it is tradition not to tell anyone you are pregnant until you are showing, so Chanda has not said anything to me about the pregnancy. When we’d first invited Chanda to join the focus group, her husband stumbled up to us hot and drunk and said “no, I don’t want my wife to participate with you.” Sella, who was helping me that day, retorted, rather snottily, “It is your right. If you don’t want her to participate I will strike her from the list.” As we walked off, several women in nearby houses who had witnessed the interaction, begged Sella and me not to remove Chanda from the list. Two days later (and 1.5 hours late) Chanda walked into the focus group we held with married girls her age and asked for a camera. She took mostly self-photos, her arms outstretched, and a few photos of a pile of cash spread out on the earthen floor of their stout and slanted little home.

As Chanda walked towards us for the interview today once again her husband stumbled awkwardly behind her. As we turned to say goodbye, her husband, who teetered in the light breeze, suddenly, and with surprising energy and accuracy given his state, slapped
Chanda square across the face twice and said, “I don’t want you greeting the muzungu [white/English person].” Her baby cried out from the house and Chanda scurried towards the cry. Her husband followed at her heels with his fist forward. We could hear that the beatings continued in the bedroom.

A youth organization in a nearby town was contacted and for the first and only time I saw a husband reprimanded for beating his wife. One of the organization leaders who was well respected in the village and knew the family well did the reprimanding. Two days later, this man, as sober as a stone, apologized to me.

Although at the time I thought it rather ironic that Sella, who as a peer educator spent much of her volunteer time advocating “equal rights” said it was this drunk man’s right to determine the activities of his wife when we first invited Chanda to participate in the focus group, now when I read my field notes it makes sense. In practice, women’s rights are loosely and somewhat unpredictably protected by this discourse. On the one hand, Chanda’s case is an example of what gender rights discourse fails to accomplish, or only accomplishes in a partial, unreliable way that is easily undermined by perpetrators of gender-based violence. For example, while this man has been exposed to the human rights discourse, it seems that he interpreted his behaviour as a failure of manners to the White outsider rather than as a violation of his wife’s rights. The emphasis on awareness and education means that less is invested in the enforcement of laws, or in the kinds of material support that might actually empower women like Chanda. On the other hand, as far as I know, Chanda’s regular beatings were halted for the entirety of the two years that I worked in her village. Regardless of whether the police or the youth organizations can legally do something, the threat of reprise for rights abuses does provide youth with some leverage for achieving some of their own desires, at least in the context of their families.
Physical abuse by husbands was also frequently the topic of the “suffering” photos and stories of young women. Valerie’s photo and story, discussed for other reasons in Chapter 1 is a prime example.

**Figure 5.1: Suffer photo: Inequalities in marriages**

Recall that Valerie, a 25-year-old woman with three children, took this photo to explain how her husband is a lazy and abusive alcoholic. On account of his alcoholism and affinity for additional “wives” (as Valerie referred to his various girlfriends) on whom he spends a lot of money, she explained that her children go hungry and she fears contracting HIV/AIDS. Valerie’s strategy for dealing with her husband’s infidelity is to scare a new girlfriend away by threatening her (as long as she is not pregnant, for in that case if a miscarriage occurs Valerie may be blamed for using witchcraft to kill the fetus). Valerie’s parents received 8000 MK (about 30 CAD) when her husband took her to his village. This bridewealth prevents Valerie from being able to go home to her parents if she feels her husband is making it impossible for her to meet her own and her children’s needs.

Many young Malawian women were well aware of newly married women’s constraints and vulnerabilities within marriage. Tawanga, a 16-year-old girl gave three reasons that marriage may be undesirable: the loss of “rights” or freedom to engage in activities in town, physical
abuse and poverty. The latter referred specifically to husbands not giving their wives the money necessary to grind maize for preparation of nsima, the staple food. She was not sure she ever wanted to marry.

R: They [marriages] are not good
L: Why?
R: As I have already said, having a boyfriend it can disturb your plans [to study] and as the end result you will not reach your [goals].
L: Wati thengwa? [What about marriages?]
R: It means that all your rights end there.
L: All your rights?
R: Rights! We call it wanangwa in Chitumbuka – rights, freedom.
L: So…what kinds of rights end when you are married?
R: For example maybe there is any functions or activities for you to go and watch and your husband will say no it means your rights has not been reached, because you have a right to go but your husband says ‘no don’t go’, it means that your rights have been disturbed.
L: What else happens when girls are married, are there any other challenges?
R: Kutchaika [being beaten].
L: Does that happen very often do women get beaten when they get married?
R: Yes
L: Why are they beaten?
R: Chifukwa chakuti panji ka banarume lero nga mowa so panji waruta ku mowa kura bwe wawerako maro moti wakuzayamba kachifukwa ka doko panji kuphika nsima bwe watchedwa kuphika bwe kuti kutchayana [The reason is that most of men nowadays they like drinking so when they go for drinking and when they are back you can quarrel over a minor thing, like you have taken a long time to cook nsima, then you can be beaten].
L: Mmmm, what else are the other challenges [women face] when they get married?
R: Kusuzgika [suffering]. Ndarama ya kuchigayo [Not having money for milling maize].
The dietary diversity and food security survey results in my research support findings that correlate marriage with heightened food insecurity for girls. The survey, which was conducted with 213 rural youth aged 11-29, employed an experiential measure of food security based on the Food and Agriculture Organization’s Individual Food Security Measure (FAO 2007). The results showed that both male and female youth who report their spouses to be their primary caregivers were significantly more likely to report eating smaller meals due to food insufficiency (63.6%) than unmarried youth living with biological parents (36.4%). Although no significant differences were evident in dietary diversity between boys and girls in general, with both scoring extremely low dietary diversity scores (4/14 food categories in dietary diversity score developed by FAO 2007), in the first years of marriage the dietary diversity of young women declines significantly. Whereas 16.7% of single girls and young women experience very low (0-3) dietary diversity scores, 41.7% of married girls experience the same.93

Additionally, married young women in Malawi are found to be less likely than unmarried young women and older married women to have comprehensive knowledge about HIV transmission and yet are at one of the highest risks for HIV today because they are sexually active and have little power to negotiate safe sexual practices with their husbands (NSO 2005).94 Grace, a 21-year-old girl completing her secondary studies who, like Tawanga, questioned whether she would get married, explained how her father’s behaviour taught her that husbands abuse trust and can put their wives as risk of HIV:

93 I conducted this dietary diversity survey during the season of food insecurity, when the harvest from the previous year had run out and the next year’s crop was still in the ground, not yet ready to be harvested and consumed. A survey conducted during food secure seasons may show different gendered patterns of food distribution.
94 Comprehensive knowledge about HIV/AIDS is determined when youth “say that use of condom for every sexual intercourse and having just one uninfected and faithful partner can reduce the chance of getting the AIDS virus, say that a healthy-looking person can have the AIDS virus, and reject the two most common local misconceptions [that HIV is transmitted by mosquito bites or by supernatural means ie: witchcraft]” (Malawi Demographic Health Survey 2004, NSO 2005: 211).
Yes, I think I will get married one day, but I also think that chances of getting married are 50:50… when I think of HIV I don’t think of getting married. And I don’t trust men myself. Because in my life, this age from when I was in secondary [school] to this date I have met different people. Many married people are just proposing me but, like, they are married, but [and still] they are asking me to do something like that, so when I think of that I think ‘one day I will get married and my husband will just do that too’, so then I think ah, I cannot get married. … and too, when I think of what my father was doing, that is why he is HIV positive, so… My father was married to his first wife and had my brother who lives in Zomba. And then with his second wife he had my other brother. And then he met my mother. So, it was not polygamy I can say because he left that wife, he said I do not love you and I want to marry another. But now, he has not left my mother, no, but he likes just going with other girls and so we hear, ah your husband he is just going with this girl, hey he is with that woman and this and that. So, when I think of that I don’t think of getting married in my life.

I came to learn that agency, education, abstinence and prevention of early marriages are central tenets of girl-targeted campaigns in northern Malawi. With the highly gendered labour and decision-making at the household level for both married and unmarried girls, and the frequency with which physical and verbal abuse, poverty, broken trust, and fears of HIV were described as characteristic of marriage, these values seem appropriate. Nonetheless, in the next section I probe how this approach, which positions girlhood as a key locus of intervention for securing Malawi’s future, meshes with rural girls’ strategies for self-protection and how it shapes their aspirations and interpersonal relations.
Gender Empowerment, Education and Abstinence

Figure 5.2 depicts a poster stuck to the earthen wall in a youth’s home. The same poster is found on hospital walls, in resource centres, at schools, in maize mills, and on grocery stalls. It links girls’ independence, health, morality and education to productivity in the future by showing women in high profile, uniformed careers, including a lawyer, a judge and a police officer. It combines messages about girls’ individual right and responsibility to go to school, the emphasis on “abstinence” of the ‘ABC’ campaign, gender equality and valuing one’s life.

Figure 5.2: HIV campaign poster to encourage behaviour change among girls

As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, the overarching goals of peer educators, a youth organization leader explained, were to “find out the problems of rural youth, promote positive behaviour change among youth, and to establish more youth clubs.” This poster is an accurate reflection of much of youth-targeted programming in that it too is focused on shaping
youths’ behaviours, whether sexual or scholastic. Behaviour change messaging targeting girls clearly sees the two as intimately linked.

As has also been shown in other African contexts, much of the behaviour change programming targets women with information on how to behave morally so as not to sexually entice boys or men. More than once, I witnessed programme staff imitating a sexually enticing walk to a chorus of giggles from the crowd of young observers, with the aim of teaching women how not to walk, in order to protect themselves from rape, HIV/AIDS and pregnancy (also see Cheney 2007; Hayhurst 2012 for similar examples from Uganda). I also attended several trainings for girls on other behavioural strategies for preventing or dealing with rape. One facilitator opened a youth club meeting with a problematic scenario: “An older man who desired a young girl much more beautiful than his wife followed her into the bush to rape her.” He then asked, “What can you do if a man is standing over you in a bush?” Girls’ responses ranged from suggesting that girls should not go to the bush in the first place, saying, “You should say no to picking matiokolo [wild fruits found in the bush]” to “Grab his genitals and run!” To the latter, the facilitator responded, “Of course, that’s not a good option because it hurts the man, though it is good for the girl.” The facilitator’s second example was frequently discussed at workshops: “A standard 8 [primary school level 8] girl has been impregnated by her teacher. What would you do?” This time the facilitator provided the answers, in an effort to speed the lesson along. He said, “Go to your grandmother. Your grandmother should explain your situation to your parents. A problem shared with someone is at least half-solved. To think deeply and become mad is not a solution.” Again, the solution was exclusively focused on girls’ individual, immediate and appropriate behaviour. The legal and moral culpability of abusive and predatory men was not addressed.
Girls in Malawi value education and often describe education as a route to prosperity and independence from men. Women who had stopped their schooling to marry and then felt unsupported by their husbands frequently lamented not having stayed in school. One 26-year-old mother of two children said, “[I fear for the future] because I am not educated and I married two husbands who are not caring for me, and I am back from marriage but if I was educated I [could] do things on my own.” Just as Tawanga and Grace noted above, this woman affirmed that marriage led to all kinds of suffering and therefore it is perhaps better to study. However, studying alone is not enough. Studying leads to independence if, Tawanga reasoned, “When you finish school, [you] get a job, and start receiving your salary, then you can depend on your own.”

As the introduction to a skit youth wrote and performed at a youth advocacy event I helped facilitate in August 2009 demonstrates, the promises of uniformed careers in the poster above do not match the realities of rural employment opportunities in Malawi.

Performer 1: Hi, I’m Brianna. I finished Form 4 [final grade in secondary school] with 26 points. I’m unemployed.
Performer 2: Hi, I’m Martin. I finished Form 4 with 15 points. I am ‘just staying.’
Performer 3: Hi, I’m Chimwemwe. I finished Form 4 with distinction. I cannot find a job.

Unemployment was a particular concern of educated youth, who felt that after they had completed secondary school the government had abandoned them by not providing further opportunities.

I met some girls who felt education would lead them to a good job and thence to independence from a husband and protection from HIV/AIDS (see Poulin 2007; Stambach 2000 for similar findings in Tanzania). However, many girls described sexual relationships with their boyfriends in exchange for money or gifts of basic necessities such as soap, lotion, underwear,
Research conducted by Tawfik and Watkins (2007) in rural Malawi found that, contrary to the assumption espoused in global health programmes (including WHO and USAID discourses in Malawi) and government discourses that women engage in extramarital sex out of financial need and “survival,” women from rural villages in the Balaka District cited several other reasons as well. Tawfik and Watkins (2007) write, women are also motivated by “attractive consumer goods as well as by passion and by revenge for a husband’s infidelity” (1090). Several anthropologists have shown that African girls are drawn into sex with boyfriends or into the sex trade by luxury items, often referred to as the three C’s, cars, cash, cell phones (Lee 2001; also see Pattman 2001 on sex trade in universities in Botswana) or four C’s, adding clothes (van den Borne 2003). Lotions and some foods are also often discussed in the literature as “luxury” items. Poulin (2007), drawing on her research on the sex trade in Malawi, explains, “Girls use money to buy luxury items, such as body lotions or cookies, bringing them admiration from their peers” (2387). School-bound or school-going girls from rural villages in the context of my study, however, describe these items not as luxuries but as necessities for success in school. As I demonstrate below, without lotion, for instance, they may be teased or even feel rejected from school. Also, some of the girls I interviewed who worked in the sex trade expressed choosing to do so to avoid having to marry. While they were often coming from very poor households and certainly also needed the money, it was a combination of motivations – economic need, status enabled by the purchase of “luxury” goods, and desires to challenge gendered assumptions in Malawi—that motivated some women to engage in sex work.

Rural girls and boys explained that they are heckled for their odour and for their uncleanliness after long walks to school. As Adeline Masquelier (2005) points out, dirt,
“becomes at times almost synonymous with nakedness in its capacity to inscribe stigma onto human bodies…what is visible is exclusion from the moral community” (7). In 24-hour activity recalls that I conducted at the end of each interview with youth, I frequently learned that youth who described themselves as being enrolled in school had not gone to school the previous day. When I asked why, responses often echoed that of this 14-year-old boy, “Malaya nkhachapa cha! I did not wash my clothes.” Rural youth often have only one school uniform, and, with more than an hour’s walk to school, it does not take long for this uniform to become very dirty. Dirty clothes and body odour made rural girls feel especially self-conscious. As I became more familiar with village girls who walked into town to go to the public secondary school, increasingly regularly girls visited me ostensibly to “wash their legs” but also very obviously to borrow my antiperspirant and scented body lotion, both of which they applied liberally over much of their bodies before heading to school.

These same girls were also sometimes turned away at the classroom door for not wearing a brassiere. One girl in Form 4, the final year of her secondary schooling, in a conversation about the factors that affected how her peers interacted with her, explained how her popularity was negatively affected by her role as a monitor of whether other female students were wearing a brassiere as they entered the classroom. “I would be sitting at the door and running my hand down the back to snap their bra strap,” she described as she demonstrated on me. “Not wearing a bra, they say, would be distracting to the boys,” she explained. Since women’s breasts are not generally seen as sensual in Malawi, I was surprised to learn of her task. A respected elder Malawian woman who was university educated and had significant experience travelling to European countries once explained to me why she felt so frustrated by the increasing tendency for girls and young women to wear pants. “The breast [for you] is like thighs in Malawi. A
woman can hang her breast anywhere to feed and it doesn’t matter, but if a girl shows thighs a man is sky high.” Pants, apparently, draw attention to two separate thighs, and especially the point at the crotch where the thighs meet. Nevertheless, some teachers had implemented a mandatory brassiere rule in their classrooms. In girls’ dormitories at both public and private schools, the morning routine included borrowing and exchanging of brassieres until every girl had secured their breasts under their school uniform, part of the proper school attire. This certainly disadvantages rural girls, who most often cannot afford to purchase undergarments or to stay in school dormitories where they might be able to borrow a brassiere from a friend. As the girl above further noted, “mostly it is girls from the villages that do not have a bra.” For girls, the financial support of a boyfriend to purchase necessities for school is understandably seen as a means of addressing many obstacles to achieving an education.

As the literature shows elsewhere, girls in Malawi also very much love their boyfriends for the commodities they can help provide (Poulin 2007). In an autobiographical story, one village girl (17) wrote concerning “love” in her life,

Love is a source of everything. It is so wonderful to be loved and cared by someone who is special. When [I] am so lonely, he is always there to comfort and encourage me. Many times when am in trouble he tries to help me, one time I was lacking basic needs, like school fees, clothes, food and pocket money… At the end of the day I will find myself getting employed from his [my boyfriend’s] money which he paid school fees.

In exchange, however, this girl had to have sexual intercourse with her boyfriend so that he would not abandon her. As she wrote later in the same story, “In the process of enjoyment he was forcing me to have sex with him while we promised each other not to have sex before marriage.” As with many girls, she found that to stay in school she inevitably failed to fully “value her life” and “abstain from sex,” as the poster advises. The objectives of equality,
independence, and abstinence until marriage, it seems, are not always compatible with other nationally endorsed goals, such as staying in school. One interpretation of this girl’s story and one that would accurately characterize the feelings of many girls and young women in my research is that to be independent later, one must be dependent now.

Importantly, however, another interpretation is possible and also relevant to some girls and young women. Girls sometimes feel the need to justify having sex with their boyfriends and therefore point out the material gains from the relationship, but secretly want to have sex for other reasons – because it feels good, because it solidifies the relationship, because they like the whole package of having a boyfriend who loves them and demonstrates his love by giving her nice things. As Emma (21) said, countering the local sentiment that sex is performed by women for men, “Sex is natural also for women, it is a natural desire.” As the next chapter shows more clearly, the objectives espoused in the poster are also not always compatible with girls’ and young women’s goals for umoyo wachizungu or English/white life. For the girl who wrote the story, “valuing her life” may also mean preparing for umoyo wachizungu in various ways including forging intimate relations characterized by “love.” As noted above, gifts from boyfriends are often an important sign of love in Malawi (Poulin 2007), and thus the exchange of sex for material gifts may also be considered necessary by some girls to feel sure that they are properly “loved."

Recent statistics on HIV risk groups in Malawi reaffirm that school is no place of safety from HIV for girls. The 2007 “National Plan of Action for Scaling-up SRH [Sexual and Reproductive Health] and HIV Prevention Initiatives for Young People” reports on several studies showing that girls in secondary schools are at significantly higher risk than non-school-going girls for HIV, and the Malawi Demographic and Health Survey 2004 shows that women
with secondary school education had an HIV prevalence of 15.1% compared with 12.3% among women with only primary education (NSO 2005). As one officer in the Ministry of Youth Sports and Development in Malawi said to me, “People used to say education is a vaccine for HIV/AIDS, but that has been proved otherwise.” Expressing a kind of illusory nostalgia for “the rural” that reflects rural elders’ nostalgia for “the past,” the officer explained, “When rural girls leave villages to go to school, they are exposed to radio, TV, videos, internet and magazines which encourage immoral [sexual] behaviour.” Being far away from their parents’ “control,” and engaging in risky sex with urban men who have higher rates of HIV/AIDS than village men, according to this officer, is what has lead to increased rates of HIV/AIDS among schoolgirls. This sort of illusion of “the rural” acts similarly to elders’ highly idealized memories of the indeterminate past – to prevent more accurate diagnoses of the problems with youth.

The rural demographics in Malawi coupled with the concentration of schools in urban areas plays a large part in explaining the relationship between school and HIV/AIDS risk for girls in this context. The officer’s assertion that consumer media lead girls to engage in high risk sex, and the assumption that parents in rural villages can “control” youth, however, both show how policy-makers ignore the very point that this apparent contradiction between education and HIV risk should illuminate: anticipatory expectations of the economic potential of well-behaved, educated girls—and the interventions they justify – do not compensate for the highly disempowering effects of increasing rural poverty and livelihood insecurity in the present. Even as theories linking education and health risk among rural girls are challenged, the “anti-politics machine” (Ferguson 1990) – or the constant rendering of largely political problems as technical so that they are imagined to be best addressed through changes in local knowledge and behaviour
rather than in national or international policy – chugs along finding new justifications for the management of girls’ behaviour and ignoring badly needed structural change.

By tying girls’ education to their behaviour – namely abstinence – the gender inequalities that prevent married girls from studying are overlooked in girl-targeted campaigns. Sella – who has not married early, has abstained, and has finished secondary school – confided in me on her 23rd birthday, “my biggest fear, Laurine, my biggest fear is that my husband, he will beat me or be shouting at me. I can’t. I can’t support this. To be shouting at me, or beating at me? But what can I do?” Perhaps making schools more accessible to rural girls and ensuring that foreign donors and philanthropists who support girls’ education fully fund their education – from paying school fees to ensuring their basic needs are met, including soap, appropriate clothing and footwear, and salt to add to their food – would be a step towards sustainable change in the quality of girls’ lives. Equally important are legal support for abuse claims and real employment opportunities for women in rural villages. Infrastructure and opportunities for women must, however, be provided simultaneously with opening spaces for discussing and possibly challenging the inseparability of sex, gifts and “love” in this context. The affective component of gift-giving in Malawi plays an important part in explaining the exchange of sex for material goods – sex is not motivated by material need or wants alone.

Measuring Jenda Equality

Since the development of the National Gender Policy and National Gender Programme in 2000, promoting and protecting gender equality has been a priority for the Malawian
government. With respect to the National Gender Policy, the mandate of the Malawian Ministry of Gender, Child and Community Development is:

i) To lead the national coordination of gender mainstreaming in cooperation with other line ministries and,

ii) To take responsibility for enforcement of the women’s empowerment objective (NORAD 2010: 14).

There is considerable evidence, however, that the ministry lacks the capacity to coordinate the mainstreaming of gender policy across ministries and programmes, leaving much of gender programme development and implementation to various foreign government and non-government organizations. The Norwegian Agency for Development and Cooperation, for instance, reports that in 2008 59% of the Norwegian Embassy of Malawi’s portfolio was dedicated to promoting “Women’s Rights and Gender Equality” (NORAD 2010: 6). Their energy is focused on gender programming in Malawian agriculture and health sectors, as these two sectors receive the greatest amount of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA).

An accountability section is a de rigeur part of strategic reports produced by the ministries, outlining how community-based organizations will be accountable to the government and international donors. Above, I referred to the “National Plan of Action for Scaling up SRH and HIV Prevention Initiatives for Young People: Foundations for Safe Guarding Malawi’s Future” to show how girls in particular emerge as good investments for the protection of Malawi’s future economy and to point to recent evidence that education does not necessarily protect girls from HIV. Here, I refer to it again to discuss how the report frames the evaluation of efforts to overcome persistent gender inequalities. The evaluative framework employed in this report is consistent with many other similar documents provided to me by the Ministry of Youth.
Development and Sports during my research. It demonstrates how gender accounting misses the mark on understanding some of the incongruities between current programming and the gendered realities in rural villages detailed in the previous section.

Section 4.2 of this report, entitled, “Reporting and Accountability” reads, “Youth serving organizations (YSO) will be accountable to MoYDS (Ministry of Youth Development and Sports) but will report directly to the donor on progress made on implementation of specific activities in line with the NPA [National Plan of Action].” In several tables that follow, the precise monitoring and evaluation plan is outlined; for each objective, related activities are listed as “impact indicators,” “outputs” or “targets”. While some of the objectives are qualitative in nature—prefaced by phrases like, “strengthened capacity for” and “improved attitudes and competence of”, “supportive environment for” and “increased understanding and commitment for”—none of the indicators, outputs or targets measure these achievements directly. In each case, the corresponding indicator, output or target is quantitative in nature, measuring the extent to which activities were implemented, rather than impacts realised. Indicators, outputs and targets include “# of networks for young people,” “# of educational materials distributed,” “# of teachers trained in LSE [Life Skills Education],” “% of schools with trained LSE teachers,” the “# of religious leader conferences organized,” etc.

Several of the objectives are specifically related to gender equality. For example, one objective is “Increased understanding and commitment for SHR [Sexual and Reproductive Health] and gender-related issues, policies, laws and programmes at all levels,” and another is increased “young women’s skills in GBV [Gender-based violence] prevention strategies.” In these cases too, however, the corresponding indicators of measurement are quantitative, including the “# of advocacy activities implemented,” “% of parents supporting sexuality
education and services,” and the “# of young women trained in GBV prevention strategies.”

Such indicators serve to celebrate the unrelenting focus on girls’ attitudes and behaviours and in turn reinforce the importance of interventions aimed to encourage participation in civic education rather than address highly unequal power dynamics in social relations between boys and girls, men and women. The education of girls undoubtedly makes important contributions to addressing inequalities but being in school does not, in and of itself, address relational inequalities. Furthermore, rather than challenging inequalities in the household that prevent girls from doing well at school, girls are simply allowed to graduate with lower grades than boys. While the intension is surely to compensate for the additional responsibilities of girls in Malawian households, this policy can also serve to reinforce ideas that girls are inherently less intelligent than boys. The gender indicators, however, miss all of these nuances. Instead, they measure “the procedural efficiency of action in terms of the agency’s mission” (Gledhill 2007: 341) or “the extent to which ‘targets’ have been met” (Shore 2008: 287), “rather than its substantive impact on the lives of human beings” (Gledhill 2007: 341).

I witnessed several examples of this in the field. One that stands out clearly in my mind occurred on March 20, 2008 when I joined a group of peer educators on a mission-funded “Life Skills” training session at one of the primary schools on the outskirts of town. While youth organizers slowly choreographed the dance required to get enough low wooden benches into the classroom, and then seated everyone at least one person away from their friends, I had time to contemplate the scene from my position on the end of one of the benches. Some 60 youth, about

95 Leaders of HIV and Life Skills trainings also alternated equally between girls and boys when seeking oral contributions that provided an important component of post-training accounting.

96 Colleagues and I have noted this tendency to measure gender equality as “countable” in Latin American agriculture and development programmes as well (Humphries, et al. 2012).
half boys and half girls between the ages 11 and 16 were finding seats. As they shifted about, trying to find a seat next to someone who was not already their friend, their movements echoed loudly off the cement floors and corrugated steel roof. A welcome breeze discovered the two glass-less windows cut into the red brick walls on either side of the classroom. Green chalk boards painted sloppily at each end of the classroom provided the only bleak source of teaching inspiration. Otherwise, the walls were completely bare.

As people settled down and the session began, participants were asked to describe the problems facing adolescents. HIV/AIDS only came up at the very end of the session, with some prodding from the facilitators. One boy, whom a facilitator later described as a “dramatist,” stood up and, rather dramatically, blamed girls for HIV/AIDS since their infection rates are higher than boys’ in Malawi. A facilitator confirmed this fact, but a debate ensued as girls defended themselves. “How can this be?” asked one girl. Another offered the rationale that “the boys are having sex with many girls and infecting their girlfriends. Girls cannot do this [have sex with many boys].” The dramatist stood to announce that many girls are also having sex with many boys and infecting their boyfriends. The facilitator responded that “this may be true, but what we must focus on is what girls can do about this [high infection rate].” In a chorus that seemed suddenly to unite everyone in the room the girls sang out, “abstain.” This loud proclamation of the “correct” behavioral answer abruptly ended what had been a candid, complex, and productive discussion about gender. The number of youth trained in abstinence is measurable and has become a key jenda strategy in programmes, taking precedence over more complex and uncountable gender discussions.
Performing *Jenda* Equality

Gender accounting sometimes leads to *jenda* performances by programme staff and volunteers. A “good” impression is vital to sustaining donor funding and securing jobs in the health and development sector, one of the only sources of formal employment in the area of my research. Volunteering for an organisation is essentially the only route to this type of employment and many youth thus volunteer tirelessly and hopefully. In interviews, I routinely asked youth to explain why they participated with groups and clubs. They almost invariably pointed to stories, sometimes real and sometimes mythical, of someone who landed a job after being a good volunteer for some period of time. I frequently heard, “Cane began volunteering in 2003 and now he went to Scotland. Then he will have a job with the hospital.” The story of Dilemma, however, was by far the most common volunteering success story. It often started…

“like Dilemma did.”

“Like Dilemma did – got the job I mean,” Tawonga started. “He started just volunteering, working very hard and being very committed to the development of our region. For 6 years he volunteered with youth and the AIDS organization. Now look at him, working full-time with a good position.”

Somewhat ironically, I received the first of several emails from Dilemma asking me for help to find funding so that he could continue to work in May 2009. After 3 years of full-time employment with an HIV-awareness programme, the funding for the youth component of the

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97 The other reason that boys, in particular, volunteer is, as they put it, “to prevent from being ‘bad’.” Discussed in Chapter 4, male youth see themselves as an inherently “bad generation.” Volunteering, engaging in sport activities and going to school are often positioned as important for preventing “bad” behaviours and controlling detrimental desires of boys.
programme had dried up and Dilemma wanted to write proposals independently to continue his health and development work. “You have grown up and should be mature, an organization, not a programme,” his former employer had told him, compelling him to reach out to me for help with key words for the latest proposal he planned to send to the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). In a phone conversation later he asked, “Would you think that ‘Climate Change’ would be good for getting funding, or ‘jenda’?”

Every dedicated volunteer knows that health and development jobs are reliant on sustained development funding from organisations with particular agendas, often prompting certain jenda performances at critical times and places. For example, youth programme participants “spontaneously” form gender-discussion groups outside the main doors of resource centers on the same days that donors visit. Some girls were even excused from paid employment to participate in the shows.

In private, youth volunteers frequently expressed frustration with what they perceived as the irrelevance of gender-related activities or the hypocrisy of some program leaders. One active youth volunteer said to me of one leader, “He talks about abstinence and teaches of it and then proposes to the same girls at the workshop and sleeps with them without protection! So, do you give him respect?” I agreed that this is behaviour unworthy of respect. Still, I would have not dared to suggest that she confront him, for I knew that she had volunteered for 3 years and desperately hoped that she would be next in line for a job.
**Struggles and Strides in Achieving Gender Equality**

Equally striking to me as how gender programmes, in response to pressures for accountability, elaborate gender activities that do little to challenge inequalities, was the extent to which inequalities are being challenged by girls and young women. I show this occurring sometimes in spite of programmes, but often because of them—in unexpected ways. Whereas it could once have been assumed that marriage marked social adulthood for young women who, as noted above, transferred from the “control of her parents” to the “control of her husband,” women are increasingly using marriage and divorce, strategically. Most strikingly, women are choosing to marry for “true love” rather than social convention. They are marrying in ways that they believe reflect and guarantee “love for ‘life’”, a triple entendre meaning faithfulness in marriage and love forever, love for a long life, free from HIV/AIDS, and a love for a fun lifestyle full of ‘life’ and not just rural toil, poverty and hardship as discussed in the following chapter. As girls opt to marry for love, it means the rise of other markers of social adulthood, such as being educated or employed. Emma (21) for instance explained,

My grandmother says, you should go and get married. Yes. But I am not, maybe, [laughs] willing to get married just because early marriages [laughs] I am not prepared [at this age] to get married. If possible when I am prepared then I can get married but just being forced to get married [laughs] it’s not good.

Getting “prepared” for marriage includes studying and then getting a job. When I asked Sella (22) when she would marry, she said,

Uhmm the age [at which I will marry]? It’s very difficult [to say] because my thinking I suppose to have something to do it’s where I can say that now I can marry because nowadays marriage ends everywhere. So, when you don’t have any support concerning about job or something like those, it’s very difficult for you to survive. Yeah, so my
thinking it’s like, if I do something, maybe have a job or else a business, I can say any support concerning about life, that’s where I can say now I can get married.

This young woman, in preparation for marriage, is planning to be economically independent, so that she can support herself in the case of a divorce or death of her husband. The need to be economically independent, one 17-year-old boy named Alex explained very pragmatically, was one reason given for girls preferring to live in town rather than staying in the village. Moving to town is one way of preparing for the kind of marriage they value.

In town people are like that, they don’t depend on marriages. They even talk of that [with their boyfriend] before staying [deciding to be in a relationship]. Yeah, then [girls] just divorce [and] they stay on their own, have money, and are still working. Yeah you see that’s the good about school you know. It gives them that, um, independence. Because, you [girls] will think, you are like aaah ‘what’s this man gonna say’ hey? If he does this and that stuff then I’m gonna go on my own way because I will also have my own way and my own money. You know, [town girls feel], ‘I contribute much’.

Pregnancy is sometimes employed to “trap” a husband, especially in cases where girls felt that their parents would be unsuccessful at arranging unions or where girls wanted to escape school, poverty or abuse in their natal home. For instance, in a focus group with married girls between the ages 15 and 17, 3 of the 4 girls were brought by their parents to their husband’s home village because they were visibly pregnant. While only one girl said she had purposefully become pregnant, when I asked how they felt about school, they responded, “pachoko waka [so, so], according to me I was trying my best [but] I was failing some subjects,” and “I do not like schooling.” If school offers the only replacement for a husband in Malawi and yet is not going well, marriage seems necessary. Trial (16), who had purposefully become pregnant, explained, that “when I did not go to school, at home I suffered...I did not want to move far from home,”
she explained, “but at home I had some quarrels so I decided to marry.” Her husband added later that day,

   My wife was in troubles, being tortured by her mother who chased her to Matuli [the mother’s late husband’s village and household]. When I told her to use a condom she was refusing. So, she just wanted to marry. Her mother chased her [to her in-law’s village] because her mother has another man outside of marriage. My wife, knowing that man very well, told her mother that she knew and encouraged her not to do that [cheat] so that is why she chased her.

Poverty, physical abuse at home, and disability were other common reasons for strategically getting pregnant in an attempt to secure a husband. Of course, these efforts are not always successful.

I met the mother of a baby girl named “Tikhane”, meaning “they hate us,” when helping a local organization deliver a food security survey in the area. Tikhane gripped the limp polyester sleeve of her mother’s missing arm and suckled her young mother’s breast so loudly that it was impossible to concentrate on the survey questions. Instead, I asked about her baby and when she was born. The mother said quietly “tikhane”. At first I didn’t quite understand why she had said this, but then I realized this was the baby’s name. The mother pointed out her other three children, each fathered by a different man who had refused to take responsibility for their children when they learned she was pregnant. She said that she had “tried three times” and with each one, “even with their child” the fathers would not marry her. That is why she named this third and last baby Tikhane.

A collection of new social activities organized exclusively by and for young women comprise other strategies that rural girls and young women use to challenge gender inequalities.
As an illustrative example, I will discuss herein kitchen-top-up parties. My first introduction to these social events came very early one morning. Emma must have visited my home before 6 o’clock in the morning, in fact, because when I stepped outside to stretch before a run at 6:15, the neatly folded invitation was on the step. It read,

You are invited to a Kitchen-top-up Party!
When: Sunday, August 5th from 2pm – 5pm.
Where: Emma’s house, Mlambe village, Mzimba District, Malawi.
Colours: Red and White.

A quick consultation with my research assistant had me carrying red drinking mugs and a white metal teapot on the two hour walk to the stout, earthen home where Emma lived with her grandfather. Eight other women also came, each carrying a kitchen-related gift in the colours Emma had selected. At the party, Emma graciously accepted her gifts and in exchange served us tea with milk, sugar and sweet doughnuts. We sang, danced and chatted like a typical Malawian family at a traditional marriage ceremony until the looming darkness urged us to make our way home. While this was the only “kitchen-top-up party” I attended during my time in Malawi, I frequently saw that other women, especially those in town, had similar invitations pegged to fridges. The church hall in town was also frequently decorated for kitchen-top-up parties. These social functions were conventionally held by married women (with their husbands’ permission) most often associated with local churches and who espoused a certain “modern” identity. No one could tell me when exactly women started to have kitchen-top-up parties, but conversations among foreign volunteers in Malawi likened them to “modern, Tupperware party/wedding shower for middle-class women.” They were “a sign of wealth and friendship” among women and “a way to replenish the kitchen.” Kitchen-top-up parties were sometimes organized by women’s groups in local churches for a woman of honour and respect (such as a reverend’s wife).
and seemed to require that women brought “modern” kitchen items like fancy tea pots, platters and bowls wrapped in matching tea towels, rather than spoons and pots for cooking nsima. My fellow foreigners frequently declined requests to attend kitchen-top-up parties, saying that their invitations were given with the “wrong motivations”—meaning motivated by expectations for money rather than friendship. However, sharing wealth appeared to be an important part of friendship among women and higher expectations for gifts from women with more money was applied equally to foreigners and Malawians.

Certainly, a key function of these new social networks among rural women is to access resources that many rural women would not otherwise have. “They are a way of finding money,” Emma explained, usually by married women. When I asked husbands in the village about kitchen-top-up parties some thought they were new and good ideas for women and others did not. In urban areas, however, they are increasingly encouraged and supported by husbands. One Peace Corps volunteer in Malawi wrote about his invitation to a kitchen-top-up party in his blog on January 22nd, 2009.

So basically what the Kitchen Top Up party is, is a party thrown by women, for other women, in order that they may be given kitchen related gifts; silver wear, plates, maybe a decorative bowl or something. Basically it’s an excuse for women to get together and have a good time. I think that the only reason the word ‘kitchen’ is in the title is so men don’t get worried that women are doing something they shouldn’t be, like wearing pants or having a career. But anyways, the woman for the Kitchen Top Up I attended rented out a hall, put in speakers, had music and danced and shouted and I think somewhere in there gave gifts to each other. The important thing to remember is that men are not invited, which was weird, because the second after explaining this thing to me, the teacher who is a man invited me another almost too manly of a man, to a party he just told was only for women. I found out later that a few men can be invited by the husband but they don’t
actually attend the party. What they do instead is sit about 50 meters away in chairs, drink booze, and stare longingly at the hall where the women sing and dance about…The highlight for any Kitchen Top Up party is the moment when the men once collected ask permission to enter the hall, then upon doing so dance and throw money at the woman hosting the party…about an hour after I get there the husband asks a small boy to go see if it’s cool for us to come. And the husband is real smooth, he plays it off like it’s no big deal if they don’t let us, but you can tell we want to. So the kid comes back and says the women are ready and as one big posse, we all roll up to the door of the hall and wait for the music to play. In our group there were like 8 or so guys and the hall has maybe 50 women. The music starts and we enter…98

In the rest of this entry, Keegan explains how the men danced to one song, all while throwing paper currency at the female host of the party, not at all unlike a modern wedding ceremony in Malawi where guests toss bills at the newly married couple. Then the men went home where their wives joined them later in the evening. The host’s husband was proud to invite Keegan to an event that symbolised modern gender equality, albeit, as with asiki discussed in the next chapter, in which a husband still keeps a watchful eye on his wife while allowing her the freedom to socialise with her friends and obtain her own money to spend.

When I asked Emma, who was unmarried, why she had decided to throw herself an event typically reserved for married women, she asked “why not?” Her guests, most of them also unmarried, agreed with Emma that there is no reason for unmarried girls not to throw kitchen-top-up parties. They, too, have needs. Thus, when Emma threw her party the meaning was changed. For unmarried, rural girls, these parties were symbolic of the new, modern times in which women provide for themselves in the absence of a husband. In this case, Emma was

98 http://keeganrules.wordpress.com/2009/01/22/31/ (access date June 02, 2010).
asserting her right to have friends and receive symbolically modern items without need of a man. She was claiming her right to gender equality.

**Jenda’ed Subjectivities of Rural Youth**

The chapter to this point has shown that gender accounting misses the mark on understanding and addressing gender inequities. I now endeavour to take this one step further to look at how “countability” has entered public consciousness in Malawi. Whereas *jenda* is often engaged with some sort of authority figure subconsciously presumed at the receiving end of this counting, I will also show how it has come to shape gendered subjectivities among some Malawian youth.

I recorded many examples of this phenomenon in my field notes. On April 4, 2009, a group of youth and I spent the evening conducting short, semi-structured interviews with bar-girls in town. I wrote in my field notes that evening:

> While we did our interviews, we decided to split up, and immediately Gift said, “Steven, either Emma or Sella has to go with you.” “Jenda!” he said, as a reminder to us that it means women and men doing the same things all the time.

And after cooking dinner one evening in that same week with Steven, I recorded:

> Steven said, as he squatted over a pot of bubbling cassava flour (making *kondowole*) “this is how it will be with my wife. Us cooking together. *Jenda.*” He has emphasised this many times to me. It occurs to me, these youth want *jenda* which they believe is men and women doing everything together.
In the “Life Skills” training, discussed above, at one point the facilitator wrote on the board, “Adolescent Growth and Development” followed by “Defining Life Skills.” Murmurs echoed around the room while the facilitator read the definition aloud. “Having life skills is the ability to cope with the challenges you face as young people. For example, academic challenges can lead to “downness” so, “how do you deal with this? You must have strategic solutions to these problems.” After defining “life span” in Malawi as “1-40 years” and “adolescence” as “development from childhood to adulthood,” the group was engaged in a very frank brainstorming on the physical and psychosocial changes associated with adolescence among boys and then girls. Gender-specific lists were formulated on the board and accompanied by diagrams of naked adolescent bodies. For boys, height, voice change, facial hair, acne and the production of sperm were among the physical changes listed. For girls, growth of hips and breasts and menstruation were written on the board and added to the diagram. Both also grew what one participant called “public hair,” which evoked some laughter and a retort by another participant, “private hair!” The facilitator responded with the correction, “pubic hair,” making a triangular symbol with his hands around his genital area. A key difference between psychosocial changes among boys and girls recorded was adolescent boys’ increasing disinterest in personal hygiene and adolescent girls’ increasing obsession with it. But the most striking discussion arose around “wet dreams.” When speaking about physical changes in boys, someone offered “wet dreams” as one common change. Some snorting and uncomfortable shifting, my own included, echoed around the room, but the contribution was accepted with almost dramatic seriousness. The facilitator asked whether girls also experienced this change and an extensive debate ensued. It seemed to me that some participants had mixed up ideas about a wet dream with menstruation, but either way the facilitator suddenly shut down the debate. In the name of “gender equality” he said, “we must say that girls also have wet dreams.” Jenda as a quantifiable form of equality,
after all the information was written, turned out to be the most important message from the perspective of the young male facilitator, another indication of jenda’s pervasiveness in the minds of young Malawians. Further, this story illustrates how simplistic approaches to behavior change shut down other approaches, and the insistence on wrong and right answers that can be counted effectively terminates potentially beneficial discussions about girls and boys, women and men.99

Kara and Kelvin’s relationship serves as another example of how jenda is manifested in intimate relations among youth. When I ran into them in the market one day, Kelvin was asking his girlfriend where they should go for lunch. She responded that it did not matter to her. In reality, the restaurants in town presented very few options. Kelvin became frustrated with this non-engagement in the decision at hand. Exasperated, he responded, “but we have jenda. I don’t want a wife who cannot say what she wants each and every time.” Jenda to Kelvin was the quantifiably equal participation in every decision made, something Kara usually also seemed to value. This was the first and only time I saw her acknowledge the meaninglessness of this kind of jenda. Perhaps she also noticed the implicit male dominance here. Kelvin, as a male, can try to demand a certain kind of relational participation from his girlfriend and give an implicit threat by saying that he does not want a wife who will not conform to his expectations. In this way, jenda slips from a form, however limited, of gender equality to a clever tool for male dominance.

Given that a man can demand jenda from his girlfriend, it should not be surprising that more deeply ingrained gender roles in the context of the household are not seen as incompatible

99 Wet dreams tend also to be a bit stigmatized among boys and thus the male facilitator’s insistence on jenda here may actually work against female interest as it suggests that girls, too, experience this stigmatized change. As such, this application of jenda does not necessarily serve the social status interests of girls.
with the successful achievement of *jenda*. Within marriage it is uncommon for a husband to prepare food for himself or his family. In one interview an 11-year-old girl spoke about the marriage she envisioned for herself which was characterized by her husband’s respect for her. When asked what her relationship with her husband would look like after they were married, however, she responded with only one line, “I will cook for him.”

**Conclusion**

Throughout the dissertation I show how both girls and boys are making strides towards addressing gender inequalities in rural Malawi. This chapter demonstrates just how remarkable these achievements really are. The expectation that women are submissive and deferential to elders and especially to men starts as a feature of girls’ junior status with parents and becomes a lack of power in romantic relationships. In marriages in particular, girls appear to be especially vulnerable to various forms of insecurity and abuse. As the data presented above demonstrates, married young women frequently struggle with very poor nutrition relative to their husbands and fear alcoholism by husbands, which is variably associated with neglect as well as physical and verbal abuse. I showed how, in response, some women are finding ways to delay or even avoid marriage. In the following chapter, I show how women are also demanding particular kinds of marriages characterized by “love,” which they feel helps guarantee more equal gender relations in the marital household. Unfortunately, the ways in which health and development programming celebrates a quantitative measure of women’s participation in trainings (Watkins and Swidler 2012) as the essence of gender equality promotes blindness both to more deeply
ingrained and consequential gender inequalities in the lives of rural youth and to the remarkable strides some young women are making in asserting power in their relationships with men.

In Malawi, gender equality is reduced to something “countable” in health and development programmes as they struggle to meet the accountability requirements of national and international donors. If anticipation is a key feature of contemporary health and development (Adams, et al. 2009; Piot 2010), accountability is critical to its operationalisation in rural villages. Marilyn Strathern (2000) refers to how “accountability” has moved beyond financial institutions, demanding proper accountability of time, costs, and processes by public institutions, “audit cultures.” In Malawi, an arena that readily illuminates the potential shortfalls of the audit culture employed by health and development interventions is gender equality. In programme evaluations, what is measured are not changes in gender relations between boys and girls, men and women, but rather the “# of advocacy activities implemented,” “% of parents supporting sexuality education and services,” and the “# of young women trained.” Such surrogate indicators serve to celebrate the unrelenting focus on girls’ attitudes and behaviours. In turn, they reinforce the importance of behaviour-change training rather than address highly unequal power dynamics of social relations between boys and girls, men and women. They are measuring procedural efficiency not “substantive impact” on the lives of their participants (Gledhill 2007: 341).

One of the greatest concerns with audit culture is, as Shore (2008) remarks with regard to the British academic system, “it is partly that audit appears so ‘reasonable’ that makes it hard to contest; who can legitimately stand opposed to ‘transparency’, or ‘quality’ or ‘accountability’?” (291). Rather than raise suspicion, I show how “jenda audits” infect development programme logics (systems and training) in Malawi, leading to misrepresentation of gender change in
programme evaluations, a distortion of empowerment activities to meet evaluative goals, and in some cases to performance on the part of youth and programme staff to please donors and keep their jobs. Furthermore, I argue that it has entered public consciousness in ways that shape gendered subjectivities, visible in particular in youth social and sexual relations. Particularly concerning, however, is the prospect that the uncelebrated strides made in gender equality by women (taken up to a greater extent in the following chapter), may be over-shadowed by the highly celebrated superficial *jenda* equality in this audit culture.
Chapter 6: Love for “Life”

As noted in the previous chapter, though the subordination of women remains prevalent in rural Malawi, inequalities are being challenged by girls and young women and, in some cases, their efforts are supported by girls and young men. This, I argued, occurs sometimes in spite of programmes, but often because of them — just in ways that were unexpected and are largely “unaccounted” for in programme evaluations (Watkins and Swidler 2012). How young women and men are approaching “modern” relationships serves as an example of the readaptation of programme messages.

“Love marriages,” and particularly those marked by an elaborate white wedding ceremony, are deemed one of the most important strategies for securing some kind of gender equality by women. The trend in Malawi towards “love marriages,” or what are sometimes referred to as “companionate marriages,” in which “individual fulfillment and satisfaction” are primary goals, reflects a wider shift observed all over the world (Wardlow and Hirsch 2006: 4). Particularly in the context of market liberalization, global media, including foreign films, magazines, music and television, have contributed to shifts in desires towards courtships characterized by romantic love and companionate marriage (see multiple chapters in Cole and Thomas 2009; Hirsch and Wardlow 2006). In Malawi, as I have argued earlier, many of these

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100 A Christian ceremony in a white wedding dress.
101 Companionate marriage has been used to describe a “marital ideal in which emotional closeness is understood to be one of the primary measures of success in marriage and a central practice through which the relationship is constituted and reinforced” (Simmons 1979 and Skolnik 1991 in Wardlow and Hirsch 2006, 4).
global messages are carried to rural youth through health and development campaigns and the foreign volunteers who deliver them.

This rising desire for relationships constituted by romantic love is due, at least in part, to love’s association with modernity and progress, as, Wardlow (2006) shows in Papua New Guinea and Cole (2007) demonstrates in Madagascar. As the articles in Hirsch and Wardlow’s (2006) edited volume, “Modern Loves” describe, however, contemporary forces of globalization foster significant heterogeneity in what constitutes “modern” intimate relations. Also, Thomas and Cole (2009) remind us that so too does the “deeper history of how people in Africa have deployed and reworked ideologies of love” (16). I contribute to these literatures by providing an example of how “love,” and especially “the wedding,” is influenced not only by popular media, but also emerges from a long history of customary and Christian marital ideals that imbue the marriage ceremony with deep significance. This, in turn, is combined with what youth glean from NGO discourses about “healthy love” and their interactions with the local and foreign volunteers who deliver such messages. As a result, the symbolically saturated “white wedding” in Malawi comes to stand for emotional, moral, health, gender equality and class aspirations simultaneously.

I call these marriages characterized by “real” or “true” love, in the words of my informants, marriages motivated by “love for ‘life’,” as a way of differentiating it from other kinds of “love” that rural youth also seek, particularly when a “wedding” and thus “love for ‘life’” is not possible. “Love for ‘life’” is an intentional triple entendre implying a Christian-influenced faithfulness in marriage and love forever; love for a long life free from HIV/AIDS; and a love for a fun lifestyle that having money can buy—and not just rural toil, poverty and hardship. The “white wedding,” which symbolized this kind of “love for ‘life’” was desired with
painful urgency among many of the youth in my study: if modern lives in modern houses away from the village are critical for feeling “human,” as Desire explained in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, the right kinds of loving relations must be lived by those in these houses. Youth frequently characterized “love marriages” as critical components of the idealised umoyo wachizungu.

While the “love” symbolized by the white wedding is charged with hope in Malawi, research in other African contexts has shown that romantic relationships and companionate marriages often do not live up to expectations, particularly for women. Anthropologists have shown that emotional intimacy and material provision together define a man’s love for his girlfriend or wife in several African contexts (Cole 2009; Hunter 2009; 2010; Smith 2009). In Madagascar and South Africa, two countries in which this inseparability between love and material exchange can be found, deplorable economic conditions have sometimes made it impossible for men to fulfill material expectations (Cole 2009; Hunter 2009). In Nigeria, women have sometimes found that the material gifts that characterized courtship between the couple did not persist after marriage (Smith 2009). Where there are expectations for gender equality in love marriages, namely in the forms of “the rejection of polygamy and the embrace of more egalitarian forms of decision making” (Thomas and Cole 2009: 26), similar disappointments can be found. Smith (2009) for instance, found among the Igbo in Nigeria, that men frequently engaged in extra-marital sexual relations to the frustration of their wives who had hoped and expected the relationships to be monogamous.

In such cases, however, women have developed strategies for dealing with disappointments. Hunter (2009), for instance, shows how women in South Africa form relationships with multiple men concurrently to help meet their financial needs. Smith (2009)
shows that while Igbo women in “love” marriages can find it difficult to call on kin and in-laws for support, in part because “the ideology that in such marriages a man’s happiness…is directly related to the capacity of his wife to please him,” women will sometimes draw on narratives about their husband’s responsibility to the family to persuade him to be faithful (179). I add to these studies by looking at how women in Malawi organize their extra-familial friendships in ways that mitigate the dissatisfactions they encounter in their love marriages. I ask how friendship (in its supposedly modern forms) intersects with marriage (also supposedly modern) and how they co-constitute and bolster one another to provide the lifestyle women desire, including gender equality, in the shifting social terrain of rural Malawi.

As much as “real love” is desired, the right kinds of “love marriages” symbolized by the “white wedding” are rarely possible in my research setting. Modern weddings are tremendously expensive, and to get them “right” is especially costly and out of reach for most youth. Rural youth, however, still do opt to marry for “love,” either by “stealing the bride at night,” a form of elopement, or through pregnancy – two forms of marriage that put youth in a more precarious position without the same legal guarantees or kin-based obligations as marriages based on custom. In particular, these forms of marriage do not forge the same in-law relations, or asewere, as do either “traditional” marriages or the white wedding. They also, however, do not come with the same kinds of “modern” material goods and money that are gifted at a wedding and thus do not fulfill the expectations of “love for ‘life’.” In turn, I show in this chapter how, in response to shifting aspirations for love in intimate relations in rural villages, youth must also work to shape their personal economic and social conditions in ways that support new, companionate marriages that are not quite “love for ‘life’.” I show how this takes shape in new types of friendships—friendships also based on affect and pleasure rather than kin obligations. In particular, I show
how new, extra-familial friendships, called *asiki*, also based on “true love,” are forged by youth who elope. These friendships act as a source of support, care, and significant joy in the absence of familial ties once forged by marriages that emphasised kin relations more than affective dimensions. These friendships are in many ways consistent with kin-based forms of gift-exchange (Mauss 1954), but they are simultaneously very modern because they involve the exchange of high status material goods and independence from what are also sometimes very unequal relations between women and elder, especially male, kin. While various other projects have come into rural villages recently that organise women into savings groups that are intended to help women purchase the things they want, the *asiki*, I show, are so popular precisely because these other “village bank” savings strategies ignore the social relationships that are built up through gifting – social relationships that are critical to survival in rural villages. I argue that this signals an important area for additional research on love: namely, the ways in which “modern” love in intimate relations in rural villages may be part of a broader shift in social relations to “modern, loving friendships” among rural non-kin.

Below, I aim first to tease apart the various strands of meaning embodied in the “love” symbolised by the “white wedding” in Malawi and to explain how the “white wedding” ceremony has come to encompass emotional, moral, health, gender equality and class aspirations. By looking at the experiences of boys and girls who eloped, I then examine how young women, whose marriages do not quite fulfill all the expectations of “love for ‘life’” re-arrange their social lives to help fill the gaps in loving relations. This, I argue, signals truly innovative mechanisms devised by women for addressing inequalities both between women and men and between youth and elders. The ways in which boys support these mechanisms show
significant potential for overturning certain gender inequalities in the future, a potential to which anticipatory interventions would do well to attend.

The White Wedding and the Emotional, Moral, Health and Class Expectations of “Real Love”

Through all the giggling I could hardly catch what the girls were discussing. They were on their way to the Youth Centre in town, where they participate voluntarily as peer educators, and had stopped by my house to chat. Each had completed secondary school. Two were from surrounding rural villages, but walked to their volunteer jobs a couple days each week. Two lived in town.

Sella was shaking her head so exaggeratedly I wondered if she was performing some sort of exercise when I greeted them at my front door. “I tell you,” Sella stuttered through her laughter as she and the other three girls squeezed onto my small, wooden “loveseat,” “it was a white one, from sellawula [second-hand market].” “Oh, I tell you,” Emma jumped in since Sella’s laughter and head shaking made her voice quiver incomprehensibly, “and the one she was wearing had long sleeves!” “And the dress in the back,” added the third girl, “was a line of, do you know those pins, used for nappies of babies, the locking kind [I nodded in acknowledgement], yes, those lined the back!” “And red, from the soil, because the train, it dragged in the dirt!” the story slowly emerged in stunted bits of details. It was at this point that I realized they were talking about a village bride. “And people maybe just threw like these,” pointing to a dusty coin I had picked up outside and put on the table as I answered the door. Coins, rather than paper bills, were deemed highly inadequate for a modern, white wedding, by
these girls whose town hairstyles – wigs and plaits – shifted and bobbed as they giggled. “And they gave gifts, like weddings, but just, plastic ones!” Porcelain and glass gifts are expected. “Oh, and it lasted 2 days!” This is the length of time characteristic of a “traditional” marriage ceremony rather than the coveted, “white wedding” the couple was apparently trying to perform.

While my early morning guests mocked the pathetic, ersatz wedding that aspired to the ideal of an unaffordable “white wedding,” anxiety lurks beneath their mockery. They too might not get the wedding, or the expectations of “love” associated with it, quite right. Young people in my research, whether living in rural villages or in town, ached with the magnitude of their desire for a white wedding.

As the giggling subsided, I asked Emma (21), who lived in the same village as the bride with the pinned-up dress, if she herself would thus opt for another type of marriage rather than risking the humiliation of the flawed, imitation modern wedding she had witnessed. She stared at me as if in disbelief that I would ask such an inane question. “I need a modern one,” she retorted, palming her head to emphasize the desperation of her need. She continued,

You know, Laurine, most people, sometimes, they tend to have traditional marriages. Things are changing. A wedding is like wanting maybe style. It is modern, as I’m saying, and one can contrast themselves to . . . [nodding to me, meaning that one can equate their life with mine – that of umoyo wachizungu].

After a pause she continued, “[Through a wedding] you can see there is real love.” These girls clearly associated a “real love” with the display of money and social class and a certain kind of equality with foreigners like me. They suggest that their marriages will not really be about love unless they have the equivalent class accessories to display it properly.
Much younger girls in villages, from whom opinions and insights were often much less forthcoming, explained similar ideas with fewer words.

R: *Nkhukumba ukwati.*
I want a wedding.
L: *Wakhumba ukwati?* [You want a wedding]?
R: Mm [Yes].
L: *Chifukwa uli ukwati nguwemi?* [Why is a wedding good for you]?
R: [no response]
L: *Ha Tamara, chifukwa uli ukwati nguwemi?* [Hey Tamara, why is a wedding good]?
R: *Kusangirako ndalama.* [It’s a way to find money].
L: *Ukusangirako ndalama?* [You find money]?
R: Mm [Yes].
L: *Chinyake?* [What else]?
R: [no response]
L: *Chinyake ke ichi ukuti ukwati nguwemi?* [Another reason that you say a wedding is good]?
R: *Kukwatisira pamoza kuti wanthu wabeke.* [To wed together with people for them to see]. [Tamara, 11]

Although this conversation is a little more difficult to understand, this young girl is likely referring, when she speaks of money, not only to the many gifts of money that a couple receives during the wedding reception, but also to the kind of man she would be marrying.

Boys also emphasized the importance of money and the public display of status embodied in the wedding. In an interview with a 19-year-old male youth one afternoon I asked, as I often did in interviews,

L: Benson, do you imagine yourself or do you plan to get married one day?”
R: Yah.
L: When?
R: Eeehe, I think, mmm, maybe in six years to come or more. At twenty five.

L: And what kind of marriage do you imagine when you marry the person? Will you have a wedding? Will you have to steal the bride at night?

R: No, no, no! I will have a wedding.

L: Why?

R: I think it’s better to for me to have a wedding. I want to get a wedding because it’s very bright to me, and I enjoy weddings.

L: What do you mean by “bright?”

R: I think bright, it’s a courageous thing. I think some people can, some people can think about me and they can take me as, as I am in a good place, according to my wedding. I think they will think that, maybe, they can think that I am thinking well and they, I think, other people can get a lesson from me. Then if they can get a lesson from me, I think I will be in a good place.

Benson desires a wedding because it would be, as he puts it, courageous, by which he seems to mean unusual and thus attention-drawing (requiring courage to break trends). Being unusual, he suggests, weddings are associated with being in a “good place” or having high status relative to others. Furthermore, he suggests that the wedding also indicates to others that he is preparing or “thinking” well – in ways that will bring about desired futures. Benson feels that if others see him as exemplary or “get a lesson from him,” then he will be regarded with particularly high status or “be in a good place” in his community.

More than only a symbol of financial security and upward mobility, weddings are also literally associated with money. The wedding ceremony invariably features gifts of money to the bride and groom. In a description of a wedding reception from my field notes on August 1, 2009, the centrality of the display of money is evident.

Today was Kelvin and Kara’s wedding. I can hardly find the energy to lift my pen after the hours upon hours of persistent dancing to the front of the hall, throwing bills at the
couple to the rhythm of Zambian love songs while an auctioneer of sorts announced the quantity of my donations to an ever growing crowd of guests. “Rolinee [as I was often called] gave one kwacha, one kwacha, oh two kwacha, two kwacha, oh three, oh four, oh five, five kwacha, five kwacha . . .”). And then to encourage someone to find a knife for the cake, “Rolinee is giving “one kwacha, one kwacha for a knife for the cake, oh two kwacha, oh two kwacha for a knife for a cake,” and then to encourage the bride to cut the cake, “Rolinee is throwing in, throwing in one kwacha . . .” and so on.

Thus, whereas a love marriage may, in and of itself, be regarded with a certain level of status, the wedding makes the socioeconomic aspirations associated with the marriage visible from the marriage’s initiation.

Besides being associated with status and wealth in the present, and a sense that both grow in the future, the wedding is also tied to Christian morality. As one girl (17) explained,

Ah, because it [the wedding] is just for enjoyment, for that [laughs], and it is the in the eyes of God. I can say what? It is well known and also you become popular if you do wedding. Um, everybody knows you and fears you [laughs]. They say that “she has got, ah, she already has a husband.” Otherwise, if you just elope someone without maybe many people knowing, some people, maybe, they can ask for…for [laughs] for you to became maybe – to be in a relationship.

In this quote the girl suggests that people know and fear those who have weddings precisely because the wedding implies that the couple had enough money to host a big party “just for enjoyment,” but also, perhaps, because they married with Christian rites. This quote also seems to suggest that the wedding helps to ensure monogamy because, after a public display in the eyes of God, others will recognise, respect and support a couple’s vows.

Some boys, particularly in response to anxieties they feel about whether giving material gifts dilutes “real love” also described “love” as, first and foremost “a feeling.” In Malawi, as in
many African contexts, “Love is perceived real only if it is backed up by a man’s best effort to provide material as well as emotional support” (Smith 2009:165; see also Cole 2009). Material gifts from a man to a woman are particularly important during courtship or in extra-marital partnerships (Poulin 2007; Tavory and Poulin 2012). Whereas Smith (2009) found women to be “skeptical about men’s pronouncements of love” (165) which may not manifest itself in the provision of adequate material support, I found that in Malawi, it was boys who were most skeptical of women’s insistence on material gifts as a symbol of men’s love. As one 17-year-old boy explained,

These girls are fond of having money from boys, this and that, so it’s hard for me to say she loves me and I can [calculate] how much she does for me, but I can’t say, I can’t know what she actually has [putting his hand to his chest, meaning “what she has in her heart”]. But for that, all I can say is [love is] a strong feeling that you have towards somebody (boy, 17).

Another boy tied this feeling to physical attraction.

Love it’s like um, the feeling that you may share or the feeling that you may feel if you are having somebody like a girl. So you explain, ‘In my heart I really love you and I am in love having you.’ [You say] ‘I love your stage of complexion, your figure,’ whatever. That’s how I can describe love [giggling] (boy, 16).

The feeling of love is also persistent, not fleeting.

I might define love as having a strong feeling towards somebody. This is really a strong feeling that you really care, you really persevere, you have to carry [one another], persevere during [any] situation you are going through. There might be some sort of calamities you are passing through. Somebody who doesn’t love you, she can’t cope, she can’t [possibly] cope out [stick it out through the hard times] with you (boy, 20).
The “feeling” these boys describe is one which ensures mutual support during difficult times – even when boys are unable to provide financially and materially as they might wish for their wives and children. The feeling of love is sometimes indicated by the extent to which a partner is nurturing and caring, as Arthur (18) explained,

I may know that someone is loving me if, let’s take [for example], if she is taking care of me, is advising me – [she says] ‘this is wrong,’ or ‘do this it will help you.’ I may also know that she is loving me if, when I am in danger, she advises me before danger may come. Or she may advise me [on] how I can stay and how I can prevent doing things that can destroy me or my future. That’s love too.

A loving couple, according to Arthur, gives advice to one another with respect to the future and making the right decisions in the present to protect desired futures. This quote also seems to imply a certain kind of equality in terms of responsibility for providing for the family. If a woman loves a man, he seems to say, she takes some responsibility for times when the family is in “danger” – perhaps of not being provided for. A loving wife advises her husband in advance if he is “doing things that can destroy…[his] future.”

Love is also about both the husband and the wife being monogamous.

It’s unloving, say, when a wife is having a boyfriend outside. It’s unloving, this sort of life. Faithfulness [is needed]. At the same I have to be faithful to my wife. And to my kids, to my – [we have] to be loving sort of parents. And [we have to] care. If a wife is having love there is cooperation and unity that means peace also will be there (boy, 17).

This quote demonstrates how husband and wife, in a companionate marriage, are the primary actors in the relationship: “cooperation and unity” among the couple is what keeps the peace in love relationships, not intervention from kin (Smith 2009). Concerns about HIV/AIDS add to the urgency with which love, characterized by “faithfulness,” is desired.
There is, in a loving sort of life, faithfulness. Some women ah, they are having you but also another, another concubine [lover], you know? Even men too do. Another concubine out there, which is unprofitable unlike to wild life [the life of wild animals]. You know, they get [infected] by HIV/AIDS, you know, this pandemic, it’s very serious and it’s real. If somebody is unfaithful to the husband, somebody is unfaithful to the wife, you know, they might be [infected] by this HIV/AIDS. Where he [the husband] has gone he will get that and bring it to the family (boy, 17).

In other words, loving couples are monogamous for life, which, in turn, protects the family from HIV/AIDS. This quote, again, seems to suggest that love is about equality in marriage: both men and women have equal responsibilities to the family to be faithful.

The wedding was also sometimes linked to autonomy from rural kin. For instance, Robbie (18) said he wanted to have a wedding “because the pastor gives some advice from the bible that a man and a woman will leave their parents and live on their own.” Most people who have a wedding do, in fact, move away from rural villages. Nevertheless, as Smith (2009) also finds in Nigeria, “modern” marriages did not imply segregation from kin; as Smith (2009) warns, “it is important not to exaggerate these trends.” In fact, as I discuss below, exchange between in-laws in the form of bridewealth payments and long-term support from sons and daughters to extended families in rural areas are seen as an integral part of the wedding ceremony. In most instances, parents are supportive of weddings and also feel a sense of pride in the status associated with hosting a wedding for a son or daughter. More problematic for elders are “love” relationships that start with elopement.

The expectation that “real love” is characterized by gender equality in the marriage, while hinted at in various ways in the boys’ quotes above, was strongly articulated by girls and young women. For instance, Emma once explained,
To my side I prefer to have a wedding because it is one way of respecting myself, to my parents, as well as to the church. Through the wedding, some people think that during wedding there is gender equality. It means that there is some respect also to the girls. And it is true because it is more difficult just to end up [end in divorce] after a wedding . . . In Malawi when you are in courtship they think that if you respect each other you don’t hug each other, you don’t touch each other, to [prevent being] tempted to sleep together or to do sexual intercourse until you get married. This is said to be a characteristic that there is real love between you.

According to Emma, if she has a wedding, it will mean that she respected both her body, by not having had sex before marriage, and her moral being, by entering into a relationship characterized by gender equality. For her, the experience in her village that fewer marriages initiated with a wedding end in divorce than other kinds of marriages is proof that this is true.¹⁰² By marrying in a wedding, Emma will also respect her parents and the church. It is respectful to her parents by pairing “modern love,” in which the couple is the primary actor, with the “tradition” of marriage ceremonies displaying the support of family and friends. Furthermore, as I discuss further below, the modern wedding has evolved slowly. It has not emerged suddenly with its emphasis on individualism, wealth and modern ideas about gender equality, as it is characterized by youth today, but it builds on a long history of small changes to a longstanding tradition of elaborate marriage ceremonies among the Tumbuka and Ngoni peoples. Today, the modern wedding encompasses several “traditions” associated with customary marriages in villages, including bridewealth payments and expectations of reciprocity among asewere or in-laws.

¹⁰² Importantly, women may find it more difficult to leave these marriages, supposedly based on “real love,” than other kinds of marriages, accounting for the lower divorce rate that Emma and others perceived among these marriages. Smith (2009) shows that in Nigeria, for example, if women admit problems in a love marriage they risk being blamed, for ultimately, in such marriages, “a man’s happiness…is directly related to the capacity of the wife to please him” (179).
When explaining the “gender equality” they expected in modern marriages, girls often reduced it to something quantifiable, as in the jenda equality discussed in the previous chapter. As Chisomo (15) explained, “It [gender equality] will be like doing everything the same in the marriage. It will be taking turns and having a schedule.” In other words, she feels that equality in the marriage is characterized by the man and wife equally splitting duties like cooking or heating bath water, *et cetera* – what has come to be called *jenda*. When recently married women talked to me about their satisfaction with their new husbands, however, what they tended to value most was more egalitarian decision-making between the couple (see papers in Cole and Thomas 2009 for similar findings in other African contexts). Women talked about being happy that their husbands discussed with them things such as whether or not they should leave their wives to go to South Africa for work or their mutual concerns about HIV/AIDS. They also appreciated when their husbands encouraged them to go back to school, to work outside of the home, and to visit their natal home or friends. Sella, who married after I had completed my fieldwork – with quite an elaborate wedding according to the video evidence – but whom I had the opportunity to follow-up with in 2012 when she was 26 years old, said, about her husband,

Ah, he is just very good. You will see. Although I said to you, [do] you remember? [I said] that if he wanted to marry me he should not be going to South Africa any more, he must find work here – it is just because we do not have money or any way to build our house that we agreed that he should go just for one or maybe two years.

This kind of discussion and agreement between women and men is what married women seemed to value in marriages. This is a kind of “gender equality” (though women did not often use this term) that appears to be much more about the quality of the relationship between men and women than about an equal division of each and every household task.
The ways in which an elaborate wedding ceremony that symbolises “modern subjectivities” become associated with certain kinds of Christian moralities, certain kinds of gender equality, and the protection against HIV/AIDS – all while simultaneously winning support from village elders – emerges as we look at the history of marriage in Malawi.

**The Evolution of the Marriage Ceremony in Rural Malawi**

Continuing the parable of Isa mentioned in Chapter 1, a “good girl” who respected her parents, Orland, a 75-year-old Tumbuka grandfather who repeatedly contrasted the good behaviours of youth when he was young to the “lost” generation today, explained customary, or what he referred to as “traditional” village marriage. Striking in this story was the extent to which he focused on the marriage ceremony rather than characteristics of the resultant marital union. This, I found, was consistent with all the elders with whom I discussed “traditional marriages”. The marriage ceremony has long been deemed important in this region since it purportedly lays the groundwork for certain values and legal protections within marriage.

Isa married in the proper way “according to our culture,” Orland started. In northern Malawi, both Tumbuka and Ngoni, as far back as Orland could remember, have customarily practiced a marriage rite referred to as *lobola* or bridewealth. *Lobola* is associated with three key practices: 1) the involvement of kin as marriage counsellors, known as *ankhoswe*, 2) bridewealth payment from the groom’s family to the bride’s parents, and 3) patrilocal dwelling. All three of these elements were present at Isa’s wedding. A boy who perhaps had seen her, or perhaps not, but “was himself ready for a wife,” Orland explained, walked over from a neighbouring village. Upon arriving at Isa’s village, he met Isa’s aunt, *amama vyala*, literally “young mother,” (the
term used to refer to the mother’s younger sister who frequently acts as the *ankhoswe* or “marriage counsellor”). She informed him that there was a group of girls in an *nthanganene*, or girls’ house, down the road and that Isa would be ready for his proposal. After the introduction and some hours spent alone to get to know one another, Isa would have been given the opportunity to deny the boy’s offer of marriage. However, the girls’ extended kin played a significant role in arranging marriages that reflected kinship priorities. Thus, while these kinds of “traditional” marriages in Malawi are not completely arranged by the family, neither are they governed entirely by free choice: socio-cultural expectations and economic need are both common reasons for marriage (Besendahl 2004). Married young men and women frequently referred to their marriages, sanctioned by customary law (discussed below), as “forced” marriages precisely because they felt obliged to marry by social convention or economic need.

Upon Isa’s consent, bridewealth was negotiated. A number of factors contribute to the amount: a girl’s education level, the family’s wealth, the girls’ apparent capacity for heavy labour, etc. The latter is sometimes determined by her weight – a heavier weight indicating that more had been invested in the girl by her parents and suggesting her greater ability to carry heavy loads for her *asewere* (in-laws) after marriage. Before the arranged date, Isa was prepared for the ceremony; she received a new *chitenji* (printed wrap/skirt) from her parents, who also purchased a goat to butcher and brewed millet beer, *chindongwa*, to serve at the celebration.

A *tenga* (literally “fetch”) carried these gifts on the assigned ceremony date from the groom’s family to the bride’s family and returned carrying Isa to her *asewere’s* compound. Isa’s family tailed closely behind. On route, Isa sometimes sat down, refusing to move until she had been paid a sum of money by her fiancé’s relatives, an offer which indicates her *asewere’s* acceptance of their responsibility to look after and respect her. Isa and her husband sat together
in front of their new home and received advice from various elders, watched special dance performances and feasted in celebration. At some traditional marriage ceremonies, other rituals such as the groom identifying his new wife from a line-up of girls whose heads were hidden by a *chitenje* are performed, but at Isa’s marriage ceremony these were not performed according to Orland. “It was a serious [marriage],” he explained. The ceremony cemented a relationship between the extended families of Isa and her husband, who visited one another annually, carrying many gifts to show their respect and love for one another. In-laws, as well as the annual journey to visit one another, are both referred to as “*asewere*.” A marriage “according to [Tumbuka] culture,” as Orland put it, was a union between the two families. \(^{103}\)

A marriage such as Isa’s would be legally recognized under customary law in Malawi, making the *ceremony* not only socially but also legally important. The legal framework governing marriage in Malawi is pluralistic. The legally sanctioned marriages are authenticated by four primary means: 1) the common-law Marriage Act, \(^{104}\) 2) what is called “traditional” Customary Law, 3) Asiatic marriage, \(^{105}\) and 4) Foreign Customary Law marriage (Besendahl 2004:12; also see Mvula and Kakhongwa 1997). In the Malawian constitution, “all marriages at law, custom and marriages by repute or by permanent cohabitation” are recognized (Republic of

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\(^{103}\) Gift exchange has long been an important part of African marriages. As Grinker, et al. (2010) point out, “Some African men and their families give marriage their highest priority, working for years to save enough money or goods for bridewealth, and subsequent payments” (114). The gift, as Marcel Mauss (1954) first argued, implies an intention to maintain a relationship between two parties, in this case, two families, and reciprocity is expected. In Malawi, gift exchange in both courtship and marriage, which predates the colonial period, has significant importance still today (Tavory and Poulin 2012). As many others have shown, the increasing emphasis on emotion in modern marriages and changing relationships with money have led some people to question whether exchange and “true love” can co-exist, but still, most young men and women in Malawi share the mutual understanding that gift giving signals affection (Tavory and Poulin 2012).

\(^{104}\) Marriage recognized under common-law means that the couple is married under the legal statutes of the system of laws inherited from the British.

\(^{105}\) Asiatic marriages and Foreign Customary Law marriages apply to very small groups of non-Christian marriages among the Asian minority or between a foreigner and a Malawian according to the custom of the foreigner respectively (Besendahl 2004).
Malawi 2001: 5; in Besendahl 2004:12). However, only marriages sanctioned by customary or common law are subject to legal protection (Besendahl 2004).

At a wedding, the marriage is normally registered under the Marriage Act and the couple is thus also protected by common law. While, as noted above, all marriages, even those by cohabitation (discussed below), are recognized by the Malawian constitution, Besendahl (2004) shows that only those recognized by either customary law (such as the marriage marked by Isa’s “traditional” ceremony) or under the common-law Marriage Act (such as most marriages that start with a wedding) are really subject to legal protection. Informal marriages (such as elopement, discussed below) “are hard to prove and a woman is left with very few legal rights” (Besendahl 2004:18).

Customary Marriage Law varies with ethnic differences across the country and often allows for polygamy. When it comes to marriage today, both the Tumbuka and Ngoni follow a set of laws that are associated with patrilineal inheritance and patrilocal residence. In rural areas, matters of family law are governed almost exclusively by customary law corresponding to the ethnic origin of the area (Besendahl 2004; Wanda 1988). Wanda (1988) points out that this applies equally to marital disagreements: “Disputes relating to marriage, divorce, illegitimate pregnancy, custody of children and the distribution of property on the dissolution of marriage are thus – to the extent that litigation in formal courts is concerned – almost entirely the preserve of Traditional Courts” (118).

This account of Isa’s marriage, I later learned, was itself not typical of a “deep” Tumbuka marriage, one which observed “deep” or old tradition. The Tumbuka in this region, until the end of the 19th century, practiced matrilineal descent patterns. Isa’s ceremony, featuring bridewealth
payment and patrilocal residence, reflected the defeat of the Tumbuka in northern Malawi by Ngoni peoples in the mid-19th century. After their defeat, the Tumbuka adopted features of the invaders’ marital customs, abandoning matrilineal inheritance practices (Vail and White 1989). Many also embraced polygamy. Isa’s marriage may or may not have been polygamous, but the point is that it represented a type of “traditional” marriage ceremony centered on patrilineal kinship values that represents one particular moment amidst a continually shifting “traditional” custom.

In 1878, when the Scottish Presbyterian missionaries established their first mission in northern Malawi, they appealed most ardently to the Tumbuka who, once again, went through a dramatic transition in marital traditions and values. The Tumbuka converted to Christianity in large numbers, and many Malawians, even in rural areas, began marrying under the common law with Christian ceremonies. Emphases on companionship during marriage opened the door for greater autonomy in the choice of a marriage partner in Malawi and paved the way for ever greater emphasis on the importance of romantic love in marriage. However, bridewealth has persisted and is given as part of Christian ceremonies today. As my research assistant said about bridewealth and her upcoming marriage in the Presbyterian Church, “It [bridewealth] must be there! We cannot have a wedding without it. They won’t even marry you [in the church] if your parents have not said they have received it and it is good.” Ministers of the Presbyterian Church I regularly attended when I was staying in town frequently asked in front of the congregation whether or not the parents of a woman who planned to get married were satisfied in their

106 Vail and White (1989) discuss the reasons for the missionaries’ success among the Tumbuka, including various reasons the Tumbuka, many of whom were enslaved by the Ngoni at the time, saw the mission as politically neutral and thus enthusiastically sent their children to be educated there.
dealing with the groom’s family prior to agreeing to perform the ceremony. Thus, weddings are modern in a way that incorporates elders rather than rejecting them.

HIV/AIDS programming, proliferating since the early 1990’s, has been influenced by Christian values and has in turn reinforced Christian marital ideals. HIV prevention messages in Malawi focus primarily on the A and B of the A,B,C [Abstinence, Be Faithful, Use Condoms] HIV prevention campaign, intertwining messages about “modern love” with respect for human rights and women’s empowerment (Watkins and Swidler 2012; also see Hunter 2010 for similar findings in South Africa). In Malawi, this message takes the form of emphasising a woman’s right and responsibility to choose a husband who loves her and to deny unloving sexual advances (Watkins and Swidler 2012). As Esacove’s (2010) recent research with NGOs and government officials in Malawi suggests, public health and NGO discourse on HIV/AIDS “creates distinctions between ‘risky’ and ‘healthy’ sex” (84). “Healthy sex” is said to occur in relationships constituted by “love” and in particular, “deep love.” “Risky sex,” on the other hand, is “exemplified by traditional cultural practices” (92). This is certainly a key element of HIV/AIDS programming in northern Malawi. Sindi, a middle-aged woman who is the former director of one of the youth HIV/AIDS programmes in the region of my research, explained that since her retirement from that position she has started her own initiative that worked with young men and women precisely to “discourage harmful cultural practices” from the perspective of HIV/AIDS (also see Watkins and Swidler 2012). This was voluntary work on her part, she explained, and entailed gathering youth from her neighbourhood to discuss how to put a stop to “harmful cultural practices” including “wife inheritance,” whereby a husband inherits his deceased brother’s wife and children, and polygamy. Interestingly hosting these discussion groups entailed bringing groups of young women and men to her large, gated home, behind
which she kept a very beautiful garden and wedding reception area that she told me many of the participants later rented from her for their wedding ceremonies. These were most certainly “white wedding” ceremonies, conducted, not at the homes of rural kin, but in a rented hall or garden. While I am not certain that this woman encouraged modern weddings as preventative strategies for HIV/AIDS, undoubtedly in her mind modern weddings characterised by a display of social status (with picture-taking in her flower gardens) are set in opposition to “harmful cultural practices” like polygamy.

Some of the girls in my study justified their need for a “love marriage” using language that echoes some of the HIV prevention messages almost verbatim. For example, in an argument I overheard Sella having with extended family about it being time she married, she cried out, in English, “It is my right to choose my own husband!” She later explained to me that she greatly feared marrying someone from a village, who might decide, after the marriage, to be polygamous and take on a second wife. Sella feels that polygamous relations are almost inevitably “abusive,” as she put it. One wife, usually the eldest one, she explains, falls out of favour with her husband and “she and her children suffer neglect and poverty and are at risk of HIV/AIDS.” As Watkins and Swidler (2012) have also demonstrated, “poverty, gender inequity, and ‘traditional culture’” are seen as the major barriers to HIV prevention programming in Malawi and are precisely those Sella seems to highlight here. “Traditional practices” like polygamy, widely seen as a symptom of gender inequality in Malawi, lead, according to Sella, to significant “poverty” and further subordination of women.

The seeming inseparability of modern status, Christian morality, and long-term health in loves desired by young people thus makes sense. As Esacove (2010) argues, narratives about the relationship between “love matches” and protection from HIV/AIDS make sense only within the
framework of “the unspoken assumptions of modernity (i.e., progress, rationality, liberty) and modern subjectivity (i.e., liberal, rational actors) in the Western heterosexual imaginary” (84). Since “only autonomous, rational modern actors can enter into a love match,” HIV/AIDS prevention programming in rural areas aims to protect youth from rural backwardness and create “modern” individualist citizens (Esacove 2010:84). White weddings are thus admired not only because they are deemed guarantors of “real love” or “love for ‘life’” but also because they do not alienate families. The families, in turn, can help to ensure the marriage continues to fulfill expectations of fidelity, trust, love, and gender equality.

Since a wedding implies a “love match” between proper, modern, individuals, supported by elders and sanctioned by the law, it is easy to see why it is so desperately desired. This said, hardly any of the youth living in villages have a wedding. Not six months after the interview with Benson in which he had spoken so eloquently of how a wedding would show others that he was “thinking well” and “in a good place,” he “stole his bride at night.”

**Elopement**

Weddings are extraordinarily expensive and thus largely inaccessible to most rural youth. As one young man detailed, “[Weddings] they can need you to be giving money for a DJ, the Master of Ceremony, a wedding cake, maybe some snacks for guests, maybe a cow for cooking, and the dress hires and a flower girl basket, and maybe some decorations here and there and a hall hire and maybe some cars to move things and the fuel…” In some cases much of the cost can be covered by the monetary gifts given to the bride and groom during the reception, but as this boy complained, “if, maybe, your guests, maybe they are very poor” which is often the case
in villages, “the wedding can be a huge loss.” Of course, the total cost of a wedding varies significantly depending on its extravagance, ranging anywhere from 20,000 MK to half a million Malawian kwacha; yet even 8000 MK out of pocket can be a lot to a village couple. Therefore, “Most of them marry by pregnancy or by stealing the bride at night,” Sella explained to me. In the case of a pregnancy, the girl’s parents are expected to bring her to the man she says is the father, who has the right to accept or deny the allegation. Upon accepting, according to Sella, they are considered married. Stealing a bride at night, in contrast, involves a boy sneaking his girlfriend out of her house and to his home village while everyone is asleep. When they wake together at his family compound, they are considered husband and wife. These two ways of marrying not only avoid the cost of the wedding, they also have the advantage of delaying or evading bridewealth payments, which are a requirement many young men find prohibitive in today’s deplorable economic climate. For the remainder of this chapter I will refer to these two types of marriages collectively as “elopement.”

Notwithstanding the economic advantages, elopement is overall a riskier proposition than a wedding from several perspectives. For one, whereas the wedding is associated purely with “love matches,” pregnancy has the ambiguous status of either being a way of marrying for “love” or a mechanism for marrying for “business,” as boys described it, where women “trap” a husband to secure financial support from a man, an example of which I provided in the previous chapter. Most importantly, elopement is a risky form of “love marriage” because it does not have the same legal protection or forge the same networks among kin as do “traditional marriages” or

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107 In 2008, K20,000 was equivalent to $140.00USD and K500,000 was $3487.00USD. (http://www.oanda.com/currency/ converter/).
108 I refer to marriages that started with pregnancy as elopement here because, as I discuss below, they are often as intentional as “stealing a bride at night,” or at least expected. Importantly, pregnancy is not a form of elopement if a man denies the allegation of being the father of a women’s unborn child.
weddings. These kin-based networks are especially important for economic and emotional support in marriages, particularly for women.

While all three – the wedding, pregnancy and stealing a bride at night – are examples of marriages that begin with a courtship and prioritize individual satisfaction of the couple, the latter two, from the perspective of grandparents, also imply disrespect for their elders. By not engaging their kin in the selection of their spouse (as in “traditional” marriages), nor in a marriage ceremony (as in “traditional” ceremonies and weddings), and by not paying brideweight, the asewere (in-law) relationships so important in Isa’s “traditional” marriage in the village, are absent in marriages that started with an elopement. Whereas asewere would conventionally make annual trips to visit one another and play a vital role in advising their children through marital disputes, when a couple elopes, no relationship between asewere is necessarily formed. Rather, a discordant relationship can form among in-laws of a couple who eloped that is exacerbated by the fact that these youth tend live independently from extended kin. As one grandmother whose granddaughter eloped lamented,

Today, in-laws doesn’t love [wutemwa cha] each other, doesn’t understand each other. Yes, you can even spit saliva at each other on the way. It is because the daughter in-law and her husband are cooking on their own and the mother in-law is also cooking on her own. Can there be understanding?

The situation that this grandmother describes can result from two circumstances that are common following elopements. One is that the couple who eloped asserts independence from extended

\[109\] The verb *kutemwa* means both “to like” and “to love” in chiTumbuka. My informants, however, insisted that it is easy to tell from the context in which the word is spoken whether it means “like” or “love.” While most of the quotes in this chapter were collected in English, in the few cases, such as here, that the quote was translated I paid very close attention to the ways in which the verb *kutemwa* was understood and translated it accordingly.
family, not only in choosing a spouse, but also by living separately and thus not sharing in the provision or preparation of food for the entire family. The other is that parents do not accept the marriage and banish the children from living with the extended family. Either way, if the daughter-in-law does not live with, and does not cook for, her mother-in-law, then the daughter’s parents, whose possibility for building a relationship with the in-laws is already weakened by the absence of bridewealth payment and a marriage ceremony, are even less likely to be able to build the expected relationships. This kind of “love,” which entails independence from kin in a way that the “love” embodied in the wedding usually does not, limits or prevents “love” among asewere. Modern romantic love seems to reorganize love in the broader society in unintentional ways.

This lack of relationship among asewere can be very difficult for a newly married couple, and especially for girls. For one, when asewere make annual journeys to visit one another they carry many gifts that help fill some of the kitchen and other household needs of the married couple and their extended homesteads. Furthermore, they dance, celebrate and give advice to the couple. For girls, whose mothers-in-law can be very harsh to them, it can be especially difficult to find that their extended family is unable and even uninterested in visiting or getting involved in solving disputes. As Mercy (22) explained, “what brings a lot of problems to my life is amama viyala [mother-in-law]. Each and every time my husband, he is giving everything [all earnings] to her. Then she is giving to me only a tiny amount of money. When my husband maybe gives me something, a little bit, then she is just saying maybe that ‘it is you [meaning Mercy] that is causing this problems.’” Then she turns to the son and says, according to Mercy, “No, it can’t be like this. But you are my son, so why?” In other cases women complained that when their husbands gave money directly to them, their mothers in-law would blame the wives, saying that
prior to her arrival her son was not depriving her so. Mercy, who despised her mother-in-law, bemoaned the poor relationship she had with her own mother on account of her husband not having paid *lobola*, “but I have nowhere to turn.”

The development of new friendships called *asiki* – also based on love, people say, but between same-sex, female friends – I argue, is a kind of strategy for dealing with this dearth of kin-based social relations. In the face of marital relationships based on “love for ‘life’,” new kinds of friendships, also based on “love” are necessary and emerging.

**Asiki Friendships**

Elders complained that replacing *asewere are asiki* or “secret friendships” between female non-kin. When I asked around the rural villages and town to try to ascertain the origin of *asiki*, I was told that “it started in town.” Most people were able to say little more about its origin than this, but according to a few people, in some work places, “Especially those with the [Presbyterian] Synod and Catholic Church, who have development offices in [the nearest city], they played a game called secret friends.” “You have to draw a name,” one woman who worked at such a development office in the city explained, “and then that person is your secret friend and you buy them a gift.” Whether this was its true origin, I am not sure. In the villages, however, this “game” took a somewhat different shape and a more serious meaning. The *asiki* relationships were not really “a secret”; rather, they were almost showcased. As one young woman in the village pondered, perhaps they are better thought of as “close friends to whom you can tell your secrets?” As yet another person explained, “They have just taken the name secret, secret to be *asiki* and kept it, though it is not the same [as the secret friend game in town].” In
other words, women in the village have translated “secret” as asiki in chiTumbuka and use it to refer to a close social relation forged among women who eloped and thus whose husbands did not pay bridewealth.

The benefits are many. As another woman exclaimed, “It is a party! [A party which occurs] when lobola [bridewealth] is not available. It is an excuse for women to walk to another village.” While an asiki friendship is forged between two individuals, when making trips to visit one’s asiki many female kin and neighbours join in and support the journey, making asiki visits like a party. As in the case of kitchen-top-up parties, asiki is also an excuse to get certain, specifically “modern” material goods. As a group of grandmothers explained during a focus group, “Mmmm, as for them [young women] they have found a way maybe of finding clothes [and other modern things for the kitchen],” as a parade of mostly young women wrapped from head to toe in their best dizzying patterns of primary colours and carrying enormous packages of gifts walked by on their way visit an asiki. Young women themselves who had asiki friends affirmed these statements by elders. “I can just say that it is a way of finding things for my house,” one young woman explained.

While this exchange of particularly “modern” goods is what most fills discussions about asiki friendships, the social support of an asiki friend and the ways in which it challenges inequalities women face in relationships with their husbands are other important benefits. Some men were clear detractors of these relationships, saying, as one man did, “the womens, there with their asiki, they can even be chatting there saying things about their husbands and they can even end up in a divorce.” Certainly women did converse about their husbands when in the company of only women and once in a while women initiated her asiki specifically because, “I was having
some problems at home [meaning with her husband], so I wanted just to go to seek advice from that one.”

Asiki also challenge hegemonic masculinities in various ways. In one village area, I had heard that asiki had been banned by a village headman. I did not work in this area directly, but when I tracked this headman down and asked him about the ban, he explained, “During asiki women are just sleeping with other men [in the village to which they have journeyed] and the result is many divorces in our village.” While none of the women I worked with admitted to sexual relations with other men while visiting their asiki, men had various reasons for feeling threatened by their wives’ asiki friendships. One of the grandmothers in the focus group mentioned above complained,

Aaaaah, [the asiki] is not good because it means girls do not fear men. When you are married and you reach up to the sunset without getting home, then you can have problems with your husband. [When girls go to asiki] it can reach up to seven o’clock, to eight, to nine before you are coming home from the other village. But your husband is at home. When are you going to cook for your husband? [Female elder].

Another woman added, women who forge asiki relations “have no respect. They don’t respect their husbands.” And, “It’s good for [the girls], in their minds, [to live] without caring for their husbands, but it’s completely [overall] not good, you must have respect for your husbands.” In this last quote, this elder notes that young women’s challenge to local values of femininity, including submission to one’s husband, is deemed by young women as “good.” A young woman who intended to find an asiki “maybe this coming year” said the same thing: “It is the chance to get away from the house and talk privately with your loved one [asiki friend].” In other words, the value of the asiki goes beyond the accumulation of household items and clothing to displays of independence, self-worth, and power in social relationships with men.
Interestingly, while *asiki* are forged by women whose marriages have not facilitated the traditional *asewere* relationships, the expectations of the relationship formed among two *asiki* friends very closely resembles that of *asewere* in “traditional” marriages. As noted above, what are considered customary marriages among the Tumbuka and Ngoni today are characterized by a gift of bridewealth, which, in turn, indebts the recipient who is expected to reciprocate the gift “in the form of the bride, labour and acquiescence of political will to that of the giver” (Durham 1995:117). This is the start of an ongoing relationship of debt and obligation between the families as they continue to meet and exchange gifts on an annual basis. Just as with *asewere* relations, *asiki* friendship entails a Maussian (1954) type of gift exchange relation. In *asiki* relations the initiator of the relationship starts making annual trips, together with female kin and neighbours (usually all young women), to her *asiki*’s homestead carrying many gifts. This creates an obligation on the part of the recipient to gather other women and return carrying gifts for the giver within the same year. Thus both *asewere* and *asiki* are in keeping with the Maussian notion of gift exchange as the recipient’s “personhood is encumbered by the personhood of the giver, embodied in the *hau* of the gift” (Durham 1995:115). As young women explained, “When she [your *asiki*] has carried you a gift then you have to be going maybe in the same year or even sooner if you can just say that this month I will be coming.”

*Asiki* friendships, however, also differ from *asewere* relations in several key ways. One key difference between the relationships among *asewere* and *asiki* is that *asiki* are expected to exchange specifically “modern” gifts. It took nearly the whole afternoon to describe what was in the packages the girls bring to their *asiki*. Sixteen pages of the 64-page transcript from that focus group were filled with discussion of the following kind,

“Pounded maize.”
“No, grinded maize.”
“Yeah, and four loaves of bread.”
“But we do carry sugar.”
“Four packets.”
“Then geisha bath soap.”
“One.”
“Plates, 10 plates is enough.”
“And salt, have you written salt?”
“Lotion is also added…”

The synthesis seems to be: white corn flour and a stirring stick to make nsima, four loaves of white bread, four packages of sugar, one Geisha brand bath soap, one Maluwa brand laundry soap, 1 kg of salt, 2 – 4 vitenji (the plural of chitenji) or cloth wraps, 10 plates, 1 basin, 2 pots, 1 flask, a teapot and matching mugs, a lamp and a winnowing basket, a pair of shoes, a set of spoons, Fanta, body lotion, glycerine, blankets, and deep fried chicken. In other conversations, however, I heard of asiki friends carrying much more expensive items, including radios, beds and mattresses. These are “modern” gifts that must be purchased. Asewere on the other hand, usually involved carrying chindongwa, a drink made from fermented millet, instead of Fanta and a goat instead of fried chicken, only maize flour, and no bread, sugar, plates, cups, blankets or beds.

A second, and perhaps more consequential difference from the perspective of elders, however, is how what is expected to be a long-term relationship of exchange is initiated for an asiki friendship relative to asewere relations. Whereas asewere relations are initiated by the gift of bridewealth, asiki relations are initiated by a request, or solicitation. As elders’ explained to
me, “[Asiki] start when a woman proposes another one, saying, ‘I love you. I want you to be my asiki.’” This causes elders much concern. “Mostly the one who proposes [makes the journey] first,” as the women explained, leaving a family irreversibly indebted if it is not reciprocated.

Whereas among asewere obligation to reciprocity is reinforced by the extended family, asiki are obligated only by their individual “love” for their friend, which may not be enough, according to elders, to persuade them to reciprocate.110 “About secret friends we think that it is not necessary because it can also destroy peoples’ lives,” one woman chimed. Importantly, this woman’s feeling that asiki friendships can “destroy peoples’ lives” likely refers, not only to the risk that a young woman makes a journey carrying gifts that are not later reciprocated, but also that it rarely has spillover benefits for village elders – whereas there are expectations that gifts carried by asewere are shared by the extended family, asiki gifts, such as Fanta, are consumed by the youth immediately and independently from family. “Asiki is the cause of poverty in our village,” some of the old women asserted.

But according to many of the young women, asiki relationships have their own foundation upon which reciprocity grows – “love.” Besides being “modern” in the sense that “modern” gifts are carried, asiki are also distinctly “modern” in that they are forged by emotional desires rather than kin obligations. When I asked young women whether it is more beneficial to propose an asiki who is wealthy, since they would be able to bring more presents, I was invariably told, “No, it [does] not matter. You may not even know [their wealth], just as long as you truly love her.” As with modern romantic relations elsewhere in Africa, however, with asiki,

110 Women do have some mechanisms for encouraging reciprocity from their asiki, however. As one woman explained, “We sing a song when you have not returned…you will act as if you are just passing by [their house] on your way somewhere and [while doing so] sing... “mwawawona hee mwawawona hee bamlyera hee bamalyera heee, mwawawona chitukuku...” meaning, “We see, hey, we see, hey, we see the crook.”
“love and material exchange cannot be easily separated in practice” (Smith 2009:165). When I asked young women in a focus group whether they were worried that their asiki would not reciprocate, one woman asserted, “they cannot just leave it [fail to return the journey] if they really love you” and the others nodded and hummed in agreement. It is this inseparability between the emotional and material exchange that makes “love” work in young women’s minds to create a sense of obligation between these friends.

Importantly, asiki emerges at a time when there are several other schemes for improving village women’s access to material goods they need and want. In the context of my research, village banks were one of the most prominent. These programmes, organized through various churches and institutions in Malawi\textsuperscript{111} form gender-segregated groups wherein the members are encouraged to purchase up to five shares weekly for 100MK\textsuperscript{112} each that they can withdraw together with the interest earned at the end of each year. Several women I came to know were members of such groups, which, in theory, could enable them to save and purchase the tea pots and cups, chicken and clothing they might receive through an asiki friendship. But there are several reasons that this does not replace the asiki. For one, as several women explained, the money saved in village banks is frequently seen as household money and decisions about spending are often made either by husbands, or in collaboration with husbands. Rarely is it decided that it should be spent on clothing and other material goods valued particularly by women. More importantly, however, village bank strategies circumvent the social relationships that are built up through gifting and thus do not have the same social benefits that come with asiki friendships.

\textsuperscript{111} FINCA is one the organizations that had village banks in the region (see http://www.finca.org/site/c.6fIGIXMFJnJ0H/b.6088545/#.UYqMpaLysfU, Access date May 07, 2013).
\textsuperscript{112} The equivalent of about 0.25 USD.
Despite the concern that this obligation to give purchased gifts can lead to poverty for some women if their friends fail to reciprocate, there is also recognition among some older women that *asiki* relations can have some positive outcomes for girls. One of the grandmothers in the focus group explained, “It [*asiki*] is like development [*tchitukuko*].” Another female elder explained, “So girls can have at least a lot of things in their house.” These quotes frame *asiki* as strategic on the part of women. By using the word “development” – a term that is commonly saved for government- or foreign-run infrastructural or health projects – this woman was trying to impress upon me both the tactical and the positive nature of such relations on the part of young women.

While most elders disapproved, at least publicly, some older women have themselves even considered proposing an *asiki* for the purpose of improving their material well-being. For example, a woman in her 50’s, one of the youngest women in the focus group, admitted to the woman next to her in a side conversation captured by my digital recorder, that she had met someone that she is considering asking to be her *asiki*. She justified, “there are many things I do not have means to get.”

While, as I showed above, men frequently feel threatened by *asiki*, sometimes *asiki* also seem to relieve some young men of the pressure to provide such material items “modern” women desire. I was consistently surprised that men, young and older, whose wives participated in *asiki* relations as hosts, or as part of a caravan of women visiting someone’s *asiki* in another village, seemed supportive overall. This certainly is not true of all men; some women’s fear of their husbands’ reaction prevented them from ever engaging in an *asiki* relation or participating in any way with an event. Nevertheless, some were supportive. These men, when I questioned them, would respond as Benson had when his new wife went to visit her new *asiki*, with a smile
and a relaxed shrug. “It is a way for them to find things,” he said. Such men did not object when women used their own savings earned selling garden produce to fund their journey and even provided money to their wives to help them purchase gifts for their friend. Young women who had such men in their lives would explain the support of their husbands as Mercy did, “Because it also benefits them to have things in the kitchen.” And indeed, while some of the gifts, such as cloth wraps, were for women specifically, many gifts benefited both women and men and even improved women’s ability to serve men – serving implements, tea pots and sugar for example. But men sometimes also seemed genuinely happy that women received things they needed. Unmarried boys and young men expressed significant distress over being unable to provide for “modern” women of today who need money and material things. “These girls [today] are fond of having money from boys,” they complained. Boys also often expressed feeling pressure to convince their father to grow tobacco with them before they marry, because otherwise “the girls will laugh at them.” By conceding to women’s desire to visit “secret friends,” men feel relieved of some of the pressure they feel in the face of modern desires for money and material goods in rural villages.

**Conclusion**

An examination of the history of shifting marriage customs in Malawi reveals how the much desired “white wedding” has come to symbolise an individual emotional connection between a couple and, in line with village “tradition,” be prescriptive of a high social class, Christian morality and fidelity (and hence immunity from HIV/AIDS). The “white wedding,” however, is largely inaccessible to rural youth, who often opt to marry for a lower-tier “love,”
one that implies neither the same status, nor the same legal or kin-based support offered by the wedding. In turn, I argue that young women strategically shape their extra-marital friendships in ways that support the practice of new, companionate marriages and make them viable even when a wedding is out of reach.

Asiki is a means of social support for young women, of challenging some of the inequalities they face in relationships with men, and of seeking the material dream associated with the “white wedding” through alternative relationships with friends. They accomplish this because these friendships are also based on “love” which is characterized in this context by both an emotional connection between two individuals (Wardlow and Hirsch 2006) and material exchange (Cole 2009; Hunter 2009; 2010; Smith 2009).

Like marriages based on romantic love, friendships based on “love” do not always fulfill expectations. In some cases elders’ prophecies come true and village women carry gifts to an asiki that are never fully reciprocated. In other cases, poor women are scolded and embarrassed by rich women for not carrying gifts that meet expectations. Furthermore, these “secret friendships,” which somewhat ironically imply a very open and public march of women towards another woman’s house, are easily under watch of an untrusting husband and thus challenge men’s authority less than it may seem. More often than not, however, asiki friendships are felt by women to be liberating for the benefits noted above. These are precisely the kinds of struggles for and strides towards gender equality that I argue deserve greater attention than they receive by the contemporary gender “accounting” of youth-targeted health programmes.
Conclusion

In Malawi’s new democracy, particular kinds of health and development programmes are flourishing. Unlike the programmes and policies of the past, which valued a militaristic discipline for youth and emphasised practical training in skills relevant to agriculture, contemporary initiatives take a new and different approach. Today’s interventions are “anticipatory” in nature – they have their sights set on the long term and are willing to make sacrifices in the present in hopes they will generate a prosperous, healthy future. During my fieldwork in 2008 and 2009, these programmes were predominantly funded by donors interested, first and foremost, in staving off the high rates of transmission of HIV/AIDS, particularly in the future adult generation – today’s youth. Aligning themselves with national policy and interests, the programmes combined this goal with a focus on youths’ future leadership of the nation. Their strategy entailed training youth to be healthy leaders, bombarding them with messages about their human rights— or “freedom”— and the importance of education, women’s empowerment, certain kinds of gender equality and moral or “healthy love.”

This situation is not unfamiliar in African contexts. Eager to do away with the disappointments of the present, Africa’s future became its salvation (Piot 2010; Weiss 2005), and “anticipatory interventions,” as Adams, et al. (2009) have called these programmes that are focused on preparing the present for a future unknown, have flourished across the continent (Piot 2010). According to elders in Malawi, youth took to this new orientation vigorously with a sense of urgency. My young informants were the youth who are “just staying,” an idiom used by rural youth to describe a feeling of failure to make progress towards their goals. “Just staying”
requires significant imaginative, social and physical work on the part of youth to maintain hope for new futures and to keep desired futures visible on the horizon. As part of their project of sustaining hope, my young informants employed discourses related to human rights, empowerment and jenda (or a kind of gender equality) in the arena of their everyday lives and eagerly sought modern social relations that enabled them to feel worthy of the futures they imagined. Elders complain that with these programmes youth go from “just staying,” to “just playing” (as Durham 2004; 2005b notes in Botswana). While anticipatory interventions target youth over elders, this does not fully explain anticipations’ extreme popularity among young people. Many elders, too, want to see change for the future and feel frustrated with the persistent poverty in rural villages. Whereas elders find some guidance for the future in their memories of the past, however, youth feel abandoned by unfulfilled promises of the past and cling to imaginations of the future for direction today.

When I returned to Malawi in 2012, I found that the human rights trainings, HIV/AIDS prevention messages and youth club activities had all but vanished. Such is the way with contemporary health and development programmes in Africa: “NGOs come and go, and any structures they create, such as youth clubs to dramatize the dangers of AIDS or microfinance projects to ameliorate poverty and empower women, usually evaporate when the project funding ends and the NGO departs” (Watkins and Swidler 2012:198). Of course, they left their indelible mark in the form of altered local structures, new hierarchies and novel subjectivities that, as I demonstrated in this dissertation, have emerged in highly awkward and unpredictable ways as consequences of their programming (Piot 2010; Watkins and Swidler 2012). Some of the youth clubs were still in operation in the villages, where youth organised their own trainings, and various resource centres were still in open but without funding for activities or trainings. One
programme leader explained, “Yes, you know nowadays the problem is that the donors they don’t want HIV/AIDS. They have told us, maybe, to write a proposal for climate change.” He then asked if I might be able to help them. I took a quick glance at the proposal they had already started to write and it seemed very familiar.

Regardless of whether it is prevention of HIV/AIDS, the empowerment of women or climate change that is the umbrella topic, the focus is on the future and the solution in the present is behaviour change through training today so as to create moral and healthy leaders for Malawi’s tomorrow (Cheney 2007; Englund 2006b; Hayhurst 2011; Piot 2010; Watkins and Swidler 2012; Weiss 2005). In this study, I set out to understand how youth-targeted HIV/AIDS programmes, with their emphases on human rights and women’s empowerment, figure into rural Malawian youths’ desires for, and work in anticipation of, the future in one particular rural context at one particular moment. It seems, however, that the findings of this study resonate much more widely with different kinds of development initiatives and in some ways anticipate the effects of future projects too. In this way, my findings summarised below contribute not only to advancing anthropological theory but also could inform more applied initiatives in health and development, helping them to envision the overlooked and obscured effects of fostering particular kinds of anticipation.

This research generated multiple and overlapping findings. Here, I wish to draw attention to two key findings that resonate throughout the dissertation. The first is the insidious and unexpected ways that discourses and ideals espoused in “anticipatory interventions” (Adams, et al. 2009:248) become detached from Western health and development logic to engender numerous unexpected effects in the lives of rural youth and their families. This is sometimes a function of the anticipatory mode itself, as in the ways that accountability requirements reduce
gender equality to something countable in the field. Youths’ creative recasting of these ideas in their aim to make them meaningful and consequential to their contemporary social and imaginative lives sometimes, to use Hunter’s (2010) terminology, yields discourses and ideas “spectacularly turned on their head” (9). The historical, social, political, economic and demographic context in contemporary village Malawi further intersects with these new formulations of global discourses to produce completely new and unanticipated ontologies.

The second key point I wish to bring to the fore is that by privileging the future over the present and the past, programmes overlook numerous structural barriers to changing the lives of the youth who “just stay.” In doing so, I demonstrate an argument I introduced in the beginning of this dissertation about how the unanticipated effects of these programmes constitute and give rise to several invisible violences (Bourgois 2009). On the other hand, however, some effects are generative of new and positive subjectivities and relationships. The most egregious error, I argue, is that these meaningful changes and important effects are overlooked by programmes. This ignorance prevents programmes from building upon positive effects to generate desired change and sometimes undercuts their own goals – for example blocking processes which empower women underway sometimes because of and sometimes despite their efforts.

After synthesising these key findings in the dissertation, I will also demonstrate below how, by looking at how anticipation emerges in a rural African context, this dissertation makes several theoretical contributions to anthropologies of health, development, youth, gender and love. Finally, I discuss some of the methodological contributions and limitations of this research and suggest some ways to move forward.


**Frictions, Blurring, Elisions and Upsets**

The ways in which youth-targeted “anticipatory interventions” generate unexpected effects, variably destructive and generative in nature, was shown throughout this dissertation. For instance, as part of their project of preparing now for an imagined future, youth have become enamored with the human rights discourse. As youth take up their human rights in the absence of legal structures and supports, however, they take them up as individual “freedoms” in the context of their families (Englund 2006a). As these new “freedoms” collide with changing relationships to money in rural villages and youths’ desires for *umoyo wachizungu* or English/white life, a discursive elision takes place between the rights discourse and other markers of modernity; youth, for example, take up their “rights” to wear modern clothing and drink commercial alcohols. Perceived as a kind of selfish individualism among elders, this employment of the rights discourse threatens social reproduction, leaving among elders a feeling of nostalgia for the “discipline” and “respect” underpinning youth programmes of the past. Demographic changes associated with HIV/AIDS, increasing rural poverty and youths’ fluency in modern discourses of development relative to elders’, however, generates a complex situation in which elders feel unable to confront youth or offer alternatives. They ways in which intergenerational discord is accepted as inevitable as youth prepare for new, “modern” futures, I have argued, is an example of everyday or “normalised” violence (Bourgois 2009).

The same complex of factors that impacts elders’ authority to discipline youth in rural villages affects young men’s ability to practice expected masculinities in the village, though in different ways. Rural poverty prevents young men from being able to pay bridewealth and support their families according to expectations, sometimes leading them to turn more heavily towards other markers of masculinity including alcohol consumption and sexual relations with
multiple women (Kaler 2004a). Isugbara and Undie (2008) have recently shown that young Malawian boys, in particular, show extreme anxiety about getting masculinity “right” in the contemporary context and in turn work constantly to affirm and re-affirm their masculinity by talking about and acting on sexual desires. But for some of the boys and young men engaged in my research, desires to feel “worthy” of new, “modern” futures combined with fears about HIV/AIDS have them forgoing new masculine identities premised on their patience, hard work and support of women’s empowerment. As these intersect with the anticipatory focus on the productive potential of girls – frequently referred to as the Girl Effect – and as an unspoken corollary, not boys, selfish behaviours including alcoholism and womanising surface in boys’ self-constructions as innate tendencies rather than part of a socially produced and constantly shifting construction of masculinity. The Girl Effect, thus, engenders a form of symbolic violence – boys “naturalize the status quo and blame themselves for their domination” (Bourgois 2009:19). In this way, anticipatory programmes actually undermine their own intentions by acting as a barrier boys must overcome in order to construct new masculine identities – identities that may well challenge inequalities for women, the very aim of the Girl Effect in the first place.

Struggles and strides towards challenging gender inequalities by both men and women are further hindered by the slippery ways in which the evaluations elaborated by anticipatory interventions influence programme activities and gendered subjectivities in rural Malawi. What Strathern (2000) refers to as “audit cultures,” or the systematic approach to accountability increasingly demanded by institutions outside of the corporate and financial sector of their birth, is critical to the operation of the interventions I worked with in Malawi. I show how this effectively reduces gender inequalities that are relational in nature to something individual and countable. A straightforward, quantifiable sort of gender equality, termed jenda in Malawi, takes
off in the rural context where the subordination of women starts in the natal household and thus gender inequalities that are deeply ingrained and relational in nature are extremely difficult to approach or overturn. This, in turn, affects programme activities, leads to jenda performances by programme participants, and, in some cases, filters into youths’ subjectivities as young people strive to act in moral and “modern” ways. When they assert their plans for more gender-equal marriages, the equality they imagine sometimes emerges as “doing everything the same in the marriage...taking turns and having a schedule.”

In other cases, however, the awkward interactions or “frictions” (as Tsing 2005 calls them) between the local and the global seem to render new approaches to tackling inequalities that may just work out. Discourses on modern and “healthy” loves seem to contribute to desires for marital relations symbolised by the “white wedding” ceremony and re-arrangements in romantic relations and friendships that provide new and positive opportunities for women not always available in customary marriages. Desires for “love marriages” that meet emotional, moral, health, gender equality and class aspirations, embodied in the “white wedding,” simultaneously emerge as discourses on moral and healthy love interpose a customary marriage ceremony that has been changing slowly for a long period of time. These marriages, though rarely available to youth, actually unite “tradition” and “modernity” in ways that simultaneously win elders’ support. Potentially achieving youths’ aspirations for “modern” intimate relations and, generating a marriage which is supported by law and by kin, it is easy to understand why the “white wedding” is so urgently desired. Even the inaccessibility of “white weddings,” however, is generative of new friendships, also based on “love.” These relationships signal other, truly innovative mechanisms devised by women for addressing inequalities both between women and men and ideological clashes between youth and elders. Asiki friendships in particular challenge
hegemonic masculinities as women leave the house and party with female friends in other villages, provide means for accessing “modern” household items and thus to display their association with the desired, “modern” social class, and build sources of support and advice when the hopes and expectations of “love” relations with their husbands are not fulfilled.

These unexpected effects are symptoms of the highly individualised approach employed by contemporary anticipatory health and development initiatives that focuses on behaviour change through training. In the following section, I take up how these programmes, by prioritising the future over the past, also obscure more structural barriers to education, employment, health and prosperity in rural villages.

The Anti-politics of Anticipation

The anticipatory mode positions youth, and particularly boys, as culprits in their own demise. It implies that youth irresponsibility is to blame for the barriers they face, rendering individual behavioural change training the solution to stagnant national development. The anticipatory regime’s focus on “individual responsibility and initiatives” (Piot 2010:160) obscures the longstanding structural violence or the “unequal access to resources, services, rights, and security” (Bourgois 2009:17) that plagues rural Malawi. Anticipatory interventions are thus prime examples of Ferguson’s (1990) “anti-politics machine” at work.

In their photographs and narratives, my young informants clearly identified many structural and political barriers to meeting goals that are largely out of their control. Youth, for instance, do not drop out of school because they lack goals or dreams that are promoted through
education. Youth wished to be doctors, lawyers, project managers, business owners, and nurses, all of which require high levels of education. Instead, youth quit school because those jobs are not really available to them, particularly in rural areas. Furthermore, attending secondary school often means abandoning those under their care at home because the schools are far away. Of course, since they struggle even to find enough food to eat, school fees are also often out of reach. Youth marry young not because they do not know about their human rights, nor because they wish to disrupt familial and social order, put their health at risk, or prioritise “sex over school,” but because unmarried girls in a patrilineal society do not have access to land, the only viable source of economic opportunity in this rural community. Girls often marry because they do not have school fees or are not performing well in schools that are often overcrowded and poorly staffed or, in some cases, because they were expelled from school for not wearing a brassiere. Boys, for their part, drink alcohol, at least in some cases, because it is one of the ways young boys connect with elders in a context where intergenerational relationships are strained by youth seeking new and global cultures and youth asserting their “rights” within their families. Thus, gender inequalities in access to resources, employment and educational opportunities for girls are partly to blame for early marriages. Deteriorating intergenerational relations help us to understand alcohol consumption by young boys. Overlooking these in favour of a simpler, de-politicized framework for understanding youth challenges undermines youth agency and further marginalises youth as irresponsible, non-agents rather than empowering them to be the “leaders of today.”
Advancing Theories of Anticipation, Gender, Youth and Generations

By taking up Adams, et al.’s (2009) call to pay attention to the “varied and specific forms anticipation takes as both an effect of political economies and a feature of them” (248), this dissertation contributes to anthropological theory in several fundamental ways. It shows how anticipation emerges very differently in a rural African context than in Western health and development logic. For international NGOs, anticipation emerges amidst statistical data and forecasts which make the future seem inevitable and salvageable through particular tactics in the present, like supporting the education of girls (Adams, et al. 2009). For rural Malawian youth, on the other hand, anticipation engenders a state of liminality. Futures are highly uncertain as rural youth move in and out of “just staying.” As they reach for a sure footing, what emerges as certain is that acting as if desired futures will transpire is necessary to make imagined futures a reality. Anticipation thus persists only as it works amidst and intersects with numerous other factors that help to sustain hope. These include the imaginative and physical work of youth themselves in their effort to feel worthy of imagined futures. Small, philanthropic donations to youth who engage the right discourses and show patience and perseverance amidst “just staying” play their part. The circulation of success stories and Bible verses that describe how “good” behaviours in the present pay off with future status and prosperity are also important. Without these catalysts, it is possible that anticipation would not and could not take root.

While I see anticipation emerging differently in Malawi than in the language of anticipation in the West (Adams, et al. 2009), I also see it emerging somewhat differently from Piot’s (2010) description of the emergent “nostalgia for the future” among urban and rural Togolese. Piot (2010) finds that new temporal orientations towards the future are accompanied by a rejection of the past among Togolese. He writes “Africanity is rejected and Euro-modernity
embraced; futures are replacing the past as cultural reservoir” (Piot 2010:16). In Malawi, however, I have shown that while there is a distinct shift in youths’ engagement with the future since the democratic transition, the values and practices that emerge as youth engage new discourses are often alloys of old and new, the local and the global. This is perhaps most visible in the ways the modern “white wedding” reflects the importance of the marriage ceremony and of gift exchange in customary marriages or in the ways women prefer asiki friendships over village banks as a means of saving and buying things they need. Asiki friendships are preferred, I argue, precisely because asiki friendships imply reciprocal relations among friends that reflect those customarily valued among aswere (in-laws) but circumvented by village banks. Tacking back and forth between the past and the future in the appropriations of new ideas, however, is also visible in how peer educators embraced and re-interpreted traditional Ngoni and Tumbuka songs, dances and traditional costumes, when training elders about how to prevent the transmission of HIV/AIDS. They aimed to “attract elders with something familiar,” and simultaneously teach them something new. In fact, in this research I found that it was precisely this situation of being between the past the future – the old and the new – that made these youth so drawn to new ideas.

This study thus also builds in new and important ways upon Mannheim’s (1972 [1952]) theory of “fresh contact,” which holds that the susceptibility of youth to new ideas and practices is a consequence of their young age and thus lack of established habits. Anthropologists (through their focus on urban and not rural youth as much as anything else) have contributed to the widespread belief that urban youth, on account of being more agentive, are more susceptible to new ideas as per the “fresh contact” theory. Cole (2004) has complicated Mannheim’s argument by showing how youth, by virtue of their “fresh contact,” not only accept new ideas and drop old
ones that are no longer relevant, but also attach new meaning to old practices. Durham (2007) shows how new ideas are assimilated not only by and among youth, but by youth as they are negotiated intergenerationally. Adding to these arguments, I believe that “fresh contact” is fundamentally interstitial. It is this liminal state of feeling “betwixt and between” (Turner 1969:95) a past not available and a future unknown (Piot 2010), that drew my young Malawian informants to global constructs (human rights, women’s empowerment, and modern love).

Because youth felt torn between obligations in rural villages and desires for education and urban employment, and between being youthfully hopeful and modern and contributing traditionally to proper social reproduction in rural villages, they forged new and creative forms of masculinities, modern loves among friends, and “kitchen-top-up parties.” In other words, “fresh contact” is located between generations, between rural and urban, between the local and the global imaginary, between the past and the future and between youth resistance and youth acquiescence.

By seeking to understand the slippery ways in which key ideas and discourses embedded in the anticipatory mode in Malawi often become something new and unexpected as they trickle their way through particular (social, political, economic, historical and demographic) contexts and encounter “fresh contact” in my young informants, I also contribute significantly to anthropological understandings of how specific global constructs interpenetrate the local in the contemporary context of globalisation (Tsing 2005). By looking at how accountability is taken up by local NGOs and community-based organizations promoting health and development among youth in rural Malawi, I add significantly to understandings of the “multiplex, cross-cutting…values and practices promulgated in the name of accountability” (Strathern 2000:2). Doing so also contributes, however, to our understanding of the various ways in which “audit
culture” (Strathern 2000) is a potent force influencing how global ideas take new and unexpected forms in local contexts. Whereas I found, as do many other anthropologists, that local elites or “brokers” (Watkins and Swidler 2012:197) responsible for implementing global behavioural change training play a significant role in shaping those ideas as they seek to translate them in meaningful ways to local contexts (also see Englund 2006b), I argue that attention must also be paid to the ways in which global ideas such as gender equality are shaped by audit cultures even before they travel from the West to other contexts. I also contribute in this dissertation to understanding the social forms that proliferate from the sometimes fecund site of the human rights discourse as it is taken up and made local (Englund 2006a; Goodale 2006; Merry 2005). By exploring in detail how human rights functions as a trope in rural Malawi, I show how the rights rhetoric gives hope for something new to the rural youth who “just stay,” but also easily slips into demands for “modernity,” characterized by money and modern consumption rather than equality and justice for poor rural families. While the human rights discourse, as adapted by rural youth, in turn re-arranges social hierarchies and challenges elders’ ideas about proper social reproduction, I show how the global discourses on “modern love” on the other hand, inspire rearrangements of social lives that reflect the exchange-based relations that elders value. Several anthropologists have taken interest in examining how modern “loves” are emerging and taking shape in global contexts (see multiple papers in Cole and Thomas 2009; Hirsch and Wardlow 2006; and Hunter 2010). My research identifies an important area for additional research on love: namely, the ways in which “modern” love in intimate relations in rural villages may be part of and bolstered by a broader shift in social relations to “modern, loving friendships” among rural non-kin.
Methodological Contributions and Limitations of this Research

For this study, I developed a new approach to using photography in anthropological research. Building on studies that have shown significant advantage to giving informants cameras (Banks 2001; Castleden, et al. 2008; Hernandez 2009; Strack, et al. 2003; Wang and Redwood-Jones 2001) and those showing the benefits of incorporating photography into ethnographic text (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Schonberg and Bourgois 2002), I developed a tool I call Photo-LENS (Life-experience Narratives of Significant concepts) and incorporated it into my ethnographic approach. Photo-LENS differs from the inductive approach taken by most photographic research. Participants in Photo-LENS are asked to think of their personal experiences and interactions (or life-experience) with key constructs around which there is a social, political and/or institutional discourse. The key constructs I asked about in this research were “joy,” “suffering,” “health,” and “love.” The photographs are then used to elicit stories of experience with or opinions about these concepts.

Throughout this dissertation the importance of this method for engaging youth in expressing their opinions, and concerns in this context where generational hierarchies and a very domineering transnational discourse on youths’ lives inhibit youth voices and perceptions, is apparent. While I attempted to compensate for shortcomings identified in other photographic research reports by thinking critically about the research and by triangulating my findings with multiple other sources of data (including ethnographic fieldnotes, participant observation, focus groups, interviews without photographs, a survey et cetera) this study, of course, still encountered some limitations.
For one, as I have pointed out in various places throughout this dissertation, the stories youth told me were sometimes performative, with me as the particular audience in mind. Youth sometimes perceived me as a volunteer development worker and perhaps aimed to please me with the stories and opinions they shared. It is possible that using photography contributed to this sentiment in some manner, as some youth may have aimed also to take images that they felt would be visually interesting or pleasing to me. Assumptions about my purpose in Malawi, of course, faded as the fieldwork went on and the youth became accustomed to me living with them and their families in the villages and not working regularly with a particular youth-targeted initiative. What was important for this research, however, was not to distinguish “real” from “imagined” stories of suffering, joy, health and love or to identify “wrong” stories and “right” ones. Rather, Photo-LENS was employed in this research to help identify how resources available through national and transnational programmes are used variably (in performances or otherwise) by different youth and their parents.

A second and important limitation to using photography was that it was extremely time-consuming. While teaching youth to use the cameras and moving in and out areas with electricity so camera batteries could be charged took time enough, all the ethical precautions necessary were even more time-absorbing. Arranging for completely private interviews with youth in rural villages, storing everything in well-labelled, password protected files, and seeking permission for the use of photographs from photographers as well as anyone featured in the photographs took significant organisation. This, in turn, meant that I did not do all of the research I had intended. I had planned not only to work with rural youth residing in villages, but to trace youth who had left the villages to find out how they engaged with health and development programming and how programmes did or did not give meaning to their lives as they moved. I managed to track
down some youth who lived nearby, but did not visit a boarding school on the other side of the country or youth living with relatives in the Southern Region. I will have to save these inquiries for follow-up studies.

Finally, while photography fostered a close relationship with many of my informants, my lack of fluency in local languages certainly affected my ability to build relationships with some youth and limits my certainty that I understood all the nuances in youths’ stories. My doctoral fieldwork brought me to Malawi for the first time and while I hired a local professor to help me learn chiTumbuka and I became much better at communicating as time went along, I never became fluent. The fact that programme staff frequently communicated in English or chiChewa and that my informants mixed chiTumbuka, chiChewa, English and some Ngoni as they spoke made learning and understanding more difficult for me. Fortunately, I worked with a full-time research assistant who became a close friend of mine for the duration of my research. She helped me to translate during interviews, but also to understand everyday conversations for we slept, ate, travelled and worked together every day. I found her translations, interpretations and opinions invaluable to my understanding of things in this context, even though we did not always see things the same way. Her willingness to discuss things ad nauseam when I wanted to be sure I understood correctly and the ways in which we double- and triple-checked translations and meanings with three other assistants at various times in my work, makes me feel confident that this limitation did not significantly affect the quality of my final arguments.
Ways Forward for Research and Development Practice

My next initiative, as noted above, will be to understand how rural-urban migration intersects with youths’ engagements with and adaptation of youth-targeted, anticipatory discourses in Malawi. My research, however, suggests several other important avenues for further anthropological enquiry. Needed are studies which pay attention to how anticipation emerges in different contemporary African contexts and its consequences for the lives of children, youth and elders. It will be particularly interesting to see how the findings of this study anticipate the effects of new anticipatory interventions emerging, such as those concerned with climate change, which aim to make youth into environmental stewards in preparation for expected erratic weather patterns. Paying particular attention to rural African youth may open more opportunities for understanding how the incorporation of new global ideas and discourses into their everyday lives, not only affects social and particularly intergenerational relations in unexpected ways, but also necessitates numerous other strategic changes in local social and economic relations in villages, some more liberating for youth and young women than others. Studies which employ Photo-LENS in new contexts, where different key concepts or discourses need unpacking, would also make a significant contribution to critical theory on the use and analysis of visual data in child and youth-centred research.

As a final word, I urge anthropological studies which critically examine health and development programming to share their findings in ways that inform policy and practice. Sally Engle Merry (2005) has argued that “[human rights movements] produce human rights consciousness among people at the bottom of the social hierarchy from time to time, but in the absence of success or reinforcement, this consciousness can fade” (229). This is likely true of gender empowerment movements. This thesis thus, perhaps, captures a unique moment, a
moment in which hope prevails among rural Malawian youth who are willing to imagine futures where human rights guarantee certain kinds of equalities. With youth desires being increasingly incommensurate with rural realities, this is a moment we might leverage to help make sure hope also provides for the rural Malawian youth who “just stay” rather than fails them. As with ideas promulgated by health and development initiatives, comments and suggestions by anthropologists are likely to emerge in development trainings and everyday practice in unanticipated ways. But, as with the discourses on human rights, *jenda* empowerment, and healthy loves examined in this dissertation, anthropologists’ suggestions will sometimes be taken up in ways that may just work out.
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Classen, Lauren, Rachel Bezner Kerr, and Lizzie Shumba


Coad, Jane


Cole, Jennifer

—


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—


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—


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Kyaddondo, David

Larkin, Brian


Lee, Richard B


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Lindsay, Lisa, and Stephan Miescher, eds.


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Wagner, Jon


Wanda, Boyce P


Wang, Caroline C., and Mary Ann Burris


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Wulff, Helena

## Appendices

### Appendix 1

**Youth Joys**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Which groups of youth mentioned this?</th>
<th>Why it is a “joy”?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caring for Others (children,</td>
<td>▪ All, especially older youth or eldest sibling</td>
<td>▪ Increases reputation/status&lt;br&gt;▪ “I love them”&lt;br&gt;▪ Makes family proud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grandparents)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancing (listening to music,</td>
<td>▪ All</td>
<td>▪ Forget worries&lt;br&gt;▪ Fun&lt;br&gt;▪ Friendships&lt;br&gt;▪ Maintains culture/tradition (traditional Ngoni dances)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>singing, writing songs)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church/God</td>
<td>▪ All</td>
<td>▪ Protection from jealousy by others and witchcraft&lt;br&gt;▪ Moral and good&lt;br&gt;▪ Makes family proud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking Alcohol</td>
<td>▪ Boys, especially older boys and boys who lived in “towns” for work or school</td>
<td>▪ Helps us connect with our culture/elders (Ngoni)&lt;br&gt;▪ Solve problems in discussion with other men&lt;br&gt;▪ Forget our worries, sleep better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>▪ All</td>
<td>▪ Keeps mind and body busy&lt;br&gt;▪ Provides money for needs&lt;br&gt;▪ Makes one marriageable&lt;br&gt;▪ Can help your family&lt;br&gt;▪ Source of pride, status and respect&lt;br&gt;▪ Independent, adulthood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>▪ All</td>
<td>▪ Food is necessary to live, study, work&lt;br&gt;▪ Can share with friends&lt;br&gt;▪ Important in care for parents/siblings/grandparents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>▪ All</td>
<td>▪ Forget worries&lt;br&gt;▪ Chat with&lt;br&gt;▪ Help with problems&lt;br&gt;▪ Love&lt;br&gt;▪ To be healthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Love</strong></td>
<td>▪ All</td>
<td>▪ To marry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Help with problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Forget worries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ To be healthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Money</strong></td>
<td>▪ All</td>
<td>▪ To be healthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Buy food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Buy clothing, shoes, soap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Pay school fees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Care for parents, grandparents, siblings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nice House</strong></td>
<td>▪ All, especially boys.</td>
<td>▪ Pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Give to mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Part of responsibility (especially for boys)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Nice for sleeping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quiet Places</strong></td>
<td>▪ Especially girls</td>
<td>▪ Think without pressure from family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Escape responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Pray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Playing Sports</strong></td>
<td>▪ All, especially boys</td>
<td>▪ Forget worries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Have fun with friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Keeps mind and body busy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Prevents one from engaging in “bad” activities (ie: drinking alcohol, or going after girls).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth Clubs</strong></td>
<td>▪ Older boys and girls</td>
<td>▪ Make friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Share worries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Opportunities for financial benefits (through workshop stipends)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Opportunities to travel (locally or abroad through youth exchanges)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tobacco/agricultural resources</strong></td>
<td>▪ All</td>
<td>▪ Provides money for school fees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Provides money for food like eggs, sugar, salt, meat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Appendix 2

#### Youth Challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Which groups of youth mentioned this?</th>
<th>Why is it a “suffer”?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hard Labour</strong></td>
<td>- Girls – seeking and carrying firewood, water</td>
<td>- Physically difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Boys – moulding bricks, herding cattle</td>
<td>- Tiring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Takes away from school time/study time/play time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Boys/Men Fighting</strong></td>
<td>- All</td>
<td>- Embarrassing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Causes physical pain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poor Environment</strong></td>
<td>- All, tended to be better off-boys and girls</td>
<td>- Not enough trees - affects climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Lack garbage disposal system (can make us sick)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Drought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Poor soils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- No wood for fuel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HIV (fear of)</strong></td>
<td>- Some boys and girls, all ages, overall this was remarkably rare given</td>
<td>- Will never grow to be an “agogo” (grandparent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>national focus on HIV prevention among youth</td>
<td>- May leave children parentless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Orphans suffer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Watching Others Suffer</strong></td>
<td>- All, very common, related to AIDS, old age, and other problems</td>
<td>- Extreme sadness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Embarrassment/secrecy (related to stigma)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Sufferers are unhappy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Feeling of helplessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Responsibility to care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Responsibility to pay for hospital fees/medicines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- High cost of funerals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Food Insecurity</strong></td>
<td>- All – very common response, seasonal, linked to alcoholism, unemployment, poor environment, school drop-out etc</td>
<td>- Food is necessary to live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- People look for food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Worry every day about what grandparents/siblings will eat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Nothing to share with others (damaging to social relations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Going to School</strong></td>
<td>- All</td>
<td>- Very poor grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- No time to study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Long walk to school</td>
<td></td>
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<td>---</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No soap (teasing from others)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kicked out for not wearing a clean uniform/a bra/shoes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers not teaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fees etc. take money needed for care of others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No jobs afterwards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>All</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No school fees, food, soap, clothing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No opportunities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sense of hopelessness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Houses</td>
<td>All, especially boys</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roofs leak – no sleep, sickness</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frustration with unmet expectations (related to “right” to education, unemployment rates)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Embarrassment (especially that youth could not provide adequate house for mother)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling of failure</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Alcoholism (by husbands, brothers, fathers, uncles)</td>
<td>All, especially married girls and boys 11-14</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drink the money</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No food, no school fees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No help with agriculture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Embarrassing</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physically and verbally abuse youth, mothers etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased responsibility to care for family</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pressure to drink</td>
<td>Boys 15-30</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling confused, torn between the benefits of drinking with elders/friends, their “right” to do as they like, to forget their worries, and to be a “good” Christian youth. Worried that alcohol consumption linked to risk of HIV.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>All</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No food</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not able to marry</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No pride/respect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caregiving</td>
<td>All, especially with divorced or dead parents</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cost (financial, missed school, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Lack of Agricultural Resources</em></td>
<td>- All, especially girls, because they can only access land through their husband, boys with poor relation to patrilineal kin</td>
<td>- No decision-making power on land which belongs to father/husband’s family</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- No right to land in mother’s home village</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Few opportunities in urban areas</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Discrimination towards rural Youth</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Violence against women</em></td>
<td>- Many girls and boys spoke of instances of both verbal and physical abuse of women</td>
<td>- Husband beats his wife</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Husband takes on second wives/girlfriends putting girls at higher risk of STIs</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- Woman must have children immediately in marriage</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- Families force girls to marry to receive bride price</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- No access to land by women</td>
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<td>- Boys favoured with school fees</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- etc, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Discrimination towards rural Youth</em></td>
<td>- Many girls and boys spoke of instances of both verbal and physical abuse and discrimination towards youth</td>
<td>- Employers favour older employees</td>
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<td>- Employers do not pay youth at the end of the month</td>
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<td>- Doctors, teachers, elders do not listen to youth</td>
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<td>- Youth can not vote</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Right to education is violated because of no school fees, big class sizes</td>
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<td>- Schools are too far away for rural youth to go</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- Confidentiality is disrespected in health centers</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*These are examples of themes that emerged in the background of many Photo-LENS stories, but did not often emerge as an actual image that was usable for stimulating discussion or advocacy. Photo-LENS stories about the shame and physical challenge of living in a very poorly thatched, earthen home was often accompanied with a photograph of the youth’s house, demonstrating visually the same story shared orally by the participant. Violence against women, however, sometimes came up with that same photo of a thatched house when the participant said they had no money for a nice home because their father favours a new, younger wife and has left their mother without land or economic resources to improve their house. The visual media in this case does not represent this element of the challenge to an uninformed viewer. See discussion for more details.
## Appendix 3

Youth understandings of “health”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Explanation and Significance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical Health</strong></td>
<td>Freedom from Illness</td>
<td>Going to the clinic when one feels certain symptoms related to diarrhea and malaria for instance was a common response. When presented with symptoms most youth go to the clinic first, unless their symptoms are the same as symptoms that in the past the clinical staff was unable to diagnose and cure in which case the problem is often interpreted as spiritual and a local healer specializing in witchcraft is sought.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fatness</td>
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<td>Fatness is related to social relations. “She is healthy because she is very fat. She’s fat because she abstains and has friends, does not work very hard and likes to chat.” In some cases youth took photos of HIV positive people who as a result of taking antiretroviral drugs have gained weight. This has important implications for risk perceptions of youth related to partners on ARVs. Sport activity was also related to fatness because it is seen as an important leisure activity that would reduce stress and therefore increase weight. Fatness is also associated with beauty. The girls in the study varied in body size and shape. All but one girl interviewed indicated that they wished to be fatter than they were at the time of the interview.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good Food</td>
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<td>Food was sometimes seen as contributing to a healthy fatness. The foods most often mentioned as foods important for health were nsima (a local staple made from maize flour and water), meat, eggs, and rice. Foods that increase the blood and are thus also important are lemons and other citrus fruits. These discussions were often closely related to both joy and suffer photos related to food insecurity. Rural youth experience up to 4 months of hunger annually between November and May.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social/Relational Health</strong></td>
<td>No Stress</td>
<td>The link between freedom from stress and well-being was made by nearly every youth. A girl aged 20 said, “I’m healthy because I don’t get worried. In 2000 I was thin because I was not happy. But these days no, I like chatting with friends and don’t like being alone.” Critical to preventing stress are strong kin and friendship relations. A boy also in his 20’s said, “Sickness is thinking. When you think, “my head is paining” it pains. The most important is chatting, chatting, chatting, to not worry.” Whereas western biomedicine values individual relaxation, confidentiality and even secrecy, for youth a network of people with whom personal things can be discussed is critical to good health. Related to friendship/love.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friendship/Love</td>
<td>Youth emphasized the need to care (physically and economically) for others. This improved the networks of people who would in turn care for you. In some cases youth also explained they were returning a favour by caring for parents and grandparents, who fed and cared for them in their early childhood.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leisure Time</td>
<td>Playing games and engaging in sport activities are related to keeping the mind occupied and preventing thinking about one’s problems. As often as people mentioned that jogging and playing football or netball are good for the health, they mentioned that physically demanding activities considered “work” are bad for the health such as carrying firewood and water or moulding bricks. This is because it is the fact that sports are leisure activities that makes them healthy – stress free and good for the mind, rather than the fact that they are physical activities.</td>
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<td>No Alcohol</td>
<td>A photo of men drinking from pink plastic cups in a rural “bar” where women brew and sell home-distilled alcohol, was one of the most common “suffer” photos by young boys and related to this were discussions about how not having a drinker in the family is important for “health”. Whereas drinkers often say drinking relieves stress, when young boys and girls talk about alcoholism, they most often associate it with the negative impacts it has on the social well-being of the family, rather than the physical well-being of the individual who drinks.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patrilineal Kinship Relations</td>
<td>In the context of shifting caregivers in light of HIV/AIDS, much research and programme emphasis in Sub-Saharan Africa has focused on caregiver relations and child health. In Malawi youth have significant agency in choosing with whom they live. Often youth told of how they decided themselves to live with a relative and how very lucky they were to have lived with an aunt in “town” rather than in a village with their biological parents, for instance, for it enabled them to finish secondary school. What youth did note, however is that their mother’s relationship with their biological father and his family plays an important role in their access to land and thus sustainable livelihood options. Youth, who live in their mother’s home village (as a result of a divorce or the death of their father, were far more likely to associate town businesses and urban careers as important to sustaining health (their own and that of their mother and/or grandmother) than those living in their father’s home village, which is the tradition in patrilocal society. They are also less likely to show interest in agriculture and feel particularly vulnerable if they do not find school fees.</td>
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</table>
| Preventing jealousy and witchcraft | Fear of jealousy and witchcraft was so strong that youth would give up opportunities for jobs, school fees, and even for international exchanges to prevent friends or family members from becoming jealous and using witchcraft to cause them or other family members harm. Youth who have left to go to school or work in urban areas are particularly vulnerable when they return to rural villages; so much so that some say they can never return. Praying to God, sharing food/wealth and sharing opportunities with others can help protect one from this risk.

| Moral Health | Christianity | Going to church and praying to God are critical to protecting oneself from witchcraft. It was also often associated with values of order, discipline and cleanliness and abstinence or prevention or transmission of HIV.

| Abstinence | This reflects Christian-run HIV campaigns in the area which place the strongest emphasis on the “A” of the “ABC” prevention model, Abstinence, Be Faithful and Use Condoms, particularly for unmarried youth for whom engaging in sex is associated with immoral behaviour. Often youth linked fatness to morality and abstinence. “She is fat because she abstains.” Again, the links between weight gain and ARVs and local, social understandings of fatness and morality and specifically abstinence have important implications for HIV prevention campaigns.

| Environmental Health | Garbage disposal, soil fertility, prevention of deforestation | Garbage disposal and concerns about the broader impacts of deforestation on soil moisture and fertility came up most often by youth who were relatively better off, for whom food insecurity was not a challenge. Access to fresh water and soil fertility or access to fertilizers however, were very often seen by many youth as important to ensuring household food security. |