The Problem of Malawi in Western Discourse:

Power, Patronage, and the Politics of Pity

By

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Abstract

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While recent sociological work on African social problems tends to focus on particular areas such as HIV/AIDS, this dissertation considers relationships and links between diverse social issues to argue that western-defined African social problems are not only disconnected from what Africans themselves see as their major needs but are also rooted in an historical pattern of power and inequality. Using Malawi as a case study I compare discourse about four diverse social problems—slavery, HIV/AIDS, climate change, and homosexuality. I demonstrate how these vastly different issues are related: each is framed and funded by foreigners and each is depoliticized, often blaming Africans themselves for various negative outcomes of global inequality. But despite the blame, these social problems are presented to the western public through a frame of pity that underscores the need for immediate western intervention.

Since the mid-1800s Malawi has experienced numerous and distinct cycles of western "help," interest, and involvement but each individual issue revolves around a central troublesome notion—that Malawi and Malawians are flawed and in need of western guidance and assistance to (re)achieve a more ideal state. In this way, even the most "well-meaning" attempts to address legitimate health and social problems further long-standing stereotypes of African helplessness and western superiority. Engaging theories of stratification, development, and realist constructionism, and relying on interviews, ethnography, and survey data, I interweave historical and contemporary western discourse about Malawi to analyze shifting and competing

conceptions of what is wrong with the country as well as how these understandings have influenced western interventions. By contrasting western understandings and images of Malawi with Malawians' views of the same problems, this dissertation not only builds on stratification and development theories but also investigates practical reasons why western policy interventions have so often failed to create sustainable change.

In Gratitude

Now, at the end of this large, long project, I am humbled by the number of people who helped me achieve it. First I would like to thank my committee—Barbara and Paul, who were there from the start, and Juan who stepped up much later but whose advice was invaluable. I am so grateful to have had a committee that actively supported me and facilitated my way through this process. Innumerable thanks to Rati, who knows everything and who is always gracious, no matter how many questions, and to Urania, whose work behind the scenes made my life infinitely easier.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The analysis in this dissertation is, strictly speaking, the product of a doctoral program's worth of reading, travel, research, and analysis. But the central questions of my dissertation grew out of experiences that began in the late 1990s. After studying the influences of capitalism on witchcraft beliefs in Ghana in 1997, I returned to the United States plotting how to return to Africa for further research. I applied for a Fulbright and, in January 2000, left the U.S. bound for the central-southern African country of Malawi. I stayed for a year and a half, completing my Fulbright then working at the U.S. Embassy there. I took many weeks to immerse myself in Chichewa, a national language. Then, in addition to working with tobacco farmers as I'd written in my proposal, I volunteered with a small community organization that wanted to start a local lending library. I also worked to create a community for myself, joining a volleyball league and a church. Though, at the time, I felt like I was simply living an adventurous life, diving into as many cultural activities and trips, and meeting as many different people as possible, many of the experiences I had during my time in Malawi have proven formative in how I've come to view the country, its history, and its place in the world and thus formed a framework for my doctoral work. Two experiences in particular generated long-reaching questions.

When I first moved to Malawi, I stayed with a Malawian family, a woman— I will call her Ruth— and her son. Ruth's daughter was at boarding school and I used her room; my rent helped with the family's expenses. On my second night in-country, Ruth took out a photo album and showed me pictures of her family and friends. She was a nurse and many of the pictures were from her nursing school days. The photos were similar to those I'd seen of people's college days in the U.S: young people, free from parental restraint, having fun and learning to live on

their own. What was different about the photo tour of her younger days was that, even though Ruth was only in her mid-thirties, at least half of all the friends she showed me had already passed away.

At each turn of the page, there would be an explanation of who the people were, followed by an explanation of what they were doing presently. Either they were working, or had immigrated to the U.K. or the U.S., or they had died. Gingerly testing the waters, I began asking Ruth how each individual had passed. While there were several who had fallen victim to malaria, pregnancy complications, or road accidents, most had "been sick." I learned immediately that sick was a euphemism for AIDS. Most people were not tested, but simply showed symptoms and signs of the disease. Turning through the pages and looking at pictures of Ruth's husband, she told me he had died a few years previously. I asked her how and she told me he had been sick. One doesn't ask whether those still alive have AIDS, or are sick. Some people are forthcoming with the information, some are not, and most do not know. So I didn't ask Ruth if/how she had managed to avoid getting HIV. She was very healthy and robust looking and I hoped for the best, though I must admit, I feared the worst.

Throughout my time in Malawi, AIDS was an ever-present specter. The country has the dubious distinction of having one of the highest infection rates in the world (though still quite a bit lower than many of its neighbors). I did not intend to study HIV/AIDS, partly because I have a deep, negative reaction to the ways AIDS has become "the issue" whenever westerners discuss the continent (which is rare enough as it is). But despite my desire to distance myself, the disease inevitably foisted its way into my social circles. AIDS was everywhere. You could not live there, have Malawian friends, and not know the disease yourself. In 2000, Malawi's AIDS rate was around 14% and the country had not yet mounted a comprehensive response. Affordable anti-

retroviral drug programs were years away, mother-to-child transmission was common, and the death rate from AIDS was astounding. I once spoke to a Lilongwe coffin-maker (whose business was thriving) and he estimated half his coffins were for children under five.

Even though I slowly accepted a growing interest in AIDS, I felt uncomfortable because my curiosity was not about AIDS *per se* but about its representations and about AIDS as a social object. For me there was a tension because I saw the devastation from AIDS but did not want to participate in the clinical or educational side of things: I did not feel qualified to "fight AIDS."[1] Additionally, daily life in Malawi did not revolve around AIDS. In spite of the massive numbers of infections and deaths, AIDS did not preoccupy my friends or the people with whom I worked. When I asked the farmers and my friends about their biggest problems, no one mentioned AIDS and so my own awareness of AIDS felt out of sync with people I knew. These tensions and this recognition of disjointed priorities were to become central concerns of my doctoral work.

The second incident that struck me and has served to guide my academic inquiries happened after I'd been in-country for several months. I had moved out of Ruth's house and into a flat in a part of town with a mix of expats and Malawians. But after living there less than two months, the Malawi government indicated that they were going to raise the rent in the apartment complex from 7500 Kwacha to 18000 Kwacha, unaffordable for most Malawian residents, even though many were well educated and had formal employment. Rumor had it the government was trying to force tenants out in order to use the apartments for its employees—Capital Hill was just up the road. Tenants organized a series of community meetings to protest the rent hikes. I attended several with a Malawian friend of mine and was impressed to hear neighbors debating what actions they could take to stop the government from getting rid of them. They decided to

[1] The imagery of war or battle is often invoked in discussions of AIDS. See Sontag, 1989, for an early analysis of this fighting ideology.

create a petition, gathering signatures from as many people as possible, indicating both an unwillingness and an inability to pay the new rents. But while everyone could agree on this tactic, no one could agree on who the petition should go to because they were nervous about being "rude" by delivering it to the wrong government official.

As I listened to folks debating the pros and cons of bringing it to various government ministries, I realized that I was witnessing part of Malawi's democratic transition. Every person there that day had grown up during Malawi's thirty-year dictatorship, where speech was utterly censored and individual freedoms limited. In 2000, Malawi had been a democracy for only six years: democratization, I learned, is no overnight phenomenon. People were nervous about their rights to speak out against government and about what would happen if they were to offend someone in power. In the end, the petition was never sent and the rents went up. I wondered at the time how many years would have to pass before that fear of government reprisal would lessen. But I also wondered what other factors influenced local political action and social change. This too would form a central question for my graduate studies.

When I returned to the States, I spent several years doing various odd jobs: I worked as a bank teller, a full-time Habitat for Humanity volunteer, a grocery store clerk, I worked at a women's health advocacy group, and a state comptroller's office. I did a masters degree in public administration, focusing on NGOs and social change because I had a strong desire to work for social justice. I lived in Ethiopia for half a year, teaching junior-high English and working as a consultant. But no matter what job I was working, I maintained in interest in the continent and increasingly noticed the realities of global inequality. For example, my sister was diagnosed with HIV in the mid-1980s but it never progressed to AIDS. We were fortunate that, with Medicaid, she could access government health programs and had access to changing regiments of highly

effective antiretroviral drugs. Juxtaposing her experiences of low-income care and medical options in the United States with those of people I knew in Malawi informed my awareness of inequality and injustice and kept AIDS in the forefront of my thinking.

As African AIDS gained ever-greater "awareness" among westerners, I grew increasingly troubled that we simply accepted AIDS as the major African issue without recognizing its complexity or even asking how it came to be such a problem in the first place. Then, during a statistics course, I stumbled upon the Afrobarometer dataset (see the Methods and Data section) and, running some simple statistics, learned that, continent wide, Africans do not list AIDS as one of their major problems. In many ways, that realization underscored my experiences in Malawi and, as I studied Malawi's history of western intervention and contemporary realities of civil society, led me to several grand questions. My dissertation addresses several of these: 1) How does "The biggest problem" status of AIDS affect programming on the ground? 2) Does western discourse account for lived experiences and how does this impact Malawians' "buy-in" to western aid efforts? 3) How does discourse influence interventions and are Malawi's history of social problems related?

Background and Literature Review

African issues are undertheorized in sociology, in part because Africa as a whole has historically played little direct role in the work of western sociologists. (Dodoo and Beisel 2005) Given the historical boundaries among academic disciplines, African Studies was relegated to anthropologists, historians, or political scientists. Too, there is enormous political, geographic, cultural, and development diversity on the continent and given the often unique sets of circumstances and inequalities facing the continent as a whole, and individual countries in particular, western-centric theoretical models often fall short of capturing these complexities.

Few western sociologists have focused on Malawi and many that have have emphasized particular social problems, principally HIV/AIDS. Writing about Malawi, most authors take for granted the pre-existence of social problems, without examining how they came to be defined and understood as problematic, which has consequences in how we intervene in these issues. I draw on a number of theoretical perspectives to gain a nuanced understanding of Malawi as a social problem but two broad categories of literature will underscore my thesis: social constructionism, with a particular emphasis on "realist constructionism," advanced by sociologists of ecology with roots in both the sociology of science and symbolic interactionism; and stratification literature with particular emphasis on development and civil society.

Social Constructionism

An examination of discourse in the creation of social problems is embedded in the interplay of power and knowledge which Foucault (1975; 1988a; 1995) so clearly elucidated. Blumer's theories of interactionism (1969) and Berger and Luckmann's (1966) discussions of reality construction are also relevant in analyzing these dynamics of power. Fee and Fox (1992), Patton (1990), Sawers and Stillwaggon (2010), Stillwaggon (2006), and Treichler (1999) all show how the problem of African AIDS has been created and argue that the structure is enmeshed with problematic racial and ethnocentric western ideologies. Spector and Kitsuse (1987), Tierney (2007), and Erikson (1976) show that even something seemingly un-human, like a natural disaster, is socially constructed, both in creating the environmental conditions that permit a disaster and in our understanding and handling of its outcomes.

Building on Foucault's insights about power and knowledge, critical development theorists (Cooper 1997; Diouf 1997; Escobar 2010; Ferguson 1990 and 2006; Finnemore 1997; Gupta and Sharma 2006; Li 2007), most of whom come from an anthropological perspective,

point out the various ways development enterprises are depoliticized, failing to address underlying power structures that help perpetuate global inequality. Critical development theory thus alerted me to the relational quality of discourse creation, its connectedness to power, and its importance in critiquing donor agendas and local responses. I began to question how donor narratives influence Malawian NGOs, whether the poorest Malawians have any input into local strategies dealing with the myriad social problems they experience, and how governments, NGOs, and donor organizations interact to form 'transnational topographies of power' (Ferguson 2006), structuring global authority and governance.

Social construction and knowledge production theories are useful to show that while some circumstances seem natural, they are imbued with and strongly influenced by social meaning. But though I rely heavily on these power/knowledge construction dialogues to break down essentialist views of Malawians generally, as well as AIDS and climate change specifically, I recognize that these issues have direct embodied meaning for Malawians. Therefore, I reject a strong constructionist perspective for what Foster and Clark (2008) label "realist constructionism." Coming from a sociology of ecology perspective, the authors argue that when considering events or occurrences, we must recognize that they exist no matter how humans define them. We do not create AIDS with discourse: AIDS has physiological effects regardless of how we label or characterize it. But these labels and characterizations have enormous social implications and so I use realist constructionism as a balance between a wholly material and wholly constructionist perspective. In doing so, I show how discourse about Malawi's social problems has developed and how Malawians and westerners view and interpret these issues differently.

Stratification, Development, and Civil Society

While constructionism helps clarify the generation of dialogue about Malawi's problems, I use stratification literature to underscore the history of western interference and exploitation in the country. Simmel's work, "The Poor" (1965), or Arendt's work, *On Revolution* (1963), are rarely used in the study of stratification in or with regard to Africa. Yet together they provide a useful framework with which to consider western intervention on the continent. Simmel theorized that poverty is characterized not only by a lack of material wealth but also by the fact that "others—individuals, associations, communities—attempt to correct this position," (p. 140) creating an obligation of thankfulness on the part of the poor and reifying the superiority of elite helpers. I argue that the development of a preoccupation with Malawi's flawed nature and the concomitant impetus for western help and correction is rooted in this idea of the poor. Though there is enormous in-country inequality in Malawi, the entire country is poor by world standards and thus Malawians as a whole are subject to fixing, undermining the validity of Malawians' ideas and self-stated needs by granting the power of "right" to wealthy western nations, organizations, and individuals.

It is this construction of Malawians as a group (poor, suffering people) which makes Arendt's politics of pity particularly well-suited to examining western intervention. Arendt writes that pity stems from distant observations of the suffering of a *class* of people by another class of people, non-sufferers. Pity, grounded in these observations of suffering, spurs action to combat suffering, based on sentiment. She writes pity:

> Can reach out to the multitude and therefore, like solidarity, enter the market-place… Without the presence of misfortune, pity could not exist, and it therefore has just as much vested interest in the existence of the unhappy as thirst for power has a vested interest in the existence of the weak. Moreover, by virtue of being a sentiment, pity can be enjoyed for its own sake, and this will almost automatically lead to a glorification of its cause, which is the suffering of others. (84)

Pity is thus a tool engaged to direct outside action at a situation of perceived suffering. With this framework, I argue that pity has guided western interventions in Malawi from the earliest western contacts. Because Malawians have been constructed as a class of poor people who suffer endlessly due to human and environmental maladies, and because Africa is portrayed as so different, so *distant*, governments, organizations, and individuals mobilize support for African causes by invoking pity for the poor, hapless African.

Development literature generally takes inequality and poverty as a starting point, often in relation to concepts of globalization. (Firebaugh and Goesling 2004; Wade 2004) Walter Rodney (1981) and philosophers such as Fanon (1994), Sartre (2006), and more recently Mudimbe (1988 and 1994), come from a Marxist perspective to argue that the underdevelopment of Africa occurred largely as a result of European exploitation, with negative effects on the minds of the colonized. Paul Farmer (2003) vividly portrays health disparities that exist in the global economy and notes that long-standing realities of extreme inequality, mired in historical exploitation, only further underdevelopment. But western presence did not stop with independence: authors note the dismal results of structural adjustment programs and other interventions by foreign bodies. (Amin 1974; Lurie et al 2004; Moyo 2009; Sen 1982 and 1992) Recently, there has been something of a backlash against these anti-western views of development and hegemony. Calderisi (2006) lodges the blame for Africa's problems squarely on the shoulders of Africans themselves and Easterly (2006) does not damn the poor directly but argues that western aid hasn't worked because it acts as a barrier to the smooth functioning of the free market, a direct critique of Sachs' (2005) call for more well-focused aid. Moyo (2009) similarly underscores neo-liberalism and calls for the west to end aid to the continent, arguing that aid is actually the problem, encouraging dependence and corruption amongst recipients. Pro-and anti-aid

discourses demonstrate how Malawians are once again relegated to a simplistic problem status—implementers and beneficiaries of western interventions rather than participants in the dialogue because, ultimately, they are presumed to be the problem.

Western nations often circumvent African governments (and government officials) by delivering development assistance via civil society[2]. But civil society organizations, including NGOs, may sometimes disenfranchise the very people they purport to help. Englund (2006) found that donor emphasis on western-defined human rights issues actually had the unintended consequence of ignoring voices of the poor Malawians donors most vociferously vowed to help and thus, ironically, undermining their human rights. Using Simmel's dialectical ideas of rights and obligations, I interrogate the ways in which development "help," while perhaps non-governmental, is tied to hegemonic ideologies, discourse, and practices. (Barnes 2005; Fisher 1983; Loseke 1997; Monaci and Caselli 2005; Vogel 2006)

Finally, I rely on world culture theory to make sense of the relationships between Malawians working in the NGO sector and donor driven agendas. World culture theory is derived from work in sociological institutionalism and emphasizes the vitality and strength of global scripts in influencing states' actions as well as the actions of various actors within states. These global frameworks are often introduced through, and upheld by, international NGOs. Sociological institutionalism offers a means to understand globalization and the seeming universalism of economic development models and agendas in diverse nation-states; it posits the nation-state as a worldwide institution created and upheld by globally sanctioned cultural and political models. (Beckfield 2003; Meyer et al. 1997) National laws and development models have become increasingly homogenous because, at the global level, there are policy

[2] While civil society itself is something of a contested term (Kalipeni et al. 2004), I use civil society to refer to organizations that define themselves as non-governmental.

proscriptions, often espoused by NGOs, that link particular ideals or values with economic and social development. One critical aspect of world culture is the primacy of the individual and individual rights. (Elliott 2007; Frank and Mceneaney 1999; Frank et al. 2010) For example, Frank and Mceneaney (1999) found that during the second half of the twentieth century, many nation-states changed their policies on homosexual relationships, with nearly all policies tending toward greater liberalization and placing greater emphasis on the freedom of individuals, rather than protection of social groups or the state itself. Their findings showed that embeddedness in world culture played a significant role in this liberalization.

The inviolability of the individual has led to a preponderance of human rights doctrines that seek to protect people across the globe (Elliott 2007) and a state's failure to uphold human rights in various forms can result in real damage to its reputation in the world order, even possible sanctions. (Cole 2005) Formal commitment to economic and social treaties makes it less likely that states will "choose" to go against world cultural models because doing so goes against the global scripts for achievement of such vital goals as development. Clearly this leads to questions about inequality within the world culture/world polity system and the power to define cultural ideals and models. Beckfield (2003) found that membership distribution in NGOs mimics world income inequality; wealthier nations have greater memberships in NGOs than poorer nations. Because NGOs, as actors, help shape national policies, this lends credence to the concern that world culture is dominated by western interests and explains increasing isomorphism in state policies.

Given the strength of western interests in shaping world culture and diffusing it throughout the world via NGOs and other means, state resistance to world cultural values is often limited. Elliott (2007) and Meyer et al. (1997) argue that states do at times violate these

universalistic models but that even outright resistance to such values often relies on other forms of world cultural scripts, namely various forms of rights or opportunities. World culture theory is useful to critique the ways NGOs function as 'actors' to legitimize world society values and claims within and between nation-states (Beckfield 2003; Boli and Thomas 1997; Meyer et al. 1997; Meyer and Jepperson 2000), the ways professionalization of civil society may devalue or undermine local ideas and participation (Ghosh 2009; Hunsberger 2010; Olesen 2008), and the ways world cultural values may take precedence over economic development. (Frank and Mceneaney 1999) Literature on sociological institutionalism led me to examine how global discourse was being interpreted by those in NGOs and to question whether local elites might influence local strategies or simply respond to world society goals, thus conceptualizing NGOs' embeddedness in a complex 'field of tension.' (Sadomba and Helliker 2010)

By drawing from these literatures, this dissertation situates particular social problems in Malawi within a larger social and historical context, highlighting the divergence between western and Malawian perspectives.

Data and Methods

Because this dissertation is the outcome of over a decade of research in and about Malawi, my methods are multifaceted. I incorporate ethnography, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and analysis of survey data. Inequality is the underlying theme of my dissertation but I am investigating a variety of "levels" of inequality: inequality amongst foreigners and Malawians, inequalities amongst Malawians themselves, and inequalities between countries of the global north and south. Case studies are suitable for research that considers both a particular phenomenon and the social context in which the phenomenon occurs, particularly when the work uses "multiple sources of evidence—converging on the same set of issues." (Yin 1993, pp. 31-2)

These numerous sources are necessary in order to parse out the historical origins of western ideas about, and action in, Malawi.

Ethnographic data

Though I was not studying AIDS or climate change when I lived in Malawi in 2000 and 2001, they inevitably formed part of the social landscape. In 2000, Malawi had not yet mounted the response to HIV/AIDS that we see today, and climate change was an as-yet-unspoken term among the people I knew, but nonetheless, people were living with the effects of these issues. Living in Malawi at the time allows me insights into the early stages of public response that many outsiders studying the AIDS epidemic today do not have. Furthermore, after my Fulbright ended, I worked at the US Embassy for six months and was thus privy to conversations amongst, and response from, American and Malawian staff regarding the illness. The time I spent in Malawi provides a solid and unique platform from which to view AIDS and climate change in the country. I was aware of a larger dialogue and more varied issues than these. At the same time, I knew people working in the AIDS industry and had friends who were affected or infected, thus AIDS formed a decided part of my consciousness. Similarly, the farmers with whom I worked were strongly influenced by, and worried about, environmental changes that impacted their crops and livelihoods. I draw from journals I kept, newspaper clippings I took, and observations to ground my overall project in a broad context.

Interview Data

I collected the interview data for this dissertation during trips in 2008 and 2010. I conducted a total of fifty-one semi-structured interviews with members of NGO staff, mainly in Lilongwe, Malawi's capital city. I conducted interviews at forty-two separate organizations in and near the city. Thirteen organizations were international NGOs, meaning their headquarters

are outside of the country and, with one exception, outside of Africa; twenty-one were local NGOs, meaning they operate only within Malawi; three were regional NGOs, meaning they operate only within Africa, usually Southern Africa; and I spoke with people at three donor organizations, connected to foreign government missions, and at two parastatal organizations, meaning they are government entities working in the private sector. During two interviews, both at local organizations, multiple people participated in the interview—two at one organization, four at the other. And on four occasions, I conducted multiple interviews at the same organization. In addition, I spoke with four people twice, in both 2008 and in 2010: two of the respondents had changed organizations during that time. While there was some variation in levels of education, all my respondents had completed at least a secondary education, with nearly half having attended some schooling beyond high school. In 2000 and 2001 I conducted many discussions in Chichewa as well as English but in 2008 and 2010, my interviews were in English. With four exceptions, all respondents were Malawian: of those four, one was from another African country, one was European, and two were North American.

I used a snowball sampling method (Goodman 1961) to find NGOs. Because many NGOs are large organizations, I began simply presenting myself at organizations with the biggest signage: it is easy to find the well-known international and regional NGOs because they're in high rent buildings in commercial areas. Every time I spoke with folks at these NGOs, I would ask them to refer me to colleagues at other, preferably smaller, NGOs, a form of respondent-driven sampling (Heckathorn 1997 and 2002) that Cress and Snow (1996) term "onion-snowball" sampling because each new referral expands the research layers. Because large international NGOs often partner with local organizations for outreach purposes, this strategy worked well. I was directed to numerous NGOs that I would never have discovered on my own.

Though snowball sampling and its derivation, respondent-driven sampling, present well-established biases, researchers have shown that it is not inherently flawed when trying to connect with hidden populations. (See Heckathorn 1997 and 2002 and Salganik and Heckathorn, 2004) Because of the public nature of NGOs in Malawi (NGOs must be registered with the government), they are not, technically speaking, a "hidden population," but given my lack of familiarity with Lilongwe NGO circles, the quick "turnaround" of smaller organizations, inexact and changing addresses, and unreliable phone numbers (glancing in a phonebook will give you numbers, most of which are wrong), respondent-driven sampling provided the most reliable and straightforward method of connecting with respondents.

Gaining access to the organizations was simple and I found that respondents were interested and willing to talk with me. I introduced myself as an American graduate student researching development relationships between the west and Malawi. I presented my IRB consent forms and with one exception, all respondents agreed to be recorded. There is an historic culture of authority in Malawi: qualifications and degrees are well respected. This, in part, likely helped me gain easy access to NGOs and other organizations. But, in addition, NGO staff in Malawi are well-acquainted with the research process and foreign visitors and are accustomed to providing time for us. This too played a large role in my ease of access.

I interviewed NGO staff because I was interested in learning how local organizations dealt with the overwhelming international focus on HIV/AIDS in Malawi and how the sociopolitical climate of AIDS influenced their work. As Luke and Watkins (2002) note, it is both useful and necessary to consider the perceptions of national elites[3] because they act as a bridge between western donors and local populations. In addition, elites are charged with

[3] I consider my respondents 'elites' because of their greater-than-average education and income levels and their proficiency with at least one European language. See Matthews (2010) for a discussion of the difficulties of assigning 'elite' status to Africans as well as the difficult position African elitehood conveys.

implementing practices and ideas on the ground. Though authors such as Englund (2006) and Swidler and Watkins (2009) amply demonstrate a (frequently purposeful) disconnect between elites and villagers, in spite of these real differences elites are usually deeply embedded in family systems and, as elites, responsible for many family members.[4] As I show in Table 1, I interviewed people at a variety of organizations—international and local NGOs, NGOs with a variety of focus areas (women's rights, education, HIV/AIDS, environment), and new and well-established NGOs—because I was interested in how a major international issue affected all of them, even when HIV/AIDS was not part of their original mission or their strategic plans.

Table 1 Breakdown of types of numbers of organizations and people interviewed

Type of Organization	Number of orgs. represented in data	Number of Interviews	Number of people interviewed
International NGO	13	17	16
Local NGO	21	25	27
Regional NGO	3	4	3
Donor	3	3	3
Parastatal	2	2	2
Totals	**42**	**51**	**51**

Because my consent form explained my research interests and because I wanted to avoid leading questions, I did not follow a strict interview script. My interview questions were open-

[4] Despite their current status, it is important to point out that elites in Malawi are often *very* newly elite. Most people I interviewed grew up in rural villages and were the first generation of people to attend school *at all*. For instance, one respondent, Chikondi, grew up in northern Malawi. His father had completed some primary school but his mother had no formal schooling. His father happened to find work with Catholic missionaries who offered to support Chikondi's eldest brother through school, understanding that once he had achieved schooling, he would help his younger siblings. Reminiscing about his growing up, Chikondi told a story that demonstrates his familiarity with rural poverty. His parents had some chickens, he told me, but, "Mainly our diet would be, um, you know, beans, vegetables, with *nsima*, like that. Once in a while we would go slaughtering a chicken and that's how we would get our meat. It was like we grow up in an area where we would wish, where 'I wished we get some meat. It's now a month we've been eating vegetables beans, vegetables, beans.' And one of the things that drove my brother to get on with education was because of his complaint, 'I wished I ate a piece of meat.' He was told that, you know, 'If you get educated, did you know that you can eat meat everyday?' And he would say, 'No, it can't be! Everyday?'" Personal experiences of poverty combined with continuing responsibilities to family members mean elites are not severed from the realities of rural life in Malawi, even if they live relatively well in urban areas.

ended, intended to allow respondents to talk about whatever concerns or issues they felt most pressing and to learn a bit about their own histories. I asked questions such as, What are the biggest challenges your organization faces?; What are your personal frustrations doing development work?; What are the major donor and government priorities for Malawi and are there any mismatches?; and What do you think are the most pressing problems for Malawi? Interviews took anywhere from 30 minutes to two hours, with an average of about one hour. I conducted, transcribed, and analyzed all interviews myself, using a grounded theory approach to look for themes in the data. (Glaser and Strauss 1967) I was particularly interested in people's frameworks for understanding the complex interactions between their organizations, the national government, and the international community, with particular focus on priorities and funding. To ensure confidentiality, I use pseudonyms when quoting people and do not reference particular organizations.

Survey Data

To get a sense of Malawians' concerns when considered against development indicators for their country, I use a cross-sectional dataset collected by Afrobarometer[5], a non-profit organization that compiles information related to various social, political and economic issues on the African continent—with a particular focus on sub-Saharan Africa. Because of poor infrastructure, governance problems, extreme poverty, and lack of resources, it is rare to find large-scale survey data for the continent. Although many researchers use smaller scale ethnographic data (as I did) and scientific researchers may be able to combine data collected at different sites, these do not give a broad sense of what people worry about or believe. Afrobarometer thus provides a unique opportunity to get Africans' opinions on various social problems. Given the extreme historical

[5] http://afrobarometer.org/index.php

exploitation of the continent, it is critical to consider Africans' needs and concerns in research that may guide policy.

Afrobarometer public opinion surveys have been conducted four times: Round 1 (1999-2001, 12 countries), Round 2 (2002-2004, 16 countries), Round 3 (2005-2006, 18 countries), and Round 4 (2008-2009, 18 countries). Malawi was surveyed in each of the rounds. The survey asks thousands of people (diverse in ethnicity, age, urban/rural residence, and income) in each country their views about subjects such as politics, democracy, and economics. One question asks respondents what they think are the biggest problems facing their countries. In the first round of questioning, only 2% of Malawians thought that AIDS was the biggest problem. No one said climate change, though issues related to the environment were on the list. I compare the results of this question over the four rounds of surveys. Given the enormous amount of time, money and attention given to AIDS in the last decade, I expected to find that the number of respondents listing AIDS as a major problem increased. Similarly, I expected to find that "markers" of climate change (drought, flooding, deforestation) increased over time as well, given increasing awareness of environmental issues by NGOs and the Malawi government.

Primary Source Data

In addition to the ethnographic, interview, and survey data, I also refer to historical newspapers and missionary writings to clarify our "early knowledge" about Malawi. As I will show in chapter two, the area of Malawi was made famous in Europe and North America by the travels of David Livingstone, the first white man credited with "discovering" Lake Malawi. Livingstone's letters home inspired other Victorian explorers and missionaries to follow him and so there is a significant amount of missionary writing as well as newspaper articles about exploration and discovery in the area. Missionaries' letters and journals are housed in archives in

around the world but there are numerous compilations easily accessible in book form. I refer to these primary texts to give a sense of early western "knowledge" about Malawi. I also use articles from both the *Times of London*[6] and the *New York Times*, to show the type of early information that was disseminated about Malawi. Prior to 1891, when Britain officially colonized Malawi, there were 558 articles in the *Times of London* about "Nyasa" or "Nyassa" (as Malawi was then known). And there were 66 articles in the *New York Times*[7] during the same time period. News articles frequently referenced or printed missionary letters. Missionaries were the early explorers in the area and helped set the stage for the commercial enterprises that followed. These texts are useful in demonstrating what missionaries and explorers wrote about, as well as how they framed their experiences. Most importantly, these writings allow us to compare how the themes that preoccupied nineteenth century Europeans live on today. Using this wide variety of sources and methods, I parse out the creation of Malawi AIDS and climate change discourse and its impact on the ground, questioning how historically contingent dialogues influence our contemporary ideas of the country and thus our intentions and interactions there.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the multiple sources of evidence, there are limitations to my study including issues of generalizability, the breadth of historical data, and my frameworks. Africa itself is a construct with entrenched imagery in the western mind. It has a landmass four times the size of the United States comprised of fifty-four countries. Both inter- and intra-country difference is significant so tackling "Africa" as a solitary unit is not an achievable goal. Instead, I focus on Malawi as a case study. This allows me to focus fully on Malawian history, recognizing the

[6] *The Times of London* began in the late 1700s and, because so many missionaries were British and Britain participated so heavily in the Scramble for Africa, there were many articles about the early explorers.

[7] *The New York Times* is the major paper of record for the United States. I use *New York Times* articles to give a sense of how Africa generally, and Malawi specifically, was "introduced" to Americans during the nineteenth century.

important ways history influences the present, a critical absence in much sociological work about Malawi specifically, and Africa more generally. But, because Malawi's history is distinct from all other countries, I cannot generalize and state that processes occurring in Malawi are replicated elsewhere. Still, in spite of an inability to make precise generalizations, Malawi's history as a colonized country and its postcolonial inequalities and interactions with the west mimics many other African nations, therefore I feel confident that though my work is unique to Malawi, scholars in other parts of the continent would find similar processes and very similar inequalities.

Much of this dissertation is based on interview data and because my sampling method was based on convenience and includes only 51 interviews, the interview data is also not generalizable. Furthermore, because my grand questions involve issues of western funding and the ways western ideas about Africa influence social change in Malawi, I focus on people who work in organizations that get western funding and implement western solutions to western ideas about Malawi's social problems. This leaves out non-elites as well as political activism and organizations that are localized and small. To combat the elite nature of my respondents, I refer to Afrobarometer data in order to show a far more generalized perspective on what Malawi's problems are. Still, most information comes from elite Malawians and some might wish there were a greater diversity in respondents' social class as well as type of organization represented. I think that this is a valid criticism but my focus necessitates respondents familiar with foreign influence. I would hope that other scholars, particularly Malawian scholars, are investigating local political activism and changes in grassroots organizing.

Importantly, while I read and referred to hundreds of newspaper articles, journals, and letters about Malawian history, I use them as primary source data. My initial hope had been to

perform a content analysis on news of Malawi, as well as missionary writings, over time, but as I got deeper into the research, I realized that the voluminous amount of material made this an impossibility for my study: it could provide ample information for an entirely separate dissertation. I hope to do a more systematized study of Malawi's historical representation in the west but it will have to be a future project. In spite of a lack of systematization, though, the breadth of historical data makes for a rich platform from which to examine contemporary social problems in Malawi and how the west addresses them.

Outline of the dissertation

Chapter two provides a brief history of Malawi then traces the construction of a discourse about slavery as a social problem using newspaper articles as well as missionaries' letters and journals. Chapter two draws from the Foucauldian perspective to explore how Africa generally, and Malawi specifically, has been constructed in the western mind. I demonstrate how many of our contemporary categories of Malawian social problems are rooted in the earliest interactions between westerners and Africans that have become entrenched and essentialized in our minds. Examining how slavery was constructed as a social problem, and particularly how its social construction benefitted Europeans, I argue that this same process has continued over time. I focus on the discourse about slavery to indicate how western perceptions of Malawian social problems, while possibly well-intentioned, tend to be depoliticized in ways that validate western superiority. Furthermore, by looking at how Africans were presented within this discourse of philanthropy, pity, and imperialism, I create a foundation with which to understand contemporary representations of Malawians and Malawian social problems.

Chapter three introduces the problem of AIDS in Africa highlighting how western fixation with the disease does not accord with Malawians' prioritizations of social problems.

Representations of African AIDS are highly simplified. Stories and photographs show people wasting away from AIDS related illnesses, describe the plight of orphans who have lost their parents to the disease and are often suffering themselves, and, using these iconographic images, draw on emotions to issue impassioned battle cries to save Africans from AIDS. I argue that AIDS and the narratives used to explain its epidemic nature in sub-Saharan Africa closely fit historical frames and stereotypes introduced in chapter two. These simplistic representations of AIDS in Africa and the equally simplistic notion that westerners can save the poor beleaguered African help explain why African AIDS became so prominent in the imaginings of westerners and why so much money has been provided to fight the syndrome. The amount of money earmarked for HIV/AIDS programs in Africa during the 2000s dwarfed funds for all other programs and likely diverted attention away from other pressing health issues as well as from the underlying structural causes of AIDS itself. (MacKeller 2005; Shiffman 2008) I use Afrobarometer data to show Africans' feelings about AIDS as a social problem. Building on work by Whiteside et. al. (2004), I demonstrate that, continent-wide, Africans overwhelmingly prioritize social issues other than AIDS. I then focus on Malawi specifically, showing how Malawians' opinions and prioritizations match those of the continent as a whole, interweaving these statistics with theoretical insights on power/knowledge, subjectivity, and inequality to argue that the idea of AIDS is more powerful outside Africa than within it.

In chapter four, in conjunction with development and civil society literature, I analyze in-depth interviews with civil society staff to bring together the AIDS discourse constructed in the west with Malawians' views and programming on the ground. This chapter traces the impact funding is perceived to have on development work in the country and further clarifies the mismatch between the western emphasis on AIDS and the felt-needs on the ground. I highlight

the ways in which western discourse is used but, ultimately, fails to prioritize Malawians' concerns. Drawing heavily on theories of sociological institutionalism and critical development theory, particularly Englund (2006), Ferguson (1990 & 2006), Finnemore (1997), Igoe and Kelsall (2005), and Li (2007), I argue that AIDS not only overshadows other pressing social problems but that despite the rhetoric, the genuine horror westerners feel about AIDS, and the amount of funding devoted to fighting it, the huge emphasis on AIDS in some ways undermines various attempts to combat it. Civil society organizations treat AIDS as a cash cow and feel shackled to AIDS work, having to include AIDS in every grant proposal they write. Because so few local staff are expert in any area of AIDS epidemiology or care, this results in an array of programs that sometimes do more to keep NGOs afloat than combat the illness. In this way, AIDS becomes just one more donor trend in a long succession of funding fashions. Furthermore, because local staff feel other pressing priorities are ignored in light of AIDS, they often feel undermined by the entire donor apparatus.

Chapter five investigates the rise of climate change as a new cause-du-jour in Malawi, possibly usurping AIDS in trendiness. Using the foundation of missionary discourse and my investigation of the problem of AIDS, I show not only how climate change has entered development discourse but also how it builds on long-held ideas of Africa's environmental failings. In addition, using ethnographic and survey data, I demonstrate how discourse about climate change closely mimics that of HIV/AIDS in order to show how both of these issues are western constructs that largely ignore the priorities of both the Malawian people and the government of Malawi. Not only does chapter five highlight just how wedded to western funding Malawian social change organizations are but it also suggests how the depoliticization of social problems and their simple narratives victimize the people least able to protest the dominant

frames: currently in Malawi, climate change is heavily linked to cutting down trees for charcoal—an activity performed almost exclusively by the poorest people in the country. Blaming poor people for Malawi's climate change woes relieves polluting nations of answering cries for climate justice.

Chapter six brings together world culture theory with microlevel cultural theory on the cognitive turn to consider how cultural identity can be used as resistance to unwelcome foreign interventions as well as an expression of power that disregards the rights of domestic minorities. I examine the reactions of my respondents to two donor initiatives: building orphanages as part of an HIV/AIDS response and advocating for the release of two men imprisoned for homosexuality. Examining respondents' reactions to these two particular donor interventions provides critical insight about resistance and power in Malawi. Whereas respondents did not like orphanages and considered them out of place in Malawi, they did not actively resist them or speak ill of those associated with them. Unlike orphanages, though, respondents were unanimous in their rejection of foreign funds related to the issue of homosexuality and used a human rights discourse to critique foreign intervention on the issue. This case demonstrates how Malawians do at times reject dominant western frames and ideas, actively working against social change.

Chapter seven is a conclusion chapter, synthesizing theoretical and practical insights from the preceding chapters to emphasize the overwhelming strength of western discourse on African AIDS and climate change and the continued divide that exists between foreign aims and Malawians' hopes. The chapter argues that the lack of strong divergent discourse about the issues is inherently linked to power dynamics within Malawian society and between Malawi and its foreign donors. Without recognizing the historical embededness of these social issues and the similarities amongst these "disastrous" problems and our responses, we are likely to remain in a

cycle of anticipating and bemoaning one new disaster after another while simultaneously failing to acknowledge the knowledge and priorities of Malawians themselves.

Research ethics and personal considerations

Nearly all research is fraught with ethical dilemmas, from practical considerations of how to design a study and ensure confidentiality to far more elusive concerns about race and class privilege. And when one is researching the impacts of inequalities, working directly with populations of people weighted by those inequalities, issues of ethics become even more salient. As a white American woman I have a significant privilege on many levels and during each of my stays in Malawi, I was always conscious and sometimes uncomfortable about my actual and perceived levels of privilege. I first want to address the issue of race as it affected my work in Malawi. Coming from the U.S. I carried my own loaded understandings of race and racial privilege and believed that my race was one of the most significant things that differentiated me from Malawians and certainly the thing that most stood out. In 2000 and 2001 I dated a Malawian man and after we had been dating for several months, I asked him, one day, if his parents minded that he was dating a white woman. He shook his head and said, “No, not at all. Do your parents mind that you’re dating somebody who’s so poor?” It was one of those moments when I realized that my “awareness” was rooted in my own racial construction. Class, for me, was not as salient as it was for him and race, for him, was less salient than it was for me. My tall blondness obviously stood out in a country of mostly dark-skinned people and there is a well-documented history of oppression and intervention by whites in Malawi. My whiteness afforded me easy entrée into organizations because it is connected to ideas of authority and educational attainment. But race is also wrapped up in issues of class: my whiteness acted as billboard signifying class privilege.

Additionally, it would be inaccurate to suppose that whiteness is the only or even the most significant racial division in Malawi. There is a small but significant number of South Asians in Malawi, as in much of eastern and southern Africa and in 2000 and 2001, many formal businesses were Indian-owned. There seemed to be a goodly amount of resentment on the part of Malawians toward Indians because they were perceived to ill-treat Malawian employees. During my 2008 and 2010 trips, this had actually shifted and people were talking about how "the Chinese" were taking over all the businesses. This dissertation argues, in part, that inequality is frequently depoliticized by the aid apparatus; race is, in many ways, also depoliticized. Despite a history of white racial superiority in Malawi, the country's more recent history of dictatorship, corruption, and growing levels of internal inequality serve to push white oppression out of view. Currently whites, and other foreigners, are, by and large, involved in "helping" Malawi, working in development and providing aid dollars so it *appears* that the most egregious acts of oppression are actually perpetrated by Malawian leaders themselves, effectively making whites seem somewhat harmless in contrast, blatant racial oppression a reality of a bygone era. I say all this not to downplay my racial privilege, which is substantial, particularly when considered alongside financial privilege, but to emphasize that race has its own construction in Malawi and racial tensions do not precisely mirror those in the United States.

Malawi is a poor country. The women farmers with whom I worked earned approximately $35 for their entire year's work of tobacco cultivation. Need, in the country, is high. Mitch Duneier, in his methodological appendix to *Sidewalk* (2001), raises the important issue of whether and how we, as privileged researchers, intervene in the lives of those whom we research. I must first acknowledge my bias. I believe that ethnographic research and the interview process is inherently exploitative: I benefit from the time and information respondents

provide but provide little or no benefit to them. While my benefits may not be financial, they are certainly experiential and, in the case of my doctoral research, grant me a form of research capital that has led to formal employment and further credentials. As a student, my income is very low by American standards but quite high by Malawian standards and, when daily confronted with examples of absolute poverty, I consistently struggled with how to respond. When I worked with the women farmers, I would periodically bring gifts. I brought things they needed but often could not afford: matches, soap, oil, salt, sugar, and, one time, a big bunch of new and used clothes people had donated. In 2010, when I visited one of my old research villages, the women all asked if, when I came back, I would please bring shoes. Most still had never owned a pair of shoes. The stark contrast between my situation and theirs made any concerns about whether or not I should remunerate them in some way moot. Not to do something would have been ludicrous but I continuously wrestled with the fact that whatever I gave was never enough.

I was daily harangued by people in the city for money. Whenever possible, I gave them change. I cannot claim that I did not get aggravated by the constant begging: I found it extremely tedious. But most of the time, I could maintain perspective, especially in my latter trips, which were far shorter. This begging was in no way limited to white foreigners. Wealthy Malawians stand out with their nice clothes and cars and were targets of begging as well.[8] I gave financial gifts to a few acquaintances: these tended to be larger gifts— hundreds of dollars—and were related to specific, one-time needs. I supported a particularly gifted youth through his secondary education, at a cost of $300-$500 per year for four years. During my 2008 and 2010 interviews, I

[8] Chikondi, one of my respondents who has worked in the development sector over twenty years, told me that he feels so overwhelmed by peoples' requests of him that one time, when he had to go home to his village, he actually borrowed a friend's car, rather than using his own, so that people would not recognize him as quickly and, thus, let him avoid the immediate requests for money, food, and assistance that greet him upon each return to his childhood home.

did not provide money to my elite respondents and I was very clear that neither they nor their organizations would benefit financially from talking to me. I did, however, continue to give money to those who asked and, when I visited my old villages, brought more gifts. Still, I was never satisfied with what I gave.

Because I attempt, in this dissertation, to delve into western ideas of help and a feeling of "needing" to help, my own worries about privilege and responsibility remain forefront in my mind as I try balance my critique of western intervention with what feels, to me, a human desire to *do something*, to alleviate suffering in some way. I remember the visceral reaction that I felt every time some young children, dressed in raggedy clothes, would run over to me, palms extended, eyes wide, saying, "*Njala*, madam, *njala*." I'm hungry. I also remember how often, moments before, the same kids had been playing or going about their business, adopting the long faces only when they noticed my bright white skin. And so this dissertation stems, in some ways, from my own desire to make sense of how international structures uphold global inequalities, undermining even the most well-intentioned efforts to create positive social change and reinforcing longstanding power dynamics.

Introductory conclusions

I try to balance a number of competing perspectives in this work. I attempt to recognize that a liberal western desire to fix various social problems and make things better for poor Malawians at times exacerbates those same problems without condemning the often-genuine concern of those in the development sector; I try to provide a focused critique of the construction of Malawian social problems such as HIV/AIDS and climate change without denying that they are, in fact, real problems accompanied by real suffering; and I try to recognize the ways the west perpetuates historical inequalities without portraying all Malawians as victims and also

recognizing inequalities within Malawian society itself. I have my own internalized biases, and I benefit from enormous privileges, which I try to be conscious of as I write. Still, despite my attempts at reflexivity, I cannot claim to be objective or unbiased in my writing. All of my readings and ideas are deeply connected to friends and experiences I have (and had) on the continent and at home, and thus, for me, discussion of AIDS or inequality between Malawi and the west is not simply an academic exercise.

About two years ago, I got an email from a mutual friend letting me know that Ruth had passed away, leaving behind her two children: she was a few months shy of completing her PhD in nursing. Ruth died of aggressive tuberculosis, one of the opportunistic infections that go hand in hand with HIV/AIDS, which of course, she had likely contracted over a decade before. So while I try to see the big picture, personal experiences led me to think about HIV/AIDS and inequality, accompanied by an abiding desire to work for a shift in global priorities and I recognize that this influences my perspectives and, consequently, how I have structured this dissertation.

Chapter Two

"Worn-out links from the great chain of animated nature:"[9] A brief history of Malawi and the entrenchment of western ideas about Africans

"Each actor in a historical drama has a different perspective, both enriched and limited by his or her vantage point. One of the most difficult tasks for the chronicler is to respect that vantage point without falling into the arrogance of hindsight or latter-day righteousness. It requires an act of imagination to transport oneself back into that other country of the past, discarding for a moment at least the omniscience that is the historian's preferred cloak." Herbert 2002, xvii

"History will be kind to me, for I intend to write it." Winston Churchill

Introduction

In this chapter I consider Malawi's history of western interaction, reflecting on how early missionaries and explorers helped ingrain Victorian ideas about the continent, particularly the necessity of helping Africa, and the concomitant objectification of Africans. Though the Portuguese were in Central Africa as early as the 1600s, David Livingstone is credited as the first white man to "discover" the area of Africa now known as Malawi. Livingstone's hero status in England and around the world, Europe's growing imperialistic mentality, and local realities in Malawi combined with Victorian sensibilities of morality and progress all ensured that other missionaries and explorers were soon to follow Livingstone's path. Missionaries were the early explorers in Central Africa: their observations about locals' heathenism and ignorance, poor health, agricultural productivity, and the environment, and the nearly total absence of Africans' voices in the narratives, underscored stereotypical knowledge of Africa at the time and helped fuel a drive to control the continent.

I refer to missionaries' journals and letters in addition to news articles as examples of *how* Malawi was presented to foreign audiences. As Herbert's quote, above, rightly notes, any event in history is interpreted through multiple lenses—each actor has a particular perspective.

[9] *Times of London*, October 31, 1960.

But power matters not only in history's interpretation but also in the very act of who creates it. Malawians, and Africans generally, rarely contributed to documented history of the continent. For example, Chauncey Maples, a British Bishop who spent twenty years of his life working in the Nyassa region, wrote, "Savage Africa has little or no history. Where people have no culture whatever, there can be no written record of the past… Tradition, vague and obscure in the extreme, is all that we have to fall back upon; and this can hardly be trusted for more than half a century of past time." (1899: 165-6) Given this perspective, it makes logical sense that locals' perspectives were given short shrift in how Europeans understood Malawi. Except when Malawians agreed with Europeans, they were often dismissed as ignorant, at best.

Because nearly all information about Malawi, and Africa generally, came from outsiders, that same information was framed with western viewpoints and biases. By studying *how* European "experts" talked about the "natives" they met, I show how racialized tropes of Africans became fixed in foreign consciences. Furthermore, by studying how foreigners framed and discussed one particular social problem—slavery—I show how Malawi and its people were created as objects to facilitate foreign domination of the area. I argue that this objectification, built on expert testimony and rooted in nineteenth century Victorian ideals, continues in current discourse about AIDS and climate change and, while Malawians arguably play more of a role in "upliftment" or "development," are still rendered largely voiceless, unless used as evidence in support of western intervention and benevolence.

The first part of the chapter gives a brief sketch of Malawi's basic geography, followed by a lengthier detailing of its history. Too often, academic works, focusing on contemporary social problems, fail to ground them in historical context. This is a critical omission because relationships today are deeply connected to relationships past just as current biases have long-

standing historical roots. Finally, I discuss the case of slavery, oft-mentioned by missionaries, to show competing characterizations of Africans within the context of European commerce and charitableness. I argue that this case is exemplary to indicate the deep-rootedness of the seeming imperative for present western interventions in Malawi.

Physical and Economic Geography

Malawi is a small landlocked country bordered by Mozambique to the east and southwest, Zambia to the west, and Tanzania to the north. (Maps 1[10] and 2[11]) It is slightly smaller than Pennsylvania or England and has a population of about 13 million people. There is one rainy season, lasting from approximately November through April. Its physical landscape is varied: part of the Rift Valley, Malawi is characterized by flat plains, mountains, and plateaus. Lake Malawi occupies fully a third of the country's landmass and is essentially a large inland sea, subject to tides. Malawians traverse the lake on handmade wooden dhows or an old steamer (plying the lake since the early 1950s) called The Ilala, named for the area of Zambia where David Livingstone died and was initially buried. The Shire River, which flows out of Lake Malawi and into the Zambezi River to the south, is, in many places, impassable for boats due to cataracts. The Shire thus does not provide a useful way to transport goods in and out of the country. Malawi has no well developed rail transport and thus all goods must enter the country by air or road.

Malawi has little formal industry. Approximately three-quarters of Malawians are subsistence farmers, growing their families' food on plots of land that grow smaller and smaller over the years as population increases. Malawi's chief export is tobacco, though the country also produces tea and coffee. The government is the country's biggest formal employer. Malawi has

[10] http://www.figweb.org/Fig_wasps/Agaonidae/Courtella/Courtella_malawi.htm
[11] http://geography.about.com/library/cia/blcmalawi.htm

three major cities: Blantyre, named after David Livingstone's birthplace, is the largest city and the commercial capital of the country; Lilongwe is the capital and the home to most of the country's government agencies and NGO headquarters; and Mzuzu is the largest city in the north.

Figure 1, Malawi's location in Africa

Figure 2, Malawi

Malawian history

Pre-colonial history

Malawi's early history is characterized by settlers, mainly Bantu speaking peoples, moving in and out of the region, particularly the area around Lake Malawi. Newcomers intermarried with older residents, bringing new ideas and forging new alliances. As more people settled and the population grew, the intricacies of everyday life and personal interactions grew more complex and chieftaincies formed to deal with these issues. By the 1500s and 1600s, there were numerous distinct groupings of people and rulers. The Malawi peoples (or Maravi, according to some European pronunciations) a variety of related ethnic groups who shared a

common language, formed a confederacy in the mid-1500s—one of the strongest and largest groupings in Central Africa. (Davidson 1969) They farmed, created iron tools and weaponry, and, over time, became active in trading along well-established routes from the interior of the continent to the Indian Ocean. There were frequent rivalries between chiefs and rulers and chiefs would form alliances, including deals with the Portuguese, who were already trading in and exploring the region, in order to conquer or resist adversaries. Chiefs wanted to control long-distance trade routes because goods and trade allowed them to maintain or expand power. They could trade ivory (highly desired in Europe for any number of goods) for cotton cloth (replacing the bark cloth most people wore), beads, or tools. These could be distributed to a chief's people, to other powerful chiefs, thus furthering alliances, or used by a chief and his or her family. (Davidson 1969)

For early Malawians, like many Africans of the pre-colonial period, though lineage helped determine chiefs, a chiefship was not automatic: power was not dictatorial and people had to possess a balance of skills in order to gain access to a chieftaincy. (Davidson 1969; Guyer 1995; Guyer and Belinga 1995) There was a complicated system of patron-client relations in pre-colonial Malawi in which chiefs sought to "control" larger numbers of people in order to gain power and influence by providing security and access to goods for their people. People attached themselves to chiefs based on what a chief could provide in terms of protection from other groups of people and the material goods chiefs had access to. Perceived domination or abuse of power was grounds for removing chiefs or removing oneself from a chief's influence. Sparse populations, large uninhabited land areas, and instability in access to food meant wealth was indicated by the number of people within a person's sphere of influence: the more dependents a person had, the greater his or her strength and power. This wealth-in-people meant that "wives,

children, clients and slaves were valued, sought and paid for at considerable expense in material terms in pre-colonial Africa," (Guyer and Belinga 1995: 92) and that there was considerable attention paid to the potential benefits of alliances made with other powerful peoples. By the time Livingstone and his fellow missionaries began arriving in Malawi in the mid-to-late 1800s, chiefships and alliances had only grown in importance.

The 1800s were a time of constant upheaval and uncertainty for peoples in the Malawi region. Though long-distance trade with the coast was centuries old, by the early 1800s, the demand for ivory was rivaled by the demand for slaves. The Arab slave trade used these old trade routes to penetrate the interior of the continent, bringing hundreds of thousands of slaves to ports in Mozambique, Kenya, and Tanzania. (White 1987) Thus chiefs became more important and people sought to align themselves with the strongest chiefs, protecting themselves against slave raiders and enabling them to capture the slaves they needed for trading. Many groups created stockaded villages in order to keep out slave raiders, thus greatly changing the diffuse nature of chieftaincy and patron-client relations.

In addition to the increasing Indian Ocean slave trade, the Ngoni, a splinter group of Zulus from southern Africa, began moving into the Lake Malawi region. The Ngoni (like the Zulus) were known for their warfare and they began systematically conquering the peoples in the Malawi lakes region. So not only were people protecting themselves from slavery, they were also protecting themselves against marauding Ngoni. The Ngoni did not participate in the slave trade but did capture other peoples to add to their own numbers. In capturing people in the area, they dispersed large communities as people fled, thus making those people more vulnerable to slave raiders in the area. (Davidson 1969; White 1987) It was into this insecure, fearful situation that Livingstone walked in the middle of the 1800s.

Livingstone and the early missionaries, steeped in a tradition of European superiority and seeking adventure in the untamed African wilds, found ample evidence to support their beliefs of religious and scientific authority. The Malawi region in history, while never the idyllic Eden some Europeans would paint it, (Moir 1991; *Times of London* October 31, 1860) had been more peaceful in past centuries, but by the 1800s was a region in forced and fearful transition. The missionaries were confronted not only by "exotic" African peoples and customs, but by the inhumanity of the slave trade, carried out by Africans and Arabs. Thus they perceived much to civilize and change. Their journals and letters home focused on the need to abolish the slave trade and bring civilization and commerce (Livingstone 1956; *Times of London* June 15, 1864 and July 23, 1864) to the poor heathens: the guilt of Britain's own participation in the centuries-long Atlantic slave trade helped create widespread calls for freeing Africans from the yoke of slavery once and for all. (*Times of London*: November 3, 1874 and May 4, 1875) Missionaries began settling in the Malawi region, starting schools and clinics, preaching the Gospel, and beginning to serve in the roles of chiefs themselves, for people who sought protection from the insecurities around them. (White 1987) The earliest people to align with missionaries were either chiefs seeking protections for their people, freed slaves who had nowhere to go, or other socially marginal folks. (Good 2004; Maples 1899) While the missionaries showed remarkable determination in learning local languages and exploring the region, thus acting as early anthropologists and scientists, they accomplished little in the way of converting the heathen masses. Still, their explorations and their insistence on the possibilities of trade and commerce in the region encouraged the imaginings of people at home and brought other, secular, Europeans in search of the riches available in Central Africa.

Colonial Nyasaland

Early reports by Europeans in Nyasaland heralded navigable rivers, the perfect landscape for growing cotton or other important cash crops, and the likelihood of large coal deposits in the Lake Malawi region. (Kirk 1965(2); Livingstone 1956; *Times of London* March 2, 1860) But while Nyasaland did not actually live up to this hype, it was nonetheless sought after by colonial powers in the famed Scramble for Africa. There were some tense years in the late 1880s as both the Portuguese and the British tried to gain strongholds in the area, forming alliances with chiefs who would then raise that country's flag. Each side wanted more chiefs under their flag, the better to claim the land as theirs. Europeans conceived the idea of creating estates in the region, getting the land under cultivation and thus indicating ownership. John Buchanan, a one-time missionary, left the church to become a planter and helped broker deals between other settlers and local chiefs in the southern area of Malawi. (White 1987) Between 1889 and 1890, nearly one million acres of land were "purchased" by Europeans for estate cultivation. Little actual remuneration was given to local chiefs. Historians believe that the politics and fears of the preceding decades—when local chiefs were busily trying to align themselves with various powerful factions—still held sway. That, coupled by the fact that the region was still sparsely populated, made chiefs willing to part with these enormous tracts of land. (White 1987) But no matter how Europeans were able to achieve control the land, the plan worked. By 1891, the British took control and Nyasaland became a British colony, though questions of access to the land ceded to Europeans would haunt the colony throughout its existence.

The British instituted a hut tax, payable in cash, designed to pay for the services of the protectorate and to force Africans to work on European estates. Because there was little actual trade, in order to access cash for the hut tax, Malawians could labor on British estates or they

could find work elsewhere. The hut tax helped introduce a long period in which Malawian men, particularly those from the northern and central regions of the country, where estates were not as dominant, served as a migratory labor pool for South African, Zambian, and Zimbabwean gold, diamond, copper, and coal mines. Other Malawians worked on European estates for about one month per year to make enough money to pay the hut taxes for their families. Malawian families did not live in nuclear units within one hut. Men and women generally kept different huts and each hut generally housed one adult so one family could take up many huts. Still, initially, one month was generally adequate to meet the hut tax. But the initial set-up was soon problematic for British estate owners. Africans wanted to perform their hut tax labor during the periods of time when they least needed to be in their own fields. Unfortunately, this meant that they were largely unavailable when Europeans needed them most—when the tobacco, cotton, or coffee needed the greatest labor inputs. Thus began a system known as *thangata*.

Thangata is a local word meaning "help" and in the local language referred to informal, voluntary neighborly assistance that was typical in villages. (White 1987) But the Europeans' *thangata* was anything but informal or voluntary. Africans were "permitted" to settle on European lands (though many had been living there for decades prior to European ownership) and were considered tenants, provided they agree to work for Europeans above and beyond that required for their hut tax. Theoretically, *thangata* should have added only one month's labor onto the initial one month's hut tax labor. In practice, thangata became a system of forced labor as European estate owners and their overseers refused to sign Africans' tax certificates or punch work cards which would release them from more work. Thus two months could stretch into three or four and, in some places, six months of labor. (Mwase 1967)

Unlike other southern African British colonies, Nyasaland did not have a large white population. But in spite of their relatively small numbers, whites instituted harsh systems of racial division, less institutionalized than apartheid in the more southern colonies, but no less oppressive. (Mwase 1967; Chiume 1982) Like racial regimes elsewhere, white planters denied access to education by refusing to build schools. Between this practice in the south and loss of working age men in the northern and central regions, British protection managed to protect the colony from any sort of skills or knowledge acquisition. (Mwase 1967) In an ironic twist echoed in other parts of Africa, missionaries who sought to civilize the natives through evangelism were often the only groups of whites who attempted to provide schools and widespread access to possibilities for material improvement. (White 1987)

Africans were not quiescent about the harsh treatment by whites or the oppressive *thangata* system and, while often stuck in a cycle of debt to European estate owners, sought various means to improve their positions. John Chilembwe, a young man growing up in the *thangata* system, attached himself to Joseph Booth, a radical Scottish missionary who disdained the hypocrisy of British colonial policy and advocated "Africa for the African." (Booth 2007; Langworthy 1986) Booth took Chilembwe with him to the United States where Chilembwe attended seminary in Virginia then traveled back to Nyasaland to begin a "technical" mission, intended to provide both evangelism and practical skills training. Chilembwe's churches began spreading throughout the areas of European estates and locals sought Chilembwe's help in combating the oppression. In 1915, Chilembwe and a multitude of supporters set out to murder all the white men in the southern district. They succeeded in killing several, including A. Livingstone Bruce, a distant relation to David Livingstone, and the controller of the largest estate in Nyasaland. Bruce had a reputation of excessive violence and thus Chilembwe's followers

beheaded him in his home. Bruce's dismembered head served as a symbol of Africans' refusal to submit to white oppression, though Chilembwe was hunted down and killed shortly after the uprising.[12] (Mwase 1967; White 1987) The Chilembwe uprising served to terrify Europeans who only became more intractable in their racialization and prevention of Africans' education and upliftment.

Throughout the colonial period, the old missionaries' predictions of a land poised to deliver caches of wealth proved false. European estates, while sometimes profitable, switched from cotton to tobacco to coffee to tea in search of a riches-bearing cash crop. And while there were certainly some successes, as tobacco, coffee and tea are all grow in contemporary Malawi, the majority of estates accumulated debt and simply never achieved their promise. And while the Chilembwe uprising was quickly put down, Africans throughout the region continued to labor under oppressive conditions. The British also instituted harsh environmental laws, restricting the type and amount of wood Africans could cut and what kind of animals Africans were and were not permitted to kill. In agrarian Nyasaland, these rules were despised. Over time, Africans educated within the missionaries' schools and, in some instances, protectorate schools, and Africans who traveled out of the country or continent pushed for systematic changes. Finally, as a result of a proposal to create a Central Africa Federation with Northern and Southern Rhodesia, transferring sovereignty from London to Salisbury (now Harare, Zimbabwe) and in essence systematizing (white) settler rule throughout the three countries, Malawians united in protest. (Chiume 1982; Herbert 2002; White 1987) While the Federation proposal did pass, it was a last-ditch effort to secure white power. In the mid-1950s, Malawians were elected into the all-white

[12] Chilembwe remains a national hero and one can see his face on the back of all Malawian currency. He is memorialized by a national holiday, John Chilembwe Day, though he is also remembered on Martyrs' Day.

Legislative Council and, within a decade, Malawians had coalesced to force out the British and create the new Malawi.

Post-Independence Malawi

Independence did not usher in an era of freedom for Malawians. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, a native Malawian who had lived most of his life in the UK and, later, Ghana, was tapped to help lead efforts against the whites and, after July 6, 1964, became Malawi's first president. Banda was supposed to be a close friend of Kwame Nkrumah, but even before independence, there were indications that Banda was not the pro-national socialist many had hoped. Within two months of independence, Banda had fired his cabinet members on the grounds that they were plotting behind his back. Furthermore, he proposed and pushed through a constitutional amendment allowing permanent detention of politically subversive people without needing to declare a state of emergency or war. (Chiume 1982) In the early 1970s, with the blessing of the legislature, Banda declared himself president for life and held the post until 1994.

Banda created the Malawi Young Pioneers, government-sponsored youth groups, to police citizens: anyone found in violation of the country's laws was considered subversive and the MYP were known to be violent. Rules were rigid: there was no freedom of press—only two newspapers operated in the country, both with a heavily pro-Banda bias. Men could not wear their hair past their ears or have beards, nor could they wear flared (bell-bottomed) trousers because they were too western. Women could not wear pants and skirts had to fall below the knee. There were special rooms at the international airport and at border crossings where visitors could get their hair cut or change clothes when they entered the country. An acquaintance of mine in Malawi told me that his girlfriend had had her legs beaten by police at a border crossing in the early 1990s because she had been wearing shorts. One could not work on national holidays

like Martyr's Day and, if the Youth Pioneers found you working (and, as many people told me, they wandered villages and neighborhoods actively looking for offenders) you were punished. Ruth had told me how difficult those "holidays" were because even daily household tasks, like washing nappies (diapers) or cooking could fall under the description of "work." Any hint of sentiment that denied Banda's absolute primacy was sufficient to get one punished. Scores of Malawians fled the country, were exiled, imprisoned, or killed. Ruth told me that they lived in constant fear of servants, neighbors, and even their own children by the end of Banda's time because "you never know who is listening to you," or who might report something you did not even say.

While many of Banda's laws were dictatorial, there were some positive changes during the initial years of his presidency. Gross domestic product and per-capita incomes rose, as did capital spending and domestic investments. (Owens 1998) He put money into agricultural subsidy programs that allowed farmers access to seed and fertilizer. He emphasized employment and funded training programs in skilled trades and agriculture. Unfortunately, Banda's plans for development focused on exporting agricultural products and expanding the estate sector of the economy introduced under British colonial rule, which still relied upon a tenant system of production. Social programs were not emphasized and most investment monies went to infrastructure development in order to facilitate agricultural growth. (Owens 1998) The currency was held steady, not allowed to float, and remained strong but wages were kept unnaturally low, which assisted in preventing rural to urban migration and enabled estates access to scores of inexpensive laborers.

Under Banda's rule, customary land that belonged to smallholders was given to leasehold estates and a bevy of laws prevented many cash crops from being grown on anything but these

estates, preventing poor smallholder farmers from entering competitive markets. Though smallholder farmers were forced to sell maize through a government parastatal, maize was heavily subsidized and consumer prices kept low, alleviating fears of famine and the necessity of a widespread movement to force higher wages. Over time, the oil crisis hit, world prices for agricultural products fell, trade routes through civil-war-ridden Mozambique were closed and serious droughts befell the country. (Owens 1998; White 1987) In the late 1970s/early 1980s Malawi's economy stagnated and declined. A series of structural adjustment policies throughout the 80s and 90s devalued the currency and caused Malawi's foreign loan debt to skyrocket.

Banda's spy forces grew stronger over time making it difficult for any organized uprising against him: small groups of exiles attempted to chip away at Banda's power but, because they operated from outside the country, they had little influence. Several factors influenced the end of Banda's rule: after the Cold War, when western nations were less concerned with anti-communist alliances, unquestioning support for several African dictators faltered. Nearby nations, such as Zambia, introduced multiparty elections. Adding to people's murmurings of dissent inside and outside the country, the Catholic Bishops of Malawi issued a Lenten Pastoral Letter entitled "Living Our Faith" which called Banda to task, labeling his authoritarianism un-Christian and demanding greater government accountability to all Malawians. (Mitchell 2002) Foreign pressure combined with intolerable domestic conditions and the Bishops' letter helped lead to a regime change in 1993-1994, when Malawians voted in their first democratic elections.

Since Banda's time, Malawi has remained extremely poor, currently ranked 171st out of 179 countries on the United Nations Human Development Index. (UNDP 2011) The first democratically-elected president, Bakili Muluzi, while certainly ushering in greater freedoms for Malawians, oversaw an extremely corrupt government system. During the Muluzi years, foreign

governments rescinded all direct budget support to the Malawi government. This coincided with a neo-liberal turn in the west that called for smaller governments and a feeling by foreign governments and development agencies alike that civil society organizations (NGOs, community-based organizations, voluntary associations) would be the panacea to lift Africa out of its misery. (Igoe and Kelsall 2005) In post-Banda Malawi, money poured into NGOs, particularly NGOs promoting human rights and democracy. But shifting funding from government to NGOs caused Malawi's infrastructure to suffer enormously: roads crumbled, failing communications systems deteriorated further, schools closed due to lack of teachers or lack of teachers' salaries, hospitals and clinics were understaffed and underfunded, training programs for skilled workers closed. And during this time, when social services declined, as a result of corruption and structural adjustment programs, AIDS spread rapidly throughout the country with no infrastructure in place to curb its spread.

Powerful Discourses

Most sociologists writing about contemporary social problems and donor-oriented solutions in Malawi pay scant attention to the country's history; this omission is unfortunate because today's social issues are thoroughly connected to the nation's past. More importantly, our current *understandings* of Malawi, and other African nations, are rooted in deeply embedded and long-held discourses. Foucault's early works are extremely useful for understanding how certain populations, or sectors of populations, have come to be labeled and separated from the rest of the population, the better to be brought under control and the reaches of power. Foucault painstakingly describes how several institutions—asylums, prisons, hospitals—served to shift power and control from a central disciplinary body to a more diffuse and subjective process of self-control and governance. (1975; 1988; 1995) The gaze, as the ultimate form of knowledge,

and, by extension, power, forms a critical component of Foucault's analysis. The gaze entails a passive, yet highly attuned, eye for details, piecing together disparate pieces of social, biological and individualized information to determine both problems and solutions.

In his volumes on sexuality, Foucault moves away from a direct link between bodies and power and takes a wider view of how power influences populations of people. In Volume One, Foucault makes the compelling argument that governments have become concerned not with controlling death but, rather, with the management of life itself. "A power whose task is to take charge of life needs continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms… Such a power has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize." (1990: 144) Within this new context of (bio) power, human rights, the ability to strive for health and happiness, became a primary objective. Foucault demonstrates how control and power, once direct and directive, became diffuse, aimed at *leading* populations of people rather than dissuading persons from bad behaviors through the threat and use of bodily harm. New groups of experts and measures of discourse, as well as myriad labels developed by those in power as a method to categorize people, led people to examine themselves, moderating their actions, the better to conform to a normative grouping.

Foucault's analysis of power is in many ways limited when attempting to understand power and African subjectivities. (Vaughan 1991) His analysis of power as diffuse and his focus on self-governance downplay the role of the state or other forms of direct power and control. But missionaries, those seeking commercial ventures, and, later, colonialists, were acting out a very particular type of control and power in Malawi. The civilizing discourse was premised on racial and cultural superiority over the African "other" as well as economic and political values that made direct exploitation and dominance conceivable. Missionaries the colonialists that followed did confront a terrain of wildly different cultural realities from their own: they did not see

Malawi as a modern state, nor did they treat it as a modern state peopled with thinking subjects. Rather, Malawi, like other African nations, was defined from the earliest European contacts as a place to be brought under control. Recognizing this is, in part, why I emphasize Foucault here. While his themes of bio-power and governmentality fall short of explaining African social problems, they go quite far in explaining westerners' *conceptions of* African social problems as well as the idea that discourse is inherently tied to knowledge and action. Furthermore, we should bear in mind that even if Africans were not considered thinking subjects, western construction of the African other had direct ramifications for how power was structured and, thus, the ways Africans may have internalized these inequalities. (Fanon 1994)

Authors such as Autesserre (2012), de Fina and Georgakopoulou (2008), Finnemore (1997), and Mamdani (1996 and 2009) point out the power of narratives in western framing of African problems and the ways in which these frames direct our action (or inaction) toward the continent. Autesserre (2012) shows that eastern Congo's immensely complicated social and economic realities have been reduced to a highly simplistic cause, effect, and solution equation: the illegal extraction of mineral wealth is the cause of all Congo's problems; rape of women and girls is the consequence; and strengthening government is the solution. This understanding frames events in the region, directing aid and development efforts with the unfortunate and unintended consequence of actually increasing human rights violations in eastern Congo. Western interventions in Africa are rooted in *western* understandings of the continent and its problems as well as potential solutions and narratives that resonate with western audiences. But I hold that even simplistic narratives are rooted in even simpler, longer-held ideas of Africans as inferior others, begun before missionaries but entrenched by their personal narratives. Even as interest in various social problems comes and goes (see Downs 1972; Igoe & Kelsall 2005), the

underlying discourse about Africa in the west changes little. Our narratives of Africans' violence, ignorance, poverty, and helplessness remain consistent whether we discuss AIDS, the environment, genocide, or war.

"In Africa, we have to induce the thirst we come to satisfy":[13] Missionaries in Malawi and solidifying stereotypes

Romanticized European imaginings of Africa existed long before David Livingstone meandered his way to Lake Nyassa but the experiential writings of early European explorers and colonizers set up a framework onto which subsequent narratives have been mapped. Doug Stuart, writing of the earliest South African missions, argues that missionary success indicated divine favor toward England, conflating nationhood with morality, righteousness, and "being saved." (1993) Writing within the Victorian era, the writings of early explorers accomplished several things: they introduced the world to the "true" continent in all its splendor, barbarity, and backwardness; they showed the ignorance of Africans, thus reifying the superiority of European and other civilized nations; and they demonstrated how pitiful Africans' lives were, creating an imperative to help the helpless. While these tropes predated European exploration of the Nyassa region, the explorers' lived experiences served to make them "experts," providing evidence to buttress and thus "prove" what was already suspected. I do not mean to villainize missionaries, businesspeople, or colonists: their dogged determination to pursue their goals is impressive as is their willingness to live a majority of their lives on the continent, learning local languages and the intricacies of varying cultures. But no matter the missionaries' or other early Europeans' intentions, the ways in which Malawi was presented helped essentialize the continent for western audiences. An examination of western discussions of African slavery illuminate this point.

[13] Maples 1899: 175.

As I already mentioned, the area of Malawi was ground zero for slavers bringing ivory, rubber, or other goods from the interior to the coasts. Slaves on their own did not generate large profits: feeding and caring for caravans of slaves from the interior to the coast required more money than was often recouped. So slavers would raid inland villages and force captives to carry goods to the east. Upon arrival, slavers sold both goods and slaves and, in this way, profited greatly. Livingstone noted "the open sore of the world" early in his travels in Malawi and talked about them throughout his journeys. (*Times of London,* April 11th, 1874) In 1859, shortly before reaching Lake Malawi for the first time, Livingstone wrote that a large slave-caravan was camped near him,

> With plenty of slaves, ivory, and malachite. In a few minutes half a dozen of the leaders came over to see us. They were armed with long muskets, and, to our mind, were a villainous-looking lot. They evidently thought the same of us, for they offered several young children for sale, but, when told that we were English, showed signs of fear, and decamped during the night. (Livingstone 1956: 136)

Here Livingstone not only introduces the normalcy of slave trading but also indicates that Englishness is an already-established revered (and feared) moral counterpoint to slavery.

The early explorers shared numerous examples of the horrors of the slave trade. Dr. Kirk, who traveled for a time with Livingstone and later became Consul of Zanzibar, wrote the following narrative:

> About 1 pm. while we were in the huts, a gang of 84 slaves was marched into the village with a few drivers. On being spoken to, the latter ran off, not before 4 guns had been taken… The slaves were, most of them, tied by the neck with ropes, in gangs, some refractory ones had beams of wood as thick as a man's thigh and six feet long with a fork at one extremity in which the neck was secured by an iron pin. The party consisted of women and children mainly, with a few men. They began clapping their hands as soon as they knew that we were their friends, the English. The ropes were cut adrift and the sticks sawn off their necks… The people of the village looked on during all this with great satisfaction… The atrocities committed on the march seem to have been very great. Two women were shot because they attempted to escape. This had been done to make an impression and prevent others from doing so. One woman who was unable to carry both

> her load and her young child, had the child taken from her and saw its brains dashed out on a stone. (Kirk 1965(2): 351)

Kirk's account, like Livingstone's, painted the British as saviors, a fact recognized by the local people, who become, in the tale, the helpless victims saved by the kindly outsiders. A *New York Times* article dated November 23rd, 1889 argues that the missionaries' "bravery in standing up for the persecuted natives against the slave dealers must vastly increase their influence and create lasting obligations of gratitude." It is important to note that the people saved were "women and children mainly," as African women and children are doubly helpless in the face of African male domination. By focusing on poor women and children and the horror one woman experienced seeing her child killed by slavers, Kirk's story also creates a sympathetic human connection between foreign readers and African slaves, important for focusing foreign charity and philanthropic endeavors. Lambert and Lester (2004) note that writers had to elicit sympathy for primitive others in order to create a sense of responsibility over great distances.

The issue of slavery resonated not only because of the portraits of humanity painted by European witnesses but also because of British guilt over its participation in the Atlantic slave trade. In a *Times of London* article dated May 4th, 1875, a British minister wrote, "we have the reproach of ages of cruelty and neglect to wipe out." And another man, Sir Bartle Frere, who had traveled on the continent, made an impassioned plea regarding England's obligation to Africa which the *Times of London*, November 3rd, 1874, reported in the following manner:

> Slavery of one kind or another was always known in Africa, but the enormous deportation of slaves was, [Frere] was sorry to say, a feature which had only been developed to its late proportions since they came into communication with the Northern nations of Europe. They all felt what an enormous debt that imposed upon them, how bound they were to make some recompense to Africa for having introduced such a curse. He left them to judge… whether there was a better mode of paying that debt than by offering them the blessings of Christianity and civilization.

By tying slavery up in a complex web of obligation, morality, and God-fearing justice, missionaries and explorers turned the cause of eradicating slavery into a necessity. Emphasizing the connection between the horror of slavery and Britain's role in increasing slavery on the continent served to silence people who felt that the government and the churches were wasting their time and money trying to "civilize" the Africans.

Slavery is a useful lens through which to view long-standing representations of Africa and Africans in the west because even within discussions of slavery, contradictions were evident. While natives were portrayed as pitiful and needing European help, they were also portrayed as greedy, materialistic barbarians. The same Dr. Kirk who described the slave caravan above detailed two incidents in his journal when he mistook Africans and animals. In the first entry, dated July 24th, 1858, he wrote, "Livingstone takes out the boat to shoot a potamus whose shining head seemed to show above the water, but on getting near it, he did not fire, as it looked rather strange and on going up to it, it turned out a dead negro." (1965(1): 56) And on August 4, 1858, he wrote, "I observed on the top of a high bank among the long grass, a large black brute," but running for his rifle, realized the futility of it, the brute "having turned out to be a hippopotamus." (1965(1): 59) While these may be legitimate tricks of the eyes, they nonetheless serve to foster the already strong idea that Africans are subhuman. And while Kirk's account may be dismissed for possible inadvertency, other writers make their animal-African comparisons more blatant. Walter Kerr, who traveled throughout Southern Africa up to Lake Nyassa was quoted in the *New York Times* saying, "From an English point of view he [the African] is a filthy creature and smells like a badger. He has no idea of cleanliness… He devours nuts, roots, and fruits like his brother, the ape… In a human sense his life is a failure… he is akin to the brutes of the field and forest." (October 25th, 1886)

In reading newspaper and missionary accounts, the portrayals of Africans as troublesome seem as common as those portraying them as utterly helpless. Reports of Africans often define them as greedy and calculating. Two groups of Africans seem to share the greatest disdain of foreigners: native porters (baggage carriers) and chiefs. Travelers frequently complained about the unreliability of porters. When they were able to secure porters, the men would sometimes quit in the middle of a journey, forget items, and, certainly, go too slowly. The *New York Times* reported, "The only mode of transportation… is by carriers. These are a worthless set of vagabonds, who exact more than the value of the goods for bearing them, and they often cause considerable losses by their carelessness. The tribes along the way, too, come in for their share of plunder. They demand heavy tribute for leave to pass, and exorbitant prices for food." (October 9th, 1876; see also *Times of London* October 31, 1960) Lack of understanding of systems of exchange in and around Nyassa led to various misunderstandings and feelings of being cheated. But the portrayal of these annoyances helped undermine the "character" of Africans in the area. Upon describing villages at the north end of Lake Nyassa, Jane Moir, wife of a businessman said, "When I first saw these villages I thought they must be like Paradise. Now I have found there is the 'but' that always exists in human beings, but the people are the most inveterate beggars; from the head Chief to the smallest child who has courage to come near the whiteman, they beg and beg, until you are perfectly sick of them. Especially in the chiefs, it is disappointing." (1991: 61)

Connected to these notions of greediness were frequent mentions of Africans' materialism. Chauncy Maples, wrote, "We deal with men dead in trespasses and sins, wholly indifferent to a hereafter, completely given up to material things, with intellects scarcely capable as yet of taking in spiritual notions." (1899: 49) The emphasis on Africans' love of "material

things" seems strange, given foreigners' tendencies to focus on how substandard Africans' lives were in comparison to Europeans'. But it was believed that Africans' desire for things European was ruining them. Moir continued:

> If it weren't for trade, how much nicer it would be to have all natives like these North-Enders with clean, well-oiled, or rather buttered bodies, instead of being swathed in filthy smelling calico, as most natives are who live near English stations! If you wish to see men in a purely native state, come quickly to the North End of Lake Nyasa, for even already the love of calico is growing in their bosoms, and who knows how soon they may become like the rest of their brethren! (62)

Africans' love of things was also connected to slavery: Livingstone noted how materialism led chiefs to sell their own people. "Often the chief has nothing but human flesh with which to buy foreign goods," he wrote, "[Slavers] give four yards of cotton cloth for a man, three for a woman, and two for a boy or girl." (1956: 137-8) The emphasis on African's supposed materialism seems particularly odd given that trade was, aside from the civilizing effects of Christian missions, offered as the only way to effectively stop the slave trade.

Livingstone, from his earliest days in the area, and followed by other missionaries, explorers, and traders, advocated "legitimate trade" as the best means to stop slavery. He provided the following rationale for his Zambesi expedition:

> To extend the knowledge already attained of the geography and mineral resources of Eastern and Central Africa; to improve our acquaintance with the inhabitants, and to endeavor to engage them to apply themselves to industrial pursuits and to the cultivation of their lands, with a view to the production of raw material to be exported to England in return for British manufactures; and it was hoped that by encouraging the natives to occupy themselves in the development of the resources of the country, a considerable advance might be made toward the extinction of the slave trade. (*New York Times*, May 10th, 1874)

From his earliest explorations, Livingstone wrote of the "salubrious" climate of Malawi and that his "countrymen might there enjoy good health and also be of signal benefit by leading the multitude of industrious inhabitants to cultivate cotton, buaze, sugar, and other valuable produce,

to exchange for goods of European manufacture." (1956: 139) At a conference entitled, "Africa, our second India," British businessmen, with the expert advice of Henry Morton Stanley, (of "Dr. Livingstone, I presume" renown) discussed the great markets Africa represented. "It had been estimated that 2,400,000,000 yards of calico were sent annually from this country to India, and there was no reason why we should not send a similar quantity each year to Africa. If this were done, it would afford occupation to 200,000 Lancashire operatives, besides giving a tremendous impetus to the trades of Sheffield, Birmingham, and Yorkshire." (*Times of London*, January 9th, 1879)

Slavery depopulated the interior of the region to the extent that cultivation of valuable crops would be impossible. But slavery also prevented safe passage into the interior, meaning that goods could not reach any potentially heavily populated areas. Thus commerce and slavery were linked in a simple antithetical position: by stopping slavery, Europeans could ensure the safety of the interior regions where natives could grow the products the British needed for manufacturing and, then, ship them back to the interior. Slavery, while likely legitimately loathed by missionaries and explorers alike, also presented a foil, making colonial longings seem not only rational but moral as well.

Slavery was the major social problem associated with Nyassa in the 1800s. But like Malawi social problems discourse today, the social problem of slavery overlapped other social problems. In the late 1880s, during the mad Scramble for Africa, the Portuguese, who controlled Mozambique, made some moves to encroach into the territory of Nyassa. British newspapers then accused the Portuguese of leniency in terms of slavery, allowing the trade within their territory, thus turning what was, essentially, a straightforward battle over colonial territory into a moral accusation about slavery. In addition, slavery was grafted onto pre-existing racialized

categories of Africans' ignorance and helplessness as well as Europeans', and particularly British, superiority. Thus while Africans were helpless to stop slavery and suffered from it, they also helped perpetuate it through their ignorance and greed for material goods. In effect, the only people who really understood the truly heinous ramifications of the slave trade were Europeans, and especially Britons.

While the language may seem antiquated and the problem of slavery long past for Malawi, I argue that the way this social problem was presented throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century achieved the following: it entrenched the idea of European superiority and authority; it entrenched feelings of pity for "deserving" Africans; and it entrenched ideas that Africans, in their childlike ignorance, do harm to themselves. Though the link is not causal, I believe that these fundamental understandings grew from knowledge to truth because of the expertise of missionaries and explorers. Their personal experiences and writings helped ingrain fundamentally racist and paternalistic ideas about the continent and the west's need to fix it. Slavery *was* a serious social problem but the way it was used and benefitted Britain may cause us to question how many people used slavery as a convenient cover for unconcealed colonial fantasies. Moreover, slavery was "created" in the west, negating any African input into the problem or its potential solutions. As Chauncey Maples' quote at the beginning of this section indicates, missionaries had to "induce a thirst" for European religion so that they could then fulfill their mission in Africa. In other words, they needed to create a problem in order to solve it. Similarly, Europeans needed to reify or create particular imaginings about Africa in order to convince the western public of their opportunity there. Contemporary social problems such as AIDS and climate change are not only presented in a similar manner to slavery (albeit without

blatant gleeful projections about the benefits to western industry) but also owe their understandings and (potential) solutions to creators in the west.

Agenda Setting in Contemporary Malawi

Since its earliest European explorers, Malawi has been an object of outsiders' study and subject to the whims of donors who try to ameliorate its perceived problems. After Muluzi was elected president, the donor trend was human rights and democracy, followed by a big push for family planning. But then, with international attention to the AIDS pandemic and its ravages in sub-Saharan Africa, donor interest shifted again, focused on the problem of AIDS. Currently, climate change seems to be increasing as a donor interest. But even while AIDS was still the donor favorite, foreign governments, following a global trend and noting changes implemented by Malawi's third president, Bingu wa Mutharika, to ensure transparency and responsible use of funds, began to shift money back into direct budgetary support and away from NGOs. Malawi, in desperate need of foreign currency and development aid, seems to have little say in how funds are directed and programs implemented.

In recent years, concern that foreign donors may hijack the national interests of poor and middle-income countries has grown, leading to the Paris Declaration (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action. (2008) Both are premised on five essential elements for successful development: ownership (national agendas are set by country governments); alignment (donors support these agendas); harmonization (donors fit their programs to these agendas); results (outcomes are measurable and funds clearly accounted for); and mutual accountability (both governments and foreign donors are responsible for the outcomes. (OECD 2012) Ideally, these five components should lead to a partnership between donors, recipient governments, and civil

society so that local aims and needs are not ignored in the face of international pressure or desperation for international funds.

In practice, widespread agreement with Paris and Accra has not led to achievement of the goals. Sridhar (2009) argues that systemic obstacles related to global inequalities prevent implementation of these objectives, particularly with regard to issues of global health. These include an abundance of donor priorities for health, donors' lack of accountability to people in recipient countries and their own countries, and insecurity of external funding. Despite the worthy objectives of Paris and Accra, donors still have enormous power in agenda setting—partly because they fund government budgets. So if a government is setting its own priorities it may very well be setting priorities with an eye to what donors want, rather than what its citizens want. But even if a government outlines the objectives of its own people, donors can simply veto payment for particular programs or activities, putting money elsewhere. As Lusayo, one of my respondents, said:

> Right now, maybe because of the Paris and Accra, they've tried to put government ahead of these things... But in terms of what happens on the ground, I think there is a mismatch, okay? Because now the donors come in and say we'll only give you money for this. So although something else was a priority… some donors are not buying into it… It's a mismatch because at the end of the day it's their money they have to say what happens to that money.

In 1996, Malawi began to create its "Vision 2020," a national development strategy that "provides Government with a wealth of information on what Malawians would like to achieve," (SDNP, Preface) in order to accomplish the following: "Malawi as a God-fearing nation will be secure, democratically mature, environmentally sustainable, self reliant with equal opportunities for and active participation by all, having social services, vibrant cultural and religious values and being a technologically driven middle-income economy." (SDNP) Vision 2020's ten chapters detail objectives for goals such as good governance, achieving a vibrant culture,

developing economic infrastructure, and fair and equitable distribution of income. Since the creation of Vision 2020, the government has also created the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy, a five year plan (2006-2011), to help operationalize tactics to achieve Vision 2020. Within this, the president outlined what should take national precedence. In 2009, to begin his second five-year term, President Mutharika increased priorities of previous years from six to nine: 1. the green-belt initiative to irrigate up to one million hectares of land, 2. New water supply systems, 3. Reformation of the education sector while entrenching science and technology, 4. Development of roads and the Nsanje World Inland Port Development, 5. Climate change, natural resources and environmental management, 6. Integrated rural development, 7. Public health, sanitation and HIV and Aids management, 8. Youth development and empowerment, 9. Energy, mining and industrial development. (The three new priorities were 3, 5, and 8). (Fast Facts 2009) Malawi's priorities are meant to guide the priorities of donors.

Different donors give preference to different priorities, often dictated by home countries, in the case of bilateral donors. For instance, DFID, the British development agency, divides its money through various sectors, giving the most to health (39%), followed by education (22%), governance (17%), and growth (16%), (DFID)[14]. USAID prioritizes "investing in people," which includes money for HIV/AIDS (which receives more money than any other sector), education and, increasingly, malaria and maternal and child health, (83.1%), economic growth (15.6%), governing justly and democratically (.9%), and peace and security and humanitarian aid (.3% and .1% respectively), (USAID). NORAD, the Norwegian development agency, and another one of Malawi's biggest donors, prioritizes economic development and trade (41%),

[14] In April 2011, amid a diplomatic fray in which the government of Malawi expelled the British ambassador for writing an email saying President Mutharika was becoming increasingly autocratic, Britain suspended aid to the country so it is uncertain what DFID will focus on upon resumption of funds.

environment and energy (1%), good governance (17%), health and education (33%), and HIV/AIDS (7%). Religious, foundation, or other donors have their own priorities as well as different levels of accountability. The following chapters will detail how Malawians' views of these fundamental social problems accord and differ from those of western donors and how, consequently, patterns established by the earliest Europeans in Malawi continue today.

Chapter Three

HIV/AIDS and International versus Local Prioritizations

Introduction

HIV/AIDS in Africa has been presented in western media as the biggest crisis ever facing the continent, and funding for HIV in Malawi has dwarfed all other program funding in the last decade. But though Malawi's HIV rate hovers around twelve percent, Malawians do not list HIV/AIDS as one of their primary problems: instead, they emphasize issues related to immediate survival such as inadequate food, water, and jobs. In this chapter, I present data on global funding for, and Africans' responses to, HIV/AIDS, considering Africans' self-reported social problems and how these connect to AIDS discourse. I then look specifically at how Malawians respond to AIDS. Their seeming lack of preoccupation with AIDS is in opposition to western representations of the pandemic: these competing foci are indicative of the discrepancies between Malawians' experiences and western frames and modes of intervention.

Scholarly attention to HIV/AIDS in Africa has focused on issues of race and sexuality, (Fee and Fox 1992; Gisselquist et. al. 2003; Marshall 2005; Njiro 2005; Sawers and Stillwaggon 2010; Stillwaggon 2006) norms or cultural patterns in health-influencing behaviors (Clark et. al. 2009; Myckalovskiy et. al. 2004; Rasmussen 2008; Yeatman 2009; Zachariah et. al. 2003), the direct and indirect effects of the AIDS industry (Frank 2009; Morfit 2011; Seckinelgin 2004 & 2005; Swidler and Watkins 2009), and, to a lesser extent, issues of justice, particularly with regard to drug availability and social movements (Higgs 2004; Miller 2003; Nolen 2007). But few people have given more than a passing glance at what Africans themselves think about outsiders' focus on AIDS and attempts to curb its spread. (An exception is Whiteside et. al.) It seems taken for granted that Africans are happy and grateful to have a large outside focus on the

illness; anti-AIDS campaigns such as Product (RED) focus on Africans' expressions of gratitude for treatment. (Anderson 2008)

This chapter revisits some of the data used by Whiteside and contrasts western emphasis on HIV/AIDS in Africa with the self-reported problems of Africans generally and Malawians specifically. Highlighting then examining the mismatch between Malawian and western emphases on AIDS adds to a growing literature about global justice (or injustice), the ways knowledge and power intersect and influence local communities, and the changing nature of foreign power and influence in Africa. Englund (2006) shows that international emphasis on human rights actually undermined the rights of the poorest Malawians by ignoring their voices in determining political priorities. In this chapter and the next, I investigate whether HIV/AIDS discourse and programming has similarly disenfranchised people vulnerable to and affected by the illness. It is critical to realize that the discourse used in AIDS work on the continent is tied to neo-liberal understandings of risk behavior and reduction, self-governance, and science—understandings and priorities firmly rooted in western individualism that cast judgment on those who do not follow particular directives. Authors caution that attempts to educate a populace about ideas, and to change behaviors without first understanding and embedding them within local languages and belief systems, tend to have limited results. (Englund 2006; Rugalema 2004)

AIDS and Africa: a brief explication of the issues

> One of my Malawian friends and I both applied for jobs at the American Embassy in Lilongwe. We were sitting at a local bottle store [bar], on upturned bottle crates, sipping sodas a few days before my interview. He had not previously told me he had applied, saying he didn't think he'd get the job. "What did you apply for?" I asked.
> "An accountant position."
> "Huh. So we could work together! That would be fantastic!… When do you find out if you got it? Did you already have an interview?"
> "Yes. I had my interview in April." It was July at that point.
> "April! And they haven't let you know yet?"
> "Well, they called me last week and I just went Monday for my medical examination."

"What medical exam?"
"They make you go to the doctor. To get blood tests."
"Blood tests." By that time, I was fairly certain I knew what he would say but had to ask anyway. "What do they test you for?"
"Oh, I don't know. Diseases. AIDS. Everything." He swirled his bottle, looking at me. "I think they don't give you a job if you have the AIDS."
"And do they test everybody?"
"Yes. That's what people told me."
"I wonder if they'll test me."
The swishing continued. "Ah-ah! I doubt it," he said, smiling at me.
"I doubt it too," I agreed.
And we were right. Because I was not everybody.

I never learned whether testing applicants for AIDS was a written policy at the embassy. But based on conversations I had with other workers, it was clearly an informal policy, at the least. Whether race, ethnicity, notions about sexual behaviors, or something else allowed my blood to be above suspicion and prevented my mandated testing is unclear, but what is certain is that my friend and I were treated differently. Different assumptions were made about us, our individual circumstances irrelevant, subsumed in whatever characteristics were deemed salient. His body was presumed threatening, mine not. The preeminence of western science has enabled and perpetuated racist misconceptions of Africa and a resultant problematization of the collective "African body." Despite the heterogeneous nature of Africans and African nations, "the African" in "Africa" is treated as a singular problem in western discourse and, of course, in western policy, which not only directs African governments' governing strategies, but also western interventions on the continent. There is no recognition of individual Africans and so in many ways, there is a presumption that the African is too poor/ignorant/sexual/violent to care for him/herself and thus will continually pose a problem for us.

AIDS in Africa has been portrayed, in the west, in a relatively straightforward manner—an entire continent devastated by the disease. The continent as a whole does indeed have a higher HIV infection rate than any other region of the world, with approximately 22.9 of the estimated

34 million global infections (UNAIDS 2011) but not all countries are equally affected. Swaziland has a surveyed prevalence rate of 25.9%, Nigeria, 3.6%, Uganda, 6.5%, and Senegal, 0.9%. (UNAIDS 2010: 181) Despite these glaring between-country differences, all Africa is perceived to be, and portrayed as, plagued by HIV/AIDS. Without denying the severity of the disease in parts of Africa, we must also recognize how the disease has been framed, understood, and addressed, and note that our interpretations of AIDS on the continent have been influenced by long-held social beliefs. (Fee and Fox 1992; Patton 1990; Treichler 1999)

Unlike in other world regions, where a variety of modes of transmission are recognized in spreading the disease, heterosexual sex was, until very recently, understood to be the single significant mode of transmission of HIV/AIDS in Africa. (Brewer et al 2003; Sawers and Stillwaggon 2010; Stillwaggon 2006) As Seneca Vaught (2007) argues, outsiders' interpretations of African societies are inevitably linked to western racism. There is a long, well-documented, history, in the west, of ascribing deviant sexualities to black people. Black women have been painted as both overtly-sexual temptresses and passive recipients of men's interest or aggression. Black men have been depicted as insatiable, hypersexed beasts who prey on innocent women. (Stevenson 1994; Gilman 1985; Hill-Collins 2004; Cohen 1999; Simmonds 1988) These racist schemata have persisted over time and may have prevented unbiased consideration of other possible modes of transmission, such as iatrogenic transmission, or social realities that accelerate the spread of HIV/AIDS as a result of sex, such as extreme gender inequality and malnutrition. (Buve 2002; Gisselquist et al 2003; Marshall 2005; Sawers and Stillwaggon 2010; Sidel and Levy 2002)

Unfortunately, science is not as pure as we might hope: scientists, no less than average people, are influenced by social categories and biases. (Epstein 1996; Gould 1996) Instead of

taking a wide view of the structural inequalities and social realities that existed in different parts of Africa, scientists ignored evidence of medical transmission, homosexuality, and co-factors of poverty, and insisted heterosexual sex was the problem in Africa, which guided social and political policies aimed at combating the disease. Privileged science, firmly rooted in western empiricism, has framed understandings of the disease worldwide and has perpetuated perceptions of Africa and Africans as backward, dirty and uncivilized. Racist notions of African sexualities have prevented consideration of other possible methods, or accelerators, of transmission, failed to place HIV/AIDS in a broader cultural context, and largely overlooked concerns of average Africans. AIDS is a disease impacted by, and inextricably linked to, power. Foucault wrote, "There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations." (1995: 27) Interpretations, understandings and the very definition of AIDS are controlled and manipulated by western elites.

Attempts to address the AIDS epidemic on the continent have shifted over time but revolve primarily around education and condom use or treatment. Only recently have programs begun to address such pressing co-factors as gender-based violence and food security in concert with HIV work, despite ample evidence that Africans themselves have long recognized these overlapping inequalities. (Whiteside 2004; De Waal 2006) Patterson (2006) writes that westerners have tended to frame HIV/AIDS in Africa as an emergency rather than a development problem. Framing it this way necessitates a particular, short-term response, instead of a long-term dedication to dealing with structural inequalities. While Africans themselves report that their problems are structural (Whiteside et al. 2004), westerners stress the AIDS emergency and advocate drugs and treatment as the way to combat it. William Easterly (2006) argues that the

west has perpetually drafted overly-simple solutions to ameliorate the world's most complex problems and that, in their simplicity, these plans fail to address or fix the root issues.

Despite early recognition that AIDS would be a monumental health catastrophe, western organizations as well as western and African governments ignored the warnings, partly due to conservative skittishness about addressing certain causes and means of prevention of HIV/AIDS (i.e. safe sex), and HIV/AIDS grew rapidly into a pandemic. But while the reasons HIV/AIDS is so prevalent in parts of Africa are complex and necessitate a frank discussion of global inequality, efforts to address AIDS focus more on treatment than prevention. Thus far, I have traced the ways African AIDS was constructed and considered how such a myopic view of the disease may, in fact, have contributed to its spread. But in noting ways in which African AIDS was constructed, it is also useful to consider the role money has played in both its definition and treatment.

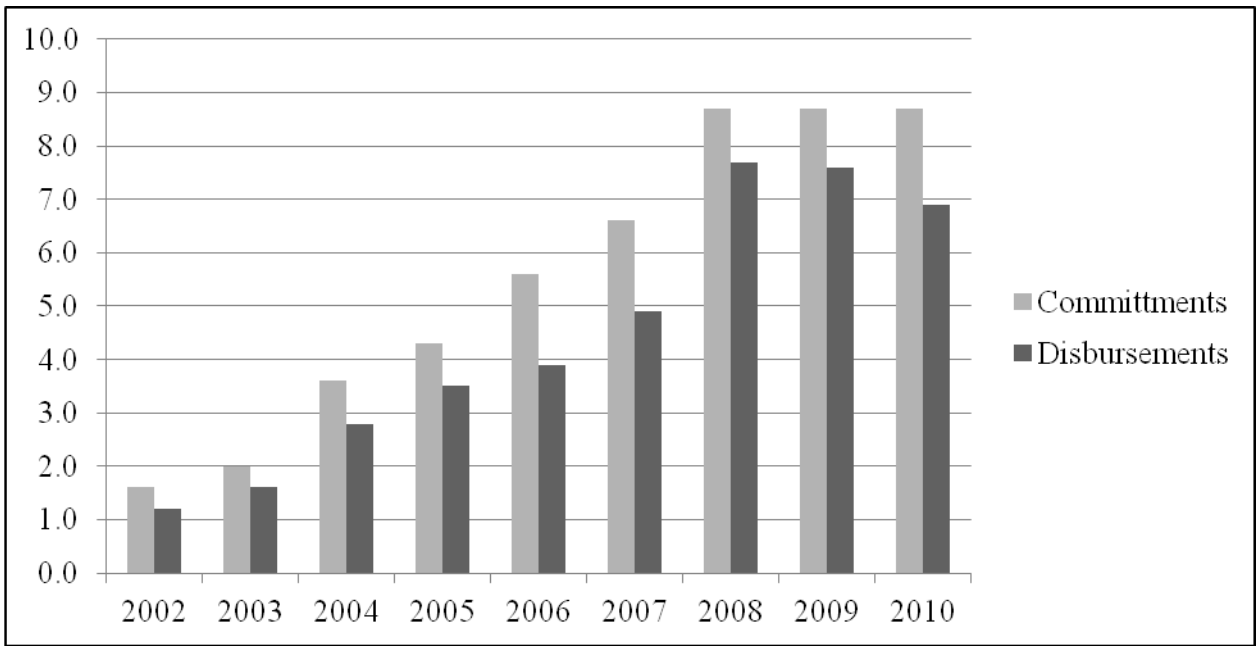
Foreign attention to AIDS

Donors and AIDS

Global attention to the problem of AIDS in Africa was slow to start. While the first cases of AIDS on the continent were reported in the mid-1980s, little attention was paid to its spread until after it reached epidemic proportions. Since the mid-1990s, however, funding funneled into Africa for the express purpose of addressing African AIDS has seen drastic increases. Donor governments and agencies (both bilateral and multilateral) have prioritized AIDS above other African social and health issues. Looking at international funding for AIDS, there was a distinct increase over time (see Figure 3) with bilateral and multilateral funding increasing from approximately 300 million dollars in 1996 to 15.6 billion dollars in 2008. (AVERT) The Global Fund, a public-private partnership designed to collect and disburse pledges from donor

Figure 3

International AIDS Assistance from Donor Governments, 2002-2010, in USD Billions[15]



governments, private foundations, and corporations, accounted for 20% of all public monies dedicated to HIV/AIDS programs worldwide. Between 2002 and 2007, governments pledged 9,227,255,331 USD to the Global Fund and between 2008 and 2011 pledged another 12,522,016,862 USD. Non-governmental groups including, but not limited to, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, MAC Cosmetics, the United Methodist Church and Product (RED) pledged a further 1,431,801,842 USD between 2002 and 2011. As is evident from Figure 3 and Table 2, funding dedicated to AIDS has leveled off. I will discuss this further in Chapter Five but the amount of funds going to support HIV/AIDS initiatives still dwarf all other social issues on the continent.

[15] Data from the Kaiser Fund, http://www.kff.org/hivaids/upload/7347-07.pdf, accessed 7 December 2011

Table 2 **Global Fund Contributions, USD**[16]

	2001-2009		2010		2011	
Contributor	**Pledged**	**Paid**	**Pledged**	**Paid**	**Pledged**	**Paid**
Governments	**15,268,438,449**	**15,114,710,846**	**3,405,548,016**	**2,783,321,164**	**3,075,285,728**	**1,813,644,669**
Other	**657,245,595**	**800,292,980**	**126,689,001**	**148,102,906**	**134,739,118**	**46,855,199**

Money, Pity, and Philanthropy

As I showed in the previous section, foreign governments have dedicated large sums of money for AIDS programming but while the majority of money provided to research the epidemiology and etiology of the disease was given by governmental organizations and individual nation-states, it is difficult to know the amount of private or corporate support that has gone into addressing African AIDS. By the mid-2000s, the call to help Africa and fight AIDS in Africa gained recognition and momentum. Corporate efforts like Viva Glam, by MAC Cosmetics, Idol Gives Back, and (Product)RED, hereafter (RED)[17], are several examples of current attempts to battle the African AIDS problem.

In the late 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s, a philanthropic trend emerged in which companies encourage people to buy products, promising to give a percentage of the profits to charities: by marketing and selling specific products, or by launching fundraising efforts, many corporations raise money to send to African AIDS organizations. Such "embedded giving" (Strom 2007) or "cause marketing" (Stole 2008) promotes consumerism, entwining buying and benevolence. (RED) is a fine example of this phenomenon. It encourages people to purchase products that fund AIDS work in Africa. (RED) is a unique business model that uses cultural schemas and categories to link capitalism to humanitarianism, constructing it as a moral issue.

[16] www.theglobalfund.org/documents/core/financial/Core_PledgesContributions_List_en/, accessed 8 December 2011.
[17] The parentheses, according to RED's website, are meant to indicate an "embrace" (About, accessed 17 December, 2007).

(RED) does not simply advocate the purchase of products, it also attempts to persuade us, as consumers, that we have the opportunity to save Africa without ever leaving the comfort of our homes or malls, without doing anything but shop. Because it gives such a simple solution, (RED) attempts to convince us that not only do we have the opportunity to change the world, we also have an obligation to do so.

Creating a moral imperative, or making use of one, with relation to philanthropy is not an modern phenomenon, as I showed in Chapter Two, with regard to slavery. Tracing the construction of the concept of charity throughout the 1900s, Dorileen Loseke argues that charity is a powerful model throughout history because there are multiple moralities embedded within it, allowing for different emphases at different times, thus the ability to withstand historical changes in public sentiment. "Charity becomes a sacred morality of religion, an all but sacred morality of democratic community, an economic morality of capitalism, a human morality of compassion for others." (2007: 440) In the United States, and in some parts of Western Europe, neo-liberalism has come to dominate political ideology, with governments scaling back social welfare programs and shifting the burden of assistance to private charitable organizations, reinforcing a culture of individual responsibility. Interestingly, (RED) was launched first in the UK, then in the US, both of which experienced neoliberal turns. Comparing French and North American workers, Michele Lamont (1992) found Americans more likely to view volunteerism and philanthropy through a moralistic frame. Exploring the social construction of emotions, Markus and Kitayama (1994) suggest that ignoring such notions of morality with regard to helping others when we have the opportunity to make things right could negatively impact our own feelings. Thus (RED) and other embedded giving programs must tap into our emotions and our sense of morality, connecting shopping and social change.

Africans' Most Important Problems

With so much international attention and so many resources devoted to combating HIV/AIDS in Africa, one could easily assume that AIDS is not only the biggest problem on the continent but also that Africans are preoccupied by the disease as well. After all, looking at the statistics, with 22.9 million people infected across the continent,[18] it seems impossible that Africans could fail to know someone with AIDS, know someone who had died of AIDS, be fearful of contracting the disease, or have the illness themselves. But also looking at the statistics, it is clear that AIDS does not affect every country equally. Rates are generally highest in Southern Africa, followed by East Africa, Central Africa, then West Africa. Given the unfathomably high prevalence rates in some countries and the low rates in others, I began to wonder how Africans themselves thought about AIDS and how it fit into broader global frameworks. Would people in countries with higher disease prevalence be more concerned about AIDS than those in countries with low prevalence? What factors might influence people's concern with HIV/AIDS? When I lived in Malawi in 2000-2001, during 23 informal interviews with rural women farmers, I asked them what their biggest problems were. Eleven responded money or joblessness, nine responded lack of food/hunger; one responded death (all but 3 women had lost at least one child, most had lost more than one); and two remarked on issues related to farming. I had been somewhat surprised, at the time, that no one responded AIDS, given the already significant education campaigns going on and the enormous numbers of deaths occurring in the country. But that was a small, unscientific, snowball study of women in two small villages. Maybe, I thought, it would be different if I had more data.

Using survey data collected by Afrobarometer, a non-profit organization that conducted four rounds of interviews in a total of twenty countries between 1999 and 2009, with over 21,000

[18] http://www.unaids.org/documents/20101123_2010_HIV_Prevalence_Map_em.pdf

respondents in each round, I tallied up what Africans thought their biggest problems were, using the question, "In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address?" Respondents could give up to three responses, first biggest problem, next biggest problem, etc. In every round, only a handful of categories received over 1,000 responses. The top responses in all rounds (not in order) were: education, health, unemployment, poverty, management of the national economy, food shortage, farming, infrastructure, and water supply. Table 3 shows the numbers of respondents, by country and by round, who thought that AIDS was their biggest problem. In the first round, only 611 people total, 3.84% of all respondents, said AIDS was the biggest problem, 333 as their first response, 278 as their second response.[19] In the second round, 2,442 people, or 10.05% of the total number of respondents, said AIDS was a big problem, 516 as their first response, 906 as their second, 1,020 as their third. In the third round, 1,821 people, or 7.17% of respondents thought that AIDS was among the biggest problems, 436 as their first response, 627 as their second, and 758 as their third. And in the fourth round, 1,162 respondents, 4.19%, thought AIDS was one of the biggest problems, with 238 noting it as their first response, 406 as their second, and 518 as their third. Batswana, Namibians, and South Africans were more likely than others to think AIDS was their biggest problem and at first glance this makes sense: Botswana has one of the highest prevalence rates in the world (24.8%), while South Africa has a prevalence rate of 17.8% but the highest number of people infected in the world. Namibia, at 13.1%, has a high prevalence rate as well. But though it would make sense that countries with the highest rates of HIV/AIDS and, ostensibly, the highest numbers of AIDS-related deaths, might remark on AIDS as a top priority,

[19] In the first Afrobarometer survey, respondents could give only two responses.

Table 3 **Afrobarometer data showing respondents who thought AIDS was their biggest problem**

	Round One				Round Two						Round Three						Round Four					
Total respondents	15924				24301						25397						27713					
	Response 1		Response 2		Response 1		Response 2		Response 3		Response 1		Response 2		Response 3		Response 1		Response 2		Response 3	
Country	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc
Benin											4	0.33	3	0.25	2	0.17	3	0.25	0	0	5	0.42
Botswana	139	11.58	102	8.5	112	9.33	129	10.75	109	9.08	143	11.9	111	9.25	71	5.92	43	3.58	42	3.5	44	3.67
Burkina Faso																	1	0.08	4	0.33	1	0.08
Cape Verde					4	0.32	15	1.18	11	0.87	3	0.24	17	1.35	10	0.8	1	0.08	6	0.47	5	0.4
Ghana					4	0.33	5	0.42	28	2.33	1	0.08	4	0.33	1	0.08	3	0.25	2	0.17	4	0.33
Kenya					31	1.29	86	3.59	107	4.46	6	0.47	20	1.56	32	2.5	1	0.09	11	1	11	1
Lesotho	0	0	1	0.08	6	0.5	18	1.5	33	2.75	13	1.12	22	1.89	23	1.98	8	0.67	14	1.17	26	2.17
Liberia																	0	0	2	0.17	1	0.08
Madagascar											0	0	2	0.15	2	0.15	1	0.07	0	0	4	0.3
Malawi	6	0.5	6	0.5	6	0.5	11	0.92	15	1.25	3	0.25	4	0.33	5	0.42	7	0.58	8	0.67	10	0.83
Mali	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.23	3	0.23	2	0.16	2	0.16	2	0.16	5	0.41	3	0.24	1	0.08
Mozambique					29	2.07	65	4.64	82	5.86	13	1.09	21	1.75	41	3.42	17	1.42	19	1.58	19	1.58
Namibia	65	5.49	62	5.24	78	6.51	133	11.09	125	10.4	58	4.83	92	7.67	128	10.67	23	1.92	42	3.5	50	4.17
Nigeria					17	0.7	31	1.28	42	1.73	4	0.17	13	0.55	25	1.06	12	0.52	14	0.6	20	0.86
Senegal					1	0.08	1	0.08	8	0.67	2	0.17	2	0.17	4	0.33	0	0	2	0.17	1	0.08
South Africa	87	3.95	86	3.91	126	5.25	242	10.08	276	11.5	130	5.42	203	8.46	241	10.04	89	3.71	179	7.46	225	9.38
Tanzania	2	0.09	6	0.27	35	2.86	65	5.31	66	5.4	11	0.84	17	1.3	15	1.15	11	0.91	16	1.32	14	1.16
Uganda	5	0.22	5	0.22	42	1.75	66	2.75	66	2.75	27	1.13	55	2.29	62	2.58	9	0.37	38	1.56	66	2.71
Zambia	0	0	0	0	8	0.67	12	1	18	1.5	8	0.67	19	1.58	40	3.33	2	0.17	3	0.25	9	0.75
Zimbabwe	29	2.42	10	0.83	17	1.54	24	2.17	31	2.81	8	0.76	20	1.91	54	5.15	2	0.17	1	0.08	2	0.17
Total	333		278		516		906		1020		436		627		758		238		406		518	
Total/round	611				2442						1821						1162					
Percent/round	2.09%		1.75%		2.12%		3.73%		4.20%		1.72%		2.47%		2.98%		0.86%		1.47%		1.87%	
Total Percent	3.84%				10.05%						7.17%						4.19%					
		Indicates question not asked in that country that round																				

Lesotho has nearly as high a prevalence rate as Botswana (23.6%), but few Basotho listed AIDS as their biggest problem. And Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, and Malawi all have prevalence rates greater than ten percent (14.3%, 13.5%, 11.5%, and 12% respectively) but relatively few people in those countries responded that AIDS was their biggest problem. As in my unscientific sample, then, Africans surveyed did not rank HIV/AIDS among their biggest problems. Looking at the issues to which they attributed primary status, poverty, food shortage, unemployment, it seems somewhat intuitive that if someone is threatened by famine or lack of employment and income, they will rank other issues higher than AIDS. Put another way, people preoccupied with survival are probably less likely to prioritize the threat of a seemingly-distant-death from AIDS, especially when there are other, more immediate health threats, such as malaria, with which to contend.

But even with the increasing financial commitments, increasing emphasis on HIV/AIDS education, and increasing effort to reduce stigma, Africans' emphasis on AIDS as their biggest problem actually declined. It is possible that a decline in focus was inevitable once ARVs were introduced and deaths slowed, but as I've already noted, the belief that AIDS was the most serious problem was never high to begin with. It seems relevant to ask what effect this seeming lack of focus on AIDS has on AIDS programs? I will thus turn specifically to Malawi, looking more closely at Malawians' responses to AIDS and how the Malawi government and non-governmental sector address HIV/AIDS in the country.

Malawians' most important problems

Ideally, given the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action, donors can and should tailor their development agendas to the stated goals of a well-informed national government and the Malawi government can and should tailor its development agenda to the

needs and concerns of its citizens. But looking at Malawians' understandings of the big issues can provide interesting insights about how closely donors', governments', and citizens' priorities match. Using Afrobarometer data, and particularly its query about what the biggest problems facing Malawi are, I will show that while government priorities seem roughly well-aligned with what Malawians think is important, donor priorities do not. Table 4 lists the top ten problems by frequency of response for each response in each survey year. Round 1 is somewhat anomalous because, while in every round, responses were open, in the first round, the responses were not coded together though they were often quite similar: in the latter rounds, responses were grouped under fewer headings so you see larger response rates. I include responses of AIDS and disease (though Round 2 did not have any responses of 'disease') in the table to juxtapose how few people noted them as the major issues.

Looking only at first responses, food shortage was the biggest problem in every round but the first, when it was second (though certainly "prices too high," the most frequently cited issue in the first round, would impact people's ability to provide food for their families if their harvests failed. The third most cited problem was "starvation," which is clearly linked to "food shortage.") Even after a government agricultural subsidy program was underway (Rounds 3 and 4), people were still most concerned about a shortage of food. By the fourth round, Malawi had achieved national food security but people still listed food shortage as the biggest problem. It is possible that though Malawi achieved *national* food security, it did not achieve *household* food security, a critical difference, but it is also possible that once people have lived through a famine (there was a widespread and serious famine in Malawi in 2001-2003 and again in 2005) the fear of food shortage, even if not immediate, never goes away.

Issues of farming and agriculture, poverty, economic concerns, and irrigation consistently

rank high. In the second, third, and fourth rounds, "health" also ranks. Though a response of health might be a proxy for AIDS (as, to reiterate, HIV/AIDS manifests in various ways, all leading to sickness and ill-health), the data make this common-sense understanding difficult to ascertain. It is tricky to know whether people provided a general response of health or whether several responses were amalgamated into health. For instance, in the first round, 107 people answered that health-*related* issues were most important, but health itself was not a common response. These health-related responses included "health," 1 person; "health (medical supplies)," 35 people; "health services (poor quality)," 20 people; "health services (shortage)," 48 people; and "health services (rural areas)," 3 people. While it is intuitively appealing to look at "health" responses in the latter rounds and presume that they may be "safe" ways of talking about HIV/AIDS, noting a shortage of health services or supplies is a very different issue. For instance, I once brought a person to the Lilongwe Central Hospital (which is the main hospital for the entire central region of the country) because he had a fairly serious laceration on his hand, possibly requiring stitches and certainly requiring cleaning and bandaging. I dropped him off at the emergency department and when I returned a couple hours later, his hand was cleaner but un-bandaged. When I asked him why, he told me they didn't have any bandages right then. (I drove him to my house and gave him a supply of gauze, band-aids, and medical tape to take home).[20] Clearly then, we cannot assume that a response of health is necessarily a backdoor way of noting the problem of AIDS—it may be a proxy but it very well may not. Disease would likely be a better proxy but as Table 4 shows, few people noted disease.

[20] Though this happened in 2000, one of my respondents told me a similar story about in 2010. His cousin had broken his arm and needed a cast but there was no plaster at LCH.

Table 4 Afrobarometer data on Malawians' biggest problems

Round 1, 1999-2001								
Response 1	**Freq.**	**Perc.**	**Response 2**	**Freq.**	**Perc.**	**Response 3**	**Freq.**	**Perc.**
Prices too high	191	15.81	Missing (no further reply)	149	12.33	Missing (no further reply)	510	42.22
Food shortage	94	7.78	Prices too high	130	10.76	Poor quality services	97	8.03
Starvation	73	6.04	Security	72	5.96	Prices too high	74	6.13
Security	71	5.88	Food shortage	58	4.8	Security	29	2.4
Poverty	54	4.47	Shortage of health services	57	4.72	Poor quality roads	28	2.32
Lack of farming improvement	53	4.39	Poverty	48	3.97	School shortage (Education)	28	2.32
Shortage of health services	48	3.97	Poor quality roads	47	3.89	Shortage of health services	28	2.32
Poor quality roads	46	3.81	Lack of farming improvement	45	3.73	Food shortage	25	2.07
Crime	41	3.39	Medical supplies (health)	34	2.81	Wages (not enough)	25	2.07
Unemployment	36	2.98	Poor quality water	32	2.65	Poverty	22	1.82
AIDS	6	0.5		6	0.5		9	0.75
Disease	3	0.25		3	0.25		4	0.33
Round 2, 2002-2004								
Food shortage	341	28.42	Food shortage	197	16.42	No further reply	157	13.08
Poverty	146	12.17	Poverty	152	12.67	Health	123	10.25
Farming/agriculture	138	11.5	Farming/agriculture	139	11.58	Poverty	119	9.92
Unemployment	124	10.33	Health	92	7.67	Farming/agriculture	105	8.75
Management of Economy	110	9.17	Management of Economy	91	7.58	Food shortage	105	8.75
Health	50	4.17	Unemployment	75	6.25	Water supply	88	7.33
Crime and Security	48	4	Water supply	70	5.83	Education	80	6.67
Education	45	3.75	Education	63	5.25	Management of Economy	66	5.5
Water supply	37	3.08	No further reply	53	4.42	Crime and Security	58	4.83
Infrastructure/Roads	29	2.42	Loans/Credit	49	4.08	Unemployment	45	3.75
AIDS	6	0.5		11	0.92		15	1.25
Round 3, 2005-2006								
Food shortage	587	48.92	Farming/agriculture	179	14.92	No further reply	232	19.33
Farming/agriculture	149	12.42	Water supply	174	14.5	Water supply	124	10.33
Water supply	73	6.08	Food shortage	173	14.42	Education	92	7.67
Education	46	3.83	Poverty	96	8	Health	92	7.67
Poverty	46	3.83	Loans/credit	88	7.33	Farming/agriculture	81	6.75
Loans/credit	39	3.25	No further reply	75	6.25	Food shortage	76	6.33
Management of economy	38	3.17	Health	63	5.25	Loans/credit	76	6.33
Health	37	3.08	Education	58	4.83	Infrastructure/Roads	62	5.17
Unemployment	31	2.58	Infrastructure/Roads	50	4.17	Infrastructure/Roads	62	5.17
Infrastructure/Roads	29	2.42	Rates/taxes	37	3.08	Crime and security	43	3.58
AIDS	3	0.25		4	0.33		5	0.42
Disease	1	0.08		14	1.17		16	1.33
Round 4, 2008-2009								
Food shortage	452	37.67	Food shortage	179	14.92	Health	144	12
Farming/agriculture	147	12.25	Water supply	161	13.42	No further reply	130	10.83
Water supply	127	10.58	Poverty	127	10.58	Water supply	109	9.08
Poverty	90	7.5	Farming/agriculture	91	7.58	Food shortage	92	7.67
Management of economy	60	5	Health	80	6.67	Poverty	89	7.42
Infrastructure/roads	58	4.83	Infrastructure/roads	80	6.67	Farming/agriculture	87	7.25
Wages, income, salary	34	2.83	Management of economy	63	5.25	Infrastructure/roads	83	6.92
Corruption	30	2.5	Wages, income, salary	59	4.92	Education	62	5.17
Health	30	2.5	No further reply	50	4.17	Management of economy	53	4.42
Unemployment	28	2.33	Unemployment	47	3.92	Crime and security	50	4.17
AIDS	7	0.58		8	0.67		10	0.83
Disease	2	0.17		14	1.17		11	0.92

AIDS' absence as peoples' major problem is obvious. Only once, the third response category for Round 2, do more than one percent (1.25%, or 15 people) of respondents say AIDS is the biggest problem. While perhaps it makes intuitive sense that people who are worried about basic survival needs would not prioritize AIDS, it does seems peculiar that so few people mention it in any round. By the mid-2000s, awareness of HIV/AIDS in Malawi was considered fairly universal so it is unlikely that we could make a case for ignorance of the scope of the disease: in fact, in every round of data collection, a majority of respondents knew at least one close friend or relative who had died of AIDS (see Table 5). We cannot make the argument that Malawians do not rank AIDS as one of their biggest problems because they do not know about it or have not been personally affected by it. Nor does it seem, as some have argued, that Malawians are in denial about AIDS. (De Waal 2006; Peters et. al. 2008) Rather, despite acknowledging the presence of AIDS and, for a majority of people, knowing at least one person who has died of AIDS, Malawians still rank other issues as higher priorities for the government to attend to, though they are not against putting resources in place to fight the illness.

Table 5 Do you have a close friend or relative who died of AIDS?

Round 1		**Round 2**		**Round 3**		**Round 4**	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
65.31%	33.11%	62.09%	24.08%	55.58%	42.33%	56.67%	40.58%

Rounds 2 and 3 of Afrobarometer asked whether respondents thought the government should put more money into fighting AIDS, even if it meant other critical needs would get short shrift. In Round 2 data, 447 respondents, or 37.25%, agreed very strongly with this statement. A further 9.75% of respondents, or 117 people, agreed. In contrast 172 people agreed and 345 people (28.75%) very strongly agreed that the government should keep its focus on other

important problems. So 47% of respondents think that the government ought to increase spending on AIDS even if other programs are compromised and approximately 43% think that the government ought to pursue other programs, even if people are dying of AIDS. In Round 3, those agreeing with A declined slightly while those agreeing with B increased. Just over 40% of people thought the government should devote more money to AIDS than other problems while 56.58% believed that the government should focus on the other issues.

Table 6

A: The government should devote many more resources to combating AIDS, even if this means that less money is spent on things like education.
B: There are many other problems facing this country beside AIDS; even if people are dying in large numbers, the government needs to keep its focus on solving other problems.

	Round 2			Round 3		
	Freq.	**Perc.**	**Cumul.**	**Freq.**	**Perc.**	**Cumul.**
Missing data	2	0.17	0.17	0	0	0
Agree strongly with A	447	37.25	37.42	423	35.25	35.25
Agree with A	117	9.75	47.17	61	5.08	40.33
Agree with B	172	14.33	61.5	78	6.5	46.83
Agree strongly with B	345	28.75	90.25	601	50.08	96.92
Agree with neither	91	7.58	97.83	16	1.33	98.25
Don't know	26	2.17	100	21	1.75	100
Total	1,200	100		1200	100*	

* Actual total is 99.99%

At first glance, this particular question seems to contradict the top priorities people mentioned in Table 4 but considering how this question was phrased and the fact that this was a stand-alone question, I do not think it is a significant inconsistency. Again, Malawians do not deny the severity of the AIDS epidemic in their country, they just rank other problems as more pressing. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the alternative given in part A, taking money away from education, also may not resonate with Malawians' biggest worries. Education was among the top ten responses in each round but it was not one of the most cited problems. And as one of

my respondents said, “If you go to the rural areas, you can actually walk kilometers and you won’t find school blocks[21] and if you ask people there what are your problems, they will not even mention school blocks. It won’t even come somewhere close to them. They have other problems.” It would be interesting to see if as many people would have agreed with A if the alternative given was food security, people’s primary worry.

Conclusions

Whatever their reasons, Malawians do not rank AIDS among the biggest problems which need to be addressed. They recognize it as a serious problem and want solutions, but overall see other needs as more pressing. Yet as I’ve shown, funding for AIDS by most major donors grew throughout the last decade (until 2009) indicating that outsiders saw AIDS as Malawi’s (and other African nations’) biggest problem. Shiffman (2008) argues that the focus on AIDS has prevented attention to other important health issues including issues Malawians feel are most important. I now turn to a consideration of the ways Malawians “talk about” AIDS—how they view its role in the country’s development and consider what development discourse about AIDS can tell us about national and international priorities, the politics of development, and the effects of global inequality.

[21] School buildings, referring to the availability of education.

Chapter Four

AIDS and development

Introduction

Building on data presented in Chapter Three which contrasted Malawians' concerns with donors' prioritization of HIV/AIDS, this chapter investigates how this disjoint influences development program activities in the country. How does the global development apparatus, so heavily focused on AIDS, influence social change in Malawi? African problems are almost always framed in western terms: what can we learn from these priorities? Because international funding for HIV/AIDS is channeled through "civil society," I asked members of Malawi's civil society their thoughts on HIV/AIDS, funding, and donor priorities with the hope of clarifying the often complex relationships between money, donor agendas, civil society, and problems of poverty.

My respondents' discussions revealed several important points: first, the power of money to dictate in-country programming drives organizational foci and creates feelings of helplessness among elites working in the development sector; second, despite the influx of money to fight AIDS, there are concerns that programs do not adequately address underlying causes of the illness and, thus, create little positive change; and third, HIV/AIDS is the overwhelming cause du jour but looking more closely, it is merely one of a series of donor priorities. (Downs 1972) These points emphasize global power and structural inequality as well as the depoliticization that occurs in foreign-planned development schemes. I will show that donors' focus on HIV/AIDS, while well-intentioned, is indicative of the gross inequalities that exist between the west and Africa. In addition, I will argue that though programs themselves are depoliticized, the interpretations of Malawians who administer the programs are highly political and thus create a

further mismatch, as they are alienated not only from decision making processes about programs but also from belief in the efficacy of programs and the possibility of change. But before addressing these substantive concerns of Malawians knee-deep in the AIDS industry, I begin with a brief background of fighting AIDS in Malawi.

The first case of AIDS was diagnosed in 1985. The Malawi government then instituted technical committees to come up with short-term and medium-term plans to advise government on how to cope with the disease. The government also began screening blood in two major hospitals, one in the capital, Lilongwe, one in the largest city, Blantyre. (NAC, Background) Between 1985 and 1992, HIV/AIDS was handled as a matter of public health and overseen by the Ministry of Health. In 1992, with input from foreign consultants, the government recognized the need for a more multi-sectoral approach to handling the problem of HIV/AIDS in the country and experts were assigned to multiple ministries to make sure the government's response to HIV/AIDS went beyond biomedicine. Still, by 2001, little progress was made in AIDS awareness campaigns and HIV rates had climbed steadily to an abysmal 14-15% nationwide, with higher concentrations in the southern region and urban areas. It was recognized that little had been done to combat AIDS as more than a public health issue. Therefore in 2001, under the gaze of donors, the Malawi government created the National AIDS Commission (NAC), to coordinate and oversee a multi-sectoral national response to the pandemic.

NAC, created as a public trust, initially reported to the Ministry of Health. But in 2002, to demonstrate political commitment to the issue, President Muluzi ordered that NAC report directly to the president via the Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC). Since then, NAC has funneled millions of dollars from donors to government programs and NGOs as well as community based organizations (CBOs) and has earned a reputation for being transparent with

funds, no small feat given Malawi's history of corruption. Even the Global Fund, an international financing institution designed to generate money for fighting AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, which has strict accountability standards, provides large sums of money to NAC. As of 2010, Malawi's HIV/AIDS prevalence was an estimated 12%, which many observers herald as evidence that the emphasis on AIDS and the strategies used have been effective.

AIDS is money

There was no dispute among my respondents that there has been a lot of money earmarked for fighting HIV/AIDS in Malawi. Odalla, who worked at a broadly focused international NGO, told me, "I think HIV/AIDS has more resources than any other issues… One thing that can tell you that is if you look at the number of CBOs that are addressing that, they are so many, and that tells you there are enough resources." Respondents often pointed to NAC as evidence of the global interest in HIV/AIDS in Malawi. Geoffrey, executive director of a local NGO, said, "If you go out now-if you just go out here," and pointed out the window, "you'll see a vehicle labeled NAC, HIV- or-whatever, support. I mean, you just stand by the roadside, anywhere in Malawi, it can't go a whole day without seeing a vehicle that is to do with that." And Fredrick agreed, saying, "I would say that a lot of funds are being committed to HIV/AIDS. Because like currently we also have the Global Fund which is managed by the National AIDS Commission-there are a lot of resources going into that."

People's concern was not that NAC had many resources but rather that those resources either didn't make it to beneficiaries because of misdirected programming or that the quest to achieve NAC funding was too intensive. For example, in discussing the money available, Chaweza, a program director of a local NGO, told me:

> To me we have a lot of funds around HIV and AIDS but maybe the problem would be to do with how priorities are set. For example, here in the Malawi we have the National

> AIDS Commission which receives huge sums of monies for HIV interventions. But whether the support reaches the intended beneficiaries is something else. So in terms of support, I'd be quick to say yes, but whether priorities are set right is something else.

Sometimes, people were able to voice specific quarrels with the types of programming they perceived NAC funding, such as a focus on education when they felt behavior change was a more pertinent problem (I will address this further, later in the chapter) or, as Yamikani, executive director of a small local NGO noted, an overemphasis on soft issues. "Look at NAC, they want to do conferences, conferences, conferences. Yet we say we need to do infrastructure development. But they would want to see research dissemination… But what impact does it have?"

Still a more frequent lament was that applying for NAC funding was so taxing it was nearly prohibitive. Eldson, a program officer at an international NGO, explained, "There's a lot of money just sitting in NAC, right? To transfer those funds to finance programs on the ground— you write a proposal—we have been struggling with a proposal here for two years!" Numerous respondents discussed their frustrations with NAC's bureaucracy, which meant fewer accessible funds for immediate problems. Moses, a minister with a religious NGO said, "I look at the process as being a bit long and a bit cumbersome. [NAC] is something that can take even two years from the time you submit your draft." Still, some monies are disseminated and the mass funds available may enable some organizations to function. As Isaac, part of a regional NGO, said, "almost each and every community based organization that I know is tied to HIV and AIDS."

Given that respondents were in agreement that there were massive amounts of funding for HIV/AIDS work, I asked whether there was too much funding. Respondents who thought there was not and could not be too much funding recognized the scope of the pandemic and toll it

has taken. Abiti, program coordinator at an international NGO, said, “The HIV problem is big. Everyday we’re getting new and new infections and, uh, there’s need to be a reaction to that and you know HIV costs a lot of money.” Respondents who did not disagree with the quantity of funds or focus usually felt that some of the strategies and programming were misguided, however. Geoffrey said, “I myself, I would not stand on the platform to say, ‘reduce the amount of money on HIV/AIDS and take that money back.’ No, what I’d say is, ‘maintain this, and even increase, but at least provide funds for these underlying causes of this problem. And also look at the other problems as well.’” And Isaac told me:

> I don’t think it would be fair to say it’s too much emphasis. It’s due, considering the extent of the problem… I don’t think much has been done on finding solutions. How do we take care of this? You know our emphasis is like how many Malawians are infected? How many orphans do we have, you know? But I don’t think enough is being done to contain the problem… We’re not coming up with mechanisms or ways to protect those who are not yet infected with the scourge.

Notwithstanding claims of nearly universal awareness of HIV/AIDS in Malawi, and educational campaigns, respondents felt that, culturally, HIV was something you still could not discuss openly. Chipo explained, “We are in an era when you know, this person this is what they’re suffering from, but you don’t talk about that—that’s disrespectful. But by not talking about it, you are denying the young ones the opportunity of avoiding it. It’s almost like a time bomb.” Given the enormous challenges, high incidence rates, and slow movement of progress, it is little wonder that many folks felt the focus and monies dedicated to AIDS were justified, even if they felt there were better uses for the money.

Despite the significance of the problem, though, many people took issue with the seeming obsession with AIDS. Fredrick said, “I may say that quite a lot of donors are too much for HIV/AIDS in Malawi at the moment.” Those who felt that too much money was spent on AIDS cited a belief that overemphasis on AIDS takes attention away from other critical issues

and may actually contribute to stigma related to the illness. Eunice, executive director of a regional NGO, said:

> I believe it's too much. For me, it's contributes to stigmatization. Because you want to lift it up as if it's more important than looking at [other] issues. But if you address the environmental issues, you are able to address the HIV/AIDS issues. If you address the poverty issues, you'll be able to deal with HIV/AIDS because those are some of the contributing factors to AIDS. But if we lift it out of context, we could come in with misplaced interventions… I really believe it's taken out of context and therefore even our interventions now are specialized for HIV/AIDS where there's, to me, a whole array of reasons why we have it and therefore our interventions should be looked at in that context. If we don't pay attention to the deeper issues, we will not be doing justice to the problem.

The idea that the focus on AIDS was decontextualized was frequent among respondents, who saw a clear link between other forms of inequality and AIDS. Many respondents were frustrated that there seemed to be a lack of emphasis on poverty reduction and amelioration because they believed strongly that AIDS was a function of poverty. Wongani, a program specialist at a large international NGO, said:

> I believe that because of HIV/AIDS and the global attention it is getting, we are forgetting about these other problems we have. A lot of money is going into HIV/AIDS: we are forgetting about education sector, we are forgetting agric. sector, we are forgetting about everything else. Maybe we are so-- I don't know if I should use the word 'hyped up' about AIDS, that funding is over representing HIV/AIDS… But I feel that if we are to win the battle against HIV/AIDS, we have to look into the other areas as well. Because so long as we have poverty around, it will remain difficult for us to keep the HIV infection rates down.

A myopic focus on AIDS, then, was presumed to pull attention from the underlying issues of HIV/AIDS, namely poverty and inequality. By lifting AIDS "out of context," respondents felt that the disease was given unnecessary priority to the detriment of other serious social problems. As Nyasinga, a program official at a local NGO, said, "The farmers are not just affected by HIV and AIDS, there are so many other things." Fredrick thought that donor focus on HIV/AIDS, and

the money involved, particularly channeled through NGOs and civil society, might actually help contribute to the AIDS problem. He said:

> Sometimes what is observed is that maybe the donors see the government as being big and inefficient in implementing such programs so they give funds to NGOs working in the health sector. And I just want to emphasize that the funds sometimes themselves are the ones who cause problems. What happens is like there's employees leaving the government to work for NGOs and yet the government and government hospitals are big providers of health services. So eventually you find out that a lot of people are running out of government and joining NGOs and yet NGOs are not everywhere. So there's a lot that is lost through that. The government is incapacitated to provide good services to the people because people have run away and yet NGOs coverage is not wide enough… It becomes so complicated, that situation.

Fredrick thus argues that by funding NGOs in the fight against AIDS, donors further undermine the Malawi government, which should be the leader and primary coordinator in reducing the country's disease burden. Whether respondents thought too much, too little, or just the right amount of funds were devoted to AIDS, all respondents recognized that the money and international attention given to AIDS had significant impacts on their organizations and civil society as a whole.

"You have to talk about AIDS."

In 2008, out of 31 people I spoke with at 31 institutions, all incorporated AIDS into their programming, though I did not talk to a single organization that had AIDS work as its primary mission. In other words, no matter their mission, a focus on AIDS programming was ubiquitous in the organizations I visited. Every person felt there was some sort of pressure to pursue AIDS programming, whether out of a sense of obligation, recognizing AIDS as a major problem; as a result of community members asking questions about HIV and AIDS; or because the money for AIDS programming was too appealing to pass up. Whatever their reasons, respondents believed that they had to incorporate AIDS into every proposal they did, or risk losing out on funding. Most respondents noted that donors wanted them to focus on AIDS and felt that if they did not,

their organizations might not survive. So even when they were not legitimately interested in AIDS work, they sought ways to connect their missions to AIDS and set about the business of "mainstreaming" HIV/AIDS, incorporating it into every activity they did.

A matter of survival

Even if HIV/AIDS was not in organizational missions or in strategic plans, the NGOs and CBOs I spoke with incorporated it and felt that they had little option. Chaweza said:

> Right now you may be seeing a lot of NGOs in HIV/AIDS. It's because donors are saying we have funds for HIV/AIDS. So all those organizations will become experts in HIV/AIDS. Because it's now the survival-- it's all about survival now. If we don't, you know, design an intervention on HIV/AIDS, my organization would not survive, would not have funding. So, even if we do not have experts in that area, let us come up with something, get funds, and we'll keep going.

Of course one may question, keep going for what? Much as people believed in their organizations' missions and the work they were doing, for most of my respondents, work was necessary. The survival of the organization and the continuation of work opportunity seemed to take preference over stubbornly maintaining the original focus area or goals. Indeed, Chikondi, an officer at an international religious NGO, felt that mission statements and strategic plans were often mere formalities because "if in those areas, there aren't lots of resources, there will be some sort of deviation, craftily designed in order to access funding." He went on to say that, "International institutions indeed and funding institutions indeed are defining, directly or indirectly, the agenda for the civil society for everything."

Nyasinga explained that the problem is particularly pronounced when they try to access new funding. She said that when they look for new donors, "you find, you know, the focus is just on HIV and AIDS and that becomes a challenge. Because we are already doing HIV and AIDS so there's no reason if we're getting another donor, we want to do other things... But the donors say no, we can give you funding but only for HIV and AIDS." She continued to say that

organizations acquiesce and do programs they do not prioritize or even necessarily believe in, and ones that do not have community support, simply because funds are there, which limits outcomes. “Because it’s not a need or a priority, it’s not going to be successful.” Without community buy-in or even organizational commitment, many respondents felt that HIV/AIDS programs (and other donor interests) led to wasted efforts. Nonetheless, the sheer need for funds leads to various machinations to ensure organizational survival.

Connecting disconnected issues and “Mainstreaming”/”Cross-Cutting”

In order to access funds, organizations had to put forth plans to tackle HIV/AIDS, despite lacking Chaweza’s aforementioned experts in the area or even an organizational mission that might lend itself to AIDS work. As Chris, who worked at a Malawian NGO, told me, “When you have a very strong donor interest, you are going to run up and down trying to align yourself.” Respondents explained that they were able to incorporate AIDS into every funding proposal by devising ways to connect disconnected ideas. Sometimes these mental gymnastics made sense, sometimes they did not. But regardless, respondents said linking whatever programming they wanted to do with AIDS was critical. For example, Albert, director of a local NGO, said,

> Even if we do an activity which is not directly for HIV/AIDS but within each activity HIV/AIDS is an issue to address... We said, how can HIV/AIDS messages be sent to the pupils? If we don’t have buildings in rainy seasons pupils will be dropping out of school and therefore the messages of HIV/AIDS will not be passed to them.

In this case, the organization connected the construction of school buildings with AIDS by suggesting that if there are no buildings and students convene for classes outside under a tree (a common occurrence—I saw it daily in the villages where I worked), they will be unlikely or unable to come to school during the rains (4-5 months of the year). If students drop out of school or simply do not come, they cannot receive the messages about HIV/AIDS that have become

ubiquitous in Malawi curricula. Thus they connected two distinct issues in order to make their proposal for school buildings more attractive to funders overwhelmingly concerned with AIDS.

The connected ideas of "mainstreaming" AIDS or treating AIDS as a "cross-cutting" issue also enable organizations to use HIV/AIDS in their funding proposals, even if AIDS is not something their organizations are well-placed to address. Mainstreaming AIDS or treating it as a cross-cutting issue requires organizations to recognize how AIDS impacts every facet of life in Malawi so that one cannot put in a proposal for irrigation or women's empowerment without also demonstrating how this can help reduce the burdens of AIDS. Fredrick, like many other respondents, told me, "We mainstream HIV/AIDS… We aim at building girls' self-esteem, self-awareness, communication skills. But the expected outcome is that girls should be assertive and say no to aggressive behavior. No to peer pressure on sex. Yeah so eventually we find ourselves going to HIV and AIDS." Though it seems a logical outcome, that emphasizing girls' empowerment (in a country where HIV/AIDS rates for women are significantly higher than those for men), one wonders why empowerment and assertiveness training are not valid on their own, without having to link them to AIDS. Inevitably, though, respondents felt trapped into AIDS work. No amount of assertiveness training would enable them to say no to the necessity of incorporating AIDS programming because of the need for the money attached to HIV/AIDS. As Grey, who worked at a local NGO, said:

> We've taken HIV/AIDS as cross-cutting so whenever we do our advocacy work, we slot in something about HIV and AIDS. Every time. In every proposal that we write we slot in a bit of it because I think the donors have agreed that it must be cross-cutting so we just mention slightly that some of the money will go to HIV and AIDS.

One wonders the consequences, both intended and unintended, of always bringing in "a bit of it" just because donors want it. What effect does that bit have?

Progress in fighting AIDS

Malawi's declining AIDS rate, though small, is evidence that there has been real progress in battling the pandemic in the country. A twelve percent rate is significantly better than a fourteen percent rate. Some respondents felt that there had been significant progress achieved in combating HIV/AIDS, which made the money given worthwhile. They saw improvement in three areas, primarily: awareness, reduction of stigma, and reduction in deaths. Most respondents thought that AIDS awareness was near 100%, some noting that even small children knew about it. And a few of my respondents felt that this awareness, particularly among younger people, was leading to behavior changes, particularly in condom usage. Many respondents asserted that traditionally, Malawian men did not like to wear condoms (I could not ascertain whether they thought this was uniquely Malawian) but Yamikani, who works with adolescents and high school aged children, said, "The demand in terms of condom use at my organization-- so high among young people! At times they shout at us when they hear that we have stock-outs. And they shout at us to say, 'You want us to get HIV! Because if you don't give us condoms it's like telling us to have sex unprotected.'"

In addition to the possibility of some behavior change (though even more respondents claimed they did not believe behavior change was really occurring), the frequency and sheer volume of deaths as a result of AIDS seems to have slowed, even between 2008 and 2010, largely as a result of the introduction of large-scale ART programs. Chifundo, a program official at a large international NGO, noted, "With the ART programs in place, you can actually see a difference in the communities that the rate of the HIV deaths have reduced. And even the needs for the home based care have reduced which is freeing up some people to be more productive." A reduction of AIDS related deaths and the concomitant need for palliative care, in addition to

the UNAIDS suggestion that overall HIV rates have declined is certainly reason to celebrate, though not all respondents felt the gains were enough and were sometimes suspicious of the numbers. Still, it seems that AIDS has truly become part of the national conversation with more services provided for testing and treatment. One of my respondents, who has been openly HIV positive since the late 1980s, said, "To reach where we have reached, I tell you. I will tell you, in 1993, 1994, 1996, people would hardly want to be associated with reading materials on HIV. To find something on HIV, you would want to find a safe space to read it from… There was total silence. Total silence on HIV and AIDS." He told me that when he had arrived in one city for a presentation on HIV and AIDS in the early 1990s, he had to be on guard because there were rumors that people were planning to stone him to death. But while some progress has indeed been made, most respondents thought that relatively little real improvement had been made, for a variety of structural and cultural reasons.

So much money, so little progress

Charles, program officer at a regional NGO, said, "There is not any area where there is a lot of money than in this particular focus area. But when you go down on the ground, you just see that there are so many gaps. And yet the money is just too much money. So you wonder, eh, what is happening?" While some respondents saw behavior changes occurring, most told me they felt behaviors had not changed and that little was being done to prevent new infections. Furthermore, even given the focus on ARV provision, very few poor Malawians were actually able to access the drugs. When I asked why they thought progress was so slow, respondents noted that difficulties fighting AIDS were the result of several distinct issues: types of programs put forth, particularly programs that don't meet needs on the ground; a results-oriented donor culture; issues of capacity; and a dependence on "hand-outs."

Programs versus reality

The type of programs implemented and how programs were implemented were causes of concern. The myopic donor focus on AIDS which led organizations to pursue AIDS strategies to the detriment of other focus areas also meant that many respondents saw AIDS programs as somewhat useless. Nyasinga said:

> They want you to talk about gender and HIV/AIDS but I think it's not— being somebody who's been involved in HIV/AIDS and gender programming, I think it's more of, 'Oh, make sure you add HIV/AIDS and gender as well,' but it's not really integrated so there isn't that commitment to ensuring that those programs, um, you have good projects to press those issues. I think it's more that each project must have an aspect of HIV and AIDS. I'd say it's more of just window dressing, not that it's properly incorporated.

Nyasinga was one of many people who felt that donors' insistence on mainstreaming and cross-cutting AIDS undermined thoughtful, problem-driven programming in organizations' quests to secure funding. Tacking AIDS onto an otherwise disconnected program was believed to have little tangible effect.

Others felt that progress had been made in awareness, but that AIDS was still rampant in Malawi because more difficult programming was not on the agenda. For instance, Martin, officer of a local NGO, told me, "HIV/AIDS is now, in terms of awareness, is 100% at the moment. Each and every Malawian knows about HIV and AIDS. But... how do they develop programs that will actually change the behavior of somebody so that person is actually safe from contracting the virus?" Behavior change— getting people to go for voluntary testing and counseling (VCT), wearing condoms, being monogamous—were oft cited as ongoing problems that no one seemed to be addressing. Respondents felt donors were focused on awareness or treatment, not prevention, and that AIDS messages were growing stale, not reaching people. Takondwa, a programs officer at a religious NGO, had a unique interpretation of AIDS messages in Malawi:

> The type of noise that we are making, it is similar messages-- HIV, HIV, HIV. You get used. It's like if you are staying closer to the airport, there are times you don't even realize a plane has taken off because you are used to the noise. But a visitor to your home, they will say I didn't really sleep because there's all this noise. So it's also the way we've been making the noise about HIV. We haven't changed the tune-- it just gets used to your ears.

In addition to the possibility that programming might be mistargeted, Takondwa brings up the interesting and important point that the overload of AIDS education and information may actually be having the unintended effect of making people tune out the messages.

Finally, respondents turned again and again to the problem of poverty to explain why AIDS progress was slow. Though programs have been initiated to provide free ARVs, there are enormous structural difficulties getting people to and from the clinics and ensuring that clinics are staffed. Most people in rural areas have to walk long distances just to get to a road and then have to take some sort of transport, a taxi, minibus or bicycle taxi, to reach a town that would have a distribution clinic. Charles said, "People say that in Malawi, there are people who are living below a dollar a day. It's a fact, many. If they have to get a bike which goes like a taxi or a minibus, they have to pay something like four dollars. Are they going to do this on a monthly basis? They won't do this." Forget having adequate nutrition and oversight of the ARVs, just getting to a clinic is a challenge.

Respondents felt that without addressing poverty, AIDS programs were doomed. And of course, poverty often leads to dangerous behaviors. Grey described what so many other respondents felt as well:

> Many girls— out of school girls— have gone into prostitution because of poverty… People send their children to go and sell mandasi [small, doughnut-like snacks] in the night, maybe for 4 Kwacha, knowing very well that that is not the only thing that is going to happen. That the men will be after them. At one time we counted these donuts and they came up to 400 Kwacha. We gave the girl 500 Kwacha and told her to go back to her home. But she was still hanging around the place because that was not all that she wanted. She also wanted the men. Poverty is very high and it leads to all kinds of things.

This quote demonstrates how poor "poor" is, when you consider that, at the time, $1 USD equaled approximately 150 Malawi Kwacha, and the extent to which respondents emphasized behavior change. Respondents were focused less on behavior change on the part of "the men" and more on poor girls, or poor people generally, making bad choices and taking chances. Respondents feared that true behavior change was negligible but they also believed that many Malawians purposely conceal their poor behaviors. "Like the issue of cultural practices in terms of harmful cultural practices[22] in the case of HIV and AIDS," said Ntolo, who has worked in the development sector for over twenty years. "When you do a study you see they are less but are you not just counting things on the surface? Are these things not taking place just in a clandestine way? Where families and, you know communities are saying, 'We'll let people not know this.'" On one hand, respondents saw girls and poor people as victims but simultaneously blamed them for making bad choices. Nowhere was this irony clearer than in respondents' discussions of "handouts."

Handouts

One of the biggest frustrations respondents talked about and connected to a lack of progress in development generally and HIV/AIDS specifically, was people's desire to receive what they termed handouts. Handouts were some kind of allowances given by donors and could take many forms: cash for attending workshops or trainings, per-diems—money provided so attendees could purchase lunch or dinner— or simply payments for labor. Because so many programs rely on voluntarism as part of a doctrine of sustainability (Swidler and Watkins 2009), imagining that if people do the work of development themselves, it will have a more lasting impact, locals are obligated to do various kinds of work such as digging wells, molding bricks

[22] This refers to things like forcing a widow to marry her dead husband's brother or encouraging sex after male initiation rituals.

for new buildings, forming a road crew to create and maintain road systems, or acting as home based caregivers for the chronically ill. Not surprisingly, people often ask for remuneration for this labor or for attending workshops and trainings. My respondents found such behavior troubling and indicative of a lack of desire to move forward and progress. Geoffrey said, "One big challenge is to convince people out there to move away from free handouts. And really to go for, to develop themselves." I wondered how people who need development assistance were supposed to develop themselves.

In general, there was a sense that donor beneficiaries wanted to receive something for nothing, that they were content to just sit around, palms up, collecting money instead of being active participants in their own betterment. Abiti said:

> You want them to contribute something. If you're building a road for them, if you're rehabilitating a road for them. If you're opening an irrigation scheme for them, which they asked for. They have to contribute labor. They have to contribute like maybe stones. Because you're coming in with large monetary support to buy all the equipment but some people just don't want to do that. They want you to do everything.

It seems the neo-liberalism that has pervaded development assistance and global politics in the last decades has not failed to influence Malawian development workers, many, if not most, of whom are recently removed from village-level poverty themselves. Geoffrey went further, demonstrating his disdain for a "culture of handouts," saying:

> I went to a meeting in Blantyre. We had a field day. There was the politicians, the local leaders, our own staff, and so many farmers there. I said, 'Okay Mr. Chief, I am giving you an assignment. Identify ten people that have become rich, they have got out of poverty, as a result of free handouts. So I will be coming in a month's time. You show me those people.' They told me right there, they said, 'No, we can't give you names. It's impossible. You can't get out of poverty if you get free handouts.' So everybody knows it's a problem.

I found myself marveling, as he was talking, at how high was his burden of proof that the only

way to show handouts were not completely wasteful was to show ten people who were rich (or at least not impoverished) as a result.

When I asked people why handouts were so common or had become such an issue, they suggested it's because donors used to just give people things like food or other items. But several suggested the answer lies in Malawi's history of dictatorship. Chaweza said that it was relying on Banda for thirty years that taught people the government was obligated to provide for them. "And it's that mentality, it's that thinking that people have grown up with. To such an extent that there's little that people can do by themselves to support their own, you know means to a living." There was a distinct sense that poor people just wanted to receive money and services and my respondents talked about how difficult this made any progress with HIV/AIDS or other development work. Many donors will not fund "handouts" or pay for people to attend trainings so therefore, many great trainings, educational strategies, or community programs, could not take place.

Results and Numbers

Partly to combat instances of corruption and partly as a result of a shift incorporating business practices into development, donors have become more and more interested in monitoring and accounting for outcomes. Respondents noted that donors were emphatic about results. They felt, though, that such outcome-driven programming was often not what was needed on the ground or what worked best in the local environment. They were frustrated by the time-bound nature of most programming (usually 1-2 years for grants; 5-year programs were exceptions rather than rules) which forced them to show some sort of results within a very short timeframe. Chimango, who worked for an international religious NGO, said,

> In any type of development project, you're trying to change the mindset of the people and change is a gradual process. But you have funding limited for like maybe two years or

> maybe one year and you're trying to change people and instead of trying to facilitate social change, it's more like coercion of change because some guy from-I don't want to mention the donor-from whatever they're going to come and see whatever results you're going to demonstrate. So that puts you under pressure because you're not given enough time.

Not only did respondents feel they were unable to implement programs that would create significant change within the short timeframes, they also felt that, often, the most gratifying changes were the ones least visible. Shadreck, a director at a small international NGO, said, "What's in the head of a human being cannot be seen."

The emphasis on results caused organizations to do programs that could be easily accomplished and measured, but not necessarily create change. And respondents felt troubled because there was no margin of error. If they failed to show progress or meet targeted outcomes, they risked losing funding from that donor and possibly others, when word spread that they were ineffective. Nyasinga said, "They don't even want to hear, our project didn't work because there's a drought in the area, unless, you know it's like a major *major* drought that everybody hears about in the whole world. Then maybe it makes sense to them. But maybe if it's just a local drought, you find no it's not allowed to say our project didn't work. It always has to work and that's not how it works!" The need to secure funding and the threat of losing a donor are so significant, that respondents felt forced not only to focus on issues they might not choose but then, within that focus, to focus on particular outcomes when they might not believe in their efficacy.

Part of the problem in focusing on measurable outcomes is that the harder-to-measure outcomes are ignored. Respondents pointed to ARVs, a critical component of the international drive to eliminate AIDS, as evidence that a focus on outcomes could be deceptive. Odalla said, "We are obsessed with the figures. If you go down there [to the rural areas], what is happening?

People are having ART on an empty stomach, their nutritional levels are very low. But we claim to be doing more, okay?" Odalla and others believed in the provision of ARTs but not at the expense of other, equally critical development efforts. Chris elaborated, saying:

> So the issue around HIV and AIDS we are more— so concentrated on key, key outputs. I will give an example— how many people go on ARTs, that has become an output now, yeah, whereby there's pressure to increase the number. But the question is, yes the number who have full blown AIDS or HIV requiring ARVs, we'll never meet it. So instead of having mitigating measures, look at maybe what are the other supporting measures looking at making sure people's quality of life improves, we have tended to look more at the indicators which are very easy to reach as outputs. There has been more tendency to look at numbers, the outputs, not the quality of the outputs themselves.

This argument, like so many I've discussed, revolves around the issue of failing to look at HIV/AIDS comprehensively. The focus on results and outcomes, respondents felt, actually failed people because it did not account for their other problems or even their own personal needs. Abiti explained, "When donors visit the projects, they only look at the objectives that you put in the proposals and if the objective is being met. See that maybe the field is green or the HIV/AIDS infected households have vegetable gardens they look at that and they're happy. But ask the beneficiaries, what is your other problem? 'Well we travel 2 or 3 kilometers to get water,' and [the donors] say 'okay' but they just go back and they don't do anything about that." This notion, that donors ignored the problems on the ground, was common, as was the sense that little could be done about it.

Is AIDS really the issue?

As I spoke formally with respondents and informally with many other Malawians, inside and outside the NGO sector, it seemed clear that respondents' main concerns had little to do with HIV/AIDS itself. True, few of them thought HIV/AIDS was the biggest problem facing the country, but it went beyond merely thinking the focus on AIDS was misplaced. Often, I felt that one could be talking about any number of donor initiatives and the responses would be very

similar. (Indeed in Chapter Five I show how donor interest may be shifting from AIDS to Climate Change and the similarity of language used to describe both problems.) Instead, as critical development theorists have shown (Braun 2011; Escobar 2004 and 2010; Ferguson 1990 & 2006; Li 2007), their concerns are largely related to the development/aid apparatus itself. Many of my respondents were highly educated, some had done masters degrees or doctorates outside Malawi. But regardless of education level, my respondents were well versed in the language of global inequality. Rather than deemphasizing the political nature of global inequality and the ways it affected the NGO, government, and development sector in Malawi, they made the issues political. There is a disjuncture between what Ferguson refers to as the "Anti-Politics Machine" of development and the highly political interpretations of the people working in that sector. In this section, I highlight the ways in which my respondents made HIV/AIDS, and development generally, political, looking specifically at the power of donors and concomitant lack of power of beneficiaries; the difficulties of civil society in Malawi, caught in a spot between government and international donors; and frustrations working in the sector, with particular regard to the racism of development.

Donor Power, Donor Preferences, and What about the Beneficiaries?

I asked respondents if they felt it was easier to get money for some types of programming over others. Of course, they responded. Charles said, "Some projects are very easier. Because they are fitting in, in the areas of focus for the donors. So if you design your project in that area, it becomes easier for the donor to fund you." In 2008 the issue was still AIDS, as they thought it had been for much of the decade. And so crosscutting efforts that included AIDS were much easier to get funding for than, say, sanitation programs, or irrigation programs, or food security programs. Yamikani said:

> You are a donor, you come to [us]. You support your own kind of things that you fund. If we are not doing that, you make us adjust our programs to fit into whatever is there. Or maybe by virtue if you notice it's a call for proposals, obviously it will make us to adjust ourselves, our focus, to fit into the type of focus to fit in with the pillars that are there… Usually, that's what we do. At the moment, it's the issues of HIV/AIDS.

Donors rarely dangle money in front of staff at an organization and tell them to do a specific program (or else). Rather, they issue "Calls for Proposals" which detail what donors want to do, what the focus area(s) is, and any specific rules for submitting. Ostensibly, this gives organizations opportunities to ignore programs or funds that do not fit their missions or belief systems. But when so much funding is directed at one specific issue, it becomes difficult to find calls for proposals that do not deal with that issue. And again, respondents felt that these proposals spoke to issues that were not the most pressing for Malawi. Shadreck said, "The things which they want us to submit proposals for are not the needs on the ground, they are the donors' needs. So even if you try to maneuver and try to come up with a proposal and submit, it doesn't work because what they are looking for is not what's there on the ground."

It is not surprising that respondents felt somewhat trapped by donor interests. They are well aware that their organizations are totally funded by outsiders. But after the Paris and Accra agreements, it was hoped that there might be greater efforts made to align donor preferences with those of governments which would then influence what went on in the civil society sector. In Malawi, donors did not fund government for many years, because of a history of corruption and mismanagement of funds. Instead, donors funded development through civil society, including NGOs and CBOs. Because civil society is separate from government, donors have more leeway in directing programming. But even under the first administration of Bingu wa Mutharika, when foreign governments, recognizing Mutharika's commitment to transparency, began funding direct budgetary support again, respondents felt that donors held sway. Speaking of how Malawi

government priorities and policies are created, Catherine, an American who worked at an international NGO, said, “I feel like the donors are active participants in the policy formulation here at least. So the policy is probably more influenced by the donors than the donors are influenced by the policies.”

Because donors fund budgetary support measures, they have a say in what kinds of programming gets supported. Evidence of government acquiescence to donor initiatives could be seen, Chifundo said, in how little the government actually promoted certain policies and programs it created. Talking about AIDS initiatives, she said, “If they were really government priorities, I would have seen government rushing to commit the social support and protection piece that they put there.” The Government of Malawi (GOM), under the leadership of Mutharika, accomplished many impressive things, not the least of which was an enormous fertilizer subsidy program. And the government did this swiftly and decisively, with no support from outside donors (I discuss this further in the conclusion). When the Malawi government wants to get something done, it gets done. Respondents felt that government’s lack of speed in promoting many programs or initiatives was indicative of the GOM’s lack of interest. Not only are civil society organizations controlled by donor purse strings, government is controlled as well. Eldson told me, “If you look at the principles of partnership, look at what you’re investing in, in most cases it’s skewed in terms of power relationships, positively in terms of the donor. Because they’re controlling the base. It’s a carrot and a stick.” Respondents felt they and their government had little choice but to follow donors’ wishes.

There were two aspects of the skewed power dynamics that most troubled my respondents. The first was that donors know they have the upper hand and expect Malawians to simply fall in line. The second was that the programs donors wanted were ineffective and, worse,

did not bother to consider what beneficiaries wanted and/or needed. Yamikani said, vehemently, "That's one other big problem— the attitude of most donors. They would want to see us to dance to their tunes. They want us to do what they want, not what the people want on the ground." He put it succinctly, "Most donors take advantage of our vulnerability to dictate what we are going to do."

Employment, Inequality, and Race

While there is little-to-no recognition of, or attempts to address, structural inequality in NGOs' programming, Malawians working within the NGO sector have highly politicized views of their programming and the underlying causes of Malawian social problems as well as a nuanced awareness of their nations', their organizations', and their own personal employment vulnerability with regard to pleasing donors. They recognize that the government is hugely influenced by donors who pay upwards of 40% of its national budget. They recognize that their organizations are either controlled overseas or are reliant on foreign donors. But they also know that their own positions within these organizations are tenuous. The development sector in Malawi is a large employer. It pays far better, generally, than the government does. One does not want to risk losing a job within that sector just as their organizations do not want to risk missing out on a donor's funds, even if the donor's goals do not strictly align with those of the organization. This real and perceived inequality frustrated many of my respondents, who felt demoralized by it. Mphatso, who worked at a local NGO, explained:

> When it's seen to be that they're doing me a favor. That frustrates me a lot… Because already, there's this, 'I'm the donor, you're the recipient.' When they come here, you see, it's a process where I now tend to become the beggar, not in the strictest sense of the word beggar, but it's no longer a partnership, it's no longer a joint program. It's them doing me a favor to do this.

And not only did they recognize the steep inequalities that placed them, and their organizations,

in the roles of beggars, respondents frequently noted a perceived hypocrisy about the development sector as a whole. Mphatso, who had almost left the NGO sector for a similarly-paid job in a national bank, continued, "I think there are more capitalists this sector than there. At least there, you go knowing they're capitalists, I just go to make my profit… But here, so much is done in the name of the poor."

Overwhelmingly, people I spoke with were troubled by how little international organizations and donors prioritized their needs and the basic running costs of their organizations. Because of an emphasis on sustainability, most donors do not fund the functional costs of running NGOs and/or CBOs. That is, donors hesitate to pay for things like salaries, utilities, or rents which makes organizations' survival even more precarious. I spoke with people at numerous local organizations who had not been able to pay staff in several months because they were unable to find donors to pay these core costs. Partly as a result of these strictures, there is a lot of movement of staff between NGOs. International organizations are seen as the best places to work because they are the most established and they often reach out to smaller organizations with funding. Therefore, salaries at larger international organizations tend to be larger and more stable. There is sometimes the impression that Malawians who work at NGOs are not serious about the missions of the work. In many ways, this is further evidence of the structural inequalities that exist. As Ferguson writes, a desire to achieve a "place-in-the-world, a standard of living," is a "powerful claim to a chance for transformed conditions of life," the result of enormous inequality. (2006: 19)

The notion that Malawians should be concerned with changing conditions of the poor to the detriment of their own standards of living is founded in comfortable privilege. Westerners in international organizations are not expected to skip months of salary or to remain doggedly in

their organizations should a better paying or more prestigious position be available. Eldson told me, “There’s this saying that people should not prioritize money, salary and what have you but should prioritize the work. But in the first place, why are we here? We need to be living.” And again, respondents were quite aware of inequalities in the development sector. Westerners working abroad, by and large, earn far greater salaries than local staff. Several of my respondents thought that this inequality in pay was born of racism. Shadreck explained how local knowledge and authority is undermined:

> [Donors] say, ‘You guys are not capable of actually administering the money. We are going to send you a program manager.’ The program manager will go back [to England] with probably half of that million sterling because of his status… It’s a British guy. You ask him ‘How qualified are you?’ We are talking of an agricultural project and they send you somebody who has got masters in town planning. I have my masters in agricultural planning. Who is more capable of administering the money? Because I’m black, I’m segregated.

Temporary help and consultants are frequently hired to assist with particular programs. While staff were sometimes eager to have outside help, they often felt that, yet again, their own experiences and levels of knowledge were devalued. Elizabeth, who worked for an international agency, said, “I know a Malawian like me can say something which is quite similar to what a white person said, but most people will listen to what the white person has said. It’s sort of, like a white person knows everything, which is not correct.”

Conclusions

Consequences of the global preoccupation with AIDS in Malawi go beyond shaping national policies or directing programming on the ground. The influence of money funnels attention toward this one particular social problem, to the detriment of others. International donor focus on AIDS dictates the types of social change happening in Malawi. Admittedly, local and community based organizations do not *have to* accept AIDS funding. They could, theoretically,

turn down funding tied to AIDS or any issue that did not comprise part of their organizational missions. They could ignore calls-for-proposals that did not match their goals and outcomes. But there is an overwhelming sense that without following the money, in this case without supporting AIDS programs, organizational survival is unlikely. Thus there is a sense that vulnerability necessitates focusing on social change programs that do not necessarily concord with the truest needs on the ground or that depoliticize the problems to the extent that little actual change takes place.

But in addition to these outcomes, I found a decided mismatch not only between Malawians' stated needs and foreigners' interests, but also between the depoliticization of organizations' programs and the interpretations of those charged with administering them. Not only did my respondents see that programs were decontextualized, they also felt that they were devalued by the development industry and that this was related both to their poor standing within the global economy and a history of racism. Foreigners are rarely privy to concerns about race in Africa. Because leadership is black, discussions about racial inequality are often less obvious. Future research might question the social-psychological effects such perceived vulnerability and racial inequality has.

Most interesting of my findings was that, no matter how much I asked about AIDS specifically, my respondents spoke of structural issues that only peripherally dealt with AIDS. During my interviews, I felt that AIDS was the topic of the moment but that one could substitute in any number of social problems for AIDS and the frustrations and inequalities would remain precisely the same. Indeed, between 2008 and 2010, my interviews showed that donor interest shifted from AIDS to climate change but that these underlying problems endured. It is to this topic that I will now turn.

Chapter Five

"Old Wine in a New Skin": Ephemeral Donor Agendas and a Priority Shift from AIDS to Climate Change in Malawi

Introduction

In 2010, the UN reported that global funding for the AIDS pandemic had flattened for the first time since 2002, leaving a gap of $7.7 billion dollars between allocated and necessary funds. (Kaiser 2010) But between 2002 and 2008, foundation grants for climate change more than doubled. (Foundation 2010) The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Kyoto Protocol, and an increase in attention to environmental issues in the west indicate that climate change is an important international agenda. AIDS funds still dwarf those earmarked for the environment but there is a growing global interest in the issue of climate change: during two separate research trips to Malawi, modification of priority discourse was marked. If climate change were to become the next "big issue," what might be the implications of such a shift? AIDS, despite its devastation, was never one of Malawians' primary concerns: is it the same for climate change? Or, while climate change may start as just another development priority in a history of cyclical development priorities, does it have greater immediate implications for a majority of Malawians, given the country's agrarian economy? If so, is it possible that, unlike AIDS, which seemed an utterly top-down (albeit crucial) donor agenda in Malawi, we might see more local participation or calls for climate justice?

In this chapter I examine the ways climate change rhetoric mimics that of HIV/AIDS and explore how government and NGOs may be using knowledge gained during the fight against AIDS to prepare for climate change funding. Climate change, manifested through highly variable weather patterns and environmental degradation, could resonate well with average Malawians for whom agriculture is their primary livelihood. But if it remains a top-down donor agenda, viewed

mainly as a source of revenue for Malawian agencies, as is currently the case, it could simply perpetuate the cycle of ever-shifting foreign development priorities. Furthermore, due to current framing, climate change programming, limited to tree planting and raising awareness about the dangers of deforestation, actually puts the onus of change on the poorest people, blaming them for their role in environmental destruction in Malawi.

The literature on foreign aid identifies problems of methods and outcomes, offering critiques, generally related to development failures, at the continent or global level (Calderisi 2006; Easterly 2006; Moyo 2009) as well as the local level. (Braun 2011; Englund 2006; Hunsberger 2010) The vagaries of public perception of, and international attention to, humanitarian and development problems as well as the seeming succession of development fashions, are well documented. (Downs 1972; Mohan and Stokke 2000; Mosse and Lewis 2005; Olesen 2008; Saunders 2008) But few authors have examined a change from one development priority to another *while it is happening*. This chapter is unique in that it situates us in one particular moment in time, a point when public and donor attention may be shifting and may alter the institutional, development, and even the physical landscape of Malawi. By providing a "thick description" of the ways Malawians are addressing this new donor focus, and emphasizing the seeming interchangability with which climate change has challenged AIDS' top-priority status, this chapter adds an essential dimension to development research, investigating the *process* by which development goals are incorporated into local discourse and programming. While trying to determine how climate change was altering the development landscape in Malawi, I could not help but notice how so much of the language, methods, and opportunities echoed those I'd heard just two years earlier, when my respondents were still heavily focused on AIDS.

It is important not only to recognize the strength of global discourse and ideology, but also to see how people on the ground interpret and use or modify them in current or succeeding development strategies. Eerily similar discourse and development structures, putting "old wine in a new skin," as one of my respondents terms it, may be one of the unintended consequences of global development priorities. To address this I first examine how climate change has entered development discourse and consider both local and elite conceptions of the issue as well as how Malawian NGO workers regard their role within this new agenda. Secondly, I consider the importance of framing: NGOs are both reacting to and creating frames related to climate change and thus structuring how this important foreign agenda is addressed in country. I will show that the emphasis on deforestation and tree-planting actually blames poor people for problems of climate change in Malawi, rather than acknowledging or demanding accountability from the world's great polluters. I conclude with the ways discourse on climate change mimics that of AIDS and reflect on some possible ramifications of these similarities. While I find no evidence that concern for climate change is coming "from below" in Malawi, I suggest that unlike AIDS or other global aid trends, climate change is *already* a popular concern for many Malawians (albeit by a different name). Thus with proper framing and input from people on the ground, climate change programs could actually begin to address some systemic inequalities.

Local concern with climate change

Malawians do not rank AIDS among their biggest problems in any Afrobarometer round— it actually ranks near the bottom of peoples' primary concerns. (See the appendix for rankings of the "top ten" issues.) Malawians do not deny the importance of HIV/AIDS but their first concerns tend to be immediate needs such as employment, food, and water. This absence of AIDS as Malawians' biggest worry contrasts starkly with global preoccupation with the

epidemic, evidenced by the levels of funding directed at it: the HIV/AIDS pandemic has garnered more funding than virtually any other issue in Malawi (and Africa more generally) in the last decade. (MacKellar 2005; Shiffman 2008) But how do Malawians perceive climate change?

Table 7 Afrobarometer responses related to issues of climate change and the environment

Round 1, 1999-2001	**Response 1**		**Response 2**		**Response 3**	
	Freq.	**Perc.**	**Freq.**	**Perc.**	**Freq.**	**Perc.**
Food shortage	94 (2)	7.78	58 (4)	4.8	0	0
Starvation	73 (3)	6.04	28	2.32	0	0
Crop failure	19	1.57	11	0.91	5	0.41
Need more water	12	0.99	11	0.91	5	0.41
Food supply	6	0.5	2	0.17	2	0.17
Drought relief	0	0	1	0.08	0	0
Drought	0	0	0	0	1	0.08
Round 2, 2002-2004						
Farming/agriculture	138 (3)	11.5	139 (3)	11.58	105 (4)	8.75
Food shortage	341 (1)	28.42	197 (1)	16.42	105 (4)	8.75
Water supply	37 (9)	3.08	70 (7)	5.83	88 (6)	7.33
Drought	4	0.33	1	0.08	0	0
Land	2	0.17	1	0.08	9	0.75
Round 3, 2005-2006						
Farming/agriculture	149 (2)	12.42	179 (3)	14.92	81 (5)	6.75
Food shortage	587 (1)	48.92	173 (1)	14.42	76 (6)	6.33
Drought	6	0.5	8	0.67	3	0.25
Land	2	0.17	3	0.25	3	0.25
Water supply	73 (3)	6.08	174 (2)	14.5	124 (2)	10.33
Round 4, 2008-2009						
Farming/agriculture	147 (2)	12.25	91 (4)	7.58	87 (6)	7.25
Food shortage	452 (1)	37.67	179 (1)	14.92	92 (4)	7.67
Drought	13	1.08	2	0.17	6	0.5
Land	2	0.17	3	0.25	5	0.42
Water supply	127 (3)	10.58	161 (2)	13.42	109 (3)	9.08

Numbers in parentheses indicate the response rank in the "Top Ten Problems Ranking," see Appendix.

While they do not remark on "climate change" *per se*, as Table 7 shows, Malawians frequently rank problems *related* to the environment or climate change as serious issues, which is not surprising given that approximately 80% of Malawians are subsistence farmers. In each Afrobarometer survey round, Malawians responded that food security issues were their biggest problems. In each of the three latter survey rounds they also noted farming problems and water supply worries. While "food shortage" and "drought" are quite clear, other responses may incorporate many issues into one. For instance, a response of "water supply" may mean that there is not enough water, that water is not clean, or that there is inadequate water infrastructure. "Farming/agriculture" may include poor yields, expensive farm inputs, or lack of improvement in farming techniques. Though none of the responses are categorically "climate change," they may be proxies for the issue. As the data show, Malawians are quite concerned about these environmental issues, unlike AIDS, indicated by the fact that many environmental responses were among their biggest problems overall. (See Appendix.)

Climate change becomes an elite issue

In 2008, when I interviewed NGO staff about government and donor priorities and their organizations' work, most people responded that fighting HIV/AIDS was the biggest focus. For many people, the international and national fixation with AIDS was dissatisfying: no one claimed AIDS was not a significant problem, but they lamented the sheer amount of funds going to it, which, they felt, took money away from even more pressing issues. But with an estimated twelve per cent national infection rate (UNAIDS 2010) and the level of international focus on AIDS in Africa, its primacy was unsurprising. In 2010, however, when I conducted more interviews, I was somewhat taken aback when few of my interviewees mentioned HIV/AIDS as a priority. In the space of two years, an overwhelming shift occurred: HIV/AIDS had been

replaced in predominance. People with whom I spoke felt that donors were largely focused on climate change and that AIDS had been relegated to a lesser importance. This shift is obvious when I compare priorities and buzzwords in 2008 with those in 2010. Though inexact, a basic "buzzword count" can be indicative of changing ideals and priorities. The following table shows the shift from AIDS to climate change as a priority, noted by my respondents:

Table 8 Comparison of "buzzwords" in respondents' interviews, 2008 and 2010

	2008	**2010**
Number of respondents mentioning climate change as a donor priority (unprompted)	9.6% (3 out of 31 respondents)	75% (15 out of 20 respondents)
Number of respondents mentioning HIV/AIDS as a donor priority (unprompted)	80.6% (25 out of 31 respondents)	25% (5 out of 20 respondents)

The table indicates there has been a substantial shift in the perceived priorities of donors by those working in the NGO sector. Whereas only three out of thirty-one, 9.6% of all respondents, mentioned climate change as a major donor priority in 2008, fifteen out of twenty, 75%, mentioned climate change as the greatest priority in 2010. In contrast, in 2008, 25 out of 31, 80.6%, of my interviewees thought AIDS was the significant donor priority while only five out of twenty, 25%, discussed AIDS as a donor priority in 2010. Simply talking about climate change as the donor priority does not necessarily correspond to programming on the ground or funds available for climate change work, but certainly does demonstrate that discourse among NGOs in Malawi has begun to focus away from AIDS. Though it is instructive to note the frequency with which climate change enters discussions about donor priorities, it is important to move beyond this simple count and consider *how* elites are talking about climate change.

Climate change enters development discourse

While there seems to be a general consensus in Malawi that climate change is a problem in need of attention, there is tremendous uncertainty about how to approach it. Not only did respondents note donor interest had shifted to this "new" topic which meant they needed to shift their agendas as well but they also felt climate change was gaining importance as a development issue for both practical and political reasons. They observed that though there was great concentration on climate change, they had not yet seen much programming, with the exception of reforestation initiatives: they levelled a critique against the government for failing to coordinate a national policy to guide their work in climate change which, they felt, allowed for a lack of focus. Currently, climate change seems to be considered just another donor development priority for which NGOs (and possibly the government) need to position themselves in order to receive critical funding. Similar to the earlier emphasis on HIV/AIDS, the focus seems more about organizational sustainability than the experiential realities of climate change.

The change

Chisoni, director of a local agricultural NGO, said, "HIV/AIDS is not the issue as of now. But it's still a big problem... But of course, maybe over the years, the attention is coming maybe too much into climate change, overshadowing the importance of HIV/AIDS." Not only has climate change become the big issue, but according to Chisoni, it takes attention away from the potentially more important issue of HIV/AIDS. It is a somewhat ironic stance, given that in 2008, most people I interviewed noted that while AIDS was a big problem, it was not the biggest problem and, in fact, took focus from other more pressing concerns. Nsanje, a consultant who works with numerous NGOs, said, "In general there's been some donor fatigue. But within that, I see that donors are beginning now to think, when you say HIV/AIDS, they won't dig as deep in

their pocket as they would." Because of a diminishing emphasis on HIV/AIDS, the once seemingly inexhaustible funds associated with the illness are slowing. While many of my respondents told me that there is still plenty of money available at the National AIDS Commission [NAC], there is less noise around the issue. Whereas in 2008 my respondents felt that not incorporating HIV/AIDS work into proposals meant a definite rejection by donors, in 2010, most felt that was no longer the case. Chisoni said, "I don't know if it's still a donor requirement."

Christopher, a program manager at an international relief organization told me, "With the global warming and whatnot, the environment has taken center stage… HIV/AIDS has ceased to be a priority." In 2008, NGO staff felt that they had to incorporate HIV/AIDS in their proposals and strategic plans, even if their organizations had nothing to do with HIV, or they risked losing out on competitive funding, since donors were emphatic about the need to fight AIDS. Now, with climate change possibly having usurped AIDS' place of primacy, I noticed a similar feeling among my respondents. George, director of grant writing at an international aid organization, said, "I think now [donors] are moving toward issues of climate change… So basically ourselves too, we have to change our focus to try to align with that paradigm shift." And Takondwa said, "It sounded minimal in the beginning but now you can see that all donors and the efforts and the funds are going toward climate change. So now as NGOs we also have to see what is our role within the scenario of climate change that we're having so that we can participate in that because that's where the money is."

As was the case with HIV/AIDS, none of my respondents felt climate change is a wasted issue, even if they thought other issues were more pressing, but it is equally important to note that most do not have a strong sense of interest in climate change. Instead, they recognize that in

order to remain financially viable, they must seek grants and funding from donors who, for various reasons, prioritize climate change. This shift in focus necessitates learning to incorporate a new language into their old programming and devising ways to make climate change seem like a natural component of possibly disconnected organizational missions, in order to secure funding. Nelson, assistant director at a local AIDS organization, noted the growing attention to climate change then said:

> I think we haven't done much to date but that's an area we think we have to. Not because there is that talk but we feel we're also being affected greatly by climate change. We are talking of people living with HIV for example being impacted greatly by climate change than maybe those who are not infected. And as a result, we think it's time we have to mainstream climate change activities or environmental activities.

Despite his assurance that the organization was not interested in shifting to climate change "because there is that talk," it does seem an opportune time to realize such a connection.

The shift to climate change and its concomitant necessitation of changing organizational missions does trouble some NGO staff with whom I spoke. People were concerned that the overwhelming interest in climate change, like the overwhelming interest in HIV/AIDS that came before, diminishes their ability to focus on anything off the donor radar which they see as equally, if not more, important. Frank, executive director of a local agricultural advocacy organization, said:

> Before climate change, HIV/AIDS was top of the agenda. But in a way, we are also overlooking other critical issues for consideration because if you add up the effect of climate change and HIV/AIDS, you'll still find out that malaria still ranks highest, number one killer for under-five children. So it's like HIV/AIDS, climate change, have actually stolen the show, overshadowing other critical issues that also need similar kind of focus.

While not disputing the legitimacy of climate change, my respondents were concerned that this was yet another donor agenda that failed to incorporate other meaningful and vital issues. The sense that donors might be missing the point and thereby preventing Malawian organizations

from pursuing the problems they felt most pressing caused an understated ill-will among many of my respondents, who then connected these thoughts to western power and global politics.

Why now?

Given the shift in attention to climate change, I asked respondents why they thought climate change had overshadowed AIDS at this point in time. Responses fell into two main categories, western guilt and power or natural disasters and strange diseases related to global warming. Their responses highlighted both visible/experiential reasons as well as more complicated, hegemonic understandings, including the cyclical nature of development agendas. But the most cited reason, by far, was the preponderance of natural disasters and shifting weather patterns. Among my respondents, there seemed to be a sense that the opportunity to ignore climate change had passed. Nsanje mentioned flooding and said "It's not like mankind never knew this is where we're headed to but people will do something until they really have to be stopped by some disaster… I would say it's because of the catastrophic results that we're seeing here and there and we're told it's climate change." And Esther, founder of a regional NGO, said:

> The impacts of climate change are bearing now. We are experiencing conditions that we have never experienced before. So it's a wake-up call. Scientifically, maybe it was far off, but it's happened sooner than we thought. And therefore it's action time... When we talk to communities, they are telling us about their historical experiences… There's much less rain and they're erratic and these diseases...

While mentions of diseases were not as common as droughts or floods, several people noted increases in illnesses. (Malawi had a widespread outbreak of measles in 2010.) Enfield et al. (2009) argue that climate change may be driving the re-emergence of various diseases and Tang et al. (2009) write disease prevalence as a result of climate change is the cause of reduced life expectancies in Africa.

Numerous people thought that increases in droughts or changes in the beginnings and endings of the rainy season were evidence of the effects of climate change. Chisoni said "In the last twenty years, the frequency of drought... has increased. And much of that is being attributed to climate change. So you see the challenges coming with climate change are more than they were four or five years ago." Nsanje, Esther, and Chisoni's quotes highlight an important part of the process that is happening in Malawi: connecting personal-observations with the concept of climate change. While Jasanoff (2010) points out that climate change *science* is disconnected from lived experience and observation and while McCright and Dunlap (2010) show how this detachment of meaning and experience has been wielded by those opposed to climate change science as proof that it is manufactured, current framing of climate change in Malawi hinges upon viewing environmental disasters as evidence of climate change.

Beyond personal experiences of shifting weather patterns, respondents discussed western power and the vagaries of aid as another reason for the new focus on climate change. Najere, assistant director at a human rights organization, who has worked in the development sector for more than twenty years, said:

> I think every four or five years, there's something new that is introduced that draws attention of everybody. And then somebody looks at it and says no, it's not true, I think no we're misplacing our energies. But since the majority are making reference to that and have done studies, convincing people, then this will go on but some of the messages change, the focus changes.

By referencing the studies done to convince people about the truthfulness of various issues, Najere speaks to the creation of knowledge that guides western priorities. The studies are largely conducted and funded by rich nations that then use the studies to direct interventions. Thus the studies, as well as the agendas themselves, are heavily influenced by the interests of foreign funding organizations and governments.

Continuing the point, Takondwa said, "It would be like any other agenda that comes up… It goes by prioritization of what *they* feel is something to be addressed," (emphasis mine). She continued, saying, "HIV/AIDS is mostly in Africa but climate change is across—it doesn't matter where you are, you are equally affected. So it affects across the globally, you will see people more putting effort on something which they will equally be affected by.' Takondwa felt that not only are donor attention spans fairly short, but they are driven primarily by donor concerns rather than Malawian needs. Saying donors may be shifting to climate change because it affects everyone, whereas AIDS is "mostly in Africa," she indicates a belief that African lives matter when protecting them also protects western lives. Whether her suspicions are reasonable or not, the fact that Takondwa feels like foreign agenda-setters value African lives and needs less, is telling. Development and aid are supposedly premised on "partnership," but she is one of many respondents who indicated that, in her opinion, partnership was a farce and donor agendas based on the whims of the west.

Western power in agenda setting was a common theme in my interviews but when I pushed further, to determine why climate change was the new agenda, respondents were quick to point out western fear of the effects of climate change. George echoed Takondwa's observations and elaborated, saying:

> HIV is becoming a less issue it's because the climate change issues are basically issues of you guys from the north, developed countries, basically it's their issues.[23] They know that they've polluted the environment and they want to reverse the issues... If they do more research and find out how the environment is polluted in those countries, people will be more worried and they will commit a lot of resources to those development agendas. Basically it's because they affect them, they affect you guys from the developed countries…

[23] Switching between 'you guys' and 'them' was not uncommon in my interviews. I think the code-switching was related to politeness and respondents' desire to avoid making me feel like they were blaming me, a white American, by the use of 'you' plural while nonetheless indicating the clear distinction they make between themselves and foreigners/donors.

George believed that climate change is enjoying a rapid advancement in donor prioritization because it is not, fundamentally, an African problem. In Takondwa and George's views, a burgeoning awareness of the dangers of climate change to the rich nations is the impetus for the rising interest in climate change in Malawi. Because we in the west are fearful of the effects of rising oceans, polluted air, and the caprices of weather, we are suddenly very interested in trying to reverse the situation. Essentially, George and Takondwa feel western donors support climate change programs because they will actually benefit westerners.

In addition to practical benefits of slowing the effects of climate change, several respondents felt that the west was ramping up efforts for adaptation and mitigation projects in Malawi out of a sense of guilt. Christopher told me that "most of the countries which release a lot of carbon into the atmosphere have to be seen to be doing something. Even though those countries are doing the polluting, the effects are being felt on a global scale so they have to be seen to be responsible." And Yanus, executive director of a small local NGO said, "Maybe they've realized that western countries have raped us for quite a lot of time. They've advanced their own agendas at the expense of the vulnerabilities of developing countries." He went on to point out how at the Copenhagen summit on climate change, poor countries pushed for high emissions reductions but rich countries balked at the figures. Both Christopher and Yanus felt rich nations were focused on climate change because of a realisation that poor nations had done little or nothing to create the problem. As Esther said, "it's the industrialized nations that are behind the state of the environment now… So donors are kind of saying hey, all of us we have to do something and you the developing world, we've got funding for you to start implementing projects that can mitigate and adapt to climate change... So donors are interested in making the money move to developing nations." Thus by focusing on climate change and putting funds into

climate change programming, respondents felt that rich nations were trying to ameliorate some of the responsibility for causing the problem.

What, exactly, is happening?

As I spoke with more respondents and visited people living in rural areas, it became clear to me that while elites and donors were all talking about climate change, few organizations were actually *doing* climate change-related projects as of July 2010. There seems to be a disconnect, at present, between donor interest and actual donor funding, perhaps because the issue is so new. Most of my respondents felt that climate change talk is still happening at a very "high level" and has not yet reached the consciousness of the average Malawian. Catherine said, "I haven't seen anything to be honest [in terms of programming]. It's very depressing actually… I think it's on a lot of people's minds but people aren't really clear how to address the problem… I don't feel like I've seen a lot of interest. It's just talk." Respondents said that during and after a global forum like Copenhagen, there is a great deal of discussion but it "stops there." Programming on the ground seems minimal.

Currently, organizations are focused on incorporating "climate change" into their new strategic plans and programs they already have in place. Their main focus is the issue of reforestation and tree-planting, presumed to be Malawi's key contributing factor to the problem of climate change. Takondwa said that her organization has mainstreamed forestation into their programs, encouraging every beneficiary to plant trees and stop cutting down so many trees. She said, "If it was Malawi, I would look at [contributing factors to climate change] as cutting down trees because we have reduced the oxygen that we are breathing because now there is a lot of carbon dioxide because there are no trees to absorb the carbon dioxide and make more oxygen. So it's like this is actually leaving a poison." While each person I spoke with recognized that

climate change was connected to pollutants generated largely in the west, Takondwa's statement that Malawi bore responsibility as a result of tree-cutting and thus contributing "poison" was not unusual.

Respondents overwhelmingly felt that there was not much awareness about climate change in the country, nor was much emphasis being placed on education. Laughson, who works for a women's organization said, "in general what I've seen happening is the promotion of using some means and ways in terms of preserving nature in the communities… don't rely on cutting trees… But information being given out to people, what's climate change, how is it affecting us and so forth, who's responsible, how can ABCD contribute to the whole issue? I don't see much…" Again, within this lack of awareness, there was a significant amount of attention paid to enlightening the rural masses about the dangers of tree cutting. Mussa, executive director at a local human rights organization said, "I think a large part of our society is busy burning charcoal, cutting down trees, doing a lot of activities that contribute to climate change... So we have not really gone down to reach out to somebody to know that there are some activities I undertake that contribute to climate change and the effects of climate change are actually what we are experiencing." While deforestation certainly wreaks havoc on local environments, contributing especially to floods and soil infertility, and has been a serious problem in Malawi for decades, the extent to which it actually contributes to *climate change* is uncertain and the overwhelming emphasis on changing people's habits of tree-cutting seems extreme in the overall global climate change discourse.

Chifuniro, discussing climate change programming, said, "People are saying that the climate is changing because people have cut down trees so these effects are from people cutting down trees. Fine. But I don't think the issue is climate change in this respect, the issue is

environmental degradation. And how they link together, I don't know." In Malawi, at present, climate change discourse seems to be overlaid on an old discourse of environmental degradation, which incorporated deforestation, desertification, soil leeching, over-fishing, and water pollution. These environmental problems remain serious concerns. However, the extent to which they pull attention away from an emphasis on climate justice or the ways developed nations have contributed more to the issue of climate change may impact the programming that gets accomplished. Even within Malawi, while tree-cutting is a serious problem, there is also the issue of carbon emissions. Poor regulations, poor roads, and poor maintenance lead to vehicles that continuously emit noxious black smoke. Walking along roads in Lilongwe, I frequently hold my breath as minibuses and lorries pass, until the fumes dissipate or I nearly pass out, whichever comes first. But only one of my elite respondents, all of whom rely on motor transportation to travel to and from work everyday, mentioned the problems of city-dwellers in contributing to climate change. In July, the Parliament passed a new budget and the government levied a sales tax on vehicles older than eight years. Of course, the older vehicles are more likely to belch out smoke. I found this bill to be impressive but before I left Malawi at the end of July, lawsuits were being leveled against the government by car dealerships that claimed the government's new tax policy would hurt their businesses. It is easy to focus on stopping tree-cutting or on replanting and reforestation: few people will argue as those who are being blamed are generally too poor to be part of the conversation.

In addition to the focus on trees, one other area that seems to be back on the radar in Malawi is the issue of population growth. Catherine said, "Family planning is back on the upswing [in terms of donor interest]. And, I think that's because of all the concern with climate change. In Malawi, we have really rapid population growth… I've heard that the ministry of

health plans to make that one of their core priorities." Several other respondents noted that family planning, which had been one of the big donor priorities before HIV/AIDS, seems to be making its way back into the donor interest cycle. Population growth has long been linked to environmental degradation, since more people need more food and, in Malawi, more food requires more land used and more trees cut to fuel the fires for more meals prepared. Malawi's high population makes it fertile ground for discussions of curtailing family size. Unfortunately, as feminist scholars have pointed out, a negative focus on population growth lodges a great deal of responsibility on women, especially poor women, and their reproductive lives. (MacGregor 2010: 128) I argue that this fits in with current frames in Malawi which overemphasize the role of poor people in exacerbating climate change.

Current problems in framing

Frames, according to Goffman (1974), are a "schemata of interpretation" (p. 21), and frames and framing have been widely used in interpreting psychological, political, collective action, and media phenomena. (Benford and Snow 2000) Social movement scholars, particularly, emphasize the processual qualities of framing—that frames derive from contestation over the creation of meaning. Climate change, like HIV/AIDS, is very much a scientific issue that needs intermediaries to make it relevant to those (most) of us who are not conversant in scientific discourse and dialogue. Policy makers, environmental activists, and academics worldwide have made climate change more accessible, more applicable. Climate change is a contentious issue because various stakeholders—activists, corporate CEOs, governments—want to control the definition and the framing in order to benefit their aspirations. In many ways, the framers of climate change discourse are western elites. (Beck 2010) But while it is reasonable to argue that "big issues" in Malawi are donor driven interventions, not social movements, and, therefore,

beyond the influence of any local framing, a consideration of framing is still relevant and important.

After international treaties such as the Paris Declaration of 2005 that stipulated international interventions should conform to the needs and wishes of local governments, there is at least an *illusion* of power-sharing and dialogue between foreign governments, donor organizations, and the Malawi government. As such, the government of Malawi frames its own needs and priorities, though certainly with an eye to the money that is available. To reiterate what Nsanje said, in a country where over a third of the national budget is funded by foreign governments, it is difficult to discern which are donor priorities and which are priorities of the Malawi government. NGOs, meanwhile, must be in line with both GOM and donor priorities and must frame their own goals and priorities with these in mind, in order to access funds. NGOs must scurry to align themselves but because climate change is not their forte (with the possible exception of environmental NGOs or large organizations with environmental departments), they use old discourse and methods which may only be similar to climate change.

Though both the GOM and NGOs are in many ways *reacting* to outside frames, they are, to an extent, picking and choosing which aspects of the climate change and environmental frames suit their needs and, thus, reflecting back local insights about the climate change agenda. But there are several problems inherent in these global power dynamics: because the GOM and NGOs are, at least in large part, responding to outside claims and influences and emphasizing climate change for monetary purposes, it seems somewhat devoid of genuine commitment to the issue. Because frames help guide action, the lack of local commitment may undermine the genuine needs of all Malawians, but especially the poorest Malawians and because current frames emphasize activities of survival, the poorest Malawians (and especially poor women) are

at the center of blame for climate change troubles. Despite the lack of a cohesive strategy to address climate change in Malawi, framing of the problem *is* underway, which I argue is cause for concern about the possibility of climate justice in Malawi. Parks and Roberts (2010) argue that climate justice is difficult to achieve because there is no shared idea of what is fair, a consequence of global inequality. I certainly did not hear any indications that fairness is a primary concern amongst elites in Malawi.

The main emphasis seems to be on cutting down trees as a contributing factor to climate change and the need to educate the rural masses about how tree cutting and charcoal burning are deleterious to the environment. In this way, current climate change discourse in Malawi seems to be a simple overlay of the title onto what used to be referred to as environmental degradation programs, programs that have been around for decades. Not only does such a discourse fail to advance a popular awareness of climate change, but it also puts too much blame on poor villagers who need wood for cooking and heating their homes, rather than on the rich countries that have contributed the most to global warming.

Cutting down trees

As my interviews show, elites recognize that the actions of rich nations have contributed to climate change and that climate change is most harmful to the poorest people worldwide but focus instead on Malawi's "contribution"—tree-cutting. Some of the reasons tree-cutting and reforestation issues may have taken center stage are: they fit easily into pre-existing frames and so do not require NGOs to become experts in a whole new field; they do not threaten the status quo by demanding acknowledgement of wrongdoing by rich nations which would enable calls for reparations; and they are easy to "mainstream" and to quantify—it is simple to count how many trees your organization planted but much more difficult to show that poor farmers

understand the links between tree-cutting or carbon emissions and global warming. While large-scale tree cutting is certainly destructive to the environment, focusing so much attention on tree-cutting, awareness of the harmful effects of tree-cutting, and linking tree-cutting with a global climate change agenda, puts too much stress on poor Malawians, taking attention away from global processes that contribute to climate change. By focusing solely on tree-planting and awareness about the harmful effects of deforestation, no matter how justifiable, Malawian organizations are legitimizing frames that relieve the west of responsibility for climate change and place a burden for change on poor Malawians. As Fletcher (2009) writes of discourse and framing, "language builds rather than mirrors social reality." (p.802) The Malawi government, for its part, is not currently advancing any sort of counter frame: instead of maintaining the calls for climate justice discussed at Copenhagen, Cancun, and other climate change meetings, the government seems to be waiting to see whether money actually materializes. The problem with this strategy is that by the time money starts flowing, frames may be so embedded that there is no ability to shift them and climate justice may be a lost opportunity.

Lack of leadership and coordination

When I asked respondents why they thought there was so little awareness about climate change and so few programs addressing it, they noted that while the government has taken an interest in climate change, such as renaming the Department of Meteorology the Department of Meteorology and Climate Change and making the environment a priority, they have not seen much follow-through nor do they feel there is a coordinated government effort. Chisoni said he was very interested in what kind of policies would be adopted because:

> Each and every sector, they're trying to come up with a standing as far as climate change is concerned. But the major problem that is there is that the framework of how to mainstream climate change into policies is not there… I don't know if there is something on the drawing board, but there hasn't been much of coordination. It's more of everybody

> is doing where it suits them. That's where we maybe need some government leadership… Because politics may appear because of resources. Because as resources come, people will want to move toward them… A lot of things are happening but the only thing I see is a lack of leadership.

Without a firm government stance and plan of action for Malawi in terms of climate change, it will be difficult to have any sort of governmental or non-governmental programs that actually address problems on the ground and call for targeted international aid. Programs will likely overlap and address issues haphazardly as people search for whatever funds are available.

Some respondents felt that while climate change is clearly a donor priority, it might be useful to push the Malawi government to action. Because there is a focus on connecting visible environmental/weather patterns in Malawi with changes in the global climate and because they see the beginnings of resource tranches, elites with whom I spoke rued a perceived lack of government leadership. Esther said, "I think government is interacting with the international arena which hasn't come down into putting it into the Malawi context, our education strategy, how does it fit in? At policy level also, there is no talk yet about how we are going to position ourselves… In terms of the action plan on the ground, it's very weak." Without government leadership, respondents feel that the talk will remain beyond the scope of Malawians who need to understand the impacts of climate change on their lives. Mussa said:

> They are grand programs, the Copenhagen agenda, which is disconnected… Because at their [rural peoples'] level, they are doing certain things, but they are not understanding them… It's not in their conscious. So they will continue to cut the trees... Because they have not connected how the cutting of this tree today, or the burning of this tree today will have an effect tomorrow. We want to make that connection, because it's important. But the politicians don't mention it because it doesn't buy votes… So the Japanese will bring money. The UNDP will bring money. But they will be talking about Copenhagen things, not Malawi rural things.

Just as NGO staff feel they need to position their organizations to take advantage of streams of funding, so too they feel government needs a concerted strategy not only to attract the funding of

interested donors, but to make clear a national plan, which would then allow NGOs to compete for the funding. Furthermore, there needs to be a national awareness campaign so that programming may have an impact.

All talk no action? Maybe not.

Though the majority of respondents felt that climate change is mostly at a talking stage, with little actual work being done, I argue that even if it *seems* insignificant, NGOs and the Malawi government are actively making preparations to ready themselves for big donor funds. Arrangements for a climate change push are reminiscent of ways both the Malawi government and NGOs positioned themselves for HIV/AIDS funding. The Malawi government has participated in global forums on climate change, such as those in Copenhagen and Cancun, as well as the Group of 77, poor and middle income countries lobbying for more international attention to the problems facing developing nations. In addition, the government has created a new department related to climate change. NGOs, for their part, are busily "mainstreaming" climate change into existing programs, learning to incorporate climate change as a "cross-cutting" issue, language and skills used widely to talk about HIV/AIDS programming.

By attending international climate change conferences, the Malawi government is participating in a global field of climate change and the role various nations play in coping with it. By participating in the smaller group, Malawi is positioning itself in another field, as a nation aware not only of the perils of climate change, but also of how climate change is, in Yoweri Museveni, President of Uganda's words, "the latest form of aggression" against African nations by wealthy western ones. (Kristof 2007) It is fairly well-accepted that poor people and nations are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change. (Bartlett 2008; Douglas et al. 2008; Meadows and Hoffman 2003; Tang et al. 2009) In joining with other poor nations, the Malawian

government is signifying a quest for solidarity in a fight for climate justice, even if talk is mainly rhetoric. During the struggle to make generic anti-retroviral drug treatments (ARTs) available to poor countries, African governments and activists positioned themselves within global frameworks, using various forms of advocacy and activism, to argue for the cause. It seems plausible that Malawi's government gleaned lessons from the former AIDS fights and now, within this knowledge structure, sees the opportunity to position itself for struggles related to climate justice.

The Malawi government was one of the first to create a government agency specifically designed to handle large quantities of donor funding for HIV/AIDS: NAC was created in 2001 to streamline the process of disbursing donor money and improve accountability and transparency in a country known for corruption. NAC succeeded and became a model for other countries on the continent. Respondents repeatedly pointed out the seeming futility of applying to NAC for funding because the enormous bureaucracy made the process cumbersome and time-consuming; they also pointed out how very much money NAC had. Donors had confidence in the organization: even the Global Fund, known for its stringent reporting and accountability guidelines, funnelled millions of dollars through NAC.

In 2009, President Mutharika changed national priorities, lumping HIV/AIDS with public health and sanitation, rather than its own category as it had been previously, while adding climate change and environmental management as an issue. (Fast Facts 2009) Around the same time, the government changed what used to be the Department of Meteorology to the Department of Meteorology and Climate Change (DMCC). While the new DMCC is no NAC—it does not have the same structure and whereas NAC is semi-autonomous, DMCC is a government department—the fact that the government created this new department, while also

adding climate change as a national priority, further demonstrates its signification of climate change as a serious component of its national development plans. It is currently unclear whether the government's emphasis on climate change reflects genuine interest and commitment. As Nsanje said:

> The Met Department has been renamed Met and Climate Change Department. Again, this is pasting a name to something, you're not sure whether it's reflecting inner changes or the same old way of doing things and just putting old wine in a new skin, I don't know… Some things might be moving but to what extent those changes reflect inner serious thoughts of government other than separating it from donor movement, donor pressure, it's hard to tell, particularly in a country where a good proportion of the budget comes from donors.

Regardless of the motivation of the Malawi government and whether or not commitment to containing and adapting to climate change is authentic, the government is *posturing* itself as dedicated to the issue. Participating in global meetings, including climate change in national priorities, and modifying a government department to oversee climate change issues denotes that the Malawi government takes climate change seriously. Furthermore, perhaps relying on experience from the past decade of donor enthusiasm for AIDS projects and building on the success of NAC and other governmental programs, the government has created a department that can either oversee climate change funds or oversee the creation of another semi-autonomous organization through which climate change funds may reach development organizations.

NGOs are also readying themselves for climate change funding which may become available. Respondents were clear that they would shift their own agendas in order to match this new donor preference, acknowledging that they would do so to gain access to the money. Grant-writing and executive staff at NGOs learned how to connect their organizational missions and agendas with HIV/AIDS even if they did not immediately seem compatible. As George told me, "That is another skill you develop… We try to alter [organizational agendas] to fit what [donors]

basically want." Using the same terminology, NGO staff is attempting to "mainstream" climate change into their programs, recognizing that it is a "cross-cutting" issue.

In addition to the work going on within NGOs, there is a growing discussion in the media of various, seemingly disconnected issues and how they overlap with climate change. For instance, in the January 19th, 2010 issue of *the Nation*, Grey Kasunda wrote an article entitled, "Deforestation: catalyst for gender based violence." He quotes staff from gender-focused NGOs and women's organizations about how women, who gather water and wood for cooking fires, are endangered in the process. Deforestation means women have to walk further in their searches and may come home later, resulting in beatings from their husbands. They are also vulnerable to rape while out scouring the woods. The article points out that cutting down trees is related to climate change and changes in rainfall, linking structural violence against women with cutting down trees and, thus, climate change.[24] These linkages are critical for NGOs—they help connect seemingly disconnected organizational missions with whatever donor initiative has priority.

The funding available for the fight against HIV/AIDS prompted NGOs to find any way possible to make their organizations appealing to funders. (Morfit 2011) I believe that the institutional knowledge gained in attracting AIDS funding is being used to shift missions toward climate change, in preparation for a belief that similar tranches of funding may be forthcoming, and they very well may. The United Nations has introduced REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) and the Green Climate Fund to collect and disburse global monies devoted to climate change efforts. It is interesting that these two programs are similar in name and structure to two major AIDS initiatives—Product (RED) and the Global Fund.

[24] Also see MacGregor 2010, pg. 131, for a link between women, violence, and climate change and Marra, 2008, for a description of how water insecurity overwhelmingly affects women. Additionally, organizations such as Oxfam, too, have connected women to violence because of climate change, and linked climate change and HIV/AIDS (http://www.oxfam.org/en/pressroom/pressrelease/2009-06-17/climate-change-pushing-malawi-further-into-poverty-women-hit-worst).

Both the government and NGOs are using knowledge gained in attracting AIDS funding to position themselves in a global and national field of aid recipients using their demonstrated proper use of previous funds as well as climate change-victimhood, to acquire more funding. In this way, while respondents feel little is actually happening with regard to climate change and while, in fact, few functional programs may actually be in place, there are significant machinations underway by the Malawi government and NGOs to ensure a place for themselves in the field of competition for climate change funding. By participating in this field and recycling arguments and knowledges from previous donor priorities, the Malawi government and NGOs may be inadvertently placing themselves as supplicants to the power of donor money, legitimating that power, underscoring Malawi's neediness, but undermining the needs of the Malawians donor funds are *supposed* to address.

Science, National Security, Catastrophe: talking about AIDS, talking about climate change

HIV/AIDS in Africa was portrayed as a scientific and public health issue, a national security issue, an end-of-time catastrophe, and, lastly, a social justice issue: so far, portrayals of climate are following a similar trajectory. After the initial period of ignoring the syndrome in Africa, HIV/AIDS was treated as a public health and development issue, replete with scientific jargon and medical admonitions about its spread. (Elbe 2006) Over time, the science of HIV/AIDS was replaced with more appropriate terminologies and understandings as governments, medical, and social workers attempted to slow rates of infection. HIV/AIDS became a national security issue because in our globalized world, people travel constantly: African AIDS, therefore, was not secured within African borders. (Anastasion 2004; USIP 2001) In addition, given the severity of the epidemic and so many lives lost, it was observed that population loss and upheaval could lead to political problems including, but not limited to, wars,

government and military coups, and the very collapse of nations. (Anastasion 2004; Ostergard 2002; Stephens 2000; USIP 2001) Connected to the issue of national security, HIV/AIDS has been presented, quite widely in the west, as the biggest catastrophe to befall Africa. Scientists and activists noted staggering prognostications about numbers of deaths and argued that it was not inconceivable that some African societies could literally vanish. (Nolen 2007) Finally, within these other discourses, there came a call for justice, largely connected to the issue of drug availability on the continent. (Sidel and Levy 2002) While ARTs were widely available in industrialized rich nations, their exorbitant pricing meant they were too expensive for African governments and citizens. Activist and humanitarian groups pushed to have patents lifted so lifesaving drugs could be available to Africans with AIDS. What has only sporadically been taken up is addressing HIV/AIDS within a context of global inequality.

Discourse about climate change in Africa generally, and Malawi particularly, seems similar to that of HIV/AIDS. Climate change, for many around the globe, remains a scientific issue. (Beck 2010; MacGregor 2010) While scientists have worked with policy makers (Revkin and Broder 2009) to make the language of climate change accessible to a wide audience, Jasanoff (2010) and Beck (2010) point out that climate change science is purposely disengaged from personal experience. Scientists have long pointed out that noting a hot summer here or a particularly harsh winter there does not provide concrete evidence for or against climate change. Such disengagement is, in part, because there has been so much scepticism about climate change that people will point to an isolated event as evidence that climate change science is wrong. The term “global warming” has fallen out of popular usage in part because so many people were pointing out record snowfalls and frigid winters as proof that the globe was not actually “getting warmer,” as the term suggests. (Hickman 2010) The science of climate change has to be focused

on decades,' centuries,' millennias' worth of data because weather is unpredictable and observing a few bad years is insufficient, does not *prove* anything. Jasanoff argues, "We know that the truths uncovered by science and the useful technologies that science helps build must ultimately be received back into the humdrum rhythms of ordinary lives and experiences in order to 'work'." (2010: 243) There is a constant tension, then, to connect the metadata of climate change science with the known world so that ordinary people can make use of the knowledge of climate change.

This is, in part, what is happening in Malawi. Elites note how, in order to awaken villagers to the dangers and realities of climate change, there must be education campaigns. Mussa, an economic analyst said, "what I have not seen yet is actually trying to conscietize a person to think that there are some activities that person in the village can do that contributes to climate change." Without such a process of "conscietizing," a disconnect between global science and everyday life continues because climate change remains an elite discourse. Just as the language of CD4 counts and protease inhibitors needed to be de-scientized so that regular people could understand how HIV/AIDS spread, so too does the language and the long-reach of climate science need adaptation, so average people can understand how actions now have far-reaching effects.

Climate change has long been presented as a national security threat. A 1974 article in *The New York Times* using the phrase "climate change" tells how climate changes can lead to social upheaval and notes that poor nations, particularly in Africa, are very much in danger of climate related disasters. (Sullivan 1974) And in 1975, *The New York Times* published an article based on CIA documents about how climate changes could so destabilize world grain production that there might be "increasingly desperate attempts on the part of militarily powerful "but

hungry" nations to 'get grain any way they could,'" and said that as a result, "nuclear blackmail is not inconceivable." (Weinstein 1975) National security was thus tied early and clearly to long term changes in the weather.

Connected to the issue of national security is the discourse of climate change as catastrophe. Articles about climate change and its effects play to our fears of apocalypse, noting the likelihood of extinctions of thousands of animal species, increases in violent storms and natural disasters, and the total loss of some low-lying island nations. In Africa, climate change is linked to famines which may dislocate large populations and potentially cause (or exacerbate) political and social violence; the genocide in Darfur has been connected to climate change, for example. (Kristof 2008) Just as HIV/AIDS was catastrophic because it devastated entire populations and because the social upheaval from so much death could lead, ultimately, to failed states (thus linking catastrophe with national security), climate change too has the potential to cause not only a huge death toll, but also weakening social and political structures as a result of migration and death.[25] Esther said, "The issue of climate change, if we do not address those issues, it means all those other things we are trying to do, we cannot achieve them. That's how critical it is." She noted that a climate catastrophe which destroyed the local environment would make moot all other social and health problems and attempts to solve them.

What seems to be missing in Malawi is an inclusion of social justice in climate change discourse. According to Roberts and Parks, "The term 'climate justice' is increasingly used to characterize the disparities of responsibility and impact." (2009: 393) Though many in the west agree that rich nations have done the yeoman's share of pollution resulting in problems for the poorest nations, current discourse on climate change "mitigation and adaptation" does not seem

[25] For an historical account of climate change in eastern Africa, see G.H. Enfield et al. (2009) and P. Robertshaw & D. Taylor. (2000)

to incorporate this understanding in Malawi. While my respondents point out that industrialized nations are the creators of climate change, they do not see donors addressing the disparities. As Frank said:

> Most of the big guys in the global economy are not interested in taking a sacrifice for the sake of the poor countries. It's quite interesting because much as we are facing the brunt of climate change in the poor countries, climate change may also be bringing some positive contributions to the temperate regions, um, where most of the developed countries are. So climate change could be of great harm to the south but could be of some benefit to the north.

While elites noted the injustice of climate change, no one talked about incorporating a call for climate justice into any sort of programmatic framework: instead, they focused solely on tree-cutting and the need for awareness-raising programs. It took many years for social justice to enter mainstream discussions about African AIDS; it may also take time for people to begin to incorporate justice in talks of climate change in Malawi. But given the cyclical nature of donor interest, in the time it takes to begin calling for remuneration from rich nations, donors may have already moved on to the next big thing.

Is climate change the next AIDS?

It is impossible to know whether climate change will garner the same levels of funding, much less the fixation of an international imagination, that HIV/AIDS has. But there are certainly similarities in discourse and rhetoric, including their apocalyptic predictions and national security concerns. On the surface, it would seem that climate change, like HIV/AIDS, is merely another donor-driven agenda that fails to resonate with local concerns. But as Afrobarometer data show, environmental factors related to climate change are already on the minds of a majority of Malawians—climate change makes immediate sense to people in terms of its effects. So it may be a more salient issue than HIV/AIDS was, if climate change can be framed to incorporate the concerns/needs of the most vulnerable in Malawi.

Currently, there is little consensus on how the government and NGOs are going to deal with the problem of climate change in Malawi. While a general idea of climate change is certainly in the elite discourse, no agenda seems to exist for concerted methods to address either adaptation or mitigation of climate change and there seems to be a total absence of addressing the underlying structural causes of climate change, which would require a call for climate justice. With the current emphasis on tree planting, energy efficient stoves, and "sensitization" of the rural masses on how *their* actions hurt the environment, any recognition of the overwhelming pollution created by rich countries does not enter the dialogue and rich countries are mere benefactors, providing funds to "help" prevent utter destruction in Malawi and other poor nations. As such, attention is focused on the people and activities which are, globally, least harmful to the environment, and, thus blames a problem of poverty on the poor themselves.

Climate change may well be the next AIDS in negative ways—that is, if no consensus or local leadership is brought to bear on the topic, local people never adopt it as a primary concern and, thus, never really act on it, leading to an eventual fading interest without addressing the structural underpinnings of global inequality. On the other hand, there's a possibility that climate change could be *more* than the next AIDS if the Malawi government and NGOs work together to address it. Because environmental topics or concerns about environmental conditions are *already* in the consciousness of Malawians, sensitizing people to the realities of climate change may not only garner more supporters but also see more results. In other words, people may not have to be convinced that climate change is a problem *now* (unlike the distant specter of death from AIDS) if links are clearly made between the problems they already recognize and the realities of climate change. For this reason, the government of Malawi, environmental activists, and NGOs should marshal a coherent framing strategy to speak to the causes and outcomes of climate change.

While climate change may have been introduced largely by outsiders, if Malawian leadership can frame and address climate change using local channels and local needs, if funding does materialize, perhaps local response can guide its use, incorporating local needs and knowledge in a way the HIV/AIDS industry did not.

Chapter Six

The contingent other: cultural identity, power, and rights in Malawi's civil society

Introduction

In this chapter I consider how cultural identity can be used as resistance to unwelcome foreign interventions as well as an expression of power that disregards the rights of domestic minorities. I examine the reactions of my respondents to two donor initiatives: building orphanages as part of an HIV/AIDS response and advocating for the release of two men imprisoned for homosexuality. Both efforts caused significant consternation for many Malawians, are indicative of the schisms that can exist between western and African ideals, demonstrate Malawians' flexible cultural identifications, and provide a lens with which to view competing inequalities, conceptions of human rights, and expressions of power.

While world culture theory emphasizes rights of the individual and creation of treaties and policies designed to safeguard those rights, scant attention is paid to local actors and how they are affected by cultural models or try to shift particular paradigms. The hegemonic nature of foreign intervention in Malawi and elsewhere is well established (Ali 2010; Easterly 2006; Englund 2006; Loseke 1997; Moyo 2009; Wotipka and Tsutsui 2008) but studies of group responses to development are fewer. Focusing on micro-level conceptions of rights and identity helps strengthen our understanding of globalization and the power of the world cultural model.

The differences between foreign focus on particular social issues and Malawians' interest in addressing other concerns, such as food security or education are often striking: in preceding chapters, I have explored how western agendas are interpreted by those working in the donor-sponsored NGO sector and have shown mismatches that occur between foreign and Malawian priorities. HIV/AIDS in particular has been a major emphasis of western donors, to the detriment

of other social and health programs. (MacKellar 2005; Shiffman 2008) One NGO director told me, “Put up a good program to tackle HIV/AIDS, you get funding very quickly. If you put up a good proposal to tackle poverty in terms of food security, uh, sometimes you will not be funded. So yeah, I think the attention to AIDS is really more than maybe perhaps, uh, the attention that should go to the underlying causes of HIV/AIDS.” Thus even while development agendas and projects are nearly always depoliticized, I have shown how those working within development have a politicized understanding of foreign interventions. But despite these undercurrents of discontent, there seems to be little public resistance to most donor-driven agendas. Authors writing about world culture note that there are, occasionally, conflicts over the “universal” values or foci dictated by core nations, particularly issues related to human rights (see Beckfield 2003; Boli and Thomas 1997; Elliott 2007; and Meyer et al. 1997) but few give concrete examples of ideological conflicts or consider how these conflicts play out at country level.

As I spoke with people about the challenges of working in civil society in Malawi, I began to notice shifts between who my respondents viewed as the “other”: sometimes it was foreigners, sometimes it was poor villagers. The switches often occurred in the context of culturally charged issues, and investigating this alternating other may reveal much about elites’ views of particular foreign interventions as well as the cultural contexts that influence their ideas. My work suggests that attempts to address non-prioritized problems are sometimes at odds with Malawians’ views of themselves and their cultures, which may at best prevent “buy-in” to those strategies, or at worst chip away at locals’ belief in the possibility of dialogue and partnership. But importantly, peoples’ use of cultural identity invites critical reflections on layers of power and inequality that exist not only between the west and Malawi but within Malawian society itself.

When I discussed this chapter at a recent sociology meeting, one person, who has done work in several African countries, responded that whenever his participants start referencing an "African" or country-specific identity, he ignores it because he assumes it is merely a response to his foreignness and supposed ignorance of their values, rendering the reference meaningless. If respondents' were consistent in their usage of an ethnic/cultural identity, I might be more inclined to agree with his assessment. But their identifications would change several times within the same interview, and I think that the change is telling. In Malawi, as elsewhere, power is layered. There are ethnic, religious, age, and class differences, among others, that influence interactions, ideals, and needs. Malawians working in NGOs act as a bridge between foreigners and locals, they are both recipients of aid (as Malawians) and experts/elites. In myriad ways, they are both subject and object and employ their own categories and schemas in their work and interactions. Examining their reactions to donor interventions gives us insight not only into differences between the west and Malawi but into power dynamics within Malawian society itself.

In providing a thick description of conflict over western agendas in Malawi, thereby addressing a critical absence in world society and development literatures, this chapter makes several key contributions. First, I demonstrate that using culture and identity arguments can be simultaneously anti-hegemonic and oppressive. Second, I show that cultural identity arguments in the human rights context emanate from world culture, even as they appear to critique it. This chapter thus enhances sociological understandings of the micro-level impacts of globalization by noting shifting power dynamics and contestations. I accomplish this by bringing together micro and macro cultural theories to demonstrate that local culture is not simply subsumed within

global culture; instead, local actors use both local and global arguments to protect and promote local ideals.

Orphanages and Homosexuality: Introducing the cases

HIV/AIDS has killed many adults of childbearing age, leaving their children behind: UNICEF estimated that in 2009, there were 650,000 orphans in Malawi. (UNICEF 1) Orphans are defined as children who have lost at least one parent. Those writing about the pandemic have noted that "traditional" African extended family structures are unable to cope with the sheer volume of needy children and that grannies are parenting again, when they should be resting and enjoying a less directly-responsible relationship with their children's children. (De Waal 2006; Nolen, 2007) Part of the social strategy for dealing with problems associated with AIDS in Malawi has been to increase funding for building orphanages to house orphans, though often the children have a living parent or relatives. Though it seems a reasonable mechanism to deal with the social upheaval of so many orphaned children, in 2008, many respondents, unprompted, discussed their frustration with donor interest in orphanages because of their strangeness in the Malawian context. They saw orphanages as an ill-informed donor priority, one that not only failed to solve the problem of rising numbers of orphans, but that also failed to account for the complexity of Malawian cultural systems.

Like orphanages, homosexuality is considered abnormal in the Malawian context. Homosexuality in Malawi, as opposed to the west, has not been a focus of HIV/AIDS prevention. Most Malawians claim that it does not exist in the country and indeed, gay and lesbian people have existed in near-absolute secrecy. Some scholars note that HIV/AIDS in Africa was initially ignored because westerners presumed that homosexuality, the focus of all early study of HIV/AIDS in the west, was absent on the continent, and thus HIV/AIDS could not

be a problem for African societies. (Fee and Fox 1992; Patton 1990) Issues of sexuality have not been studied thoroughly in most parts of Africa,[26] Malawi included, and there remain many western assumptions about Africans' sexualities. (Sawers and Stillwaggon 2010)

Homosexuality is against the law in Malawi: one found guilty of "buggery," as it is called, may be sentenced to a maximum of fourteen years in prison.[27] Worldwide, laws criminalizing same-sex sexual relations have lessened in the last half-century (Frank and Mceneaney 1999; Frank et al. 2010) but in December 2009, two Malawian men, Tiwonge Chimbalanga (coined by the media as "Aunt Tiwo" because he wore a woman's *zitenge*/wrapper) and his partner Steven Monjeza, were arrested on charges of homosexuality. They were engaged to marry and immediately the issue became a national and international sensation. Whereas Malawi's previous mention in international news was largely limited to stories about AIDS or Madonna's charity, the country was suddenly the center of a global controversy as foreign donors and governments responded to the imprisonment of the two men. The local response to the events was intense and outspoken: "the gay issue" became the topic on everyone's mind and nearly all voices opposed freeing the men. On the other hand, international response was solidly in their favor. Meyer et. al. argues that global culture is so powerful it can override local culture stating, "the world level of social reality is culturally transcendent and causally important." (1997: 148) Sanctions were threatened against Malawi if the government did not acquiesce to international pressure to release the two imprisoned men: Malawi's constitutional provision against homosexuality was disavowed in the face of the sacredness of

[26] A notable exception is South Africa. South Africa recognizes same sex marriage and gay and lesbian men and women have been at the forefront of the AIDS Justice Movement.

[27] Malawi is not alone in outlawing homosexuality. Continent wide, a majority of countries have laws expressly prohibiting homosexuality. Those found in violation of anti-homosexuality laws are subject to imprisonment and, in some places, even death. (See http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2010/1208/In-Africa-homosexuality-emerging-as-hot-button-issue, accessed 4 March, 2011) Anti-homosexuality rhetoric has been building in Kenya and Uganda. Uganda has been the site of anti-gay missionizing by Americans, and, recently, a local activist was murdered. (Gettleman, 2011a & 2011b)

the individual in the moral order of world culture. In the end, the president bowed to international pressures and pardoned the two men, who had been sentenced to fourteen years in separate prisons.

Juxtaposing these two cases serves several important purposes. The two issues are quite conceptually distinct: homosexuality is a contentious issue across the continent and it is somewhat unsurprising that there would be significant backlash—both foreign and domestic—about Malawi's handling of the Chimbalanga/Monjeza case. But orphanages seem, on the surface, to be a non-contentious issue. Comparing the two cases therefore demonstrates that even a seemingly "harmless" foreign intervention can have markedly different interpretations in-country. The two cases help demonstrate the homogenizing effect of world cultural values. In addition, looking at the two gives us a very clear sense of how cultural identity shifts in different contexts and how it is *used*. It is instructive to demystify a national/cultural identity in order to move beyond simplistic understandings of western hegemony and consider a more nuanced and encompassing idea of power.

Culture, Development, and the Other

Discussion of culture is not wholly absent in studies about development in Africa (Englund 2006; Hodzic 2009) but few authors have specifically engaged cultural identity in their work. Western discourse highlights supposed aspects of African culture and some authors have noted factors related to it, particularly with regard to gendered roles in the spread or prevention of HIV/AIDS. Rasmussen (2008) writes that in Uganda, there is a notion that men are responsible for much of the spread of HIV because of their "normal" manly desires and habits. As such, interventions have sought to address proper Ugandan manhood or "good" ways for men to behave. Both women and men, in Malawi and elsewhere, are presumed to seek marriage with

the supposed inevitable accompaniment of family, as this is a critical component of African adulthood. (Clark et al. 2009; Yeatman 2009) Peters (2008) argues against the oft-stated idea that Malawians are in denial of AIDS as a reason for high rates of the illness and a failure to change behavior. She examines the family system and the ways Malawians rely on and assist family, rooting her work in culture without specifically addressing *Malawians'* use of ethnicity.

Merry (2006) details how local cultural contexts must be considered when introducing gender violence policies if they are to be effective. Hodzic (2009) describes how the idea of Ghanaian ethnicity was mobilized by the state as a means to override calls for a domestic violence bill and argues that a cultural argument sometimes masks oppressive domestic power. These works address reactions to western ideals or development strategies, either implicitly or explicitly considering interactions of culture and power. But as Hodzic notes, "'Power' is examined only in locations *already* understood as hegemonic, such as the Western origin of the human rights discourse… The deployment of 'culture' *in opposition to rights* is not understood as a form of exercise of power, but as a form of 'resistance'." (2009: 352, emphasis in original) It seems possible that a dearth of attention to an idea of ethnicity and culture is a result of wanting to distance ourselves from generalizations of African cultural traits. (Anthropologists have long argued against the reification of culture; see for example Comaroff and Comaroff 2004). While it is right to be skeptical of simplistic notions of Malawian-ness or culture and ethnicity, it is also useful to question when and why people *themselves* engage the notion of ethnicity as a reason for their behavior or beliefs.

The cognitive turn in cultural theory alerts us to the tenuousness of cultural identity and the very idea of ethnicity. DiMaggio (1997) argues that because cultural knowledge is vast and fragmented, we require organizing schemata to make sense of the chaos. Cultural change often

occurs when analogies are made between new ideas and pre-existing schemata: we are more likely to take note of and respond to events or situations that fall into pre-existing schematic categories. Categories, according to Amsterdam and Bruner (2000), help us identify situations quickly and easily. Ann Swidler (1986) argues that culture does not dictate action but, rather, creates a foundation of options, her well-cited notion of the "toolkit," that helps people choose between different or competing strategies of action. Thus our schema and categories do not rule us, but rather help us make judgments and choices. And Brubaker et al. (2004) argue that a category such as "ethnicity" or "ethnic group" is *used*—that it is not a firmly existing entity. In this way, categories need not seem absolute or simplistic.

Categories and schemata, particularly those related to race or ethnicity, may be employed at specific times, when it behooves an actor to do so or when faced with a structure that requires a person to fit neatly into some predetermined grouping. At one point, a Malawian friend told me that "Outside of Africa, I am African; in Africa, I am a Malawian; in Malawi, I am Chewa; among Chewa, I am a Phiri; and among Phiris, I am simply Austin, son of my father, Lucius," indicating that not only do others define him and place him in categories but that he does so himself, depending on where he is and who he is with. These identifications may or may not be purposeful and self-identifications may or may not be conscious choices. (Bucholtz and Hall 2005) Ideas of ethnicity and cultural identity are far from static but though they are contingent on particular interactions and experiences, they still retain structural ties to cultural categories and norms. Gol (2005) noted that Turkish ideas of nationhood and identity were predicated on an ideology of Armenians as "others." Cinar, (2010) also writing about Turkey, argues that a national identity was formed from positioning Turkey in relation to a global other. As Brubaker et al. (2004) and Amsterdam and Bruner (2000) write, categories and schemas are, in fact,

socially constructed and, thus malleable. The idea of the "other" is not a timeless grouping. We have in our minds ideas of "the other" at all times, and whereas one group may be "the other" at some point, it may be our in-group at another.

Who the others are

Malawi is comprised of numerous ethnic groups—Chewa, Tumbuka, Lomwe, Ngoni, Yao, and others but generally, there is little discord between them. As Swidler and Watkins (2009) and Englund (2006) found, class status, more than ethnicity, is the primary form of division between Malawians. The authors document ways in which villagers try to gain access to opportunities by connecting with rich(er) outsiders. Simultaneously, elites try to distance themselves from villagers, posturing as important by prominently using their cell phones and shuttling around in well-appointed vehicles. In Malawi, the inexact notion of "rural" versus "urban" often acts as a proxy for the label of class though as Englund carefully described, poverty is rampant in cities as well as villages. Many urban Malawians who can afford the travel are expected to return home for weddings, funerals, and other major family events where they are meant to contribute funds that relatives suppose they've made in the cities. And it is not uncommon to hear urban Malawians talk about "In the villages…" when they are discussing issues of money, "traditional" beliefs, or lack of education. A friend who had lived in the capital, Lilongwe, for half her life, confessed to me that she was very uncomfortable having to go back to her family village. "I am from there but when I go, I just can't wait to come back home… The village isn't home anymore."

My interviews supported the idea of division between elites and non-elites, particularly along this presumed urban/rural divide. When I asked Mohammed, a program director of a large

parastatal organization, what he felt were the greatest impediments facing Malawi's progress, he said:

> The problems are culture. I don't think we have something that I would personally say is the problem facing Malawi as a whole. Okay we talk about HIV/AIDS but to me, it's the issue of livelihoods. We need to find some way of being productive. Every family needs to have this sense of being productive. This also has something to do with our culture. In the sense that we like, um, I would give you something ["handouts"]… And it creates a dependency.

As I noted in Chapter Four, the notion that poor people in rural areas are dependent upon handouts was a common one. Several respondents discussed frustrations of trying to create programming for people who would not participate without some form of remuneration and linked this to a notion of dependency, which was a "cultural" problem in the rural areas. Chrisford, director of a local NGO remarked, "People expect others to provide… When you create interventions, people won't do anything without being compensated." This idea was common, and respondents were quick to discuss it, often shortly after they'd noted their frustrations with donors' unwillingness to fund organization "running costs"—which made collecting their own salaries quite tenuous. Though my respondents saw this focus on compensation as a cultural issue, the emphasis on per-diems or funding-for-participation is by no means limited to Malawi; see Smith's work (2003) on the "Workshop Mentality."

Many respondents remarked on the changelessness of rural areas, linking it to endemic economic and health problems in Malawi. One respondent told me that Malawi's problems stem from "Cultural beliefs… Some in some districts they are lagging behind. They do not want to change to new ways of living… do not want to adjust to new things." Respondents also blamed what they referred to as "harmful cultural practices." When I pressed them to elaborate on what they meant, elites noted customs such as marrying a widow to her deceased husband's brother as a means to care for her and the children as well as the practice of having a woman who cannot

conceive covertly sleep with men other than her husband. These examples (and indeed the very term “harmful cultural/traditional practices”) come directly from a UN campaign to reduce HIV transmission. (UNICEF 1; UNFPA 1) Elites’ repeated use of the term shows that not all western interventions (even when they expressly vilify aspects of Malawian culture) are deemed problematic by elites. They see themselves as completely separate from these aspects of tradition and so the difference here is one of elites versus uneducated villagers. But I found that urban elites did not wholeheartedly (or at least consistently) embrace this urban/rural, us/them dichotomy. At times, elites were quick to embrace aspects of Malawianness, or a national cultural identity, lauding Malawian “tradition” and “values” and locating themselves within this cultural framework.

Malawian elites seem to use cultural identification, or a Malawian ethnicity/identity, quite fluidly. While they may be utterly judgmental of perceived shortcomings in culture they see embodied in rural areas, they may also, at other times, strongly associate with that same culture. The other against whom they are identifying, changes. As Swidler (1986) notes, judgments shift during unsettled times and so considering who “the other” is at any given time or in any given situation, may indicate shifting cultural ideas or norms. Elites with whom I spoke strongly identified with Malawian culture in defense of particular outsiders’ perspectives. Two issues that seemed to elicit these strong positive cultural identifications were orphanages and the issue of homosexuality.

Orphanages

Given the excessive numbers of orphans, largely as a consequence of the AIDS pandemic, foreign organizations have built orphan care centers as a means to cope with children lacking one or both parents. But this strategy creates consternation and ill-will among many

members of Malawi's educated elite who see it as misguided and, frankly, not appropriate within their culture; many used tradition and culture as a way to demonstrate their dislike of orphanages. Eunice, who directs a regional NGO, told me that:

> I was driving around in Mangochi area and I saw that they're building orphanages and to me that is stigmatization, we're putting a label and we're already excluding these people from society. They're going to grow up thinking they're a special case… If we can just love these children amongst ourselves [that would be best]. And that's what they miss most, to be part of a normal society…

Building on the same theme, and talking about his frustration that monies were being funneled into channels that were inappropriate, Geoffrey, another program director, said:

> To me there is also a lot of resources that are being diverted into people making orphanages. I for one call that caging kids and I don't think that helps because to me you even increase the stigma. And also you're denying these kids from a normal environment from which they should grow. You're creating an artificial environment.

The idea of normality, which other authors (see De Waal 2006 and Peters et al. 2008) have touched on, is a critical one. Medical sociologists have amply demonstrated the social control inherent in "normalizing" events or states of being. (Brown 1995; Gilman 1985; Zola 1972) "Normal" represents ideas of the powerful and excludes and stigmatizes any person who does not fit within a particular framework. Normal, to my respondents, meant being part of a family, being loved by Malawians and incorporated into a traditional family structure. Anything less would create dysfunction and a stigmatizing effect on children. Peters, Walker, and Kambewa (2008) write that a desire for normality is a coping mechanism to deal with the social upheaval that has accompanied the HIV/AIDS pandemic in some areas of Africa. Elites, no less than other Malawians, have been affected by the epidemic: because they have higher incomes than families in the villages, they are often called upon to care for relatives' children, pay funeral costs, or help in other financial ways. In addition, elites are as, if not more, likely to be infected with HIV/AIDS than poor Africans. (Fortson 2008; Shelton et al. 2005) Desire for normality does not

necessarily stem from a negative view of orphans or orphanages *per se*, or a genuine concern for orphans' well-being, but rather a return to a (perhaps imagined) time when the social order was more intact.

Any notion of urban/rural, us/them, or bad tradition evaporated when my respondents were talking about orphanages. Instead, they focused on the benefits of Malawian family life and its outcomes, again indicating a desire for stability and tradition that many feel is lost. Several of my respondents were adoptive parents themselves, caring for the children of deceased or impoverished relatives. Interestingly, while my *respondents* praised the values of the Malawi extended family system and the willingness of relatives to care for one another, Sanyu Mojola told me that in her research with Kenyan orphans, many *children* were anxious and excited to leave the extended family system and enter orphanages. They saw orphanages as more egalitarian, providing more opportunities than aunts or uncles whom they felt often favored biological children over adopted relatives. (August 2010: ASA Atlanta, informal conversation) The extended family system is idealized, to an extent, as the same elites who long to rely on it rue the fact that they are responsible for so many family members.

The subject of orphanages seemed to strike a nerve amongst many Malawian elites, as though it meant Malawians could no longer care for their own children. Lawrence, an official in one parastatal organization, told me:

> Things like orphan centers. Strictly speaking, that's very un-Malawian. If I told my grandmother if they were alive that there were such a thing as an orphan care center they would say 'wait a minute it's a big joke.' Why?… If I die, if my wife dies, it's expected that somehow there'll be a system where my two kids are going to go… Someone somewhere will take them.

By invoking his grandmother, Lawrence indicated that there was a better way, in the past, and that orphanages were interfering with tradition and normal Malawian ways of life. Whereas elites

clearly note differences between themselves and other members of Malawian society, namely villagers, they also find common ground in particular traditional practices and ideals, indicating that ethnicity/culture is a fluid concept, used when appropriate for their purposes. Though elites frequently disdained aspects of tradition or culture in the villages, they invoked a positive connection to the extended family system and village community to show their opposition to orphanages as a development strategy or means of coping with parentless children.

Invoking tradition and Malawian culture, no matter how idealized, serves to focus attention on resistance to ideas or actions, since identity is performative (Goffman 1959) and can function as social action. (Bucholtz and Hall 2005) But opposition to orphanages seems more conceptual than concrete because though my respondents disparaged orphanages, there was no activism directed against them. Orphanages, no matter how disliked, have sprung up all around Malawi in recent years; the government and non-governmental sectors have sanctioned, even celebrated orphanages. No one says that orphans will purposely be treated differently if they do not grow up within the family system and no one claims that orphanages, no matter how foreign to Malawian culture, are threatening Malawian sovereignty. But while orphanages inspired fond, idealized musings about the benefits of Malawian social and family systems, the issue of homosexuality inspired nearly unanimous valorization of Malawian "cultural values" in opposition to western individualism and focus on minority rights. "The gay issue" invited such public rancor that few organizations (I could not find any) accepted money to work on the issue, despite their constant need for funds and a willingness to accept donor strictures in numerous other social areas. (Morfit 2011) In addition, people not only lacked remorse for the oppression of the gay men but actually insisted that it was right and that it continue.

Homosexuality

Homosexuality, an issue raised by the arrest and subsequent imprisonment of Chimbalanga and Monjeza, further emphasizes the extent to which elites identify themselves as culturally Malawian in particular circumstances. Though the issue had died down somewhat by the time I arrived in May 2010, it still came up in all but one of my interviews. The overarching theme was that homosexuality is un-Malawian and no one should try to force Malawians to accept something so inimical to their beliefs and values. In fact President Mutharika, in discussing his decision to pardon the two men in May 2010, said that while that was his decision this time, homosexuality is unacceptable in Malawi and that if others followed the men's example, they would receive the same sentence but would not receive the same pardon. And two weeks after Monjeza and Chimbalanga were arrested, Mary Shawa, Secretary of Nutrition and HIV/AIDS, is quoted as saying, "It [homosexuality] is absolutely unacceptable. The Malawi society does not condone this kind of behavior." (Kasunda 2010) The most elite Malawians thus discussed homosexuality as anathema. As I will show, there were three main, interconnected responses to what many respondents termed "the gay issue," all of which are also rooted in the rights discourse: it threatened national sovereignty; it led to neglect of important issues and was thus a waste of scarce resources; and it promoted the subversion of normal morals and values, which people often linked to discussions of western-centric human rights.

National Sovereignty

Pressure to release the two men was viewed with scorn by many Malawians. A newspaper poll asked whether legislation should be changed, legalizing homosexuality, and every response was no. A few notable quotes were, "Our nation should not change because of western influence,"; "People who are positively behind this should know that some of these

adopted cultures can destroy our nation,"; and [They] "should be examined for sanity."[28] Several of my respondents noted that the issue pointed out how dependent Malawi is on foreign donors, one going so far as to say, "It's an illusion to claim that we are sovereign… We're driven." Another said "It threatened our democracy because the outcomes were not democratic. But we really saw at that point that the donors had such a strong— it was a wakeup call. And even for government, it made them realize that the relationship is very fragile if it's going to be determining our own national priorities."

Arguments for the protection of national sovereignty come, in part, from world cultural values of states' rights and the primacy of democracy as a governance strategy. Pointing out how donors were undermining Malawi's democratic structures used world cultural principles to critique other world cultural principles—namely the individual rights of Chimbalanga and Monjeza. Saida Hodzic (2009) argues that the mobilization of a sovereignty argument plays on uncomplicated notions of the all-powerful west riding roughshod over "native" understandings and culture, which takes for granted that there is a unified voice of resistance and fails to critique the argument for the power dynamics it masks. The issue of homosexuality is indeed more complicated than a simple reaction to supposed foreign ideals of human rights. But worries about Malawian sovereignty were not simply created by the government to sway the populace toward denying rights to the gay men, though certainly the *language* has deep historical roots. Instead, the use of the sovereignty argument in Malawi is *both* a reaction to perceived western dominance and a call to maintain legal discrimination against homosexuals.

By invoking the issue of national sovereignty, Malawians relied on both well-established universal cultural principles and a well-understood historical schema, cultivated during the

[28] "Political Index—My take on whether legislation on gay relationships should be revised." 2010. In *The Nation*, January 27, pg. 4.

colonial era and continued during the presidency of H. Kamuzu Banda, of us/Malawian versus them/the west, to respond to and encourage scorn of homosexuality and interest in the men by donors and human rights groups. As scholars have shown, human rights issues *are* at times a threat to national sovereignty, particularly when countries sign international treaties, as Malawi has done. (See for example Blau and Moncada 2007; Hagan and Levi 2007; Tsutsui 2004; and Wotipka and Tsutsui 2008. Cole (2005) argues that state sovereignty is not necessarily at risk but, rather, that international treaties affirm states' commitments to issues and help solidify their reputations in the international field.) While the concerns over donor intervention may be well-founded, they nonetheless take the focus away from the rights of the gay men (and other gay Malawians), thereby undermining them and enabling state-sponsored oppression. Leaving aside the normative issue of whether foreigners *should* intervene in domestic human rights issues, if elites were so concerned with national sovereignty and foreigners' negative influence on Malawian traditions and norms, then a national sovereignty argument could be made against many more donor interventions, including orphanages, but it is not. In this case, a sovereignty argument serves the majority and appeals for cohesion against an oppressed minority.

A waste of resources

Many people did not blame the government for releasing the men but instead viewed it as a necessity. "It was the lesser evil," said Nenani, who works at a religious NGO, "since you know you don't have all the resources to support these people, this government, of Malawi, then two people can't allow you to lose resources to take care of a lot of people who depend on you." Elites were reacting to fears, real and perceived, that donors would revoke funding for the government and NGOs unless the Malawi government freed the men and unless NGOs took up the call to legalize homosexuality. Indeed, the external pressures were significant: even UN

Secretary General Ban Ki Moon spoke to President Mutharika, intervening in the issue. Davious, a program director at a small local NGO, told me that the Global Fund had decided to provide less money to the National AIDS Commission (NAC) because NAC had no plan for dealing with "the gays." I found no evidence to support this claim but it is indicative of the local discourse surrounding the subject. Elites tended to believe that donors and the outside media forced the issue. They saw the government as caught up in it and trying to make the best decision for the country as a whole, since the entire nation had been maligned. John, a program director for a local NGO told me, "We are just a small country but these big countries were criticizing us so much. These big places were talking about Malawi in this negative way. It really disturbed me."

Many of my respondents viewed the entire matter as a waste of time, resources, and energy when there are so many significant problems facing so many Malawians. While one assistant director emphatically stated that he has no problem with homosexuality, even he said, "If we make a lot of noise about it, we make them heroes," preferring to ignore the men and all other homosexuals in favor of focusing on bigger problems facing more people. Hastings, who works at a human rights organization, talked about violence against women to demonstrate that focusing on these two men was not what Malawians wanted:

> If a woman had her arms chopped off by her husband and they jumped on that and said, 'How women are being abused in Malawi!' I would have understood that. But these two guys… It's a misplaced debate for Malawi. If we want to invoke discussion of minority rights, then there are people suffering in Malawi [more] than the gays. It was an international agenda… That's why we [the organization] didn't even enter into the debate. We said, 'It's not true' and I don't need to be convinced by anybody that it is true.

Hastings' example dismisses the issue of homosexuality as inconsequential, relying on another world culture principle to do so. In recent years, there has been a campaign to frame women's rights and violence against women as a human rights issue. (Merry 2006) Pointing out that there

are women's rights abuses in Malawi or abuses against other groups thus relies on world cultural scripts to critique this particular foreign concern which also comes from a human rights perspective. Hastings acknowledges that human rights abuses occur in Malawi but criticizes the focus on homosexuality as failing to recognize even more marginalized groups—an opinion shared by many. Several people told me the only reason *any* Malawians supported the gay men was because, "There was cooption of some Malawian citizens… Some of the people doing it were getting resources to do that." And they lamented the amount of money being poured into something that benefitted so few.

Abnormality and immorality

Because homosexuality is expressly prohibited in Malawi's constitution, and because so many people find the issue abhorrent, elites noted that Malawi is a "God-fearing nation" and that these imported value systems were threatening Malawian culture. The anti-gay stance is strongly upheld by religious leaders. Christianity and Islam are the dominant religions and, in Malawi, both condemn homosexuality. The issue was a hot topic in religious sermons and grounding the idea of morality in religious dogma only serves to undermine the majority opinion.

In addition to conflating homosexuality with religion and moral values, the entire issue of human rights is troubling to many. Hastings continued, saying, "What is a human right and when do we invoke the right of a minority? Human rights cut across all humans," again using the categories and language of world culture to condemn universal principles of the sanctity of the individual. This notion that minority rights were dangerous to the rights of the majority was common but is not specific to Malawi. Human rights and culture are often presented by both academicians and activists as dialectical, with a constant unresolved tension between the two. (Cowan 2006) In interviews, respondents seemed to cleave to the cultural/community side of the

debate in this issue, privileging a general cultural majority. Dokiso, an assistant director at a regional NGO, told me, "They [foreigners] are worried about minority rights. But what about the majority? What about the majority who are offended by seeing such things?" And a letter to the editor read:

> Dear Editor, These days there is a lot of talk on human rights. However, nobody talks about obligations to safe-guard the rights of others. The meaning of human rights has been distorted. To many this means total freedom without responsibility… It is in the same vein that whoever comes and sponsors organizations in Malawi to lobby for irresponsibility in the name of human rights is doing a bad job.[29]

Elites do not situate themselves as separate from the majority in this issue. Rather, they support preservation of the values and morals of the majority, Malawian culture. They posit foreigners and anyone buying into such un-Malawian beliefs as the problem; 'us,' in this case, is the Malawian majority.

The outcry against homosexuality was extreme. Few people I spoke to were understanding, no matter their level of education or whether they spent time overseas in places where homosexuality is not so vilified. People viewed homosexuality as abnormal or reflective of an abnormal environment. Winston, who has worked in various NGOs for nearly three decades, informed me that "we accept that it happens in prison… people are able to acknowledge that it can only happen in an abnormal environment." Prior to this case, most Malawians I spoke with claimed that homosexuality did not exist in the country. In 2000, during an informal conversation, one of my Malawian friends told me, "we don't have that here like you do that side." The desire to downplay homosexuality was so common and thorough that several people mentioned the idea that the two men weren't actually homosexual at all but were "planted" to test something or divert attention from some other issue, though no one could tell me what that issue might be.

[29] Concerned citizen. 2010. *The Nation*. January 29, pg. 15.

One comment in a newspaper poll voiced the opinion that homosexuals "are the enemies of population growth!" How could a family form when two people could not have children? The notion that procreation should be a "natural" component of any relationship is of course not uniquely Malawian. But in Malawi, as in many African and other nations, family, clan, and community are valued above the self. Though I am reluctant to ascribe behaviors or beliefs to a nebulous concept of "culture," there are structures in place that influence ideas, values, and actions and to deny a Malawian emphasis on community would be shortsighted. For example, in rural areas, women and men are often not referred to by their given names but, rather, as mother or father of so-and-so. It is more respectful, indicates their status as parents, and shows their enmeshment (and, by extension, their children's enmeshment) in the community. Thus for Malawians, individual rights are often subsumed into collective rights.

Not being part of a family or community group is socially unacceptable. The threat to children growing up in an orphanage is that they will not have those critical connections. Homosexuality, to many, creates the same potential for abnormality and divisiveness. Once one has stepped out of the realm of the group, they no longer fit neatly into normal social structures which threatens the very nature of social cohesion and categories: amends must be made. One can see an attempt at this in the reactions of the two men at the center of the controversy. Steven Monjeza publically renounced his "gay lifestyle" and announced his intention to marry a woman. *The Nation*, one of the two major national daily newspapers, ran a front page photo of Monjeza and his fiancé receiving money from a Malawian businessman who praised Monjeza for making the right choice and wanted to help him start a proper heterosexual life. (Somanje, 2010) By acquiescing to heterosexual marriage, Monjeza placed himself in a culturally appropriate social position to repair his image and reenter "normal" society. Chimbalanga Tiwonge said that he was

pushed into the marriage, corroborating people's musings that the entire event was staged. It is also reported that he was bewitched as a child, thereby relieving him of the responsibility of "choice," and placing himself in a well-known social category (bewitched) for explaining "deviant" behavior. Now that the two men are free from prison, they must rejoin regular society, no easy task, so they are using socially acceptable means and categories to do so.

As in the discussion of orphanages, ideals of normality are indicative, in part, of a negative response to a new phenomenon and the uncertainty that accompanies it. In this case, though, the overwhelming public response to the imprisoned men went beyond concern over western values and funding or an idealized past. Instead, positioning the men as abnormal and un-Malawian served to strengthen sentiment for social sanction of all homosexuals, denying their rights and enabling homophobic discourse and action. John said, "I could not sit here and have a conversation with Steven Monjeza. I would just be looking at him and not take him seriously." The perception that foreigners were trying to destabilize the values of the Malawian majority and might actually rescind critical funding only played into historical dialogue about western hegemony and the undermining of Malawian culture, lending credence to the dismissal of the men's rights.

Conclusions

By examining disagreements with two particular donor priorities, I add a critical dimension to literature on world cultural values. Vacillating between "us," educated and broadminded urban elites and "them," uneducated villagers mired in backwards customs and "us," proud Malawians and "them," foreigners, my respondents demonstrate that identities are fluid and enacted purposely, though not necessarily consciously. Their negative reactions to

orphanages and especially homosexuality (and consequent assertion of the beauty of Malawian traditional customs) act as both resistance to foreign ideals *and* an entrenchment of bias.

While the issues were framed as Malawian culture imperiled by western values, it seems likely that cultural affiliation goes beyond merely reacting to outsiders' ideas and initiatives and relates to Malawian structural categories: this becomes clearer by comparing and contrasting the two donor priorities. For both issues, what elites (and others) objected to were abnormality and stigma. With regard to orphanages, the concern was that children would not be properly socialized or connected to a family or village unit. In terms of homosexuality, many Malawians found it morally wrong, but wrong in a practical sense as well. There are several similarities between elites' dislike of both orphanages and donor commitment to sexual freedom from a human rights perspective, but there are also distinctions and these are instructive. Many elites critique orphanages as un-Malawian, for creating abnormal environments for children, and for wasting funds, whereas the "traditional" Malawian extended family system promotes social cohesion and maintains a normal environment. Many elites (and non-elites polled and quoted in news sources) condemn homosexuality as un-Malawian, the product of abnormal environments, and a focus on it as a waste of time and money whereas traditional Malawian values allow for the good of the majority and the propagation of the family system.

Building on research in world culture and the cognitive turn, this chapter shows that while the west has used and continues to use power to advance its goals, Malawian society is not devoid of power differentials and inequalities, and the powerful majority will use well-known categories of us and them to help undermine local minorities. Discourse germinated during historical resistance struggles may be used to promote inequality today. And at times, Malawians use world cultural principles to demonstrate their disagreement with other universal principles,

indicating the extent to which world cultural values have permeated distinct cultural realms and become part of local cultural toolkits. This does not erase the hegemonic character of world culture or western intervention but does complicate our understandings of Malawian resistance. My research indicates that examining the changing use of ethnicity/identity among Malawian elites provides a fruitful way to understand perceptions of, and reactions to, western assistance, while simultaneously considering inequalities within Malawi society itself.

Chapter Seven

Conclusions

During the writing of this dissertation, situations in Malawi have continued to evolve. Malawi's recent social and economic history, no less than its more distant history, help emphasize the macro and microsociological points I have made in the dissertation. In 2001 and 2002, and again in 2005, Malawi experienced droughts which led to poor harvests and widespread famine. Bingu wa Mutharika, who became president of Malawi in 2004, instituted an agricultural subsidy program in 2005, responding to the devastation of the latter famine. The subsidy program, which in many ways mimicked the pre-structural adjustment programs of President Banda's era, provided vouchers for farmers to access fertilizer, enabling them to overcome problems of nutrient-leached soil. The subsidy program was welcomed by Malawians who, as I showed in chapter three, felt food security issues were their most pressing problems. But the subsidy program was castigated by donors: the European Union, USAID, the World Bank and others refused to sponsor it. Still, despite lack of outside support, the Malawi government prioritized the fertilizer subsidies and the country rapidly achieved national food security. Despite being enormously costly, the subsidy had positive economic effects: farmers were able to grow more food than they needed and, thus, sold crops for money, allowing them to make other necessary material purchases. Additionally, the years 2005 through 2009 saw significant macroeconomic growth in the country as a whole. (Dorward et. al. 2010)

Beyond the obvious gains of increased crop yields, the government's decision to ignore donors and prioritize the subsidy program created a sense of pride within Malawi. As Madalitso, an economist, explained to me, "With this farm subsidy program, believe you me Malawi has seen some progress. You know in the media, they talk about Malawi, Malawi, Malawi because

we can feed ourselves." Furthermore, when the subsidy worked, donors changed their minds and began to espouse the program, not only within Malawi but elsewhere. After reiterating donors' initial refusal to finance the subsidies, Takondwa told me, "Malawi had to do it out of its own money, saying this is what we know is going to work... It's actually the results of that initiative has also now brought the donors back and they say 'Oh if Malawi can be food sustaining, then so can the whole of Africa.'" The subsidy program therefore became a symbol for the government's political will, the country's ability to effectively name and resolve its own problems, acting as a beacon for the entire continent, and the lack of foresight of donors who changed their tunes after the subsidy began to work. (Dugger 2007; Sachs 2012)[30] I was impressed, in both 2008 and 2010, to hear people talking positively about their government's accomplishments and openly critiquing areas they thought could be better. What a change, I thought, from my 2000 experience when people were too nervous to send a perfectly polite petition.

But by the end of 2010, the political tenor in Malawi was shifting again. World tobacco prices fell drastically, which prevented Malawi from accessing critical foreign exchange currency (Forex); the price of oil, which had risen dramatically the previous year, was impacting the cost of imports, including the all-important fertilizer; and lack of focus on infrastructure meant frequent power outages and breakdowns in the water system. In addition, Mutharika, who had been reelected in a landslide victory in 2009, seemed to be taking a decided turn to the dictatorial, quashing academic freedom at Malawi's universities, threatening news sources for "disrespectful" portrayals of the president, and cancelling local elections. Donors began to withdraw support amid concerns that Malawi was moving away from democratic ideals. Then, in

[30] Jeffrey Sachs wrote about the subsidy in the *New York Times*, describing a conversation with a British donor representative who, in 2009, reportedly told Sachs that the entire subsidy program had been the donors' idea. While I'm hesitant to ascribe too much to this conversation that so valorizes Sachs' supposed omniscience, it is quite indicative of the discourse that arose around the subsidies inside and outside Malawi.

July 2011, local groups and civil society organizations mobilized demonstrations with the theme, "Uniting For Peaceful Resistance Against Bad Economic and Democratic Governance – 'A Better Malawi Is Possible.'"[31] The marches were designed to give voice to growing concerns over Mutharika's governance. In a petition to the President, drafted by "Members of Civil Society… with Workers, Faith Communities and Concerned Citizens from all walks of life," the points of contention were listed in the following order: acute Forex shortages, acute fuel shortage, electricity shortages, lack of economic prudence, corruption and abuse of power, disrespect of the rule of law, local government elections, the University of Malawi crisis, and political intolerance and violence.[32] People mobilized in each of the three major cities and the government responded with police violence: it is estimated that more than twenty people were killed as a result of police brutality against the demonstrators. After the protests, citing disagreement with Mutharika's handling of political opposition, more donors withdrew aid, exacerbating an ever-worsening economic situation in the country.

The July 2011 protests formed part of what many hoped was an "Arab Spring" for sub-Saharan Africa, effective local activism and political protest that advocated local needs. In Malawi, there was a general perception that the protests stemmed from the agitation of NGOs, particularly human rights organizations. The government, not surprisingly, framed the protests and human rights organizations as funded by members of opposition parties and by foreign donors. I spoke with academics in the U.S. who attributed the will of protest to the work of human rights organizations as well, indicating that NGOs, for all their reliance on western funds, had benefitted from global values of, and the attached funding related to, human rights and an increasing discourse about rights in the country.

[31] http://mutafire.blogspot.com/2011/07/public-announcement-on-20-july-malawi.html, accessed April 2012.
[32] http://mutafire.blogspot.com/2011/07/here-is-what-bingu-has-been-given-today.html, accessed April 2012.

I do not wish to diminish or exaggerate the significance of the protests or those persons and parties involved. But the protests are part of a larger story and, as I conclude this dissertation, emphasize a number of issues I have raised. In many ways, the protests are precisely what those of us who celebrate local political activism hope for: they were designed to speak directly to those problems defined by Malawians themselves. While civil society and local and international NGOs may have supported the protests, the demonstrations were organized by Malawians, not outsiders. The petition delivered to the president clearly articulated how his government's actions were harming his electorate and how he could remedy the problems. But while the protests are impressive, they also demonstrate the continuing strength of global inequalities as well as Malawi's enmeshment with foreign ideologies, advocated through NGOs.

Malawi's July 2011 protests were driven as much by material interests as ideological ones: the difficulties that arose for people as a result of a loss of Forex, fuel, and the instability of electricity provided tangible examples of governmental mismanagement. While Mutharika's administration had been infringing on human rights, edging away from transparency, and driving the country deeper in debt for several years, not until those realities were felt did action take place. It is important to note that elites planned and executed the demonstrations. Elites were the people who felt the shortages and the growing daily deficiencies most acutely: the vast majority of Malawians do not have electricity to lose or cars to fuel up. Elites defined the problems and the problems were of an elite nature, being experienced by poor Malawians on a daily basis and thus for them reality, rather than an unusual situation. The only time poor people are mentioned in the petition is when the drafters propose rectifying ties with donors, particularly the British, because loss of aid dollars is most injurious to the poorest members of society. Inequality within Malawi is thus downplayed and depoliticized, even by those working to politicize national

problems. And the poor are, again, relegated to a suffering population and used to shore up elite opinions.

In addition to class differences, the protests also demonstrate the depoliticization of inequality on a more global scale. The demonstrations were directed solely at Bingu wa Mutharika and his administration. Bingu was blamed for failing to heed the International Monetary Fund and devalue the national currency; Bingu was blamed for human rights violations and corruption; Bingu was blamed for the British decision to cease aid to the country. Little to no attention was given to the global power structures that enable the IMF to make such demands or that necessitate the country's dependence on Britain for nearly thirty percent of its national budget. While I am certainly not excusing Mutharika's actions, the emphasis on Mutharika effectively prevented analysis of the global inequalities in which his government operated. Additionally, by focusing on the administration's disrespect for their rights, protesters not only relied on the popular global rights discourse but also provided further justification for Britain's revocation of aid dollars, emphasizing Malawi's lack of respect for rights in the face of the west's superiority in this realm. Thus not only do the protests show the effects of global inequality and how discourse affirms inequality, they also demonstrate the inequalities within Malawian society and the ways inequalities are replicated on a national scale.

Throughout the dissertation, I show that social problems in Malawi are both decontextualized and depoliticized: solutions to complicated issues rarely involve attempts to alter the various power structures that undergird them, thus according with the work of critical development theorists. (Particularly Ferguson 1990 and 2006) This is, in part, because western conceptions of Malawi's social problems are so detached from Malawians' realities and, in part,

because the very act of determining what "the" problem is or what problem deserves attention is a function of inequality and privilege. Politicizing social problems and development solutions would not only require addressing global inequality, it would require addressing the power inherent in the very understanding of those social problems. Macrosociologically, then, this dissertation demonstrates how global power structures dictate the terms of western assistance in Malawi as well as how particular issues are addressed: social problems that receive attention are those conceived in the west which accord with western ideologies and world cultural values. These popular global values and priorities, seemingly homogenous across nations, stem in part from scientific and research studies conducted in the west or by westerners that create knowledge guiding interventions.

Furthermore, global inequality underpins a structure that prevents local people or small local organizations from advancing their causes. Small organizations can rarely demonstrate the types of accounting and staff capacity required to access large grants but small grants rarely afford any organizational stability. Even when people doggedly pursue causes outside those that have wide western attention, they can rarely access funds to keep an organization afloat. And given high prices and cost of living in the country, people want the greatest job security and pay they can find. Thus large international organizations are often seen as the greatest goal for employment. These are the organizations that can have tremendous effects on what problems take priority. Global inequality thus helps reinforce a structure that gives credence to foreign ideas of social problems over those of the people who actually experience them.

On a microsociological level, this dissertation shows how global discourses are interpreted, solidifying perceptions of Malawi's vulnerability as well as Malawians' feelings of alienation from the work of development in their country. Even for elites who, arguably, have

more of a voice than poor Malawians, there is a strong sense that the goals of development and partnership are largely empty ideals. Additionally, I have shown how inequality is replicated in Malawi, a process sometimes referred to as "scale shift" by social movement theorists. (Tarrow 2005) Thus by focusing on elites, those working in Malawi's non-governmental sector, this dissertation enhanced literature on sociological institutionalism by emphasizing how global inequality breeds local inequality in the Malawian context. Elites must choose between furthering their own personal goals and the ideals they feel most pertinent to the nation as a whole. Often, they support world cultural values that they feel do not adequately address the needs of the majority of Malawians: their middle class status depends on these decisions.

As I was writing this conclusion, President Mutharika died of a heart attack. Though there were several days of anxiety, he was succeeded by Joyce Banda, his vice president, in a peaceful transition. President Banda has the difficult task of making amends with Malawians and outsiders. It is a sad statement that none of my Malawians friends mourn Mutharika's death: instead, they hope that Banda will, firstly, attempt to repair relationships with Malawi's biggest donors, principally England and the United States, thereby bringing fuel and Forex back into the country. Simultaneously, though, they recognize that given her need to placate donors and assure them of her superiority over Mutharika, donors could take advantage of this increased level of vulnerability, dictating development terms even more than before. Malawi's future is, as always, uncertain. But given historical trends, foreigners' ever-changing fixations, and the continuation of gross global inequalities, it seems likely that the country will remain heavily dependent on foreign aid and thus remain indebted to foreigners and our continual attempts to fix the problem that is Malawi.

Appendix
Malawi's Top-Ten Biggest Problems

Round 1, 1999-2001								
Response 1	**Freq.**	**Perc.**	**Response 2**	**Freq.**	**Perc.**	**Response 3**	**Freq.**	**Perc.**
Prices too high	191	15.81	Missing (no further reply)	149	12.33	Missing (no further reply)	510	42.22
Food shortage	94	7.78	Prices too high	130	10.76	Poor quality services	97	8.03
Starvation	73	6.04	Security	72	5.96	Prices too high	74	6.13
Security	71	5.88	Food shortage	58	4.8	Security	29	2.4
Poverty	54	4.47	Shortage of health services	57	4.72	Poor quality roads	28	2.32
Lack of farming improvement	53	4.39	Poverty	48	3.97	School shortage (Education)	28	2.32
Shortage of health services	48	3.97	Poor quality roads	47	3.89	Shortage of health services	28	2.32
Poor quality roads	46	3.81	Lack of farming improvement	45	3.73	Food shortage	25	2.07
Crime	41	3.39	Medical supplies (health)	34	2.81	Wages (not enough)	25	2.07
Unemployment	36	2.98	Poor quality water	32	2.65	Poverty	22	1.82
AIDS	6	0.5		6	0.5		9	0.75
Disease	3	0.25		3	0.25		4	0.33
Round 2, 2002-2004								
Food shortage	341	28.42	Food shortage	197	16.42	No further reply	157	13.08
Poverty	146	12.17	Poverty	152	12.67	Health	123	10.25
Farming/agriculture	138	11.5	Farming/agriculture	139	11.58	Poverty	119	9.92
Unemployment	124	10.33	Health	92	7.67	Farming/agriculture	105	8.75
Management of Economy	110	9.17	Management of Economy	91	7.58	Food shortage	105	8.75
Health	50	4.17	Unemployment	75	6.25	Water supply	88	7.33
Crime and Security	48	4	Water supply	70	5.83	Education	80	6.67
Education	45	3.75	Education	63	5.25	Management of Economy	66	5.5
Water supply	37	3.08	No further reply	53	4.42	Crime and Security	58	4.83
Infrastructure/Roads	29	2.42	Loans/Credit	49	4.08	Unemployment	45	3.75
AIDS	6	0.5		11	0.92		15	1.25
Round 3, 2005-2006								
Food shortage	587	48.92	Farming/agriculture	179	14.92	No further reply	232	19.33
Farming/agriculture	149	12.42	Water supply	174	14.5	Water supply	124	10.33
Water supply	73	6.08	Food shortage	173	14.42	Education	92	7.67
Education	46	3.83	Poverty	96	8	Health	92	7.67
Poverty	46	3.83	Loans/credit	88	7.33	Farming/agriculture	81	6.75
Loans/credit	39	3.25	No further reply	75	6.25	Food shortage	76	6.33
Management of economy	38	3.17	Health	63	5.25	Loans/credit	76	6.33
Health	37	3.08	Education	58	4.83	Infrastructure/Roads	62	5.17
Unemployment	31	2.58	Infrastructure/Roads	50	4.17	Infrastructure/Roads	62	5.17
Infrastructure/Roads	29	2.42	Rates/taxes	37	3.08	Crime and security	43	3.58
AIDS	3	0.25		4	0.33		5	0.42
Disease	1	0.08		14	1.17		16	1.33
Round 4, 2008-2009								
Food shortage	452	37.67	Food shortage	179	14.92	Health	144	12
Farming/agriculture	147	12.25	Water supply	161	13.42	No further reply	130	10.83
Water supply	127	10.58	Poverty	127	10.58	Water supply	109	9.08
Poverty	90	7.5	Farming/agriculture	91	7.58	Food shortage	92	7.67
Management of economy	60	5	Health	80	6.67	Poverty	89	7.42
Infrastructure/roads	58	4.83	Infrastructure/roads	80	6.67	Farming/agriculture	87	7.25
Wages, income, salary	34	2.83	Management of economy	63	5.25	Infrastructure/roads	83	6.92
Corruption	30	2.5	Wages, income, salary	59	4.92	Education	62	5.17
Health	30	2.5	No further reply	50	4.17	Management of economy	53	4.42
Unemployment	28	2.33	Unemployment	47	3.92	Crime and security	50	4.17
AIDS	7	0.58		8	0.67		10	0.83
Disease	2	0.17		14	1.17		11	0.92

Afrobarometer data on the ten biggest problems facing Malawi for each survey year. I include responses of AIDS or disease, though they were not amongst the top ten responses.

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