

**THE MAKING OF URBAN YOUTH CULTURE IN MALAWI: A HISTORY
OF DRESS, MUSIC AND DANCE IN BLANTYRE CITY, 1952 - 2012**

MASTER OF ARTS (AFRICAN SOCIAL HISTORY) THESIS

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work which has not been submitted to any other institution for similar purposes. Where other people's work has been used, acknowledgements have been made.

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DEDICATION

To Emma Mandala, my super woman.

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ABSTRACT

Youth cultures have in the recent years become an area of interest for cultural and urban historians. While much of the existing literature captures the experience of youth in Western societies, a few studies exist on the youth cultures in Africa particularly within the context of urbanity. However for Malawi such studies are rare if not non-existent. To that end, this study examines the history of youth culture in one of the early urban centres in Malawi, Blantyre. It argues that from the point of urbanisation, youth made alternative dress, music and dance practices from what was offered by the dominant traditional society through their interactions with the urban environment and fellow youth locally and globally. Consequently, Blantyre was a sphere of contestations over identity, morality and culture between youth on one hand, society and the state on the other. As a social history the study borrows from two dominant schools. The first school is Karl Mannheim's theory of generations which argues that youth culture is significantly influenced by the major historical events of an era and the influences to which youth are subjected. The second one is Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony which argues that dominant groups in society create and define hegemonic culture which serves to support and enhance their powerful position. In implicit resistance to this hegemony, common culture arises from the lives of other subordinate groups in those cultural places which hegemonic culture is unable to penetrate. Therefore the study contributes to the body of knowledge in urban history as well as the history of youth cultures. Through in-depth interviews and an analysis of newspapers and archival material, this study uncovers the making of urban youth's dress, music and dance practices in Blantyre between 1952 and 2012. This study is relevant because youth represent an important demographic in Malawi as the country has always been a youthful nation. Moreover, in view of rapid urbanisation in Sub-Saharan Africa in general and Malawi in particular, urban youth culture can no longer be ignored.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ADMARC	Agricultural Development and Marketing Cooperation
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
BAT	British American Tobacco
BCA	Blantyre City Afforestation
BET	Black Entertainment Television
BSS	Blantyre Secondary School
CCAP	Church of Central African Presbyterian
CD	Compact Disc
DJ	Disc Jockey
DSTV	Digital Satellite Television
FM	Frequency Module
HHI	Henry Henderson Institute
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ITG	Imperial Tobacco Group
MBC	Malawi Broadcasting Corporation
MCDE	Malawi College of Distance Education
MCP	Malawi Congress Party
MNA	Malawi National Archives
MTV	Music Television
MYP	Malawi Young Pioneers
NAC	National Aids Commission
PSI	Population Services International
SDA	Seventh Day Adventist

STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
TANU	Tanganyika African National Union
TNM	Telecom Networks Malawi
TVM	Television Malawi
UK	United Kingdom
UNICEF	United Nations Children Education Fund
VCR	Video Cassette Recorder
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas

LIST OF LOCAL WORDS USED

Alendo	visitors
Biriwita	black cloth
Botsotso	tight trousers
Chiwaya	a piece of cloth worn by women
Chilundu	a piece of cloth worn by women
Chikwiriti	white cloth worn around the neck
Chiphwanya mchenga	platform shoe
Chitenje	a wrapper worn by women
Kaunjika	second hand clothing
Kukhwefula	sagging
Nsalu	sari
Mbandana	Bandana
Mpango	headgear traditionally worn by women
Nyakula	a type of blouse with padded shoulders
Nyanda	bark cloth
Potokosi	robe like dress
Satana	dark hard cloth like denim
Sazana	dark hard cloth like denim
Thaisoni	a hi-top fade haircut
Yo	name used to refer to members of hip hop culture
Zovala za kazimoto	Mini-skirt

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The recent years have seen a growing literature on the history of youth cultures especially in the West. This development has largely overtaken African studies in general and Malawian studies in particular notwithstanding the increasing visibility of youth culture in the Malawian media and the suggestion of the existence of youth culture as documented in the available literature for other countries. Therefore this study seeks to address this gap in knowledge by examining the processes in the making of youth culture in Blantyre with a focus on dress, music and dance practices between 1952 and 2012.

In this study, the overarching argument is that from the point of urbanisation of Africans in Blantyre youth made their own dress, music and dance practices from their interactions with fellow youth locally and globally. Consequently, Blantyre was a sphere of contestations over identity, morality and culture between youth on one hand, society and the state on the other. Using data from in-depth interviews, archival sources, newspapers and secondary sources, it makes three main arguments. First, urban youth dress, music and dance practices differed from the cultural practices of older urbanites. While such practices were means to new identities and realities, they also served to resist the dominant traditional culture devised by adults. While the basis of such cultural practices was consumerism, rather than being passive consumers youth made use of commodities towards often unique ends which constituted acts of

cultural survival.¹

Second, the study asserts that youth in Blantyre made their own youth culture, through their interactions with one another and with the urban environment. Thus youth were agents who tapped into their environment to create a sense of identity and consciousness as a class. In this sense, “class happens when some men as a result of common experiences feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves and as against other men whose interests are different from theirs.”² As in E.P. Thompson’s *the Making of the English Working Class*, this study employs the term ‘making’ to connote an active process which owed as much to agency as to conditioning. Thus as the agency of youth is important, equally important were the conditionings that allowed and disallowed certain practices. The notion of ‘making’ is employed to capture firstly, how the current urban culture has been made and secondly, that the culture which emerged with urbanisation continuously changed.

Finally, the study argues that Blantyre was a sphere of contestations over culture, morality and space. While some of the contestation was intergenerational, others were intragenerational. However, they were all struggles on how the urban space was to be lived and used. While measures of social control were employed by those with power, the youth often created alternative spheres in which to live their lives as urban youth. The thesis of this study therefore is that between 1950 and 2012 urban youth in Blantyre made urban and cosmopolitan dress, music and dance practices through their interaction with one another and the urban environment.

¹ M. O’Brien, “Consuming Talk: Youth Culture and the Mobile Phone,” PhD submitted to Maynooth: National University of Ireland, 2010, p.11

² E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Penguin Books Limited, 2013) p.9

The study is approached from the perspective of youth, with an understanding that human agency is important and this agency is emphasized in the whole account. It proposes that while young people's everyday lives are significantly structured, ordered and controlled, urban youth exerted their own cultural preferences and power within their practices of cultural consumption. This account recognizes agency as not only the ability of youth to act autonomously but also that youth authored a positioned self at particular moments or encounters.³

1.2 Context

Of late youth culture has become an area of interest among cultural and urban historians. Some of the studies include Luis Alvarez's *Power of the Zoot*, David Fowler's *Youth Culture in Modern Britain*, Paul Clark's *Youth Culture in China* and William Risch's *Youth and Rock in the Soviet Bloc*.⁴ In African historical studies, youth culture has received little attention. The existing literature focuses on the cultural politics that characterised the experience of most African nations in the years after independence. These include Ivaska's *Cultured States: Youth, Gender and Modern Style in 1960 Dar es Salaam* and Burgess' *Cinema, Bell Bottoms and Miniskirts: Struggles over Youth and Citizenship in Revolutionary Zanzibar*.⁵ Another area that has received attention is youth's contact with urbanity in colonial Africa and

³ D. Durham, "Youth and Social Imagination in Africa," *Anthropological Quarterly* Vol. 73, No. 3 (2003) p. 117

⁴ L. Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance during World War II* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008); D. Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain 1920-1970* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); W.J. Risch (ed.) *Youth and Rock in the Soviet Bloc: Youth Cultures, Music and the State in Russia and Eastern Europe* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2014); P. Clark, *Youth Culture in China: From Red Guards to Netizens* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

⁵ A. Ivaska, *Cultured States: Youth, Gender and Modern Style in 1960s Dar es Salaam* (London: Duke University Press, 2011); T. Burgess, "Cinema, Bell Bottoms and Miniskirts: Struggles over Youth and Citizenship in Revolutionary Zanzibar," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* Vol. 35 No.2/3 (2002) pp.287-313

the demoralising effect that such contact was feared to have on youth.⁶ Thus, much of the literature on youth culture in Africa is ahistorical in nature. Some of the studies have focused on cultural globalisation and how African youth have interacted with global cultures such as hip hop in the local contexts.⁷ These studies reveal that global hip hop music has been adopted and adapted by youth in Africa to address local concerns and to participate in political dialogue. The studies also show that hip hop has become a significant mode of identification among young urbanites in Africa as it has been blended with traditional cultures, local languages and local issues. Other studies on youth culture in Africa have focused on urban youth languages. They show that urban youth in Africa have created their own languages in order to create new identities which set them apart from the older generation while also bridging their ethnic differences.⁸

Therefore, in as much as there is existing knowledge on urban youth culture in present day Africa, there is a gap in knowledge on how youth cultures have developed historically. To that end, this study examines the historical processes in the making of urban youth culture in Blantyre, Malawi with a particular focus on dress, music and dance. Therefore the study contributes to the body of historical knowledge on youth

⁶ A. Burton, "Urchins, Loafers and the Cult of the Cowboy: Urbanization and Delinquency in Dar es Salaam 1919-1961," *The Journal of African History* Vol. 42 No. 2 (2001) pp. 199-216

⁷ E. Charry (ed.) *Hip Hop Africa, New African Music in a Globalising World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012); P. Nilan & C. Feixa (eds.) *Global Youth: Hybrid Identities, Plural Worlds* (London: Routledge, 2006); A. Perrulo, "Hooligans and Heroes: Youth Identity and Hip Hop in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania," *Africa Today* Vol. 51 No. 4 (2005) pp.75-101; M. Ntarangwi, *East African Hip Hop: Youth Culture and Globalisation* (Baltimore: University of Illinois Press, 2009); C. Marsha & S. Petty, "Globalization, Identity and Youth Resistance: Kenya's Hip Hop Parliament," *Journal of the Canadian Society for Traditional Music* Vol. 38 (2011); F. Kiwalabye & S. Nanteza, "Globalisation, Youth Culture and Identity Today: An African Perspective," www.jace.gr.jp; A. Perullo and J. Fenn, "Language Ideologies, Choices and Practices in Eastern African Hip Hop," in H. Berger & M.T. Carrol, *Global Pop, Local Language* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2003)

⁸ R. Kiessling & M. Mous, "Urban Youth Languages in Africa," *Anthropological Linguistics* Vol. 46 No. 3 (2004) pp. 301-341; F. Moto, "Language and Societal Attitudes: A Study of Malawi's 'New Language'," *Nordic Journal of African Studies* Vol.10 No.3(2001) pp.320-343; L. Karanja, "Homeless at Home: Linguistic Cultural and Identity Hybridity and Third Space Positioning of Kenyan Urban Youth," *Canadian and International Education* Vol. 39 No. 2 (2010) pp.301-341

cultures in Africa. Furthermore, in the history of the country and particularly in urban areas, youth have always been an important demographic as the country has always been a youthful nation.⁹ As such the study of youth and youth culture offers a social history for this category while uncovering important aspects of social as well as political change in Malawi's history to which youth have contributed.

1.3 The Study Area

What is known as Blantyre today started out as two separate towns of Blantyre and Limbe. The town of Blantyre emerged as a result of colonial Christianity with the establishment of the Scottish Free Church mission centre in 1876. It was then furthered by the operations of the Livingstonia Central African Company later known as African Lakes Company (*Mandala*) in 1878 with an eventual declaration as planning area in 1897. Limbe, on the other hand, developed by 1907, characterised by commercial activities of foreign import and export firms such as the Imperial Tobacco Group and Nyasaland Railways. Although built on the sites of African villages, both towns were distinctly colonial creations, products of the battles waged by foreign and indigenous peoples over urban spaces.¹⁰ Just as other urban areas in Southern Africa, the governance of Blantyre-Limbe was characterised by segregation. Consequently, it was only in the mid twentieth Century that Blantyre-Limbe experienced rational urban development and African residence within town borders.¹¹ This is in comparison to other colonial towns such as Dar es Salaam, Bulawayo, and Johannesburg where African townships emerged early on. To that end, the lives of

⁹ B. Chinsinga & M. Chasukwa, "Youth, Agriculture and Land Grabs in Malawi," *IDS Bulletin* Vol. 43 No. 6 (2012) p.66

¹⁰ J. Power, "Eating the Property: Gender Roles and Economic Change in Urban Malawi, Blantyre- Limbe," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* Vol.29, No. 1 (1995) p.80

¹¹ A. Burton "Townsmen in the Making: Social Engineering and Citizenship in Dar es Salaam, 1945-1960," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (2003) pp. 331-365

most Africans before 1950 were largely rural. Blantyre became a city in 1966, from which time it became known as the commercial capital of Malawi, compared to Lilongwe which is the political capital. This commercial characteristic of Blantyre allowed it to experience the flowing of ideas, goods and services which in effect provided an environment conducive for the development of urban youth culture.

Blantyre has several locations and townships with varying characteristics broadly classified as formal settlements and informal settlements. Formal settlements include BCA Hill, Chigumula, Mpingwe, ITG, Mudi, Kanjedza, Chinyonga, Chichiri, Manja, Soche, Chitawila, Nkolokosa, Chimwankhunda, Chilobwe, Naperi, SunnySide, Mount Pleasant, Mandala, Zingwangwa, Nyambadwe, Kameza, Namiwawa, Chilomoni, South Lunzu and Chirimba. Informal settlements include: Kachere, Makhetha, Nkolokoti, Misesa, Ntopwa, Bangwe, Nancholi, Mbayani, Chilobwe, Machinjiri, Ndirande, Manyowe, Chiwembe, and Manase among others **(Figure 1)**. Since settlement category reflects the socioeconomic status or class of its residents, as much as possible, this study captured the lives of youth in both formal and informal settlements so as to capture how class influences urban youth cultural practices.

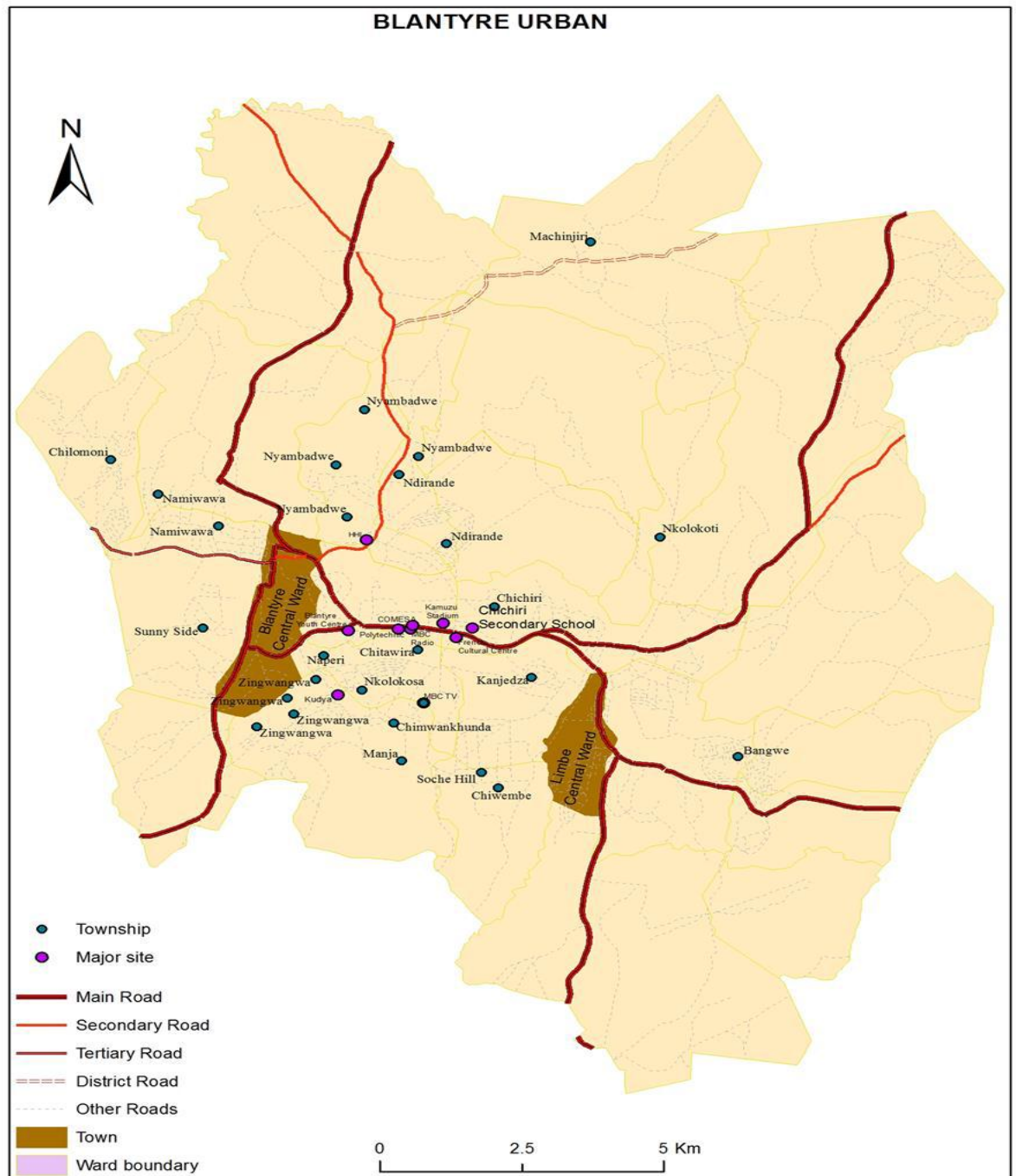


Figure 1: Map of Blantyre Urban,
Source: Prepared by Geological Survey

1.4 The Population of Blantyre

Malawi has always been a youthful nation if its population statistics is anything to go by. A similar situation is evident when one analyses the population of children and youth in Blantyre urban. According to statistical reports, Blantyre urban had a population of 661,444 in 2008, 502,053 in 1998, 333,120 in 1987, 219,011 in 1977 and 109,461 in 1966.¹² An analysis of this information reveals that children and youth made up at least 40 percent of the population in Blantyre as **Table 1** illustrates:

Table 1: The population of Blantyre urban and the population of youth

		1966	1977	2008
Total urban population		109,461	219,011	661,256
Population aged 15-34		45,885	89,012	291,989
% of youth		42%	41%	44%

Source: Population and Housing Census Reports 1966, 1977 and 2008

As seen in Table 1, youth made up at least forty percent of the population of Blantyre urban in the years between 1966 and 2008. Therefore the youth constitute a significant proportion of the urban population in Blantyre. It is also worth noting that in as much as Malawi has been experiencing urban growth over the years, the proportion of urban dwellers to the rural populations has been very low. In 1966, the urban population represented only 8.2% of Malawi's population, 10.7% in 1987, 14.4 percent in 1998 and 15.3 percent in 2008. Of these statistics, Blantyre had 4.2 of the

¹²National Statistical Office, *Population and Housing Census Main Report 2008* (September, 2009) ; National Statistical Office, *Malawi Population Census 1966 Final Report* (Zomba: Government Printer); National Statistical Office, *Malawi Population Census Final Report 1977 Vol.1* (Zomba: Government Printer 1980); National Statistical Office, *Malawi Population and Housing Census 1998*

urban population in 1987, 5.1 in 1998 and 5.1 in 2008.¹³ It can be concluded therefore that although Malawi's urban areas have increased, the country largely remains rural making the contestations over culture in the urban space more likely.

1.5 Periodisation of the Study

The study spans the period 1952 to 2012. The year 1952 was considered to be a starting point for studying urban youth cultural practices in Blantyre for two reasons. Firstly, it was after the Second World War that Africans began to have a fuller urban experience. Colonialism in Nyasaland as was in British Africa was generally racist. This racism dictated the access to resources; consumption patterns and wage rates open to Africans.¹⁴ For example, before the Second World War and even the late 1950s, Africans were obliged to transact business outside European shops as they were perceived to be thieves. Inspection and the buying of goods occurred through the windows.¹⁵ Moreover, before 1945 urban structures were non-existent to cater for Africans in the context of urbanization. However, this changed in the years following the end of the Second World War in 1945. After the establishment of the Colonial Development Corporation in 1947 several projects were embarked upon which aimed at improving urban conditions for Africans.¹⁶ It was through these projects that hospitals, schools and recreational centres were built for the benefit of Africans. Thus, as Power and McCracken argue, it was only after 1945 that Blantyre experienced rational urban development.¹⁷

¹³ Population and Housing Census 2008 Main Report, September 2009

¹⁴ J. Power, "Individual Enterprise and Enterprising Individuals: African Entrepreneurship in Blantyre and Limbe (1907-1953)," (Nova Scotia: Dalhousie University Halifax Nova Scotia, 1990)

¹⁵ Ibid., p.35

¹⁶ M. Cowen, "Early Years of the Colonial Development Corporation: British State Enterprise Overseas During Late Colonialism," *African Affairs* Vol. 83, No. 330 (1984) p. 63

¹⁷ McCracken, "Blantyre Transformed: Class, Conflict and Nationalism in Urban Malawi," *Journal of African History* Vol. 39 (1998) p.254; Power, "Individual Enterprise and Enterprising Individuals." 1990

Secondly, it was not until the end of the Second World War that Africans started residing within the town boundaries. From the onset of British rule in Africa, there was generally an official antipathy towards the process of African urbanization. It was felt that the African identity needed to be tribal in nature to enhance indirect rule. Thus, measures were taken to ensure that an African had limited exposure to urbanism.¹⁸ To that effect, African residence in the towns of Blantyre and Limbe was not allowed.¹⁹ With the exception of domestic servants and night watchmen, no African was to be found within the township after 9pm.²⁰ Africans who worked in town mostly lived in the peri-urban villages which had sprang up outside the town boundaries such as Chichiri, Zingwangwa and Ndirande while others lived as far out as Chiradzulu.²¹ However, this changed after the Second World War with the changes in British Urban colonial policy, and subsequent investment in rational urban development which catered for Africans as well as the establishment of factories in Blantyre. In consideration of these factors, 1952 is the point from which the study's analysis begins, and the point where Africans' consumption capacities and residence changed.

The study stretches to 2012 to allow for the capturing of the changes that have been there in youth culture. While the study ends in 2012 the process of cultural production and identity formation goes on.

¹⁸ A. Burton, "Townsmen in the Making: Social Engineering and Citizenship in Dar es Salaam," p.333

¹⁹ J. McCracken, "Blantyre Transformed," 1998, p. 250

²⁰ J. McCracken, *History of Malawi* (New York: Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2012) p.288

²¹ J. Power, "Individual Enterprise," 1990, p.27

1.6 Definition of youth

Youth is a term whose meaning is fraught with difficulties. Not only do different societies define and demarcate youth differently but also individuals can claim the space of youth at specific times and specific places.²² In seeking to define youth, this study has paid attention to the age, social and the legal dimensions. Generally as a social group, youth is defined in terms of age in which case the spectrum has been variously defined as ranging from the ages 10 and 11 to as high as 35 years.²³ However in an attempt to standardise youth programs, international organizations have come up with specific age categories to define youth. For instance, the United Nations defines youth as individuals aged between 15 and 24 while the Commonwealth uses the age category 15 to 29. On the other hand, the African Youth Charter under the African Union defines youth as individuals aged between 14 and 35 while the Malawi National Youth Policy defines youth as those aged between 14 and 25.²⁴ It is argued in the youth policy document that despite its limitations, the age definition offers certain statistical utility as well as the practical convenience of a definitive social group which has its own specific problems.²⁵ However the policy is flexible in its definition as it states that individuals aged below 14 and above 25 may also be considered as youth depending on their economic and social situations.

Sociologically, youth is defined as the period between childhood and adulthood.²⁶

This in essence means that one is a youth as long as he or she has not taken up adult

²² D. Durham, "Youth and Social Imagination in Africa," 2000, p.113

²³ F. Chigunta, "The Socio-Economic Situation of Youth in Africa: Problems, Prospects and Options," A paper presented at the Youth Employment Summit, 2002, p. 2

²⁴ Malawi National Youth Policy; African Youth Charter, Seventh Ordinary Assembly, Gambia, 2006

²⁵ Malawi National Youth Policy, 1996

²⁶ U. Christiansen et al, *Navigating Youth, Generating Adulthood: Social Becoming in an African Context* (Nordic Africa Institute, 2006); K. Osei Hwedie & M. Ndulo, *Studies in Youth and Development* (Commonwealth, 1989) p.91

responsibilities such as marriage or getting employment which would allow one to earn a living. However this definition is not ideal as an individual may get employment early in life but still have no family responsibilities to require him or her to be an adult. Moreover, there is also an extent to which marriage may prevent certain cultural consumptions associated with the category of youth. Culturally, in most societies in Malawi, youth is a transitional stage to adulthood that is not necessarily defined in chronological age. Rather it is defined in terms of generational relations and age grades which young people are initiated into following participation in a certain rite of passage. Such age grades have certain rights, obligations particular to them as awarded by society. Although societal expectations vary among different ethnic groups, what is common is that each group is taught skills deemed necessary for survival and socio-economic functioning at that age depending on the environment they are exposed to.²⁷

Legally, in most countries of Southern Africa adulthood is recognised as commencing at the age of 18 with the exception of Namibia, Lesotho, Swaziland and South Africa where the majority age is 21. Initially 21 was the majority age in most of these countries but this has changed in the recent years.²⁸ In Malawi, one is legally an adult at the age of 18. Marriage is however also permissible between the ages of 15 and 18 which problematises the legal definition of youth.²⁹

²⁷ A. Njoh, *Tradition, Culture and Development in Africa: Historical Lessons for Modern Development Planning* (Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2006) p. 61

²⁸ R. Curtain "Towards a Youth Employment Strategy." Report to the United Nations on Youth Employment, August, 2000; R.M. Mkandawire, "Experiences in Youth Policy Programme in Commonwealth and Africa." Unpublished Policy Document Prepared for the Commonwealth Youth Programme Department, 1996

²⁹ Constitution of Malawi, Article 22, Section 6 &7

It is apparent then that defining youth is itself a challenging task. As if that is not enough, scholars have argued that a situation of perpetual youth has developed in Africa as a result of crises such as high unemployment levels and poverty.³⁰ Such crises have resulted in a situation where it is almost impossible to become an adult. For many, the period of youth is characterised by uncertainty, insecurity and idleness all of which delay entry into adulthood. In view of all these considerations, this study employs one of the broad age definitions of 15-35. However considerations are also made on individuals who may not have belonged to this age group but nonetheless manifested an identity typical of youth.

1.7 Conceptual Framework

This study fits within the historiography of youth cultures which views youth cultures as social historical formations. In that regard, youth cultures are understood within larger social, political and cultural developments of the society.³¹ As Fowler argues, youth culture is a product of a particular period of time and a set of influences.³² Also important in this historiography is the concept of reinvention, which is the process of changing or modifying an innovation in the process of its adaptation and implementation.³³ Reinvention presupposes that culture is not static and that traditions can be invented.³⁴ For example, youth in Blantyre changed and modified global dress, music and dance practices in order to fit their own environment and circumstances.

³⁰ See J. Cole "The Jaombilo of Tamatave (Madagascar), 1992-2004: Reflections on Youth and Globalization." *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 38, No. 4, (2005); M. Diouf, "Engaging Postcolonial Cultures: African Youth and Public Space." *African Studies Review* Vol. 46, No. 2 (2003), J. Gustafsson, "Community Radio as Promoters of Youth Culture." in Thomas Tutfe et.al (eds.) *Speaking up and Talking Back* (University of Gothenburg, 2012/2013); M.D. Gavin "Africa's Restless Youth," *Current History* Vol. 106 (2007)

³¹ J. Austin & M.N. Willard (eds.) *Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 1998)

³² D. Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain 1920-1970* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008)

³³ E. M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations* (New York: New York Free Press, 2003) p. 180

³⁴ E. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger (eds.) *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983)

Although they achieved this by borrowing, they cannot be denied human agency, initiative and a perception of themselves because they selected what fitted them in a particular context.

Within the historiography of youth cultures two theories have influenced this study. First, the study borrows from Mannheim's model of generations also employed in the historiography of youth culture. Central to this model is the idea that every generation is a product of the historical events that it experiences. In that sense, historical events influence the youth culture of a particular generation. Thus, this study emphasizes the importance of the social, political and economic environments as well as historical events in the making of urban youth culture between 1952 and 2012. The study also subscribes to the view that young people invent and initiate the making of youth cultures rather than partaking in youth cultures initiated by the parent culture. In this regard, youth are sources of opposition that challenge existing norms and values and bring social and political change through generational organisation.

Second, the study has been partly influenced by Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony also dominant in youth culture studies. The theory proposes that the dominant groups in society, who possess the most valued forms of capital, create and define hegemonic culture which serves to support and enhance their powerful social position. In implicit resistance to this hegemony, common culture (youth culture) arises from the lives of other subordinate groups and classes in those cultural places which hegemonic culture is unable to completely penetrate.³⁵ In this case youth culture is invented as a form of resistance. However as a result of such resistance, contestations over culture follow between the dominant groups and the subordinate

³⁵ J. Epstein, *Youth Culture: Identity in a Postmodern World* (Wiley, 1998) p.9

groups. Similar interpretations are made in urban cultural history which posits that in the urban area there exist dominant groups that seek to create an urban vision for the rest of the urban society.³⁶

It needs to be noted that these theories have mostly been used in explaining the rise of youth cultures in Western societies. Therefore the present study examines the extent to which the theories may be applied in explaining the processes in the making of youth culture in urban Blantyre.

1.8 Research Methodology

The research was qualitative and the data was obtained from three main sources: in-depth interviews, life histories and written sources. First, interviews and collection of life histories were done in urban Blantyre between May and July 2014. The researcher collected life histories from people who spent their years of youth in Blantyre from 1952 to 2012 and interviewed different categories of informants who included parents and media personalities. In all, 50 people participated in this study but information from 34 participants has been used in this study. Here the focus was on quality rather than quantity. The participants of the study were identified on the basis of their belonging to the categories that the researcher was interested in. Considering that the participants were sharing their own life experiences which differed from one person to another, the research did not have research instruments that were applicable to all participants.

³⁶ T.J Gilfoyle, "White Cities, Linguistic Turn and Disneyland: The New Paradigms of Urban History," *Review in American History* Vol.26, No.1, (1998) p.175

Second, written sources both primary and secondary, were used in this study. Secondary written sources consisted of published books, articles, unpublished seminar papers, theses and newspapers. These sources illuminated the study with the general debates on urban youth in Africa but also youth culture all over the world. Experiences of youth in other countries such as Tanzania, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa either in history or contemporary studies offered major insights on the experience of urban youth which allowed for comparisons. Newspapers were particularly helpful in offering information due to their contemporaneity. The researcher was aware of the weaknesses of newspapers as historical sources such as the fact that news may be exaggerated to make papers marketable as well as personal biases of writers and editors which may guide what is written and what is not.³⁷ Therefore, as much as possible the researched counterchecked the data from newspapers with other available sources. The newspapers were particularly helpful in giving the opinions of readers on pertinent issues in particular periods as well as offer opportunity for illuminating more on the issues under study. On the other hand, primary sources included records, letters and written speeches. These provided rich information on the official responses to changes in urban youth dress, music and dance. Written sources were mostly obtained from the Chancellor College Library and Malawi National Archives (MNA) in Zomba as well as the internet.

On the other hand, meeting minutes, letters and speeches were used due to their official status and therefore perceived trustworthiness. However, whenever possible comparisons were made with oral sources or and secondary sources to establish the accuracy of the information. During analysis the collected data was organised

³⁷ J. Baumgartner, "Newspapers as Historical Sources," *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society*, Vo. 9 No. 3(1981) pp.256-258

periodically in order to capture the dress, music and dance of youth and the contestations that occurred in the specific periods: the colonial, immediate post-colonial and democratic periods.

1.9 Limitations

This study has been conducted amidst some limitations. First, the researcher experienced the missing of files and sources both at the Chancellor College Library as well as the National Archives. This hindered the uncovering of some information which could have made the picture more complete. Second, efforts to find prominent youth in urban culture were not always successful as some of the youth are now late. In that case it was rather difficult to capture the actors' understanding of what they were doing. Thus, their voices are to an extent missing especially in the early period covering the study. Nevertheless, to the best of her ability, the researcher has used the resources at her disposal to recreate the experiences of urban youth in Blantyre and the influences that conditioned such experiences.

1.10 Organisation of Thesis

The thesis is organized around five chapters. The first is an introduction to the study. It outlines the main argument of the thesis that urban youth made their own dress, music and dance practices different from what was prescribed by the society through their interactions with other youth and the urban environment. The purpose of the chapter is to demonstrate how the youth invent their culture and the instruments that they use. It then discusses the body of knowledge into which this study is located and offers an exposition of the study area, Blantyre.

The second chapter reviews arguments by other scholars drawn from disciplines related to the topic of youth culture. The purpose of the chapter is to fit the current study within the general literature on the subject and to highlight the key ideas that have influenced it. In the third chapter the study discusses the emergence of urban youth cultural practices in Blantyre. It argues that urban youth practices whose basis was materialism emerged following the urbanization of Africans. Thus such practices were more accessible to youth with the means of consumption. Between that time and the attainment of independence, the youth found liberation, community and economic survival in the music, dress and dance practices that they appropriated from the urban space. However the youth engaged in dress, music and dance amidst certain contradictions in the practices themselves and contestations over morality and culture.

The fourth chapter discusses urban youth dress, music and dance practices in the years following the attainment of independence. The chapter more specifically focuses on the period after Malawi's independence by discussing in more detail the cultural politics that characterised the era. The main themes covered here are the contestations between the youth and the state as well as the youth and the society and also the instruments that influenced the practices of youth. The chapter demonstrates the creativity of youth as well as the strength and weaknesses of their behaviour.

The localisation of youth culture, the influence of the media and the use of youth culture by the corporate world and further contestations in relation to this are the themes covered in chapter five. The chapter also reveals that urban youth practices became an escape for youth from the problems of urban life. It concludes with the observation that youth culture may be beneficial to some groups of youth. Those that

are enterprising turn it into a livelihood and in this way youth culture becomes an industry in its own right. Chapter six discusses how youth culture in Blantyre was brokered by non-youth actors. The role played by non-governmental organisations and the corporate world was particularly important.

Chapter seven highlights the scholarly contributions of the study by linking the findings to the conceptual ideas that influenced it. It concludes that youth were creative in the making of urban youth culture practices and created a world which they themselves understood. Moreover much as it was within certain dominant cultures, youth culture was distinguishable. Although these conclusions have been reached elsewhere the current study reveals these conclusions in a different context. This is a history of youth culture in a society that was closed and oppressive in nature which all of a sudden experienced a transition to being more open albeit with some elements of the past. Therefore we can understand this study as being different from the other studies because it shows youth struggles in two different contexts, an oppressive culture and an open one. In both contexts youth invented their culture and identities influenced by their urban environment, their interaction in the urban environment and a desire to exercise levels of control over their own lives.

Chapter Two

THE MAKING OF YOUTH CULTURE

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the reader to the main arguments of the study. The central argument was that since the urbanisation of Africans, youth made their own dress, music and dance practices in place of the practices prescribed by society. This was achieved through youth's interactions with the urban environment and other youth locally and globally. Such creations however resulted in contestations between youth and the dominant forces of society over space and culture. This chapter offers a review of the available literature on youth culture.

Youth culture has been widely researched in several disciplines including history, geography, anthropology, sociology, linguistics and musicology.¹ There is no accepted single definition of youth culture but among other definitions youth culture is defined as: the way young people differentiate themselves from the culture of older

¹ T. Skelton & G. Valentine (eds.) *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2005); A. Saldanha, "Music, Space, Identity: Geographies of Youth Culture in Bangalore," *Cultural Studies* Vol. 16 No. 3 (2002) pp. 337-350; M. Bucholtz, "Youth and Cultural Practice," *Annual Review of Anthropology* Vol. 31 (2002) pp. 525-552; J. Grixti, "Glocalised Youth Culture as Linguistic Performance: Media, Globalisation and the Construction of Hybrid Identities" *Revista de Sociolinguística* Winter (2008); R. Kiessling & M. Mous, "Urban Youth Languages in Africa," *Anthropological Linguistics* Vol. 46 No. 3 (2004) pp. 303-341; T.G. Hoogervorst, "Youth Culture and Urban Pride: The Sociolinguistics of East Javanese Slang," *Wacana* Vol. 15 No. 1 (2014); A. Bennett, *Popular Music and Youth Cultures: Music, Identity and Place* (Houndsmill: MacMillan, 2000); D. Laughey, *Music and Youth Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006); D. Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain 1920-1970: From Ivory Tower to Global Movement* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008); L. Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance during World War II* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008); M. Brake, *Comparative Youth Culture: The Sociology of Youth Cultures and Youth Subcultures: Sex, Drugs and Rock 'n' Roll?* (New York: Routledge, 2013)

people in the society²; and the way young people's social experiences are expressed collectively through the construction of differentiating lifestyles mainly in their leisure time or interstitial spaces in the institutional life.³ Thus youth culture pertains to styles, behaviours, music, vocabulary, clothes and sports, and material artefacts among others which are seen to differ from the main culture of older generations within a society.

Some studies have portrayed youth culture as an adolescent phenomenon.⁴ In such studies youth culture is seen as being a result of an identity crisis as adolescents' transition to adulthood and seek to find their place in society. However other studies have broadened the focus by presenting youth culture as an experience of youth in general. As argued by Nilan & Feixa, "participation in youth culture can no longer be characterized as a period of gang or peer group activity restricted to a certain limited period in the teens and early twenties."⁵ Similarly, Fowler dismisses the argument that in the British society youth culture was formulated by teenagers. He argues that youth culture was shaped by 18 to 25 year olds enrolled in the university. Therefore youth culture has generally been recognised as a phenomena going beyond a psychological problem.

² R. Suntoo & H. Chitto, "Youth Culture and Development in Mauritius," *Global Journal of Management and Business Research* Vol.11 No. 10 (2011)

³ C. Feixa & J. Nofre, "Youth Cultures," *sociopedia.isa*, 2012 DOI: 10.1177/205684601282

⁴ J. Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture* (Pimlico, 2008); M. Danesi *Geeks, Goths and Gangstas* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press Inc, 2010); J. Epstein, *Youth Culture: Identity in a Postmodern World* (Wiley: 1998); S. Steinberg, P. Parmar & B. Richard *Contemporary Youth Culture: An International Encyclopaedia* Vol. 1 (London: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006)

⁵ P. Nilan & C. Feixa (eds.) *Global Youth? Hybrid Identities, Plural Worlds* (London: Routledge, 2006)

2.2 Sub Areas in Youth Culture Studies

There are a number of areas that have been considered in youth culture studies. These include the extent to which the formation of youth cultures is an unintended disruption in social systems⁶; how the range between contributory and resistive youth cultures is socially negotiated and contained⁷; the role of other social identities such as race, ethnicity, and social class in the formation of youth cultures⁸; the extent to which youth cultures of young men differ from those of young women⁹; the extent to which young people are willing agents of social, cultural, and political change¹⁰; the effects of consumer goods and the consumer market place on youth cultures¹¹; how major institutions of socialization such as family, religion, and schools shape and

⁶ A. Schildt & D. Siegfired (eds.) *Between Marx and Coca-Cola: Youth Cultures in Changing European Societies, 1960-1980* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006); T. Skelton & G. Valentine (eds.) *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2005); T. Toivonen & V. Norasakkunkit, "Unable to Conform, Unwilling to Rebel? Youth, Culture and Motivation in Globalizing Japan," *Frontiers in Psychology* (2011)

⁷ P. Clark, *Youth Culture in China: From Red Guards to Netizens* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); S. Wortham (ed.) *Youth Cultures, Language and Literacy Volume 35 of Review of Research in Education* (Sage Publications, 2011)

⁸ A. Herrera & L. Bayat (eds.) *Being Young and Muslim: New Cultural Politics in the Global South and North* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Schildt & D. Siegfired (eds.) *Between Marx and Coca-Cola: Youth Cultures in Changing European Societies, 1960-1980* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006); N. Dolby, *Constructing Race: Youth, Identity and Popular Culture in South Africa* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001); L. Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance during World War II* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008)

⁹ A. Nayak & M.J. Kehily, *Gender, Youth and Culture: Global Masculinities and Femininities* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013); K. Leurs, *Digital Passages: Migrant Youth 2.0: Diaspora, Gender and Youth Cultural Intersections* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015); A. Ivaska, *Cultured States: Youth, Gender and Modern Style in 1960s Dar es Salaam* (London: Duke University Press, 2011); G. Helm, *Sexiness and Gender in Gothic Youth Culture, How do Ideals of Beauty Relate to Gender Roles?* (GRIN Verlag, 2015)

¹⁰ S. Maira, *Jil Oslo: Palestinian Hip Hop, Youth Culture and the Youth Movement* (Fairfax VA: Tadween Publishing, 2013); E. Charry, *Hip Hop Africa, New African Music in a Globalising World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012); M. Ntarangwi, *East African Hip Hop: Youth Culture and Globalisation* (Baltimore: University of Illinois Press, 2009); R. Moore, *Sells like Teen Spirit: Music, Youth Culture and Social Crisis* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); A. Ivaska, *Gendered States: Youth, Gender and Modern Style in 1960s Dar es Salaam* (London: Duke University Press, 2011)

¹¹ S. Steinberg, P. Parmar & B. Richard, *Contemporary Youth Culture: An International Encyclopaedia Vol.1* (London: Greenwood Publishing Company, 2006); S. Lincoln, *Youth Culture and Private Space* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); H. Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and its Culture: A Nation's Constructor and Constructed* (New York: Routledge, 1994)

reflect youth cultures¹²; impact of globalisation on youth cultures¹³ and the relationship between youth culture and development.¹⁴

Studies on youth culture in the West present the end of the Second World War and the baby boom experienced in the years following the war as the beginning point for the history of youth culture. In that regard, the emergence of youth culture is explained in terms of the changes in demography and social practices that western societies experienced following the end of the Second World War.¹⁵ For example, Fowler argues that as a result of the baby boom that Britain experienced after the Second World War, young people spent more time with each other than with their parents. Consequently, youth and particularly teenagers appeared as a distinct social category with its own needs.¹⁶ Similarly, Hebdige and Coleman argue that youth's generational consciousness was caused by the advent of mass media, and the changes in the education system caused the culture industry to manufacture clothes, accessories and leisure time activities particular to youth.¹⁷

¹² M. Brake, *Comparative Youth Culture: The Sociology of Youth Cultures and Youth Subcultures in America, Britain and Canada* (London: Routledge 2013); B. Sugarman, "Conformity in School: An Empirical Study of London School Boys," *The British Journal of Sociology* 18, (1967) 151-164

¹³ Charry, *Hip Hop Africa*, 2012; Ntarangwi, *East African Hop Hop*, 2009; R. Lukose, "Consuming Globalization: Youth and Gender in Kirala, India," *Journal of Social History* 38, No. 4 (2005) 915-935; C. Heaven & M. Tubridy, "Global Youth Culture and Identity," in B. Solomon & Louise Scuderi (eds.) *The Youth Guide to Globalisation* (Oxfam International Youth Parliament, 2003); P. Nilan & C. Feixa, *Global Youth?* 2006

¹⁴ R. Suntoo & H. Chittoo "Youth Culture and Development in Mauritius," *Global Journal of Management and Business Research* 11, No. 10 (2011); T. Ginwright & T. James, "From Assets to Agents of Change: Social Justice, Organizing and Youth Development," (2002) Published online by Wiley Online: onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/yd.25

¹⁵ D. Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain*, 2008 (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); J.S. Coleman, *The Adolescent Society the Social life of the Teenager* (Michigan: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961); D. Hebdige *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (New York: Routledge, 1979)

¹⁶ Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain*, 2008

¹⁷ J.S. Coleman, *The Adolescent Society*, 1961 & Hebdige *Subculture: the Meaning of Style*, 1979

From the review of the literature it is clear that consumerism was and is central to the formation of youth cultures in the west.¹⁸ However consumerism does not sufficiently explain the existence of such cultural elements as language which can neither be produced by the culture industry nor purchased with money. Hence Fowler argues that youth are active agents and creators of history and social life. Thus youth have the agency to make culture for themselves rather than just being dependent on mass media or the culture industry. Fowler also argues that youth culture in Britain was actively spread by youth themselves through: word of mouth, domestic and foreign travel; cultural contact between elite youths and working class communities; mods observing each other and their outfits in suburban dance halls.¹⁹

Apart from consumerism, scholars have also pointed out the importance of urbanisation and industrialisation in the emergence of youth culture in the years before the end of the Second World War. This is because these two processes changed the way society was structured and created institutions where young people could spend more time together. Moreover, it is also as a result of industrialisation that consumer goods have been produced and consumed. Thus, even though youth cultures surfaced in the years after the Second World War, their foundations were laid in the processes of urbanisation and industrialisation.

¹⁸ Savage, *Teenage the Creation of Youth Culture*, 2008; Epstein, *Youth Culture Identity in a Post - modern World*, 1998

¹⁹ Fowler, *Youth Culture in Britain*, 2008

Studies on youth culture in non-western societies such as Africa and Asia have mostly focused on urban youth.²⁰ Perhaps this is because of the emphasis that has been placed on consumerism, mass media and modern institutions which are typically found in urban areas. Nonetheless, in Africa as in Asia, youth make up a large demographic of the urban areas as they migrate from rural areas to look for economic and education opportunities in town. While in these urban spaces, the youth engage in representations of identity both individually and in groups.²¹ In explaining the origins of youth cultures in these urban areas most scholars offer globalisation as one of the causes. In that regard, emphasis has been placed on the role of global media. For example, Hossin and Mohiuddin show that the global media has been crucial in the making of urban youth culture in Bangladesh.²² The same is the case in Tanzania as seen in Ntarangwi and Perullo's work.²³ Mallan and Pearce as well as Steinberg and Parmar also reveal that the mass media has played a very key role in the making of youth cultures around the world.²⁴ In Malawi, globalisation also manifested itself in youth via mass media.

2.3 Youth Culture and Globalization

Much as youth cultures in the periphery are as a result of globalisation and the media, scholars have shown that urban youth are not passive recipients of global media messages. Instead they are active agents who interpret the global media through the

²⁰ Nilan & Feixa, *Global Youth?* 2006; M. Ntarangwi, *East African Hip Hop: Youth Culture and Globalization* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press 2009); A. Perullo, "Heroes and Hooligans," 2005 ; C. Rapoo, "Urbanised Soundtracks: Youth Popular Culture in the African City," *Social Dynamics* Vol. 39, No.2 (2013)

²¹ Nilan & Feixa, *Global Youth?* 2006

²² M.Z. Hossin & M. Mohiuddin, "Urban Youth Culture in Bangladesh under the Sway of Cultural Globalization: A Descriptive Analysis," *Sociology Mind*, Vol. 5 (2015)

²³ Ntarangwi, *East African Hip Hop*, 2009; Perullo "Hooligans and Heroes," 2005

²⁴ K. Mallan & S. Pearce *Youth Cultures: Texts, Images and Identities* (Greenwood Publishing Group 2003); S. Steinberg & P. Parmar *Contemporary Youth Culture: An International Encyclopaedia* Vol. 1 (London: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006)

lens of their own cultural experiences.²⁵ The same was also the experience of youth in Blantyre, Malawi where global influences were negotiated to fit the local circumstances.

Despite the basis of youth culture being consumerism, the youth make choices based on complex reasoning strategies that take everyday living conditions into account.²⁶ Therefore, the consumption of global images and products does not result in a homogenisation of youth culture in different locations of the world. Heaven and Tubridy argue that in as much as youth globally appear to share similar tastes in style of dress and entertainment among other things, there are significant differences in the way they appropriate the media technologies and global images at their disposal as the appropriation is influenced by the local circumstances.²⁷ In that regard, globalisation has resulted in the hybridisation of cultures as global influences interact with local contexts. For example, the global trend of hip hop or rap music has local meanings in different geographical contexts. Youth localise the genre by using their local languages rather than American English. In addition, they use the music as a tool for political expression as well as social commentary. In some cases youth have also blended hip hop with their indigenous cultures.²⁸

²⁵ Hossain & Mohiuddin 2015; W.J. Risch (ed.) *Youth and Rock in the Soviet Bloc: Youth Cultures, Music and the State in Russia and Eastern Europe* (Lexington Books, 2014); P. Clark, *Youth Culture in China :From Red Guards to Netizens*, (New York: Cambridge University Press: 2012); R. Lukose, Consuming Globalization: Youth and Gender in Kerala, India,” *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (2005) 915-935; J.E. Fair & M. Tully, “Crafting Lifestyles in Urban Africa: Young Ghanaians in the World of Online Friendship,” *Africa Today* 55 (2009) 29-29; D. Kjeldgaard & S. Askegaard “The Glocalization of Youth Culture: The Global Youth Segment as Structures of Common Difference” jcroxfordjournals.org (2006); J. Cole, “The Jaombilo of Tamatave (Madagascar), 1992-2004: Reflections on Youth and Globalization,” *Journal of Social History* Vol. 38, No. 4 (2005) 891-913

²⁶ E. Moyer, “ Keeping up Appearances: Fashion and Function among Dar es Salaam Street Youth *Etnofoor*, (2003)

²⁷ C. Heaven & M. Tubridy, “ Global Youth Culture and Youth Identity in Oxfam International Youth Parliament Youth Commission into Globalization Report (2003) 149-160

²⁸ Charry, *Hip Hop Africa*, 2012; Nilan & Feixa, *Global Youth?* 2006; I. Condry, *Hip Hop Japan: Rap and the Paths of Cultural Globalization* (California: Duke University Press, 2006); H. Osumare, *The Hip Life in Ghana: West African Indigenization of Hip Hop* (Palgrave MacMillan: 2012)

Such research on the way youth negotiate global influences has enabled youth to be regarded as significant contributors to the social worlds in which they operate. The emphasis here has been on hybridization as a process of cultural transactions that reflects how global cultures are assimilated in the locality and how non-western cultures impact upon the west.²⁹ A case in point is hip hop, a cultural phenomenon present in different geographies of the world and yet unique in every location as youth have blended it with local cultures and circumstances. In Senegal, Britain, Colombia and Japan hip hop has been reinterpreted and localised.³⁰ For example, Condry argues that although Japanese hip hop draws inspiration from American artists, the youth in Japan integrate Japanese language and everyday understandings of Japanese youth.³¹ It needs to be noted however that there are some studies on cultural globalisation which have sought to show the west is not always the origin of global culture, but that even cultures in the South have also been appropriated in the global North.³²

²⁹ G. Canclini *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2005)

³⁰ P. Nilan & C. Feixa (eds.) *Global Youth? Hybrid Identities, Plural Worlds* (Taylor & Francis, 2006); E.S. Charry (ed.) *Hip Hop Africa: New African Music in a Globalizing World* 2012; P. Ugor & Mawuko-Yevugah, (eds.) *African Youth Cultures in a Globalized World: Challenges, Agency and Resistance* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Ntarangwi, *East African Hip Hop*, 2009; T. Laitio, "Superlocal Identities: The European in the youth Experience," *Eurozine*, 2007. www.eurozine.com/articles/article_2007-12-13-laitio-en.html

³¹ I. Condry, *Hip Hop Japan: Rap and Paths of Cultural Globalisation* (California: Duke University Press, 2006)

³² P. Hopper, *Understanding Cultural Globalization* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007)

2.4 Historical studies of Youth Culture in Africa

The area of youth culture has received little attention in African historical studies. The few existing studies mostly focus on two major themes. First, the tensions that emerged with the creation of colonial urban centres.³³ Particularly, the fears held by most officials that the urban environment had a demoralising effect on African youth and their African identity. Such studies include Burton's *Urchins and Loafers* and the *Cult of the Cowboy* which focuses on youth in colonial Dar es Salaam. Burton looks at the influx of young people in colonial Dar es Salaam, the cultures that they engaged in and the general response of the colonial government towards these youths. He reveals that the urban influences that youth interacted with such as sports, cinemas, music, dance and fashions were seen by colonial officials and elders as having a demoralizing effect on youth. Nonetheless, youth used these influences to create cultures which were in contradistinction to the position of youth in traditional African society. One such culture was the cult of the cowboy which had such elements as denim jean trousers, hat, tough speech, the slouch, the walk of a dangerous man. Although the British colonial officials took measures to control the urban influences on youth and the numbers of youth in the urban area, their success was limited.³⁴

Second, studies have focused on the cultural politics that was experienced by most African states in the years following independence. These studies show how youth as a social category were particularly caught up in the tensions that emanated from the desire to create a national identity and rid Africa of cultural imperialism particularly

³³ A. Burton, *Urchins, Loafers and the Cult of the Cowboy*; A. Burton & T. Burgess & H. Charto-Bigot (eds.) *Generations Past: Youth in East African History* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2010)

³⁴ A. Burton, "Urchins, Loafers and the Cult of the Cowboy: Urbanization and Delinquency in Dar es Salaam 1919-1961," *The Journal of African History* Vol. 42 No. 2 (2001)" T. Burgess "Cinema, Bell Bottoms and miniskirts: Struggles over Youth and Citizenship in Revolutionary Zanzibar," 2002

in the context of urbanity.³⁵ One such study is Burgess' study of Zanzibar which looks at the impact of the cinema on urban youth dress practices following the revolution in Zanzibar and how that run contrary to the vision of the revolutionary party. He argues that the revolutionary leaders sought to construct a culture in Zanzibar according to local ideas of what constituted nationalist, socialist and Islamic discipline. However, youth influenced mostly by the cinema and availability of imported clothing dressed in mini-skirts and bellbottom trousers which in turn provoked intense public scrutiny, comment and reprisal. Therefore there followed a conflict between youth and the revolutionary leaders. Despite the measures taken by the leaders to control youth culture such as nationalising the cinema, controlling the importation of clothing and banning certain clothing items, youth created alternative avenues to escape such controls and dress the urban way.³⁶ Therefore both studies emphasize the agency of youth while highlighting that youth cultures in Africa are not without contestations. Other than these, studies on the historical formation of youth culture are rare, if not non-existent.

2.5 Youth Culture and Youth

Regardless of the nature of the society whether in the North or South, scholars have made a number of overlapping conclusions regarding what youth cultures mean to youth. First scholars have argued that youth cultures are a means through which youth construct identities. In that regard, youth culture offer young people a space in which to construct an alternative identity to the largely adult defined subject positions

³⁵ Burgess, "Cinemas, Bell Bottoms and Miniskirts," 2002; Ivaska, *Cultured States*, 2011

³⁶ Ibid

offered to them by school, work, gender, status class etc.³⁷

Second, it has been argued that youth culture is a means through which young people resist the values and ideals of the dominant society. This interpretation promoted by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, is based on Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony. The theory proposes that the dominant groups in society, who possess the most valued forms of cultural capital, create and define hegemonic culture which serves to support and enhance their powerful social position.³⁸ In implicit resistance to this hegemony, common culture arises from the lives of other subordinate groups and classes in those cultural places which hegemonic culture is unable to completely penetrate.³⁹

In that sense youth culture rises as a form of resistance to the hegemonic culture of adults. Since young people's lives actively reflect the relationship to dominant power structures, the extent to which this relationship is in any way resentful and oppositional is reflected in the expressive culture of youth groups and trends.⁴⁰ Put differently, most youth cultural practices at the group level are driven at the same time both by impulses of resistance and challenge and impulses of conformity and legitimacy.⁴¹

³⁷ J. Austin & M.N. Willard (eds.) *Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth-Century America*, (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Nilan & Feixa "Youth Culture," 2006; Burgess, "Cinema, Bell Bottoms and Miniskirts," 2002; Burton, "Urchins, Loafers and the Cult of the Cowboy," 2001; F. Moto "Language and Societal Attitudes: A Study of Malawi's 'New Language'," *Nordic Journal of African Studies* Vol. 10 No. 3(2001) 320-343; Charry, *Hip Hop Africa*, 2012

³⁸ S. Hall & T. Jefferson, *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain* (Psychology Press, 1993); D. Hebdige *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979)

³⁹ Nilan & Feixa, *Global Youth? Hybrid Identities, Plural Worlds*, 2006 p. 9

⁴⁰ S. Miles *Youth Lifestyles in a Changing World* (Virginia : University of Virginia Press, 2000)

⁴¹ Nilan & Feixa, *Global Youth? Hybrid Identities, Plural Worlds*, 2006 ; C. Wallace "Youth Culture under Authoritarian Regimes: The Case of the Swings against the Nazis," *Youth Society* Vol. 32 (2001)

Granted this interpretation, not all scholars subscribe to the view that youth cultures are oppositional and therefore a form of resistance to mainstream culture. Therefore, scholars have considered the extent to which the culture of youth is oppositional to that of adults and some have argued that youth cultures are not always oppositional to the adult culture.⁴² For instance in a case study of student movements in Sweden in the 1960s Jensen shows that students worked within established social and political structures for change and received broad support from adults. He argues that despite the media portrayals that Sweden as elsewhere faced a physical threat from its younger citizens, in reality no one really went outside the Swedish framework of appropriate behaviours.⁴³ Similarly Schwartz & Winkel argue that despite cases of rebellious youngsters, dissident counter cultures and artistic breaking of taboos the majority of youth in the post-socialist countries of Eastern Europe are conformists.⁴⁴ Nassir also makes similar arguments on the experience of youth in Asia. He posits that in Asia, traditional values such as conformity and benevolence are mutually shared across generations and genders.⁴⁵

He argues that unlike their western counterparts, traditional collectivist and interdependent qualities still remain inherent in Asian youth culture. From Nassir's argument it could be deduced that youth cultures in the West are always oppositional.

⁴² S. Jensen, "Youth Enacts Society and Somebody Makes a Coup: The Danish Student Movement between Political and Lifestyle Radicalism," in A. Schildt & D. Siegfried (eds.) *Between Marx and Coca-Cola: Youth Cultures in Changing European Societies, 1960-1980* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006) ; M. Schwartz & H. Winkel (eds.) *Eastern European Youth Cultures in a Global Context* (2015) K.M. Nassir, *Globalized Muslim Youth in the Asia Pacific: Popular Culture in Singapore and Sydney* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016)

⁴³ S. Jensen, "Youth Enacts Society and Somebody Makes a Coup: The Danish Student Movement between Political and Lifestyle Radicalism," in A. Schildt & D. Siegfried (eds.) *Between Marx and Coca-Cola: Youth Cultures in Changing European Societies* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006)

⁴⁴ Schwartz & Winkel (eds.) *Eastern European Youth Cultures*, 2016

⁴⁵ Nassir, *Globalized Muslim Youth in the Asia Pacific*, 2015

However Fowler argues that in Britain youth cultural figures sought to carve out new ways of living which were not in principal oppositional to the adult culture.

Nonetheless other scholars have presented youth cultures as being oppositional to the culture of adults and the dominant society. For example Alvarez discusses the zoot suit culture in America which emerged during the Second World War as being contrary to the values of the dominant society. He argues that the general public and city officials were concerned that the zoot suiters undermined the war effort with their outrageous costumes and makeup, sexually loose and violent behaviour and a general lack of respect for authority. In that sense this youth culture was oppositional.⁴⁶ Similarly Ugor and Yevugah argue that in Africa cultural formations of youth have created a widespread moral panic as the conservative and prudish adult generation consider it to demonstrate irresponsibility and consumerism.⁴⁷ Also focusing on Africa Diouf argues that youth cultures in Africa are counter cultural as they go against the dominant culture. These diverse manifestations of youth culture illuminate the heterogeneity of youth as a social group.⁴⁸ As concluded by Perullo as well as Honwana and Boeck, youth are both heroes and hooligans, they are makers and breakers. Youth cannot be tied down.⁴⁹

Third, scholars have argued that youth culture is a means through which youth publicly engage with issues that directly affect them. In Africa youth culture is used for engaging in such issues as economic policies, African identity, political

⁴⁶ Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot*, 2008

⁴⁷ Ugor & Yevugah (eds.) *African Youth Cultures in a Globalized World*, 2016

⁴⁸ M. Diouf "Engaging Postcolonial Cultures: African Youth and Public Space," *African Studies Review*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (2003) pp. 1-12

⁴⁹ Perullo, "Hooligans and Heroes," 2005; A.M. Honwana & F. Boeck (eds.) *Makers and Breakers: Children & Youth in Postcolonial Africa* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2005)

establishments, HIV/AIDS, education and poverty.⁵⁰ For example, youth in Kenya use hip hop to address many of the social problems affecting young people such as corruption, HIV/Aids, unemployment and poverty.⁵¹ Thus youth culture offers opportunity for youth to enter the public domain that often excludes them in favour of those who wield social, political and economic power.⁵²

Fourth, scholars argue that youth cultures offer opportunity for youth to exert independence from the control of adults.⁵³ Studies on youth culture in the West suggest that this search for independence is as a result of two conditions. First, youth have a marginal status within society because they are usually in some form of formal education or employed in unskilled labour and are not fully integrated into the economic structure. Moreover, the youth are not fully integrated into the social structure in that while they have emerged from one family, they have not yet formed another and much of their free time is still regulated and controlled by adult authorities. Second, the institutions that were placed to manage this transition such as formal education and mass media help renew the structures of society and prepare young people for their adult roles by inculcating the norms of the wider society. While the purpose of these institutions is to shape the lives of young people, these institutions are controlled by adults, giving young people little power within the context of this system.

⁵⁰ Ntarangwi, *East African Hip Hop*, 2009; Gustafsson, "Community Radio as Promoters of Youth Culture," 2013; Diouf, "Engaging Postcolonial Cultures," 2003

⁵¹ E. Mwangi, "Masculinity and Nationalism in East African Hip Hop Music," *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* Vol.41 No.2 (2004) pp. 5-20

⁵² Ntarangwi *East African Hip Hop*, 2009

⁵³ S.N. Eisenstadt, *From Generation to Generation: Age Groups and Social Structure* (Glencoe, 1956)

This shared experience of subordination creates a climate in which youth culture emerges as a site in which young people assert their own sense of power.⁵⁴ Of course in other societies such as in Africa the media may not necessarily inculcate the norms of the wider society as much of the content is foreign originated. Thus the media plays an important role in the making of youth cultures whose content is countercultural. Studies on youth culture in Africa also suggest that youth culture is a sphere in which youth exercise independence from the control of elders. Others have argued that due to lack of social control and properly functioning social support institutions youth are alienated from mainstream society and end up in the streets where they create their own social worlds. In that regard they discuss the dress, language and the activities in the streets of urban youth which are very different from those of their parents.⁵⁵ Granted that youth culture may be as a result of loosened social controls suggesting that that is all it is may be simplification of a more sophisticated phenomenon. Moreover, while youth in the streets may be involved in youth cultures, youth cultures may also be engaged in by youth from properly functioning homes and not necessarily from the streets.

2.6 Society and Youth Culture

Regardless of the reasons behind youth's engagement with youth cultures, studies reveal that youth cultures incite responses from the society which are termed as moral panics in youth cultural studies. For example, Perullo shows that in Tanzania, youth

⁵⁴ *ibid*

⁵⁵ I. Abdullah, "Bush Path to Destruction: The Origin and Character of the Revolutionary United Front/ Sierra Leone", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol.36 No.2 (1999) pp. 203-234; R.M. Mkandawire, (1996), 'Experiences in Youth Policy and Programme in Commonwealth Africa'. Unpublished Policy Document Prepared for the Commonwealth Youth Programme Department. 1996; F. Chigunta, "The Socio-Economic Situation of Youth in Africa: Problems, Prospects and Options," (2002); A. Momoh, "Area Boys and the Nigerian Political Crisis," Paper presented at a workshop in Sweden (1998)

who engaged in the hip hop culture and music were associated with violence, hostility and disruption and were labelled as hooligans.⁵⁶ Similarly in Mozambique youth's engagement with modern clothing such as short skirts, higher shoes, tight trousers get them into conflict with the older generation.⁵⁷ As such the youth are careful about wearing certain clothes while at the same time they defend their choices.⁵⁸

Likewise studies of youth cultures in Western societies reveal that young people are regularly labelled as deviant for their stylistic choices and abhorrent behaviour is often reduced to an individual's clothing habits. For example, Cohen and Williams both argue that the mainstream dominant culture in 1960s England, constructed mods and rockers as folk devils.⁵⁹ This was because the mods and the rockers were defined as a threat to societal values and interests. Generally speaking then, youth cultures have been met with panics and alarm by the dominant society.

On the same note, repressive governments in history have sought to control the youth cultures engaged by their youthful citizens. For example Springman reveals that the state in Weimar Germany used censorship measures in order to control the creation of youth identities.⁶⁰ However, this control began to wade with the growth of a youth consumer market created by illustrated magazines, science fiction novels, radio and sports all of which influenced the style and content of the Weimar cultural modernity. In another study on Germany, Wallace argues that certain youth participated in the

⁵⁶ Perullo, "Hooligans and Heroes," 2005

⁵⁷ B. Holzhausen, "Youth Culture in Rural Mozambique," Swiss Agency: Zurich. (2007) Accessed at <http://nestcepas.ch>

⁵⁸ Ibid; B.M. Sackey, "Apuskeleke: Youth Fashion Craze, Immorality or Female Harassment," *Etnofoor* Vol.16 No.2 (2003) pp.57-69

⁵⁹ J.P. Williams, "Youth-Subculture Studies: Sociological Traditions and Core Concepts," *Sociology Compass* Vol. 1 (2007) pp.572-593; S. Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (London: Taylor Francis Group, 2002)

⁶⁰ L. Springman, *Carpe Mundum: German Youth Culture of The Weimar Republic* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007)

Hamburg Swings subculture from America which involved going to dances, listening to music, dressing in a certain way and using certain styles of speech. However, the state condemned the Hamburg Swings as degenerate music which ran contrary to the model of youthfulness associated with fascist modernity. The state expected youth to participate in the dominant youth organisation and not construct alternative ideas of youth. As a result, the youth who participated in the culture were punished while others were sent to concentration camps.⁶¹ What comes out clearly from the studies of youth culture under repressive regimes is that despite their political situations, youth were active in constructing their identities. Clark reveals that notwithstanding the strictness of the government in China, youth were as active in their own ways at asserting their ambitions and difference as their western counterparts.⁶²

It should be noted that in as much as youth cultures often incited negative responses, the antagonism that was portrayed by certain governments was non-existent in others. For example, Risch in a study on Russia challenges the assumption that Communist leaders and Western influenced youth cultures were inimically hostile to one another.⁶³ He argues that while initially banning Western cultural trends like jazz as well as rock and roll, Communist leaders accommodated elements of rock and pop music to develop their own socialist music. Furthermore, the communist leaders promoted organised forms of leisure to turn young people away from excesses of style perceived to be Western. As such, popular song and officially sponsored rock and pop bands formed a socialist beat that young people listened and danced to. Consequently young people attracted to the music and subcultures of the Capitalist West still shared

⁶¹ Wallace "Youth Cultures under Authoritarian Regimes," 2001

⁶² Clark, *Youth Culture in China*, 2012

⁶³ W.J. Risch (ed.) *Youth and Rock in the Soviet Bloc*, 2014)

the values and behaviours of their peers in Communist youth organisations.⁶⁴

Nonetheless this compromise with the West brought some contradictions. For example state-sponsored rock festivals and rock bands encouraged a spirit of rebellion among young people. Moreover, youth countercultures that originated in the capitalist West, like hippies and punks, challenged the legitimacy of Communist youth organizations and their sponsors. Failing to provide enough Western cultural goods to provincial cities helped fuel resentment over the Soviet Union's capital, Moscow, and encourage support for breakaway nationalist movements that led to the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991. Clearly then, the responses of society towards youth cultures has been varied but for the most part the cultural practices of youth have tended to result in a contestation over culture.

2.7 Conclusion

Basing on this short review, there are existing gaps in the knowledge available on youth cultures in Africa and particularly in Malawi. There are a number of studies touching on youth culture in Malawi one of which is Moto's work focusing on urban youth language which he terms 'new language'. In this work he argues that this new language is based on Malawi's indigenous languages as well as the vernacularisation of foreign languages.⁶⁵ Another work on youth culture is by Fenn & Perullo who look at youth's interaction with hip hop and their language choices in the making of hip

⁶⁴ Risch, *Youth and Rock in the Soviet Bloc*, 2014

⁶⁵ F. Moto, "Language and Societal Attitudes," 2001

hop music in Malawi.⁶⁶ Other than these studies in the field of linguistics, historical studies on youth culture in Malawi are rare. Thus, there is an existing gap in the historical knowledge of youth cultures in Malawi. More than that, there is also a gap in the existing historical knowledge of youth culture in Africa as most existing studies focus on youth culture within the context of cultural politics. It is against that background that this study examines the processes in the making of urban youth dress, music and dance in Blantyre between 1952 and 2012. The next chapter begins the discussion by focusing on urban youth culture in the late colonial period, beginning in 1952.

⁶⁶ A. Perullo and J. Fenn, “Language Ideologies, Choices and Practices in Eastern African Hip Hop,” in H. Berger & M.T. Carrol, *Global Pop, Local Language* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2003)

Chapter Three

THE DAWNING OF AN URBAN YOUTH DRESS, MUSIC AND DANCE

(1952-1963)

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the making of urban youth culture from the time that Africans in Blantyre became urban residents to the end of the colonial period. It argues that urban youth culture as seen in dress, music and dance only emerged in the years after the Second World War following changes in the colonial urban policy. Following these changes, youth interacted with the urban environment to invent new identities and realities that were distinctive of the urban space. Thus through youth culture, the youth resisted traditional culture and the control of elders which characterised life in traditional society. Paradoxically, in the process they subjected themselves to the control of capitalism and the culture of their colonisers.

The discussion has been organised chronologically. First there is an examination of the lives of Africans before the opening of African residential areas in the townships with a focus on their dress, music and dance practices before 1950. Then consideration is given to the changes that Blantyre witnessed in the years following the end of the Second World War which created an atmosphere for the development of youth culture. This is followed by a discussion on the dress, music and dance practices after Africans in Blantyre began to experience urbanisation and the influences that contributed to the making of youth culture.

3.2 Early History of Blantyre

Blantyre urban has a long history that dates back to 1876 and 1906 with the establishment of Blantyre and Limbe Townships respectively. The townships were inhabited by Asians and Europeans whose low and medium density housing were found in: Mpingwe, ITG and Mudi in Limbe Township for Asians and Mount Pleasant, Sunnyside, Namiwawa, Kabula and Mandala in Blantyre Township for Europeans.¹ Although the towns of Blantyre and Limbe were established as a result of Christianity and commerce, there already was a concentration of villages that existed before the coming of Europeans. Thus after the establishment of these colonial towns, Africans moved to the peripheral areas. In 1948 negotiations aimed at amalgamating the two towns began. It was argued that the two towns needed to be joined together because Blantyre and Limbe had a common boundary, common interests, a joint water scheme and a joint electricity supply project.² Therefore it was understood that the move would enable the town councils to do better infrastructural planning than it was the case at the time. However other members of the town councils argued against the amalgamation, advancing that such a move was to have undesirable repercussions on such matters as the rates that residents were paying to the councils which were slated differently and particularly the huge costs that Blantyre Town Council was to likely to incur owing to the amalgamation.³ Nevertheless, in 1956, a new combined Town Council of Blantyre was created.⁴

¹ Encyclopaedia Britannica, Blantyre Malawi

² MNA/16/BCC/1/2/6 Limbe Town Council Meeting minutes April 12, 1950

³ MNA/16/BCC/1/2/6 Minutes of a Joint Meeting of the Blantyre and Limbe Town Councils to Decide on the Almagamation of the Two Towships, 14 March, 1951

⁴ J. McCracken, *A History of Malawi: 1859-1966* (New York: Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2012) p.292

3.2.1 African Residence

Although Blantyre town had been founded earlier, Africans were not considered members of the urban space. A desire to maintain a labour force withstanding, both government and companies avoided the creation of a permanent African urban population throughout the colonial period. This was because segregation was the colonial watchword throughout the African continent. Justified by racial theories of superiority and the panic about epidemics and the need to keep the settlers healthy through isolation from contact with the bulk of 'natives', segregation was generally followed in most colonial towns.⁵ This ambivalence resulted in at least three residential areas for Africans working in town. The most common residence for African workers was the peri-urban villages that sprang up between and around Blantyre and Limbe.⁶ These included Ndirande, Zingwangwa, Bangwe, Soche and Chichiri, all of which particularly sprang up because of their proximity to town.⁷ The most popular of these were Chichiri and Ndirande which offered settlement to colonialism's new men such as independent business people, clerks, teachers, etc.⁸ Apart from these new villages there were others that had existed before the founding of Blantyre and Limbe such as Chilomoni and Machinjiri. All these offered settlement to Africans who earned their living within the townships. McCracken argues that here the lives of people were of rural-urban character meaning that while men worked in town, women retained access to land where maize and other crops were grown.⁹ Traditional music and dances such as Beni and Mganda were also practiced.¹⁰

⁵ Freund, *The African City: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) p. 28

⁶ J. Power, "Individual Enterprise," p.193

⁷ H.C. Norwood, "Ndirande: a Squatter Colony in Malawi," *The Town Planning Review* Vol.43, No.2 (1972) p. 135

⁸ Power, "Individual Enterprise," p. 44

⁹ McCracken, *History of Malawi*, p. 289

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 302

The second common residence for Africans was the distant villages situated away from town such as the villages in Chiradzulu. In these villages Africans lived traditional and rural lives, and relied less on the money economy. The only category that lived within the township throughout much of the colonial period was that of domestic servants who lived in boys' quarters on their employers' premises.¹¹ However, later in the colonial period some Africans lived in native locations within the townships described as 'inadequate and unappealing'.¹² For example, the government houses built at Naperi by 1936 were too small for African families and their conditions were very poor.¹³ There were also a lot of regulations surrounding how Africans were to live in these locations. These included: no liquor; no open dance or assembly without obtaining consent from a superintendent and no going out of the location between the hours of 9pm and 5am.¹⁴ Consequently, most Africans preferred living in the peri-urban villages outside the townships. Apart from the houses at Naperi, in the late 1940s a few private companies built compounds for their African employees. The compounds whose character was similar to those found in Southern African colonial towns included the Mandala compound at Wenela, Mpingwe African Railway compound at Bangwe and Imperial Tobacco Company's African compound in Chiwembe.¹⁵

Therefore, for much of the colonial period, African residence in the township was limited to domestic servants and night watchmen.¹⁶ This was ensured with the legislation that banned Africans from providing their own housing by the provision

¹¹Power, "Individual Enterprise," p. 3; Encyclopedia Britannica, Blantyre Malawi

¹² Ibid., p.303

¹³ McCracken, "Blantyre Transformed," p.251

¹⁴MNA S1/392/19, Blantyre Town Council

¹⁵ Davies, *Fifty Years of Progress*, p. 38; See also J. McCracken, "Blantyre Transformed," p. 249

¹⁶ McCracken, *History of Malawi*, p. 288

'that no wattle and daub houses be allowed within the township and that only buildings of brick, wood or iron be allowed. Such houses were to be of no less value than £50 which essentially could not be afforded by most Africans.¹⁷ Legislation also did not allow Africans to be within the townships from 9pm to 5am. This was in pursuant to the segregative tendencies that characterised colonialism in Southern Africa. It was not until 1945 that the colonial authorities acknowledged the legitimacy of permanent African residence in town.¹⁸

3.2.2 Segregation in Blantyre

As already alluded to, colonialism in Nyasaland like in other colonies of Southern Africa was characterized by segregation.¹⁹ In turn there existed an official antipathy to the process of African urbanization which resulted in the neglect of African urban populations prior to the Second World War. For the European rulers, an urban African was an anomaly in the context of indirect rule which was predicated on the assumption that an African's identity was necessarily a tribal one.²⁰ It was argued that a prolonged exposure to the demoralizing urban milieu could result in a loss of identity and therefore detribalization. Against that background, several measures were taken to keep Africans tribal. The first measure concerned African residence. By keeping Africans under traditional control it was assumed that they would not be detached from African customs, values and ways. As for the peri-urban villages that sprung up, measures were also taken to place them under African traditional authority. For example, after 1936, Ndirande and Soche were designated Native Trust Land and fell in the jurisdiction of village headmen and chief Kapeni. Here women retained

¹⁷ McCracken, "Blantyre Transformed," p.250

¹⁸ Power, "Individual Enterprise," p. 202

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 35

²⁰ Burton, "Townsmen in the Making," p. 333

access to land while men went to work in town. Thus, though working in town, the lives of most Africans remained largely rural.²¹ Nevertheless, while Africans had restricted access to the urban space and its facilities, most preferred living in the villages anyway as life was cheap.²²

Second, Europeans contested Africans' use of the urban space. To that end racialism governed access to resources and consumption patterns as well as dictated wage rates and other conditions of labour. For instance, Africans were not allowed entrance into most European owned shops due to the colour bar whose driving idea was that Africans were thieves and could not be trusted to circulate freely in European shops.²³ Consequently, Africans were not full consumers of urbanity as this racialism was frustrating. In the same way, Europeans sought to prevent Africans from appropriating any elements of urbanity that would make them equal to the White man thereby maintaining inequality and asserting dominance. Thus, educated Africans who addressed Europeans in English were often thought cheeky while their western dress was mocked by white society.²⁴ This was similar to the experience in Rhodesia where the colonial administrators tried to ban urban Africans from wearing western garb in urban areas.²⁵ In colonial Kenya some European employers insisted that their African workers wear clothes that were distinctly non-western.²⁶ All these attitudes towards Africans and their consumption of an urban culture were aimed at keeping Africans tribal and traditional.

²¹ L.S. Norman, *Nyasaland without Prejudice* (London: East Africa, 1934) p. 39

²² *Ibid.*, p. 126

²³ Power, "Individual Enterprise," pp. 35-36

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 61

²⁵ T. Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (Durham: Durham University Press 1996) pp.102-104

²⁶ T. Parsons, "The Consequences of Uniformity: The Struggle for the Boy Scout Uniform in Colonial Kenya," *Journal of Social History* Vol. 40, No.2 (2006) p. 364

Third, urban facilities were not provided to service African populations. As Power notes, entertainment and other services for Africans were not provided for by either the Limbe or Blantyre municipalities.²⁷ For example, Blantyre had one cinematograph hall which only catered for the European and Asian populations except for a few cases when educational films were shown to Africans living within the township such as house boys, clerks and artisans.²⁸ Beyond the general reluctance to invest in Africans living around the townships, Europeans also had racist attitudes towards Africans. For example, on the question of cinema as a form of entertainment, it was strongly felt that Africans were incapable of understanding or seeing anything in an ordinary picture or photograph, even for those who had the advantage of a moderate degree.²⁹ Therefore the primary purpose for showing Africans films was education. The films shown to Africans included tea films, aimed at reminding the African that people who grow economic crops are prosperous.³⁰ Although in the course of the Second World War the colonial government made film accessible to Africans in the villages, it was solely for propaganda as it was aimed at promoting the war effort by encouraging African men to conscript and the general population to produce food crops in support of the war. Nevertheless comedies were also shown to Africans during such shows, remarkably Charlie Chaplin.³¹ The second category of film shown to Africans depicted the African way of life. This was aimed at keeping Africans within tradition and preventing the demoralization of the African which could result from watching American films.³² Consequently Africans were less exposed to other ways of life through film which could greatly impact on theirs.

²⁷ Power, *Individual Enterprise*, 1990 p.198

²⁸ MNA/S1/297/32, Queen Victoria Memorial Hall 1932-1937

²⁹ MNA, S2/7/27 Censorship, Film 1927-1938

³⁰ MNA, S2/7/27 Censorship, Film 1927-1938 The Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment

³¹ *Nkhani za Nyasaland*, February 9, 1949, Vol. 10 No. 22

³² MNA/S2/7/27 Censorship, Film March 1933

These racist tendencies in effect had a bearing on the emergence of an urban youth culture before the end of the Second World War despite Blantyre's long urban history. Although youth often built brick houses, bought bicycles and clothes to embrace the urban life brought by colonialism, life for most was at best rural.³³ McCracken argues that far more Malawians experienced urban culture as labour migrants in Johannesburg or Salisbury, where an estimated 10,000 Malawians were living in 1938, than they did working at home.³⁴ Such statistics need not be surprising considering the nature of Blantyre before 1950. The town did not have major employing areas as it was mostly for businesses and not industries which could create employment opportunities. Consequently, migration within Nyasaland tended to be rural to rural and not rural to urban. For example, at the time of estates expansion, people migrated to Thyolo and Mulanje tea estates rather than Blantyre.³⁵

Compared to other colonial towns in Africa, Blantyre generally experienced slow urbanisation for a number of reasons. First, the economy of Nyasaland was mostly rural as Nyasaland did not have minerals as did other colonies. Consequently, she failed to attract very many settlers, a situation that hindered rational urban development in Blantyre.³⁶ McCracken argues that Blantyre did not experience urban development as finances for such a project were not available. The number of full rate payers was significantly less and the government was not ready to invest in the project.³⁷

³³ Norman, *Nyasaland without Prejudice*, 1934 p.137

³⁴ McCracken, "Blantyre Transformed," 1998 p. 247

³⁵ W. Chirwa, "Alomwe and Mozambican Immigrant Labour in Colonial Malawi, 1890-1945," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* Vol. 27, No. 3 (1994), pp. 525-550

³⁶ K. Little, *Urbanization as a Social Process* (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1974) p.16

³⁷ McCracken, "Blantyre Transformed," p. 251

Another hindrance to the development of Blantyre as an urban centre was the nature of the labour force employed in Blantyre which was mostly temporary. For instance, before the opening of the railway, Africans worked as potters from Katunga to Blantyre and other stations outside Blantyre. The plantations in Blantyre also relied on seasonal workers. The nature of the economy therefore did not promote urbanisation, and thus villages remained villages while an urban class of Africans did not develop. As already alluded to, generally, there was neglect in the urban development of Africa, a situation which prevented rapid urbanisation in many colonies.³⁸ However, this changed with changes in colonial urban policy in Africa after the Second World War. In several colonial towns including Blantyre, the government embarked on a number of projects to cater for an African urban society.³⁹ Around the same period Blantyre and Limbe also experienced an expansion of its economy due to an increase in the prices of commercial crops. In consequence, tobacco processing factories were opened, European owned transport and commercial companies expanded and an increased number of Asian traders migrated to Blantyre.⁴⁰ Therefore, Blantyre and Limbe townships experienced growth after 1945,⁴¹ and it was only then that African urban culture increased visibility.

3.3 Dress, Music and Dance 1930-1950

In the years preceding the urbanization of Africans, cultural practices of youth were at best rural with a few exceptions for those who had the greatest contact with western material culture. This was especially the case for youth who were mission converts, school children and wage labourers who appropriated and reinterpreted European

³⁸ Burton "Townsmen in the Making," p. 333

³⁹ A. Burton, "Urchins, Loafers and the Cult of the Cowboy: Urbanization and Delinquency in Dar es Salaam, 1919-1961," *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (2001) p.207

⁴⁰ McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, p. 291

⁴¹ McCracken, *Blantyre Transformed*, p.251

clothing. On one hand, men dressed in a shirt and a pair of khaki shorts or white drill.⁴² In school, the uniform also comprised of a khaki shirt and shorts and no shoes for males. It needs to be noted that generally, Africans mostly dressed in shirts and shorts as trousers were a preserve for Europeans and a few Africans who worked as clerks, drivers and teachers and therefore could afford that kind of dress.⁴³ Moreover, as noted in the study on colonial Brazzaville, whites often insisted on clothes which satisfied their dress conventions and communicated the subordinate roles of their employees such as walking barefoot and wearing shorts.⁴⁴ Thus it was common for Africans to walk barefooted except for a privileged few who could afford to buy shoes such as the canvas shoes sold in Limbe.⁴⁵

On the other hand, females dressed in dresses and other times a robe-like dress known as *potokosi*. Older women dressed in *nyakula* and *nsalu*.⁴⁶ While the cloths used such as *sazana* and *biriwita* were purchased from Asian shops, Africans also had a textile industry, located in Neno. In the late colonial period, the government put in place a scheme through which Africans learnt the skills of weaving and spinning. However the cloth they produced locally known as *bwazi*, was considerably expensive. Thus, most Africans preferred imported Manchester cloth over the local cloth. In fact, it is argued that the desire to buy imported cloth was one of the motivations for labour migration.⁴⁷

⁴² Norman, *Nyasaland without Prejudice*, p.39; Symon Mpinguzi, Ndirande, May16, 2014.

⁴³ OT, Symon Mpinguzi, May 16, 2014

⁴⁴ P. Martin, "Contesting Clothes in Colonial Brazzaville," *Journal of African History* Vol. 35, No.3 (1994) p. 408

⁴⁵ OT, Times Mponda, Ndirande, May 16, 2014

⁴⁶ OT, Symon Mpinguzi,

⁴⁷ MNA/S1/1988/19, Native Cloth Industry

Unlike Europeans and affluent Africans who often bought already made clothes from Kandodo, Mandala or outside the colony, most Africans had their clothes made by tailors who operated from the verandas of Asian shops in Limbe.⁴⁸ Commenting on the Second World War and how purchases made would help in financing it the writer of *Nkhani za Nyasaland* newspaper wrote: “When Europeans purchase clothes, food, beverages and cigarettes, they will be helping in financing the war. Africans in purchasing cloth, blankets and salt, you will help in financing the war.”⁴⁹ This meant that Africans bought cloths and eventually made clothes while Europeans bought already made clothes which they could afford. However at this point there were no significant differences in dress between the young and the old except for youth’s preference for European clothes.

In terms of music and dance, traditional African music and dance characterised by the beating of drums and women clapping their hands in rhythm to the songs and dances, comprised the chief recreational activity.⁵⁰ Prominent in Blantyre were chioda, Likwata, Beni, Mganda and Mjiri.⁵¹ However Africans also appropriated new musical styles mostly brought home by returning migrants such as South African and American musical styles.⁵² Having been exposed to wealthier societies and a greater range of economic and social opportunities, migrants returned home with a surfeit of new tastes, desires, expectations and ideas. Due to less acceptability by the members in their villages, many migrants preferred to relocate to a cosmopolitan urban environment where a hybrid culture was forming and the peri-urban villages in Blantyre were such an environment. The new music was played through the

⁴⁸ OT, Mr Semu

⁴⁹ *Nkhani za Nyasaland*, Vol. 2, No. 35, Blantyre, November 29, 1939.

⁵⁰ Mills, *What We Do in Nyasaland*, 1911 p.93

⁵¹ OT, Times Mponda; McCracken, *History of Malawi*, 2012 p. 302

⁵² Lwanda, “The History of Popular Music in Malawi,” 2008 p.29

gramophone at evening dance parties usually held at a brewer woman's house patronised by youth. Chichiri is credited for being a site for most dance parties as compared to Ndirande which used to be quiet.⁵³ Apart from migration, Christianity also had an impact on African music. Through appropriation and negotiation, hymns were blended with African musical instruments to make them danceable. In the same way the end of the Second World War also brought musical influences from the rest of Africa and beyond.⁵⁴

In the late 1940s, Africans got exposed to Radio Lusaka which broadcasted from Northern Rhodesia. Many people in Blantyre did not own radios. Therefore to increase listenership for the radio station, Africans living at the Naperi government lines formed a social club in 1949 which played the radio every Wednesday for the benefit of Africans.⁵⁵ Here they were exposed to music from within Africa and abroad. The station had programs such as *Zoimba za Anyamata a ku Lusaka* (Music performed by young men from Lusaka), *Zimene Mwatifunsa: ndizo Mbale za grandifolo zimene Africans kuti awaimbile*, *Nyimbo za ku Midzi* (Your requests: Africans traditional music requests), *Zoimba za ku Munali m'Chinyanja* (Music from Munali in Nyanja), *Zoimba za mabuno ku South Africa* (Boers Music from South Africa), *Zoimba za ku South America* (Music from South America) and Dancing Time.⁵⁶ The club also arranged sporting activities, musical concerts and other amusements for Africans living in the Blantyre-Limbe area. Generally, in the years preceding 1945, urban youth dress, music and dance practices were not significantly present.

⁵³ Power, "Individual Enterprise," 1990 p.216

⁵⁴ Lwanda, "The History of Popular Music", 2008 pp.29-30

⁵⁵ Nkhani za Nyasaland, August 10, 1949

⁵⁶ Nkhani za Nyasaland, 2 March 1949; April 6, 1949

3.4 The Making of Urban Youth Culture

In the years after the Second World War, Blantyre and Limbe Townships experienced several changes that created opportunities for the development of urban cultures. To begin with, there was a rise in the prices of tobacco, an expansion of the tobacco industry and the increase in the number and size of processing factories all of which resulted in a boom in urban construction and commerce and opened economic opportunities for many Africans.⁵⁷

As a result of changes in the colonial urban policy, major social services projects aimed at changing Africans from tribesmen to citizens began to be undertaken one of which was to do with African housing.⁵⁸ After the Second World War the colonial government began to show interest in urban development thus taking over from the town councils which had previously been responsible for the townships. A new town plan was drawn and residential areas demarcated along the lines of class: high, medium and low density areas of which the high density areas were for African residence. From 1947, hundreds of African houses began to be built within town and roads began to be surfaced.⁵⁹

In 1952, Africans started relocating to the high density areas of Soche and Kanjedza while the peri-urban villages were incorporated into the borders of the townships. The African was officially an urban resident.⁶⁰ As the economy expanded, new jobs were created and many more Africans flocked to town. The total population of Blantyre-

⁵⁷ Vaughan, *The Story of an African Famine: Gender and Famine in Twentieth Century Malawi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p.24; McCracken, "Blantyre Transformed," 1998 p.253

⁵⁸ Burton, "Townsmen in the Making," p.334

⁵⁹ McCracken, "Blantyre Transformed," p.253

⁶⁰ Power, "Individual Enterprise," p. 316

Limbe in 1956 was 55,000, ninety percent of which comprised of Africans. By 1955/56 more than a thousand houses were constructed for African government employees at Soche and Naperi.⁶¹

With Africans resident in town, a class of urban youth emerged. Whereas some had previously lived in Chichiri and Ndirande, others migrated from rural areas. According to a Report of the Committee on Traditional Housing in the Blantyre and Limbe Planning Area in 1962, there were three reasons for the migration of people from rural areas to Blantyre and Limbe. First, people, mostly youth, migrated to look for employment so that they could earn cash. Second, some migrants found rural life dull and stagnant as such they migrated to town to find more interesting things there.⁶² Finally, people were generally dissatisfied with rural life as educational advancement and the money economy opened their eyes to wider horizons.⁶³ Benedict argues that most of these migrants were young people seeking employment and educational opportunities.⁶⁴ While in town, the youth created new ways of living that were distinctly urban. While the traditional society was controlled by elders, the town was to be the realm for youth.

3.4.1 The Construction of Morality

The youth cultures that were created by youth in the course of African urbanisation were accepted or rejected on the basis of the morality of the society. However, much of the moralities that were considered to be traditional or African had been invented at

⁶¹ McCracken, "Blantyre Transformed," p. 292

⁶² Bwalo la Nyasaland May 5, 1959

⁶³ Report of the Committee of Traditional Housing in the Blantyre and Limbe Planning Area (Zomba: Government Printer, 1962) p.12

⁶⁴ B. Benedict, *Preliminary Survey on the Needs of Youth in Nyasaland* (Zomba: Government Printer, 1963) p.9

particular historical periods much of which had to do with the introduction of Christianity to Africa. When Christianity was introduced to Nyasaland, missionaries ensured that all converts' conduct was in line with the teachings and principles of Christianity. For example, Christian converts were expected to dress in a certain way. While Africans had previously dressed in their own ways, missionaries saw the exposure of bodies by women as evidence of the 'sensuality of the negro'.⁶⁵ Within the context of Victorian morality women were not supposed to show their legs and it was considered immodest to do so. As a result, missionaries gave women pieces of cloth and taught them how to cover their bodies.⁶⁶ Thus, for missionaries and colonisers alike, women's dress had to cover the knees while breasts were never to be exposed although this had been the case in African societies. Men's bodies also had to be 'appropriately' covered. With time this became accepted as an African morality which was jealously protected by Africans as if it was fixed and not subject to change.

African music and dance practices were also condemned by Europeans. Some dances were considered as unacceptable on the basis of their connection with African religion and were seen as a manifestation of savage heathenism and antagonism to the "true faith".⁶⁷ However others were condemned because of their emphasis on pelvic movement and were branded as licentious, obscene and vulgar sexuality.⁶⁸ Eventually, Africans' ideas of morality in dress, music and dance among other areas were based on the constructed moralities of the colonialists and missionaries. It is within this background that the debate on questions of what was moral or immoral needs to be understood.

⁶⁵ F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986)

⁶⁶ M.J. Hay, "Changes in Clothing and struggles over identity in Colonial West Kenya" in J. Allman (ed.) *Fashioning Africa* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2004) p. 71

⁶⁷ J. L. Hanna "Africa's New Traditional Dance", *Ethnomusicology* Vol.9, No.1(1965) p. 13

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 14

3.4.2 Institutional Youth Culture: The Boy Scouts and Girl Guide

Associations

With Africans in town, measures were taken by the colonial government to culture youth in the appropriate and acceptable behaviours. For male youth, the aim was to counter the ill effects of urbanization, build their characters in line with the ideals of society and create reliable citizenship with emphasis on respect for authority, deference to the established political and social orders, political obedience and social conformity.⁶⁹ To that end, the Boy Scouts Association was established in 1950 with clubs at Blantyre Secondary School, Blantyre Catholic Institute, Limbe LTC and Limbe Railways. In the subsequent years, more clubs were opened at Naperi (1954), Chitawira (1960) and Ndirande (1964). In these clubs membership was open to youth aged between 15 and 25 most of whom were students, teachers and clerks.⁷⁰ For female youth the Girl Guides Association was established with the aim of developing characters, skills in domesticity and the care for children.⁷¹ Although there may have been other clubs, available evidence suggests that there was a Girl Guides club in Limbe, whose offices were on the Tobacco Auction land.

Beside the different trainings that these associations offered, youth were also trained on how to dress as responsible youth. In that sense, the two organisations inculcated a particular culture to its members. Through the military style scout uniform, the colonial infrastructure sought to model, control and socialize potentially troublesome adolescents.⁷² Be that as it may, youth also used the uniform to create new social

⁶⁹ MNA 17/BSA/BSA Printed Books, R. Reader, Boy Scout, Royal Albert Hall, April, 1938

⁷⁰ MNA/ 17/BSA/1/51, Boy Scouts Association Correspondence, Limbe Railways Scout Troop

⁷¹ M. Smith, "Be(ing) Prepared: Girl Guides, Colonial Life, and National Strength," *A Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies* Vol. 12 (2006) p.1

⁷² T. Parsons, "The Consequences of Uniformity: The Struggle for the Boy Scout Uniform in Colonial Kenya," *Journal of Social History* Vol. 40, NO. 2, (2006) p. 363

identities and attain status (see Figure 2). As an internationally recognized youth movement, the Boy Scouts Association uniform was coveted as youth sought the relative comforts of the western version of adolescence. Moreover, membership to the association opened opportunities such as attending an international jamboree in England or being called upon to serve at the European garden parties.⁷³ Therefore association with the scout uniform was advantageous as it awarded youth respect and opened opportunities only available to 'responsible' youth. Although the Comaroffs argue that dress was used to subjugate African peoples a process they call conquest by consumption, African youth used western and urban dressing to their own advantage as these clothes introduced new notions of respectability, morality, and legitimacy.⁷⁴ Consequently, scout uniforms generally had a bearing on how youth dressed in the 1950s.⁷⁵ In terms of hairstyles, the scouts had what others would consider unconventional haircuts. In Figure 2 African scouts in Blantyre are uniformly in a Mohawk haircut, a style which was also popular among teenagers worldwide in the 1950s, popularized by the American film and Pop music industries.⁷⁶ In that sense, the Boy Scouts as an association inculcated this hairstyle among its male members thus directing the nature of youth culture.

⁷³ MNA/17/ BSA/1/54 Boy Scouts Association Correspondence , Naperi Scout Troop, Letter from Commissioner of Nyasaland to the scout master at Naperi

⁷⁴ J.L. Comaroff & J.Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: the Dialects of Modernity on a South African Frontier* Vol. 2, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); T. Parsons, "The Consequences of Uniformity." p.364

⁷⁵ Conclusions made based on a survey of Bwalo la Nyasaland Newspaper in the 1950s.

⁷⁶ Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia, Hairstyles in the 1950s



Figure 2: Members of the Boy Scouts Association in Blantyre in the 1950s.

Source: Malawi National Archives 17/BSA/10/2

It needs to be noted that the association did not always succeed at fashioning youth into responsible citizens. For example, some of the youth at the Naperi club were considered dishonest as they failed to pay for badges and neckerchiefs. Thus, youth sought to be involved with the association only to the extent that it benefitted them and not allowing it to completely shape their lives.⁷⁷ The Girl Guides Association uniform was a dress whose length went beyond the knee, a neckerchief and a hat (Figure 3).

⁷⁷ MNA/17/BSA/1/54 Boy Scouts Association Correspondence Naperi Scout Troop



Figure 3: Members of the Girl Guide Association in Blantyre, 1950s dressed in their uniform

Source: Malawi National Archives 17/BSA/10/2

Beyond dressing, the associations also impacted on the musical practices of youth. Through the performance of musical plays, carol singing and stage performances, scout members learnt four part harmony and European music. The songs, which were in English, had content on scouting life in general as well as Christian song.⁷⁸

3.4.3 Urban Youth Dress

Although Blantyre had been opened up to Africans and urbanization intensified, Nyasaland remained largely a rural society. Thus the dress of urban youth reflected an urban identity compared to the dominant traditional one. Moreover as they got emancipated from the control of elders within the traditional society, youth sought to demonstrate their independence and cosmopolitanism through dress. The quickest way to look urban was to appropriate the European dress and reinterpret it in order to reach their unique ends which often included status. Although Europeans dressed in certain ways because their culture prescribed it, most youth dressed the European way

⁷⁸ MNA/17/BSA/9/1 By Scouts Nyasaland, Songs and Plays

deliberately in order to create new identities that would spell urban and modern. What we have here therefore is not mere copying but an appropriation. The reinterpretation that had occurred meant that these clothes had been localized by attaining new meaning but also by the fact that most were being made locally at the tailors’.

Male youth in the 1950s dressed in shirts and shorts often accompanied by high socks with a band as worn by prestigious Boy Scouts club members. However to look more progressive and urban-like, male youth preferred trousers and sometimes suits. Commenting on the clothes of the youth in the urban area a reader of *Bwalo la Nyasaland* remarked on how even on a hot day some youth wore suits just to look prestigious.⁷⁹ For younger males living in the peri-urban villages, the desire to be adults resulted in the appropriation of older men’s fashions in order to gain respectability. For example a man from Ndirande recalled how in his youth he and friends would envy men’s dressing: “In those days men used to wear wide legged Bermuda shorts locally known as *chiwaya*. As young men I and other youth put straw in our shorts so as to make our shorts wider and bigger too”⁸⁰ This demonstrates the creativity of youth in trying to create an identity for self but also a quest to transition into men.

Female youth on the other hand wore below the knee dresses as compared to *nyakula* and *nsalu* often worn by older women as seen in **Figure 4**. While dresses were prestigious and awarded one an urban identity, other members of society felt that dresses compromised African culture. For example in *Bwalo la Nyasaland Newspaper* in 1954 some members of society argued that female youth needed to wear *chilundu*

⁷⁹ *Bwalo la Nyasaland Newspaper*, 1956

⁸⁰ O.T, Time Mponda

as per tradition. However this was contested as the urban young women felt that times had changed and so they needed to as urban dwellers rather than sticking to the rural and traditional dress.⁸¹ Others went as far as suggesting that all women stop dressing in *chilundu* and instead fully adopt the wearing of dresses to which others responded that dresses were expensive and could not be afforded by all women. In this sense, urban female youth sought to be agents of change in completely transforming the urban society which also comprised of the peri-urban villages whose residents lived rural lives. These dresses were accompanied by hairstyles appropriated from films seen at ITG and Mpingwe African compounds on weekends.⁸²



Figure 4: Miss Machinjili from Blantyre dressed in the latest fashions of the 1950s sitting in a typical aristocratic style, right hand over the left with a side look and the dress with a wide bottom rolling down covering the chair with no wide smile, a typical Victorian pose.

Source: Bwalo la Nyasaland April 29, 1959

⁸¹ Bwalo la Nyasaland Newspaper, July 20, 1954

⁸² OT Mrs Nsonga, June 2014 Machinjili

In as much as youth sought to dress the urban way, access to clothes was determined by among other things their income capacity. For most Africans living in the high density areas of Kanjedza and Soche for example, the keynote in their economic conditions was poverty. As such, most of the income was spent on food and little money was left for other expenditures such as clothes.⁸³ Nevertheless, youth from such families were creative in accessing urban dress. For instance, those who only had one pair of shirt and shorts daily washed the clothes and wore *chikwiriti* as they waited for their more acceptably urban clothes to dry up.⁸⁴ A *chikwirit* was a white cloth that was worn by wrapping it around the body and tying it around the neck. Some youth still in school engaged in piece work so as to afford urban clothes. For example, as a young man, Times Mponda worked part time at the Blantyre Sports Club as a golf attendant so as to buy the clothes sold in the European shop Mandala.⁸⁵

After years of interactions with the urban environment the youth, particularly male youth appropriated fashions that were distinctly urban. First, as a result of Western and Indian films, African youth appropriated the cowboy fashion in the late 1950s and early 1960s as seen in **Figure 5**. The African compounds that had been constructed at ITG and Mpingwe by Imperial Tobacco Group and Nyasaland Railways respectively offered a venue for the seeing of films not only to residents from within the compounds but also to residents from Kanjedza, BCA, Limbe and other areas. It is here that youth were exposed to the cowboy identity. A phenomenon that was not

⁸³ D.G. Bettison, *Patterns of Income and Expenditure: Blantyre-Limbe, Nyasaland, Part II Urban Households* (Lusaka: Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, 1961) p.78

⁸⁴ OT, Times Mponda; *Chikwiriti* was a chitenje like white cloth that was worn by tying some of its ends around the neck.

⁸⁵ OT, Times Mponda

new in British ruled Africa.⁸⁶ Generally, in every colonial town that the cowboy fashion was appropriated, there existed contestations over it. Burton argues that the fashion which included a denim trouser, wide hat, and a matching gun on the hip did not fit within the constructed moralities promoted by the Christian Church and youth associations such as the Boy Scouts and Boys Brigade.⁸⁷ Moreover the other elements of a cowboy identity such as tough speech, the walk of the dangerous man of the films and an attitude of mind were interpreted as a revolt of youth in both age and culture against the authority of the elders and the establishment. Thus, respectable Africans and Europeans found these styles reprehensible, associating them in their mind with insolent attitudes if not outright criminality. However for Nyasaland there are no official records of government's discontent. Perhaps this could be due to Nyasaland's late urbanization and therefore a limited number of cowboys in the colonial period worth causing concern. As in many other appropriations, youth demonstrated agency in the appropriation of the cowboy fashion. For example, youth who could not afford to buy the ten-gallon hat of the cowboy simply bought anything close to it or made palm leaves hats in order to attain the cowboy look.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, not all male youth embraced the cowboy identity as some did not see opportunity in embracing it as their own while others did not want to associate themselves with perceived criminality.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ OT, Mr Mhango; Charles Ambler, "Popular Films and Colonial Audiences: The Movies in Northern Rhodesia," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 106, No. 1 (2001) p.81;

⁸⁷ A. Burton, "Urchins, Loafers and the Cult of the Cowboy, 2001

⁸⁸ OT Mr Mhango

⁸⁹ OT Harry Watson, Limbe, May 15, 2014



Figure 5: Elias Ziphondo also known as Nyasaland Cowboy in 1958 with a cowboy hat and gun.

Source: Bwalo la Nyasaland, August 26, 1958

Through dressing competitions and fashion shows youth initiated each other into urban dress practices. Mostly organised by youth themselves such events were made possible by the existence of recreational centres built by the colonial government (from 1953) and corporate companies. These recreational centres acted as social spaces for the interaction of youth and included Colby Community Centre Hall in Soche, Ndirande Welfare Club hall in Ndirande, Nyasaland Railways Recreation Hall in Mpingwe and ITG Hall in Chiwembe.⁹⁰ It can be argued therefore that the colonial government and corporate companies mediated the development of urban youth culture.⁹¹ Due to the regularity of these events, certain youth made names for themselves owing to their outstanding winning records in the dressing competitions from the mid-1950s to the early 1960s. In the male category there was Oliver Mlelemba, Jasper Mbekeani and Jairos Kanjanga while in the female category there

⁹⁰ Bwalo La Nyasaland Newspaper, May 21, 1957

⁹¹ Bwalo la Nyasaland Newspaper, September 15, 1953

was Rebecca Mtaumi and Irene Kaunda.⁹² Irene Kaunda became the first Miss Blantyre to be crowned in 1960.⁹³ This demonstrates that urban dress practices offered opportunities for the invention of identities as some became famous and obtained new identities beyond those they initially held.

Finally, youth were also initiated into certain urban practices by international artists from Africa who visited Nyasaland. One such personality was Miss Dorothy Masuka a jazz songbird from South Africa aged 26 who was a popular artist in the 1950s and 1960s. Dorothy held several shows throughout Malawi in 1961 on behalf of the Malawi Congress Party.⁹⁴ Dorothy is said to have always ‘dressed to kill’ and was considered a model in fashion for girls in Nyasaland.⁹⁵

3.4.4 Urban Youth Music and Dance

The changes in African residence in relation to the urban space impacted on music and dance practices among youth. While in the years before African urbanization new musical forms were appropriated and negotiated with the local, opportunities were not exactly present for a fuller urban experience. As such, music brought by migrants was appropriated within the traditional context. Moreover, in that context African music and dance took dominance over the foreign elements. With urbanisation youth operated within the urban context and thus set themselves apart from the traditional music and dance which remained dominant within Blantyre. Such music and dance practices included jazz, jive and rock music as well as ballroom dancing, twist and

⁹² Bwalo la Nyasaland Newspaper, July 1, 1958

⁹³ Bwalo la Nyasaland Newspaper, May 3, 1960

⁹⁴ Celebrating Mothers of African Song, www.herald.co.zw/celebrating-mothers-of-african-song/ May 10, 2011

⁹⁵ Bwalo La Nyasaland Newspaper, August 1, 1961

jiving.⁹⁶ However, these were the practices common among youth who had received western education and had a relatively high economic and social status which allowed for access to the music. Basically, youth adapted to their urban existence, identified and reshaped their environment and realities in a number of ways.

First, youth organised and participated in downer parties, dance parties, beauty contests, dressing competitions and dancing competitions all of which offered opportunity for the consumption of music. For example, in 1958, a dance was organised in Blantyre Township to celebrate the opening of a new garage. This dance was patronised by both male and female youth who paid an entrance fee to access the music. European beer was sold and music, mostly rock and roll, was provided by a pickup adapted to a radio set. “Most of the beautiful town girls attended the dance which ended in the wee hours of the morning.”⁹⁷ In the same year, the Nyasaland Youth League organized a music concert and competition in which singing troupes performed jazz and other music genres. It is interesting to note that the wing of the Nyasaland African Congress was at this time involved in brokering urban youth cultural practices as roughly ten years later the youth leaguers in the then Malawi Congress Party stated in clear terms that youth did not have time for leisure activities.⁹⁸ While parties were often held within the residential locations and offered music through gramophones and other music sets, events such as dressing competitions took place in recreational halls and were characterised by band music. These events were also made possible by the availability of social spaces where youth could meet and interact. These included Colby Community centre, Ndirande Welfare

⁹⁶ W. Rhodes “The State of African Music in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland,” *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences, Series II*, Vol. 23, No. 5, (1961) pp. 464-471

⁹⁷ Bwalo La Nyasaland Newspaper, Sept 9, 1958

⁹⁸ MNA/ The Malawi Young Pioneers, Youth Clubs

Hall, Nyasaland Railways Recreational Hall, Naperi Scouts Hut, Ramsay Hall and several other bars within town.

Second, youth formed music troupes which sang barbershop type music involving four part harmony. These included Hurry Hurry Brothers, Nyasa Follies, De Ndirande Pitch Crooners, Mpingwe Rhythm Brothers and Nyasaland African Melodians. While they appropriated the genres of music such as American jazz, these youths localised such appropriations by using indigenous language and sensibilities as well as tackling issues relevant to the Nyasaland context. De Ndirande Crooners for instance produced songs such as *Gulugufe*, *Lizzie* and *Eluby* which Lwanda argues appealed to some urban tastes.⁹⁹ Formation of these groups was often a result of acquaintances made in school or at work. However such troupes offered opportunities for the invention of new identities. Through music these youth earned fame while at the same time held onto new identities made possible through nicknaming, a unique element of urban youth culture. For example, Nyasaland African Melodians had the following members: Uncle Shampoo (E.M. Gondwe), Gen De Hoot (D.G. Msowoya), American Cherry (H.H. Zangwa), Texas Melodian (C.H. Nyasulu), Vocovo Mandolin (P.K.G. Maulidi), Doba Doba Tapa (C.H. Gondwe), Dr Wizard (D.A. Chinganda), Chocolate Maroon Gal (Mrs Constance L. Gondwe) and Sweet Zig-Zag Train Boy (C. Thipa).¹⁰⁰ Thus although most of the members in the troupe were married, for instance Mrs Constance Gondwe and C.H. Gondwe, they were themselves youth as seen in their appearance in **Figure 6** but also their involvement in urban youth culture. This illuminates the fact that youth culture in the immediate years following African urbanisation was mostly engaged in by older youth some of whom were married.

⁹⁹ Lwanda, "A History of Popular Music in Malawi 1891-2007: a Preliminary Communication," *Society of Malawi Journal* Vol. 61, No.1, p.30

¹⁰⁰ Names of music troupes and members drawn from Bwalo la Nyasaland Newspaper 1958



Figure 6: Members of the Nyasaland African Melodians

Source: Bwalo la Nyasaland Newspaper 1958

Music troupes were also found in other territories within the Federation particularly in Southern Rhodesia. For example Mashonaland from Salisbury performed in Nyasaland in 1954 while the Golden Rhythm Crooners from Bulawayo visited in 1961.¹⁰¹ Therefore, the existence of the troupes in Nyasaland had much to do with the fact that most Malawians lived in Zimbabwe as labour migrants. That, coupled with the Federation of Nyasaland and Rhodesia meant that trends easily spread in the three colonies.

In the early 60s, rock music appeared on the international music scene. The music was ably appropriated by youth in Blantyre as it was played on the radio, sold on records and seen in films. It needs to be noted that Rock Music was the first distinctive youth music internationally.¹⁰² Made popular by artists such as Elvis Presley, Chubby Checker and the Beatles this genre was not only appropriated but also localized by youth. It needs to be noted that in America, rock music was abhorred by most parents

¹⁰¹ Bwalo La Nyasaland, 26 February, 1957.

¹⁰² A. Bennett, *Cultures of Popular Music* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001)

and religious leaders alike because of its vulgarity and association with immorality and irresponsibility. However, Nyasaland youth did not appropriate the vulgarity which demonstrates rational appropriation and negotiation of music to fit the local environment. Thus, in Nyasaland the music did not result in contestations at least not on the basis of morality as there is no record to that effect.

Another important part of urban youth culture between 1952 and 1963 was dance. While the older generation was more interested in traditional dances, youth for the most part indulged in new forms of dance such as tap dancing, *phata-phata* (touch-touch), jive, twist and ballroom dancing. Generally, all experiences with music were accompanied with dance. However, there were some occasions which were particularly organized for dance the commonest of which were dance parties and dancing competitions. Dancing competitions were organized by a variety of stakeholders ranging from the colonial government to associations seeking to raise funds and youth seeking leisure. For example, The Shire Highlands African football organised a ballroom dance and jiving competition at Colby community Centre in 1960 in which both male and female youth participated.¹⁰³ In the same year, a dressing and dancing competition event was held in Zomba organized by the colonial government. This event saw participants from all over Nyasaland who competed in various categories. In the end, Miss Rebecca Mtawumi and her dancing partner Hamson Chavunga also known as Shorty, got the first position. This pair, illustrated in **Figure 7** was well known for its outstanding dancing skills in ballroom dancing and jiving and Rebecca was fondly referred to as a ‘dancing doll’.¹⁰⁴ Although that early in Malawi’s history one would expect female youth to have been inactive in the

¹⁰³ Bwalo la Nyasaland Newspaper, November 29, 1960

¹⁰⁴ Bwalo la Nyasaland Newspaper 1961

public domain, examples such as this demonstrate that although females had been relegated to the domestic sphere within the Christian morality brought by the missionaries, there were some female youth who defied this divide.



Figure 7: Rabecca Mtawumi jiving with her partner Shorty at Pillai s restaurant in Blantyre while spectators look on

Source: Bwalo la Nyasaland 1958

While ballroom dancing was not by its origin specific for youth, in most colonies including in Nyasaland it was a preserve for this class. As a prestigious dance, it offered youth opportunities for self-invention and economic advancement. The first well documented influence of ball room dancing came from labour migrants who had worked in South Africa and Southern Rhodesia who upon returning to Nyasaland taught the skills to youth.¹⁰⁵ For example, while in Southern Rhodesia, Mr M.M.W. Sangala of Ndirande got interested in an African dancing school which taught

¹⁰⁵ Bwalo la Nyasaland Newspaper, August 23, 1960

ballroom dancing. On his return to Nyasaland in 1950, he brought dancers who held demonstrations of European ballroom dancing in many centres of the protectorate.¹⁰⁶ Consequently, ballroom dancing clubs were formed in various parts of the protectorate including at the Colby Community Centre in Soche.¹⁰⁷ However the practice in ballroom dancing was not without contestations. To some people, ballroom dancing was immoral as it involved members of the opposite sex dancing while holding each other. In view of urban youth's cultural practices and other urban practices deemed a threat to African culture, some members of Blantyre formed a Nyasa Cultural and Social society with the objective of preserving African culture.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless such efforts to prevent cultural appropriations were not successful among the youth as the new practices offered new opportunities which included the invention of alternative identities which suggested liberation from the control of elders.

Granted all the practices available for youth, not all youth engaged in them. This was due to a lack of exposure for some and a lack of buying power for others. Yet for others morality drawn from religion and the advice of their parents prevented them from engaging in some of these music and dance practices. Thus the lives of youth in Blantyre varied depending on class, religion, age and labour migration. Nonetheless, youth who held the new identities navigated into the old ones when circumstances required it.

¹⁰⁶ MNA PCS1/23/3, Community Centre Blantyre/Limbe, Letter from the Provincial Commissioner of the Southern Province to the Chief Secretary in Zomba, 11th June, 1951.

¹⁰⁷ Bwalo la Nyasaland Newspaper, 1961

¹⁰⁸ Bwalo la Nyasaland Newspaper, Feb 25, 1958

3.5 Conclusion

As has been noted, urban youth culture emerged in Blantyre as a result of African urbanisation. In the years preceding the Second World War youth demonstrated their urban orientation. However, following urbanisation, many came to be identified with the urban space as they tapped into the urban environment and invented new identities for themselves. Therefore urban youth used the urban space to resist the hegemony of elders who had control over culture in the traditional society. In that sense, the urban space allowed youth to exercise levels of independence and control over their own lives. The corporate companies, the colonial government and the federation of Nyasaland and Rhodesia all aided youth in this project by offering the environment that allowed youth to invent new identities. This is consistent with Mannheim's theory of generations which advances that youth culture is formed on the basis of the influences and historical events that youth experience.

However, at this point, it was older youth rather than teenagers who took the lead in urban dress, music and dance practices. Thus even though the account dealt with youth in general, clear distinctions were evident thereby making it more obvious that youth was not a homogenous group. Internally, youth were composed of various identities, the material base playing such an important role. While they used the youth identity, this was merely an expression of the opportunities that were emerging in the urban space. Nevertheless, urban youth's practices were also characterised by contradictions. For instance, while seeking liberation from the adult culture, youth placed themselves under the oppressor's culture and consumer culture. Nonetheless, youth were not victims but active agents who took advantage of what the oppressor's culture had to offer. Although some members of the dominant culture resisted urban

youth's appropriations with the view that it compromised traditional culture, such resistance was minimal as the practices were not themselves oppositional but rather new and modern. Moreover, to what extent was what was considered traditional culture authentically traditional anyway? Nyasaland had by this time gone through a myriad of contact with other cultures and had lost much of its original culture. Therefore, urbanization only made African culture dynamic, more open and diverse. The next chapter discusses the forces at play in the making of youth culture in the years following the attainment of independence in Nyasaland.

Chapter Four

DRESS, MUSIC AND DANCE FOR URBAN YOUTH IN INDEPENDENT MALAWI (1964-1992)

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored the emergence of urban youth culture following the urbanisation of Africans in Blantyre. It revealed that youth appropriated alternative forms of dress, music and dance characteristic of the urban space in order to take advantage of the emerging opportunities as well as create alternative identities different from what was offered in the traditional society. Such appropriations were mediated by labour migration, cinema and social spaces provided for by corporate companies, the colonial government, the federation of Nyasaland and Rhodesia as well as the agency of youth themselves. All of which point to the fact that youth culture is a product of time and place. Finally, the chapter showed that the youth culture was not necessarily oppositional to the adult culture. Nonetheless some elements of the emerging urban culture such as ballroom dancing and the cowboy dress did not fit within the constructed morality.

The present chapter discusses urban youth dress, music and dance practices in the years following the attainment of independence to the advent of multiparty democracy. It uncovers the social, political and economic environments of Blantyre and argues that in the years immediately after independence an urban youth culture thrived in this urban space. However, following Banda's consolidation of power the

state intervened in youth's cultural practices with the nationalist discourse. Contestations ensued between youth on one hand and traditionalist, nationalist and religious moralities on the other. Although the nationalist morality triumphed, its victory was short lived. Despite establishing the Malawi Censorship Board, inventing a national dress code, enacting the Decency in Dress Act and using force in a quest to control urban youth lives, the state registered limited success. The chapter also argues that beyond contesting over identity, what ensued in Blantyre in the years after independence was a contestation over the urban space.

4.2 Proliferation of Urban Youth Practices 1964-1968

The end of colonialism was viewed by Africans as providing opportunity for participation in all aspects of urban life.¹ Some scholars argue that the independence of Nyasaland aimed at fighting the proliferation of a western identity that many of the elite foreign educated Africans felt at the time.² However, this study argues that the attainment of independence did not curb the proliferation of western identities. If anything it argues that independence offered opportunities for identity invention and the thriving of urban youth culture. However Banda strongly felt against foreign cultures, in 1964 he was not yet in a sufficiently powerful position to stamp the Malawi political culture with ideas largely promulgated by him. He was still expected to rule as a leader of a cabinet in which discussion and criticism of policies were permitted and the movement for independence had been led by younger educated men, who were somewhat ambivalent about certain aspects of indigenous Malawian

¹ E.P. Skinner, *African Urban Life: The transformation of Ouagadougou* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974) p. 8

² S. Twea, Cultural Issues in the Development of Nationalism and Nation Building, History Seminar Paper 2004/2005, Chancellor College, p.3; P.G. Forster, "Culture, Nationalism and the Invention of Tradition in Malawi," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol. 32, No. 3 (1994) p.487

culture³. Consequently, Banda did not take a bold stand as he first had to consolidate his power which he did between 1964 and 1969.⁴

4.2.1 The Nationalist Conception of Youth

While urban youth had their own ideas of what the period of youth ought to be, nationalist politicians had their own. In its cultural and political versions, the nationalist project in post-colonial Africa sought to do two things. First, to maintain the frontier between elders and juniors that characterized traditional African values. Second, it sought to put young people at the centre of its plans for economic development and national liberation. Youth was conceived not only as the hope of African nations under construction but also as the hope of the world.⁵ To that end, the Nyasaland African Congress formed a youth league in the early years of the party's existence. It was also in the same spirit that the Malawi Young Pioneers was founded in 1964, with the motto, "spearhead for progress". Thus the MYP best illustrated the nationalists' conception of youth. Similar bodies were found in Ghana and Zanzibar whose aim was to inculcate a particular discipline in youth for purposes of nation building.⁶

The MYP was involved in development projects that centred on agriculture and the training of youth in various skills so as to enhance their contribution to the country's development. In terms of culturing youth, the MYP advanced the four cornerstones of loyalty, unity, discipline and obedience which aimed at keeping youth in check,

³ Forster, "Culture, Nationalism and the Invention of Tradition." p. 487

⁴ W.C. Chirwa, *Dancing Towards Dictatorship: Political Songs and Popular Culture in Malawi.* *Nordic Journal of African Studies* (2001) p.3

⁵ Diouf, "Engaging Post-colonial Cultures," pp. 3-4

⁶ T. Burgess, "The Young Pioneers and the Rituals of Citizenship in Revolutionary Zanzibar," *Africa Today* Vol.51, No.3 (2005) p.4

thereby maintaining the frontier between elders and juniors. However, as in Zanzibar, discipline as a moral and cultural concept was applied to clothing and hairstyles, while keeping youth focused on development projects rather than leisure.⁷ Writing on the rationale for MYP youth clubs, it was expressed: “contrary to the affluent societies where clubs for teenagers are meant to entertain youngsters in their leisure time, in Malawi being a developing state, the functions we expect of the youth club are nationally important”.⁸ It is within this conceptualisation of youth that the contestations that occurred in the years after independence ought to be understood

4.2.2 Urban Youth Dress 1964-1968

Between 1964 and 1969, youth engaged in dress practices different from what was prescribed by the dominant traditional culture. For example, according to the morality in the dominant culture, female members of society covered their knees in their dress while men kept their hair short. However, from around 1965, female youth adopted the miniskirt locally known as *zovala za kazimoto* which they wore in the streets and in school (see **Figure 8**).⁹ While mini-skirts could be bought in shops, most were tailored locally. Female youth argued that unlike long dresses and skirts, the mini-skirt was economical as it did not require much cloth.¹⁰ However the cheapest way to have a mini-skirt was to trim old skirts to the preferred length.¹¹ Apart from the miniskirt, female youth also dressed in see through blouses and skirts with side slits exposing thigh. Male youth on the other hand grew long hair and appropriated the bottleneck trousers locally known as *botsotso* both of which did not fit within the

⁷ T. Burgess, Bellbottoms, “Cinema, Bell Bottoms, and Miniskirts: Struggles over Youth and Citizenship in Revolutionary Zanzibar,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 2/3 (2002) p.288

⁸ MNA/ The Malawi Young Pioneers, Youth Clubs

⁹ The Times Newspaper, March 18, 1968

¹⁰ OT Agness Supuni, Naperi, May 15, 2014

¹¹ The Times Newspaper, January 14, 1966

morality of the time.¹² Also popular among youth were white canvas shoes known as *zonke* shoes.¹³



Figure 8: Miss Blantyre City 1968 Gertrude Stokes dressed in a mini.

Source: Daily Times Newspaper, June 3, 1968

These appropriations which corresponded with the trends in urban youth dress globally but guided by the west, were at least an influence of three factors. First, the media forms present in Malawi such as newspapers, cinemas, magazines and fashion catalogues exposed youth to the latest trends in fashion in the west. For instance, the Times Newspaper had a women column called ‘Woman’s World’ which showcased the latest fashions in the West. Thus this column did much to expose urban girls to the latest trends in fashion.¹⁴ The second influence was the influx of British and American youth who came to teach in Malawian schools as VSO and Peace Corps

¹² Kings Phiri, “Dr Banda’s Cultural Legacy and its Implications for a Democratic Malawi,” in K.M Phiri & K.R. Ross, *Democratization in Malawi: A Stocktaking* (Blantyre, Malawi: Christain Literature Association, 1998) p. 160

¹³ Malawi News February 18-24, 1995

¹⁴ Conclusions based on an analysis of this column in the Times Newspaper in this decade

Volunteers.¹⁵ The first cohort of Peace Corps from America and VSO teachers from Britain came in 1966 upon government's request. A second cohort came in 1968.¹⁶ Due to their youthfulness, the volunteers initiated local youth into certain dress practices.¹⁷ Third, the youth in Blantyre continued to organise dressing competitions and fashion shows which acted as a space for initiation into certain dress practices. However some of the fashion shows were organised by fashion companies such as Bata Shoe Company and Kandodo.¹⁸

Youth tapped into all these influences and appropriated what offered opportunities to them. While some clothes were bought from shops in Blantyre, others were imported from Rhodesia and South Africa.¹⁹ Nonetheless, most youth had their clothes tailor made locally. As Phiri argues, urban youth picked clothing in consideration of what was practical and fashionable.²⁰ The agency of youth is thus seen in making personal decisions to appropriate what was not offered within the dominant culture, thus urban youth in that way made their own culture. It is important to note that not every young woman in Blantyre was overtaken by the short skirt phenomenon nor were all young men wearing the *botsotso*. It was those youth who saw opportunity in the appropriations that adopted the dress forms as their own.

4.2.3 Contestation of Moralities

Youth's appropriation of alternative dress forms resulted in contestations as the dress did not reflect the identity that the dominant society sought to promote. From the traditional, religious and nationalist perspectives, urban youth dress was considered

¹⁵ The Times Newspaper, January 14, 1966, p.5

¹⁶ The Times, January 14, 1966; April 8, 1968

¹⁷ The Times Newspaper, May 31, 1966

¹⁸ The Times Newspaper, August 24, 1965

¹⁹ The Times Newspaper, May 20, 1966

²⁰ Phiri, "Dr Banda's Cultural Legacy and its Implications for a Democratic Malawi," p. 160

immoral. Parents employed memory and Christian ideals which they upheld as African culture and morality. Having been cultured in such moralities by colonialists and missionaries, parents fought with their daughters over the length of their skirts and dresses and with their sons over their long and unkempt hair.²¹ Religions on the other hand condemned these practices on the basis of modesty as prescribed in their Holy Books. Female youth who wore miniskirts and young men who kept long and unkempt hair were considered immoral and worldly.²²

From the nationalists' perspective, Africans needed to get rid of colonialism in all its forms if they were to preserve their dignity. Therefore the wearing of mini-skirts was considered a form of cultural imperialism which is characterised by the adoption of foreign cultures. However, in pre-colonial African societies and even after, females wore pieces of cloths which sometimes left breasts uncovered and did not always go beyond the knee. Moreover, the process of cultural independence was to prove problematic as the elements of culture promoted as African were in fact foreign originated. For example, if in dress Africans were to preserve their culture, they needed to get rid of shirts, trousers, jackets, dresses and skirts all of which were foreign. Therefore, the process of safeguarding an African cultural identity was problematic. It is important to note that these contestations were not particular to Malawi. Generally, in newly independent African states, the dress of urban youth was a cause for concern.

²¹ An account given by Mrs Fologonya Malawi News newspaper, January 2-8, 1993

²² Agness Supuni, Naperi, May 15, 2014

4.3 Purification of Urban Youth Culture, 1969 - 1973

After a period of contestations, it was the nationalist morality that triumphed between 1968 and 1973 as it had the power and resources to regulate the lives of youth. Nationalists identified western youth present in Malawi and youth bands and movements in the west as the influences corrupting youth. Thus its efforts focused on ridding the influence of the two.²³ Speaking in 1967 the state president, Kamuzu Banda noted that: “some ‘hippies’ come via the Peace Corps and VSO tickets with their beard and long hair but they are a bad influence to our youth.”²⁴ A year later, Banda stated that the urban youth in schools and colleges who kept long and unkempt hair and put on clothes unacceptable to the Malawian society had been influenced by the Beatles and Hippies.²⁵ In order to change urban youth dress and the identities that came with it the state took several measures.

First, it banned the wearing of miniskirts by all females in Malawi, a development which was received with celebration by the older folk and the rural masses.²⁶ Emphasizing on the permanence on the ban, the most powerful person in MCP, the Administrative Secretary Mr Albert Muwalo Nqumayo, issued a statement which at best was characterised by threats and autocratic tendencies.

There can be no question that all Malawians and all decent minded inhabitants of this country abhor the fashion of miniskirts and are relieved by the government's decision to ban this fashion which is foreign to our tradition. The African girls and women who persist

²³ T. Burgess, “Cinema, Bellbottoms and Miniskirts,” 2002; Ivaska, “Anti-mini Militants meet Modern Misses,” 2004

²⁴ Speech by Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda at the opening of the distillery factory company in Blantyre, 24th September, 1967; Hippies were a youth subculture that arose in the United States in the mid -1960s and spread to other parts of the world.

²⁵ Speech by Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda at the opening of the Malawi Congress Party Convention in Lilongwe, September 16, 1968.;the Beatles were a youth musical group based in UK while the Hippies were a movement of youth which originated in America which embraced countercultural values

²⁶ The Times Newspaper, March 18, 1968

in wearing miniskirts, they must remember this that it is our custom as Africans to obey orders. The government is the parent of everyone in this country. When the government gives orders and instructions, no child is expected to defy such orders and instructions. The government has ordered that no women in this country, young or old wear mini-skirts. If the African women of this country disobey and persist in wearing them, they must not complain to anyone when some of the Malawi Youth Leaguers handle them roughly and try to put some sense in their heads. It is up to parents to see to it that their daughters obey. And if they fail, and their daughters persist in wearing miniskirts, I repeat, the Malawi Youth League will certainly see to it that they try to put some sense in their heads. Whatever the custom in other countries, here in Malawi, children must obey orders.²⁷

In this statement, Muwalo expressed how the views of parents did not matter and how what he said was final since the government was considered a parent and deserved to be obeyed. As the next person to the president, there was no way anybody could contradict him. Moreover as the head of the party he had power to give instruction to youth leaguers to harass and attack all who were not to comply. It can be concluded in view of such threats that it was only wise for parents and youth alike to comply. However, the threats notwithstanding, female youth continued in wearing miniskirts. At the MCP Convention of 1969, delegates noted with great concern that even though mini-skirts had been banned, there were some sections of the community which refused to respect 'Malawian customs'. The convention therefore recommended that the sale of mini-skirts be prohibited and its wearing in public be banned legally.²⁸

²⁷ A statement made by the administrative secretary of MCP, Mr A.A. Muwalo, Daily Times Newspaper, April 25, 1968

²⁸ MCP Annual Convention, Blantyre 1969: MCP Convention Resolution 1965-1975

Second, the state banned the VSO and Peace Corps volunteers from coming to teach in Malawian schools arguing that they were teaching Malawian youth immorality.²⁹ Obviously the volunteers did not teach urban youth anything immoral as youth were rational beings who appropriated that which suited their interests. This is especially evident in that youth continued to reinvent themselves even after the volunteers had ceased coming. Urban youth especially the educated sought to dress in clothes which were fashionable and in line with global youth trends.³⁰

Third, realising the importance of beauty contests and fashion shows in the lives of urban youth, the state institutionalised the Miss Malawi beauty contest. Its argument was that the contest would be used in preserving Malawian and traditional culture. In 1969 the state set up a National Beauty Contests committee with the responsibility of managing the event and encouraging girls from all walks of life to participate.³¹ By 1970, the dress of urban youth remained an issue as the government's threats and bans went unheeded. The condemned dress items continued to be worn especially in spaces which were not under the surveillance of the MYP. Moreover, the threats did not pose any real danger to youth at the time. Thus the delegates at the MCP Annual Convention in 1970 called on government to introduce legislation which would make the wearing and importation of mini-skirts punishable by law.³² Since there were some spaces such as the cinemas which were not under the surveillance of the MYP, the state decided to control such spaces as well. In March 1970, Majestic cinema of Blantyre put up a note in the newspaper (**Figure 9**):

²⁹ MCP Annual Convention, Blantyre, 1969

³⁰ Kings Phiri, "Dr Banda's Cultural Legacy and its Implications, p.160

³¹ R. Chalera, *National Beauty Contest of Malawi*

³² MCP Annual Convention 1970, Mzuzu



Figure 9: A notice on the ban on short dresses and mini-skirts at cinemas placed in the newspaper

Source: Times Newspaper on March 19, 1970

Warnings were also made for such spaces as schools and offices. Young women working in the civil service were warned against the wearing of miniskirts and dresses as Banda “would rather see the whole civil service drop down than tolerate miniskirts”.³³ On the other hand students in schools were also strongly advised to refrain from wearing miniskirts to school. For example, in 1971 female students at Chichiri Secondary School were wearing their skirts very short. According to an inspection report the headmaster was asked to emphasize the length of dress rule for both staff and pupils.³⁴ It is interesting to note that youth actively involved in the nationalist project, members of the Malawi Young Pioneers, also appropriated the dress forms particular for youth. This reveals that they too sought to resist the influences of the dominant culture and embrace urban youth identities. Banda issued this warning to them: “from today, no young pioneer must have short trousers, not

³³ Banda speech, MCP Annual Convention Mzuzu, 1970

³⁴ MNA/ CIN/29 Vol. 1 Chichiri Secondary School/Inspection

only young pioneer boys but also girls, their skirts must go down to the knee.”³⁵ Incidentally, the MYP were supposed to wear khaki shorts and not trousers. This indicates that in their wearing cropped trousers MYP youth were aligning themselves with a global youth trend thus manifesting cosmopolitan identities.

4.3.1 The Making of a ‘National Dress’

Despite the measures taken between 1968 and 1971 urban youth persisted in wearing alternative clothing to the ones prescribed in the dominant culture. It was in this context of failure to control urban dress that nationalists resorted to construct a national culture. This national culture was to be an imposed consensus as the expectation was that citizens would not appropriate from the various influences available in town but rather they would dress the ‘Malawian’ way. However, consensus leaves little if not no room for creativity, the very thing that youth escaped in traditional society. For urban youth, styles were means by which they acquired cultural capital, differentiated themselves from adults or the poor who lacked the interest or the means with which to access the new fashions and articulate unique social identities. As a way of promoting ‘traditional’ Malawian dressing among urbanites, the government set up a committee to invent a Malawian national dress. The making of dress here was indeed making in every sense as what was later called ‘national wear’ comprised of a West African head gear, West African wrapper and traditional *chilundu*. Thus, different cultures were stitched together to come up with a national dress which was not at all traditional. Nevertheless, in March 1971 a traditional fashion show organized by the committee was held at the Kwacha National Culture Centre in Blantyre. Lady models paraded in what the committee invented to

³⁵ Banda speech, MCP Annual Convention Mzuzu, 1970

be Malawian dressing. Although there was nothing traditional about this dress, it was argued that the shows aimed at encouraging Malawian women to take pride in their traditional style of dress and to let other people see the variety of traditional forms of dress.³⁶

Paradoxically, in this era the Blantyre Malawi Congress Party Women's League used to sing:

<i>Kale tinkavala nyanda</i>	<i>we used to dress in bark cloth</i>
<i>lero zitenje kumalawi</i>	<i>but now saris in Malawi</i>
<i>Zitenje paliponse</i>	<i>saris everywhere</i>

This was essentially an admission that *chitenje* known as *nsalu (sari)* was not traditional to Malawi. Another contradiction in the invention of national dress was the fact that no dress was invented for men. In spite of the invented of dress, urban youth continued opting for clothing that was fashionable and practical.

At a 1972 convention in Zomba delegates bemoaned the improper dressing among boys and girls in the urban areas: tight and short trousers for young men and miniskirts for young women.³⁷ The convention resolved that campaigns against these practices be intensified.³⁸ On their part the police, MYP and Youth Leaguers declared war on miniskirts and other 'indecent western inspired' behaviour and appearance which included miniskirts, see-throughs, wigs and unkempt hair styles.³⁹ Such mobilization of Youth Leaguers and Malawi Young Pioneers is similar to what happened in Tanzania following independence where the TANU Youth League

³⁶ OT D.D. Phiri, Trade Fair Grounds Blantyre, August 5, 2014; MNA/ Traditional Dress Fashion Show

³⁷ Dr Banda Speech, MCP Convention, 1972 Zomba.

³⁸ MCP Convention, Zomba, 1972

³⁹ Phiri, *Twenty Five Years of Independence in Malawi, 1964-1985 Silver Jubilee: Commemorative Book* (Blantyre: Dzuka Publishing Company, 1989) , p.46; "Dr Banda's Cultural Legacy," 1998 p.160

declared war on miniskirts. They too argued that miniskirts, wigs, skin-lightening creams, tight pants or dresses, were indecent, decadent, and antithetical to Tanzania's "national culture."⁴⁰ Nevertheless, just as in Dar es Salaam these arguments did not make sense to urbanites in Blantyre.

In the course of the contestations over the miniskirt, short and tight trousers and unkempt long hair, urban youth appropriated other dress forms which were also distinctively urban: bellbottom trousers and platform shoes. Bellbottoms were trousers often made of denim which flared out from the bottom of the calf and had slightly curved hems and a circumference of 18 inches at the bottom of each leg opening.⁴¹ Platform shoes on the other hand were shoes with thick soles, usually two to four inches thick.⁴² The appropriation of both fashions was mediated by films, international music celebrities, fashion catalogues and youth who were well travelled.⁴³ Films however were very influential in this regard as they were consumed collectively thereby resulting in appropriations by several youths. Venues where youth could watch films in the evenings included: ITG compound, the railways compound in Mpingwe, Kudya Entertainment Centre in Soche, Malawi Luxury Cinema, Rainbow 400, Drive-in Cinema in Blantyre, Apollo Cinema, ADMARC Hall and Chilomoni Community Hall.⁴⁴ Apart from films, youth also initiated each other into these dress practices. This was especially the case in schools and colleges where youth spent a lot of time together. While some youth bought factory made

⁴⁰ Ivaska, "Anti-mini Militants Meet Modern Misses," 2004 p.106

⁴¹ Wikipedia on bellbottoms

⁴² OT Times Mponda, May 16, 2014

⁴³ OT Dexter Mandala, May 5, 2014

⁴⁴ MNA/ B/11/Vol. vii (1979) Censorship and Control of Entertainment/ Clubs in General

bellbottoms, most youth had the trousers locally made in town by just purchasing soft denim cloth locally known as *satana* from Asian shops.⁴⁵

As bell bottoms became more common, they turned into a nuisance to the nationalist leaders. Considering its design, this type of trousers did not conform to the morality of society which understood a male trouser as having straight legs. On that basis the wearing of bellbottoms did not represent the ideals of the Malawian society.⁴⁶ Moreover, as a transnational currency among young people, bell bottoms signified habits of leisure and consumption that were anathema to nationalist ideals.⁴⁷ Recognising the recurrence of inappropriate dress, the state decided to use the law to prevent further digressions from the acceptable dress but also to dictate what was to be considered acceptable in the urban space. This saw the emergence of the Decency in Dress Act and the National Censorship Board.

4.3.2 Decency in Dress Act (1973)

The government introduced the Decency in Dress Act in 1973 to deal with the problem of miniskirts and bell bottoms. The Act declared unlawful these types of dress to provide for the punishment of offenders.⁴⁸ For example the Act stipulated that all people involved in bellbottoms either as manufacturers, tailors or consumers were liable to a fine of two hundred Kwacha or imprisonment for a term of six months. For the purpose of the Act, bell bottom trouser meant any flared trousers so made, that the circumference of each leg along the bottom edge was 6/5 of the circumference of such leg measured at its narrowest point parallel to the aforesaid

⁴⁵ OT Mhango August 7, 2014

⁴⁶ OT, Mr Mwala, Ndirande, May 16, 2014.

⁴⁷ Burgess, "Cinema, Bell bottoms and Miniskirts," p.301

⁴⁸ Laws of Malawi, Vol. II, Chapter 7:04

bottom edge. The offence of wearing a mini skirt invited similar punishment.⁴⁹ It needs to be noted that the two hundred Kwacha fine to be paid for the offence was at that time a lot of money which could not possibly be afforded. Thus the state took serious measures to make sure youth and manufacturers alike felt threatened to be associated with bellbottoms and miniskirts. In the same way the Act made unlawful the wearing of trousers by women as well as the wearing of bangles, earrings, permed hair and dreadlocks by young men.⁵⁰

As a result of this legislation, youth dress was controlled although the legislation was not very effective. Youth Leaguers carried around tape measures to determine the lengths of skirts and dresses as well as circumferences of bellbottoms.⁵¹ Young women wearing miniskirts were harassed while young men in bellbottom trousers had their trousers razed at the knee.⁵² In some cases young men were beaten and locked up in police custody.⁵³ As a result, most young men wore flared trousers instead. Nevertheless, much success on the war against urban youth dress was seen on female youth as incidences of miniskirts were not mentioned after 1973. A year after the Act was passed a youthful French teacher at HHI Secondary School wore bellbottoms to work when inspectors visited the school. The inspectors opined that this was inappropriate and emphasized the need for him to stop the practice as he was not setting a good example in dress to his students.⁵⁴ In the same year delegates to the MCP Annual Convention noted that despite the Act, youth continued to wear bellbottoms. It therefore pleaded with the government to do its best to discuss future

⁴⁹ Laws of Malawi, Decency in Dress, Vol. II, Cap:7:04, (July 1973)

⁵⁰ OT, Mr Malunga, 18th May, 2014, Bangwe.

⁵¹ C. Kambili, "Ethics of African Tradition: Prescription of a Dress Code in Malawi 1965-1973", the *Society of Malawi Journal* Vol.55, No.2 (2002) p. 89

⁵² OT, Mwala, Ndirande May 16, 2014

⁵³ OT, D.D. Phiri, Blantyre

⁵⁴ MNA 1/321/1, HHI Inspection Report,

importation of bellbottoms into Malawi and to prohibit their manufacture in the country.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, most informants recalled how they had a pair or two which they put on during the weekend.⁵⁶ Such persistence suggests that the nationalist morality was resisted by youth. The more youth were oppressed the more they found spheres in which to wear the prohibited clothing. Considering that the law itself was difficult to enforce as it required the use of a tape measure to measure the circumference, youth took advantage of its arbitrary nature. Moreover, it is on record that some youth simply paid the fine for the offence and continued with wearing the bellbottoms. All this justifies the argument on human agency, that humans look at a situation, weigh it and create their own space in which they can freely engage.

4.3.3 The National Censorship Board

Another institution responsible for regulating urban dress particularly among youth was the Malawi National Censorship Board. This Board was instituted following the Censorship and Control of Entertainment Act of 1968. Its main purpose was to regulate films, public entertainment and publications for the sake of public morals.⁵⁷ In that regard, written T-shirts were censored to reflect only acceptable messages while images of ‘inappropriate’ dress such as mini-skirts, hot pants, bikinis or any other item exposing the legs of a woman were duly removed from films and magazines.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ MCP Convention Resolution, 1974

⁵⁶ OT Dexter Mandala May 5, 2014, Mhango August 7, 2014; Times Mponda May 16, 2014

⁵⁷ MNA/CB/5/79 Censorship Board/Board Members Reports

⁵⁸ MNA/ CB/5/79, Censorship Board/Board Members Reports

4.4 Urban Youth Dress 1975-1985

Generally between 1975 and 1985 the dress practices of youth did not incite so much contestation in as much as they were distinct from older members of society. Such conclusions are made based on the lack of official complaints in the MCP Annual Convention deliberations from 1975 and societal outrage in the newspapers. This may have been as a result of at least two reasons. First, most of the global youth dress choices in the 1970s fit within the morality promoted by society. As a result they did not arouse contestations. For example, female dress in the 1970s ranged from midis, landing between the knee and the ankle, to maxis which were of floor length and therefore acceptable. Second, this was around when the autocratic rule of Kamuzu Banda was at its peak. As a result, the operations of the National Censorship Board, Decency in Dress Act and Youth Leaguers registered levels of success in regulating youth dress.

However, another appropriation made by both male and female youth was that of Afro hairstyle popularised by Africans American celebrities such as the Commodores, Supremes and Jackson 5 and other international celebrities. When going to discos in the late 1970s, both male and female youth would sometimes tuck in combs in their hair. Although the trend had an American origin, it was much considered immoral even for male youth as long as the hair was kept neat.⁵⁹ However, inspection reports for Chichiri Secondary School indicate that school inspectors were displeased with the keeping of long hair by some male students in the school. In fact the inspectors urged the school administration to ensure that male youth kept their hair short.⁶⁰ This means that it was not very clear whether or not it was immoral for male youth to have

⁵⁹ OT Malunga Bangwe, May 18, 2014

⁶⁰ MNA/ CIN3/29 Vol. 1 Chichiri Secondary School Inspection

an Afro or not hence the acceptability to the school administration and yet condemnation by the inspectors. This general situation of acceptability changed from the mid-1980s as contestations over culture and the urban space intensified. Interestingly, at the centre of such contestations were family and society and not the state as had previously been the case.

4.5 Urban Youth Dress Gone Wild, 1985-1992

Between 1985 and 1992, urban youth's appropriations resulted in much contestation especially on issues of masculinity, modesty and generally appropriate grooming. Although Lwanda and Phiri suggest that during the one party era youth conformed to society's ideals and were restricted in their practice of youth culture, this was hardly the case.⁶¹ In as much as this was not the experience of all youths in Blantyre, there was clearly among youth a considerable migration from society's ideals. Although the Decency in Dress Act and the Malawi National Censorship Board were in full operation, they failed to prevent the appropriation of some new dress forms among youth. This demonstrates the creativity of youth in taking advantage of the failure of the two institutions to keep up with the ever changing dress practices available for youth. Moreover from the mid-1980s Blantyre became a neoliberal space which became increasingly difficult for the state to regulate. Thus the contestations over urban youth dress came from the urban society and not the state. Having internalised the imposed national identity in the preceding two decades, the society contested the different dress items that urban youth wore at the time the state was no longer forceful. A number of factors account for the appropriation of counter cultural dress practices among youth in this period.

⁶¹ J. Lwanda, *Promises, Power Politics and Poverty: Democratic Transition in Malawi, 1961-1999* (Glasgow: Dudu Nsomba Publications, 1996); K. Phiri, "Dr. Banda's Cultural Legacy," p. 149

First, from the mid-1980s there was an increased interaction between youth in Blantyre and other youth globally through music and film. In fact film watching became an important leisure activity among youth in the late 1980s.⁶² As more and more families owned VCRs and video houses were opened within the townships, films became more accessible to youth. Consequently, youth of all classes had access to global images which were then appropriated. There is evidence to show that the video houses were so much an attraction to the extent that in some cases they negatively impacted on education. For example, some pupils at the Catholic Institute (CI) skipped school to watch videos at video shows, a problem which made a news item in the *Malawi News newspaper*.⁶³ Although not all youth had first-hand access to such images, those that did initiated their peers into certain cultural practices through their interactions in school and neighbourhood.⁶⁴ Another site for initiation was the venues for youth tailored activities such as sports, music and dance events. However, as entertainment moved from the public sphere into the private, it also became increasingly difficult to regulate what youth consumed.

Second, as a result of economic liberalisation there was a reversal in the tightly regulated importation of goods.⁶⁵ Consequently, the importation of second hand clothing (*kaunjika*) to Sub-Saharan Africa in general proliferated, leading to increased accessibility of western clothes. Through *kaunjika* clothing, poorer urban youth gained status and prestige as they used the clothes to invent new identities. The principle behind *kaunjika* is that a consumer selects clothing from a pile, clothing

⁶² Malawi News Newspaper, September 6-12, 1986

⁶³ Malawi News newspaper, April 25-May 1, 1992

⁶⁴ OT Justin Maseko Lilongwe May 14, 2014

⁶⁵ S. Field, H. Barret et al, "The second hand clothes trade in the Ghambia," *Geography* Vol. 81, No.4, (1996) p.371

which suits the consumers' taste and desires.⁶⁶ Thus, urban youth deliberately selected particular clothing which was globally fashionable thereby offered them opportunity to invent alternative identities. While some of the clothes obtained were objectionable, this trade was difficult to enforce as the second hand clothes came through Tanzania and Zambia and often entered Malawi illegally.⁶⁷

4.5.1 Male Youth Dress

From the mid-1980s, male youth appropriated the Jeri Curl and the wearing of jewellery both of which were against the society's idea of masculinity (see **Figure 10**). The Jeri curl was a permed hairstyle that was popular among Blacks in the Diaspora and was popularised by the likes of Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie.⁶⁸ In Blantyre the hairstyle was appropriated by youth of all ages, in and out of school. It is not clear what the Ministry of Education's policy was as regards the grooming of hair. However there is evidence suggesting that the new appropriation could not be contained using the existing policy. As a result, to deal with the Jeri curl school administration pleaded with parents to refrain from giving their children money for buying the chemicals necessary for the hairstyle.⁶⁹ From the newspapers it is clear that most members of society were appalled by this appropriation. Commenting on Jeri curls, the columnist George Matewere wrote: "I have called myself a perpetually inebriated idiot for failing to understand why certain handsome debonair and completely photogenic young men shall spoil themselves by curling their hair and turning themselves into an experiment for chemistry."⁷⁰ What George Matewere did

⁶⁶ K.T. Hansen, "Second-hand clothing encounters in Zambia: Global discourses, western commodities and local histories," *Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 69, No. 3 (1999)

⁶⁷ OT Wiseman Chirwa April 5, 2014

⁶⁸ Jerhi Curl, Wikipedia the Free Encyclopaedia, accessed November 30, 2014

⁶⁹ Malawi News Newspaper, January 23-29, 1988

⁷⁰ George Matewere, "Fashion Overdose Kills Me," Malawi News newspaper, Feb 21-27, 1987

not understand was that the urban space was in fact a space for experimenting with new identities. Therefore there was no anomaly whatsoever in what the youth were doing. To the youth, what they were doing was far from spoiling themselves.

The wearing of jewellery was also popularised by Black Americans especially rap and hip hop artists who had tapped into their African heritage.⁷¹ Traditionally, in African societies jewellery was worn by both genders and served as a signifier of prestige and status, especially among royalty.⁷² Thus black American youth used jewellery to manifest royalty and counteract the conditions of poverty in which most of them lived. However, in Malawi the wearing of jewellery was considered a preserve for females. Thus, the wearing of jewellery by male youth incited contestation. Writing in the Readers Write column one reader wrote: “boys are wearing earrings and many ladylike types of attire. Does this mean that they are not interested in their manhood?”⁷³ Nonetheless, for the youth who wore jewellery, there was no connection whatsoever between their appropriation and their status as men. If anything from their perspective their outlook portrayed an identity of urban young men. Therefore, although the practice was generally condemned, the male youth continued in wearing jewellery as the appropriation offered them certain opportunities such as being perceived as sophisticated and modern.

⁷¹ Malawi News newspaper, Readers Write, March 7-13, 1987; 1980s in Fashion, Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia

⁷² African jewellery, www.contemporary-african-art.com

⁷³ Malawi News newspaper, Readers Write Column, March 7-13, 1987

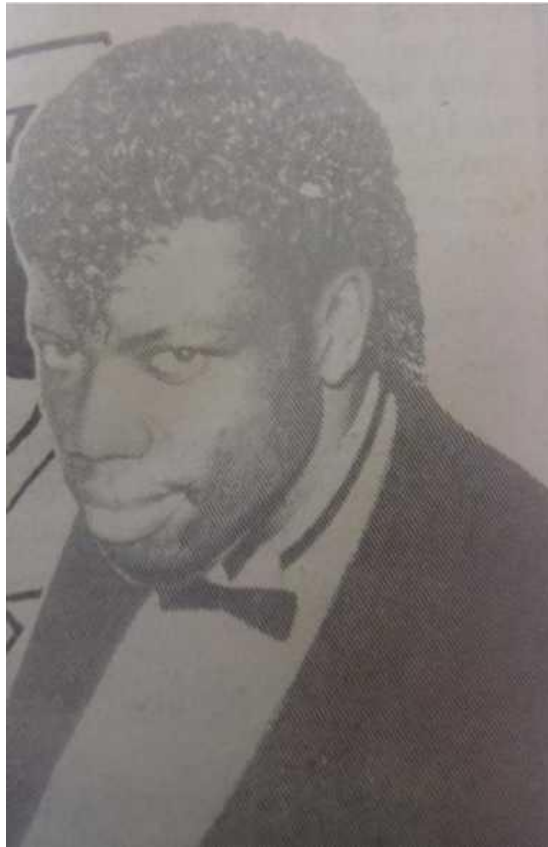


Figure 10: Vic Kasinja, the Joza Cartoon personality in a Jeri Curl hairstyle

Source: January, 1987 Malawi News newspaper

Apart from masculinity, the question of normalcy was also important in the contestations over male dress. For example, within the dominant morality, it was expected that youth cut their hair evenly. Anything contrary to this moral hair cut was declared immoral and abnormal. Thus when in the late 1980s and early 1990s youth appropriated hairstyles such as punky, cloth clown, hi- top fade (*Thaisoni*) and flat top, contestations followed (see **Figure 11 for some of the hairstyles in this period**).⁷⁴ These hairstyles were said to be confusing and outlandish and were seen to remove the respectability that came with a normal haircut. Commenting on the punky hairstyle which involved a deep hair cut along the opposite sides adjacent to the ears, leaving the topmost part of the head untouched, a reader of the Malawi News wrote: “this hairdo which is upheld by youngsters calling themselves Rastas does not give

⁷⁴ Locally known as *Thaisoni* because of the hairstyle of the popular boxer Mike Tyson

the respect a normal person deserves. In fact, people who have such eccentric tendencies are said to be batty. This whole problem to me shows that some youngsters lack parental guidance. I submit that no good parents can tolerate this”⁷⁵

Despite the attacks on these hairstyles, some youth defied society’s meaning of respectability by going to church in the punky hairstyle. In one case three youths were barred from undergoing baptism because of their punky hairstyle. Responding to a letter written by one of the youths who complained of the treatment her friends received another reader of the Reader’s Write column responded: “I think the pastor was right in barring your friends from a baptism ceremony. The punky look is unbecoming in church. It may be fine anywhere else like discos, weddings and drama shows, but not in church!”⁷⁶ Such attitudes towards youth dress, prevented other youth from appropriating them.⁷⁷ This means that while youth dress was surrounded by contestation, cooperation was equally important. Wearing the right clothes and appropriate dress for the occasion was also a concern among youth. Therefore youth navigated different identities as circumstances allowed.

⁷⁵ Malawi News newspaper, Readers Write Column, October 31-November 6, 1987

⁷⁶ Views expressed by Mike (surname not offered) in Malawi News February 4-10, 1989

⁷⁷ O.T Mr Nseula, Chinyonga, May 15, 2014



Figure 11: Joza Cartoon displaying a young man wearing the phanke hairstyle (in black jacket), the other one in the fight is a Rasta, notice the bracelet and earring

Source: Malawi News Newspaper February 4-10, 1989

In the late 1980s young men appropriated athletic wear such as track suits, athletic shoes and head bands. Although such dress items were by design for sporting activities, in the 1980s they were a trend in street wear worldwide. While these did not necessarily attract rebuke, there were other appropriations which did. These included oversized shirts commonly known as ‘big shirts’, t-shirts with lettering which other people found detestable, sleeveless top coats and baggy trousers which were big and wide around the thighs and grew tight at the ankle and tight fitting trousers known as *botsotso*.⁷⁸ Such clothes did not fit with the morality of society and those who indulged in them were considered immoral if not criminal. Nevertheless youth did not see anything wrong with their dress choices. Responding to people’s attacks on big shirts and baggy trousers in the paper one of the youths wrote: “I fail to understand how innocent baggy trousers and big shirts draw so much fire from many people. They are not revealing and are very comfortable and smart looking and I advise you try them on.”⁷⁹ Apart from making statement of identity and belonging,

⁷⁸ Malawi News newspaper, Readers Write Column, March 7-13, 1987

⁷⁹ Views expressed by Joseph Longwe, Blantyre. Malawi News newspaper, April 2-8, 1988

urban youth also used dress for political expression. Although in dressing differently from the nationalists' prescribed dress obviously youth made political statement of defiance something often missed in the history of the MCP regime, youth sometimes made bold statements in seemingly innocent ways. In the 1980s Peter Tosh's *Equal Rights and Justice* t-shirts were very common among male youth. While the t-shirts were mostly viewed as reflecting popularity of the musician, to youth the t-shirts made a political statement within the local political context of political oppression and massive violation of human rights.⁸⁰

4.5.2 Female Youth Dress

Female youth dress in the 1980s also incited contestations as the dress items were considered immoral by some sections of society. These items included: see through blouses, body clinging dresses, clothing with slits, fish net tights, leg warmers and various hairstyles.⁸¹ While the items were sometimes worn by married women, they were for the most part identified with unmarried and young women. In fact, views expressed in the media indicate that society viewed a situation of married women dressing in these clothes as an anomaly. It was suggested that married women needed to wear traditional *chilundu* as a marker of their married status.⁸² A *chilundu* is a piece of cloth woven from a fabric from the waist downwards together with a head wrap locally known as *duku* and a 1950s fashion blouse known as *nyakula*. Although see through clothing had been previously banned in the Decency in Dress Act, there was no official response to their re-emergence. However the response came from the general public as seen in print media. Most of these fashion items were considered to be inappropriate and therefore brought to question the wearer's respectability. For

⁸⁰ OT Chijere Chirwa April 5, 2014

⁸¹ Malawi News newspaper Readers Write Column, Mach 29-April 4, 1986

⁸² Malawi News newspaper, Readers Write Column, February 4-10, 1989.

example, skirts and dresses with slits which often exposed one's petticoat were considered un-Malawian, indecent and signifying a lack of self-respect in the one wearing it.⁸³ Expressing his views in the *Malawi News* Readers Write section one reader wrote: "It is true and shameful that most women expose underwear especially the petticoat and this automatically shows just how such people lack respect. Please let us not spoil our beautiful Malawian culture of dress."⁸⁴ Beyond these outcries in the media, young women were sometimes booed for dressing inappropriately.⁸⁵ However others were more sympathising with these dress practices: "the way women's dress fashions have been attacked is just sickening. I do not see anything wrong with see through material as long as it is accompanied with inner back up material. Please let us just leave people's dressing tastes alone. If we hate a particular fashion, let us just make sure we do not buy the fashion in question."⁸⁶ Young women also appropriated leg warmers and fishnets both of which invited condemnation from other quarters of society (see **Figure 12**).⁸⁷ The contestations notwithstanding, youth who saw the dress forms as means to particular ends such as urban identity and status as modern women persisted in dressing this way.

⁸³ Views expressed by Goodness Mwakatilo, *Malawi News* Newspaper April 18-24, 1987

⁸⁴ *Malawi News* newspaper April-May 1, 1987

⁸⁵ *Malawi News* Newspaper, January 2-8, 1988

⁸⁶ *Malawi News* Newspaper, April 2-8, 1988

⁸⁷ *Malawi News* Newspaper, April 2-8, 1988



Figure 12: A satirical cartoon showing older men and women dressed in fashions embraced by urban youth

Source: Malawi News Newspaper, March 7-13, 1987

Female youth also appropriated hairstyles adopted by male youth such as the punky haircut. As with male youth, the hairstyle was considered inappropriate and not reflecting respectability. In one incident a female youth was asked to leave an interview because she did not look presentable in her punky hairstyle.⁸⁸ Thus from the 1980s through the early 1990s there was an on-going struggle regarding dress, mostly between the young and the old.

4.6 Urban Youth Music and Dance 1964-1979

In the years after independence youth culture was manifested in the youth's music and dance that was mostly of foreign origin. This however did not fit well with the nationalists' urban vision which emphasized traditional music and dance practices as a way of ridding the country of all traces of cultural imperialism. To remedy the

⁸⁸ Punk Cry, Malawi News Newspaper, October 31-Nov 6, 1987.

situation measures were taken to ensure that traditional music and dance were a part of urban life. First, traditional music and dances such as *Ngoma*, *Chioda*, *Chimdidi* and *masewe* always featured at national functions such as the independence celebrations at the Kamuzu Stadium.⁸⁹ This ensured that urbanites were in touch with the practices and were accustomed to them. Second, the Women's League of the MCP actively patronised traditional music and dance which they performed at every party function.⁹⁰ Finally, the Department of Arts and Crafts promoted traditional music and obliged schools to practice and appreciate a wide range of traditional songs and dances.⁹¹ As a result, traditional music and dance was a common entertainment that was organised and patronised in the recreational halls available all over Blantyre.⁹² Nonetheless, urban youth created their own alternate visions and embraced new identities through the appropriation of foreign music and dance.⁹³ Thus, while it could not control the appropriation of foreign music, the state ensured that only politically correct and morally upright messages reached the youth in particular and Malawians in general. To that end, a Censorship and Control of Entertainment Act was enacted in 1968 followed by the establishment of the Malawi National Censorship Board. It was within this context of state control that urban youth appropriated music and dance mediated by the media, music stores, migrants and the availability of social spaces.

Although a state broadcaster the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, previously Federal Broadcasting Corporation, aired music programming for teenagers and youth, which in a way contradicted the ends that nationalists sought to meet. For example, in

⁸⁹ Chirwa, "Dancing Towards Dictatorship," 2001, p. 2

⁹⁰ Op. cit

⁹¹ Kings Phiri, *Twenty Five Years of Independence in Malawi*, 1989, p.47; K. Phiri, The Concept of Culture in Malawi: a Brief Report and Working Bibliography, *The Society of Malawi Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (1983) p. 20

⁹² OT, Mr Mhango, CEAR, August 7, 2014

⁹³ OT Mr Malunga, Bwangwe, May 18, 2014

the late 1960s and early 1970s MBC had *Teen Time*, a programme which played youth hit music from 5pm on Tuesdays and 3:15 pm on Thursdays and Fridays. The music played on the show was generally Rock, Blues and Country music which included Steve Wonder's *For Once in My Life*, Stoney Edwards' *Saturday Night* and Fleetwood Mark's *Black Magic Woman*.⁹⁴ Another programme *Teenage Requests* was aired on Saturday. It was a music programme in which requests made by youth through letters were played.⁹⁵ Some of the artists whose music was played in the programme were the Beatles, Rod Steward, Bobby Bare, Whitney Houston and Tracy Chapman⁹⁶ In the 1970s and 1980s the station had *Your choice* which also played international youth music. These programmes were hosted by youthful announcers and DJs who played the role of culture brokers and initiated the youth into certain music and dance practices enjoyed by youth worldwide. These included Davis Musa, Joyce Ng'oma and Patrick Chikakwiya. In this period, radio offered the most common source of music as most families did not own record or cassette players save for a few.⁹⁷

Thus mediated by MBC, youth appropriated and localised music and invented new identities and realities. For example in the 1960s youth localised rock and roll music appropriated from the Beatles and the Rolling Stones among other popular bands. First, they used locally made musical instruments to blend international rock and Malawian sounds and came up with a distinct sound called Afro-rock-Malawi or Afroma.⁹⁸ Therefore, though rock and roll was originally western, in the context of Blantyre a distinctive sound was created. Second, youth made their music in the

⁹⁴ Malawi Broadcasting Corporation Library

⁹⁵ The Times Newspaper January 4, 1966

⁹⁶ Malawi Broadcasting Corporation Library

⁹⁷ OT Dexter Mandala, Lilongwe, May 5, 2014

⁹⁸ J. Lwanda, "History of Popular Music," p.33

vernacular Chichewa language while the issues tackled in the songs were also particular to the Malawian context. Thus the youth rationally negotiated their appropriations and not merely copied as others would suggest. Often male youth, whether from the same neighbourhood or school, came together to perform this music either for commercial purposes or just as a social activity. Groups that existed in 1966 in Blantyre included the Heaters, the Flashers, the Zagzags, the Commets and the Beat Boys (see Figure 13).⁹⁹



Figure 13: In the picture, the Beat Boys playing at the Soche Bus stop in Blantyre. From the left: Moses Chabwera, Lawrence Themuka, Stephen Msambati and Victor Kaunda. Notice the ‘electric’ guitar and the drum set, both key instruments in Rock music

Source: Times Newspaper, Feb 1, 1966

Music stores in Blantyre were another important source of music for youth particularly after cassette players came on the scene. It was here that youth obtained the international genres including rock and roll, disco and funk music. In the late 1970s the shops included: Nzeru Record Company, Central Music Store, Times Record Bar, Ghumra Bros, McConnel and Company, T.N. Mahommed and Okhai

⁹⁹ The Times Newspaper, February 1, 1966

Electronics.¹⁰⁰ However, before these stores could sell music, they had to send cassette tapes and music records to the Malawi National Censorship Board for censorship. In the same way, music personally imported into the country had to be censored before it could be consumed. Failure to comply with this condition was objectionable and punishable by law.¹⁰¹ As such, in their appropriations and making of music, youth operated within the acceptable morality although sometimes they found ways to express the forbidden in subtle ways such as the use of metaphors. In 1976, the following songs were banned: *I Just want to Make Love to You* by Isaac Hayes; *You can't Stop a Girl in love* by the Supremes, *Get down Tonight* by KC and the Sunshine Band and *Moving Violation* by Jackson Band.¹⁰² All these songs were suggestive of sensuality and sex and so were considered explicit and inappropriate for public consumption especially by the youth. There were also other music styles which were popularised by migrant workers who had been working in South Africa and Zimbabwe. As in the late 1950s and early 1960s, kwela music was popular among youth and so too was sinjonjo music, one of the Southern African modern pop music style.¹⁰³

Social spaces also provided youth with a source of music and dance. Here youth consumed music and dance as a group. The popular social spaces included educational institutions such as the Polytechnic, Blantyre Secondary School and Soche Hill Secondary School which held dances as a form of weekend entertainment. For example, at Blantyre Secondary School weekend entertainment constituted dance

¹⁰⁰ MNA/Censorship of Records/Records and Tapes 7-12-5R/30597

¹⁰¹ MNA/Censorship of records 7-12-5R/30597

¹⁰² MNA/7-12-5R/30597 List of Gazetted Banned Records, Censorship of Records and Tapes,

¹⁰³ M. Nzewi, *A contemporary Study of Musical Arts: the Foliage Consolidation* (Ciimda, 2007); Malawi News, February 18-24, 1995

or films both of which involved the consumption of western music.¹⁰⁴ However in the late 1970s when discotheque came on the scene, disco houses were opened in Blantyre.¹⁰⁵

Youth also appropriated several dances which they used in inventing new identities for themselves. However some of the dances did not fit in with the nationalist morality and were therefore banned. For example, in the 70s there was a dance called bump or bum in which youth bumped buttocks against each other as they danced. The dance was quickly banned as it was considered immoral and inappropriate.¹⁰⁶ Since film offered a good source for dance moves for youth, the National Censorship Board cut all scenes which showed provocative dancing or any dancing considered immoral.¹⁰⁷

4.7 Urban Youth Music and Dance 1980-1993

The 1980s was a revolutionary decade for entertainment in general and youth music and dance in particular. To begin with, music became more accessible as cassette tapes whose history dates back to the late 1970s became more available through shops and vendors. That coupled with an increased ownership of stereos and VCRs by families in Blantyre allowed youth to own and share music.¹⁰⁸ Through the stereo privileged youth with access to the latest music acted as culture brokers and reproduced the latest music for the benefit of their peers. The VCR on the other hand enabled the consumption of global images within the confines of the home. Thus in

¹⁰⁴ Ivy Nkusa, June 1, 2014, Nkolokosa, MNA/1321/1 Blantyre Secondary School Third Term Activities, 1968

¹⁰⁵ Malawi News Newspaper October 21-27, 2006

¹⁰⁶ OT Patrick Dawakali, August 5, 2014

¹⁰⁷ MNA/CB/5/79 Censorship Board/ Board Members Report for August 1979

¹⁰⁸ OT Mr Malunga Ndirande May 18, 2014

the 1980s more than any preceding decade, most youth could consume music at any time. However, as consumption of music became more and more individualised, regulation became problematic.

Second, disco houses were opened within the townships and teen time discos became a regular entertainment for youth on weekends.¹⁰⁹ This development was inspired by the increase of disco clubs in America in the 1970s. As the necessary equipment became available in Blantyre, youth created disco outfits and took up deejaying as a means of making money. To that end, several disco outfits emerged which included Blast 2000, Disco Olympics, Zap Disco, Rafles Disco, Flekasi Disco, Kapeni Disco and Superfly Disco among others.¹¹⁰ For example, in 1974, Heatherwick Ntaba and his friends launched the first disco outfit in Blantyre at Flamingo Night Club, Superfly Disco. At a fee of one Kwacha, male and female youth eventually normalised discos into their cultural practice.¹¹¹ Kapeni Disco held regular gigs at Mount Soche Hotel with DJ Pazuzu whose real name was Joe Sikiya.¹¹² These outfits offered entertainment to youth and offered a platform for youth to initiate each other into certain dance practices. Other than these outfits, DJs from MBC also hosted discos for their youth programme listeners to allow for interaction. The popular venue for such events was Kudya Entertainment Centre.¹¹³

Finally, in the 1980s, Africans in the Diaspora had a formidable presence in the international music industry. African Americans who had been fighting for equality through the 1970s, had by the 1980s began to penetrate several areas of life. In consequence by the mid-1980s they had moved from the periphery to the centre of

¹⁰⁹ Malawi News Newspaper April 4-10, 1987

¹¹⁰ OT Wiseman Chirwa April 5, 2014; Malawi News newspaper September 9-15, 1989

¹¹¹ Malawi News Newspaper, October 21-27, 2006

¹¹² Malawi News newspaper September 9-15, 1989; Blantyre Handbook, Central Publications 1978

¹¹³ OT Wiseman Chirwa April 5, 2014

American society.¹¹⁴ The practices of these Africans in Diaspora were also promptly tapped into resulting in the creation of local experiences as particularly seen in reggae, ragga and hip hop music.

Reggae which originated from Jamaica became increasingly popular for a number of reasons. Firstly, reggae combined high tech western sound and traditional African sounds. Thus it offered an alternative to the overproduced high tech western disco and funk music on the one hand and the rigid traditional music on the other.¹¹⁵ Secondly, reggae had religiously inspired and socio politically charged lyrics which were applicable to the political conditions of Malawi. As any type of dissent against the regime was suppressed by the MCP government, reggae offered an opportunity for political expression without arousing suspicion while the message of hope helped youth to be optimistic of the future. For example, Bob Marley's 'Small Axe' was a popular song among the youth because of its lyrical content.¹¹⁶ In essence the song spoke of youth's intentions to get rid of the repressive regime:

So if you are a big tree

We are the small axe

Ready to cut you down (well sharp)

*To cut you down.*¹¹⁷

Although these lyrics were localised to express that the MCP government though seemingly powerful and irremovable was to be eliminated, the song continued to

¹¹⁴ African Americans in the 70s and 80s, uts.cc.utexas.edu

¹¹⁵ N. Savishinsky, "Rastafari in the Promised Land: the Spread of a Jamaican Socio-religious Movement among the Youth in West Africa," *African Studies Review*, Vol.37, No.3 (Dec, 1994) p. 22

¹¹⁶ OT Wiseman Chijere Chirwa April 5, 2014

¹¹⁷ Bob Marley, Small Axe lyrics

enjoy airplay on the state radio while cassette tapes continued to be sold.¹¹⁸ This demonstrates the agency of youth in creating alternative spheres for political expression. This paper suggests that while the debates on human rights were publicly heard in the early 1990s such calls had been made by youth in the earlier years through urban youth music. Therefore, the debates were a continuation of a struggle that they had started in the early 1980s. Other popular artists in this period were Peter Tosh, Bob Marley, Eddie Grant, Musical Youth, Third World and Burning Spear.

On the local scene reggae bands emerged whose music was a composite of traditional sounds and the international reggae sound. These included Jupiters, Exodus, Flashers, Black Angels and Young Generations.¹¹⁹ Although reggae music was consumed through the radio and listening to tapes, other urbanites took the role of culture brokers for reggae music. For example, in 1989 a Blantyre film operator McAdam Katembo organized a reggae musical show at the French Cultural Centre here local bands such as Love Aquarius, Madolo and Pamodzi featured reggae music.¹²⁰

Apart from reggae, youth also appropriated hip hop and rap music which originated from among marginalised African American youth in New York. In Malawi as in most African countries, this genre was popularised by Hollywood films such as *Flash Dance* in 1983, *Breaking* in 1984, *Electric Boogaloo* and *Crush Groove* in 1985. Through video cassette copies, these films made their way to Africa and became the most important models for the development of hip hop culture, especially dancing and rap performance.¹²¹ It needs to be noted however that in the 1980s, hip hop was

¹¹⁸ OT Wiseman Chijere Chirwa April 5, 2014

¹¹⁹ Malawi News Newspaper, June 26-July 2, 1993

¹²⁰ Malawi News March 25-31, 1989

¹²¹ E. Charry, (ed.) *Hip Hop Africa, New African Music in a Globalising World*

music for privileged youth especially college and secondary school students who were culturally aware of the trends in the US. These youth acted as a source of rap music for other youth. However, the genre was not as popular as it later was in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Nonetheless it had a significant presence as evidenced in MC Hammer's nomination in the Best International Artist category of the MBC entertainers of the year award for 1992.¹²²

Youth also appropriated several dances some of which were popularised by Michael Jackson, an icon for most male youth while others were a part of the hip hop culture that emerged in the 1970s. These included: breakdance, robot, electric boogaloo, snake dance, moon walk and fox trotting (see **Figure 14**). The dances allowed youth to invent new identities while opening opportunities for money making especially through the disco competitions organised for youth by youth. For example, in 1989 Henry Chijota won a disco dancing contest organised by Zap Disco at the Shelter Club (see **Figure 15**).¹²³ Such competitions allowed the attainment of status in the community of urban youth as well as a temporary means to economic survival.



Figure 14: urban youth dances in the late 1980s breakdancing, electric boogaloo and snake dancing. Notice the shocked and worried faces in the background

Source: Malawi News Newspaper April 4-7 1987

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012)

¹²² Malawi News newspaper January 2-8, 1993

¹²³ Malawi News newspaper, September 9-15, 1989



Figure 15: Ajiti M. styled as Michael Jackson presenting a prize to Chijota, winner of a dancing competition in Blantyre, 1989

Source: Malawi News Newspaper September 9-15 1989

However, the dance choices of youth incited contestations in the city. Some argued that the dances did not promote moral decency while others argued that the dances compromised Malawian culture.¹²⁴ Writing his views on youth's dress practices a reader wrote, "I have observed with so much concern that the so called 'new generation' boys and girls are gradually losing their culture. The only things they know are breakdance, robot, moonlight and jamming. I suggest that if possible teachers should introduce traditional dances in schools, say once a week, so that these boys and girls should learn to live up to their culture." ¹²⁵ It is interesting to note that the Department of Arts in the Ministry of Culture had throughout the MCP era obliged schools to teach their pupils traditional dances. This means that despite exposure to traditional dances, most urban youth opted for urban dance forms which allowed them status, difference and opportunities that could be had in the urban space. Nonetheless, not all youth indulged in urban youth music and dance practices. For religious reasons other youth preferred listening to spiritual songs and attending

¹²⁴ Kwinyani, Malawi News newspaper, April 4-10, 1987

¹²⁵ Readers Write, Malawi News newspaper March 29-April 4, 1986

fellowship meetings rather than engaging in urban youth social activities.¹²⁶ While for youth from the lower classes, access was a problem as these practices relied mostly on consumerism. Nevertheless, for most youth this was not a real hindrance as measures were often taken to rise above their economic circumstances.

4.8 Conclusion

On the whole, in the years following independence, youth of all ages constructed alternative social identities through dress, music and dance mostly mediated by the presence of foreign youth, media and availability of shops. Such findings are consistent with Mannheim's theory of generations which stresses the importance of the environment in shaping youth culture. However the historical events and nature of the political, social and economic environments did not limit the identities that youth invented. This is consistent with Gramsci's theory which states that subordinate groups in society create common (alternative) cultures as a way of resisting the hegemony of the dominant groups. Although the nationalists sought to create hegemony by advocating for 'traditional culture' in the urban space and used the police, MYP and the National Censorship Board to enforce it, youth created alternative spheres within which they could exercise some levels of control over their own lived experiences. This reveals the agency of human beings and youth in particular, as they seek to survive amidst social control from the state. In as much as urban practices were misinterpreted, especially by the old, they were merely transitional identities which were soon replaced by other identities. In no way should youth's practices in this period be interpreted as immorality because morality just as culture is a largely contested concept. Although the dress of youth meant one thing to

¹²⁶ Pangani Thipa of Ndirande, Malawi News Newspaper October 18-24, 1986

the society, to youth it meant a completely different thing. This reinforces the argument that meanings of dress for example are not always fixed or shared and the link between the intention of the wearer and the interpretation of the observer are far from being straightforward.

The account has also revealed the contradictions that exist not only in youth cultural practice but also in the category of youth. While youth became the target of the state in enforcing certain moralities, the duty of enforcing such moralities was given to fellow youth. Moreover, this was a gendered affair as female youth were easy targets while in most cases male youth persisted in certain banned practices such as the wearing of bellbottoms. Finally, the account reveals that youth did not merely copy culture. Instead they localised their appropriations in order to fit their local environment. Thus although reggae was popular among youth, not all youth wore dreadlocks to identify with the Rastafarian movement. The same principle also applies to the music practices of youth which saw the use of vernacular languages and locally made instruments. In the end what this tells us is that youth were makers of their own identities. The next chapter discusses urban youth dress, music and dance practices in Blantyre between 1994 and 2012 and the social, political and economic environments that influenced them.

Chapter Five

URBAN YOUTH DRESS, MUSIC AND DANCE IN DEMOCRATIC MALAWI

(1993 - 2012)

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored urban youth dress, music and dance practices in the years following independence. It showed that urban youth culture in Blantyre was a product of socio-historical processes that took place in Blantyre in the years after independence. It also showed that the urban space was a site of contestations as nationalists sought to create an urban vision for the new Malawi. However, within the context of political repression and social control, youth created alternative spheres in which to engage in urban dress, music and dance practices. Further, it revealed that youth localised their appropriations and used them in expressing political views, creating community and as a means to economic survival. In short, the account demonstrated that despite the contestations and labelling that came with urban youth practices, youth created for themselves new realities and identities.

The present chapter investigates the way youth culture was made in the democratic era (1993 to 2012). Specifically, the role of changes in politics, privatisation of media, and increased globalisation on urban youth practices and their impact on increased contestations over culture, morality and the urban space is discussed. Further, the chapter discusses how in the democratic dispensation, urban youth practices continued to be a means to economic survival, political expression and as a solution to problems facing urban youth. To achieve this, the chapter dwells on the agency of

youth in creating their own lived experiences.

5.2 The Globalization of Urban Youth Culture

Between 1950 and 1993 globalisation was central to the dress, music and dance practices of youth in Blantyre. However from 1993 as Malawi became more open, there was an increased interaction between local and global youth which resulted in much globalization of youth culture. As defined by Giddens, globalization is the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.¹ Unlike in the previous decades when access to global music, dress and dance was limited to youth from affluent families, in the 1990s access became wider owing to political and market liberalizations. The globalization of youth practices notwithstanding, youth in Blantyre had dress, music and dance practices unique to the Malawian context as they localised their appropriations. In music and dance, youth used local language, blended new sounds with the traditional, tackled local issues and blended with local traditions while in dress, youth attached new meanings to clothing thereby shedding off the meanings that particular clothing had in their places of origin.

5.3 Urban Youth Dress 1993-2000

In 1993, male youth continued with the dress practices of the late 1980s such as the use of jewellery and the keeping of 'outlandish' haircuts by male youth. Thus the contestations of the preceding years continued. On the one hand, some parents interpreted youth practices as simply youth's way to inventing new identities and

¹ A. Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford University Press, 1990) p.64

enjoying the period of youth. Commenting on the wearing of jewellery by male youth

Mrs Fologonya observed:

I am not surprised with the trend of fashion. In the 1960s when I was a girl I used to put on miniskirts. That was something unheard of and our parents were on our necks. I know 15 years from now the same youngsters will be against something else. It is their time, why should we parents bother? You see all of us at some point thought our parents' advice was silly. You cannot expect otherwise from this generation.²

On the other hand, other parents felt that youth's appropriations were a demonstration of immorality on the part of youth and irresponsibility on the part of their parents as expressed in the words:

I do not agree with the way our children are adopting these fashions. Wearing earrings is for females and yet boys these days wear earrings. When I see a boy wearing an earring I just know he is a bad boy. During my youth in the 1950s and 1960s I did not see a boy wearing earrings except women. And also, our boys should have a normal haircut. It is not good to adopt these things just because they see them in films.³

It is interesting to note that in both cases older urbanites were employing memory to determine what should be in the present. Implicitly, both arguments were made with the view that life is changeless and ought to stay constant. From the perspective of youth, parents were simply failing to deal with changing times.⁴ Therefore as far as the youth were concerned, their culture was indeed a product of their time as Mannheim advances.

² Mrs R Fologonya's views in Mackson Kazombo, "Video Boom affect Malawi Teenagers", in Malawi News Newspaper January 23 -29, 1993

³ Mr Langton Kapachika, Blantyre Views in Mackson Kazombo's, "Video Boom affects Teenagers." Malawi News Newspaper, August 21-27, 1993

⁴ *ibid*

5.3.1 The Othering

The disapproval of urban youth culture often resulted in a process of othering by the members of society. Using ‘traditional’ culture as a benchmark, youth’s cultural practices, appropriations and identities were labelled as deviant, immoral, violent and pariah. However such labels emanated from a failure to understand youth and the reasons behind their appropriations. Thus, male youth who wore jewellery or had some fancy hairstyles were considered thugs, while female youth with similar hairstyles and body hugging clothing with slits, were perceived loose. These stereotypes were particularly evident in the cartoon drawings placed in newspapers. The first picture in **figure 16** portrays school girls and a boy with urban hairstyles engaging in beer drinking and smoking. The suggestion here, implicitly though, is that youth with such hairstyles are immoral and have questionable behaviours. In the second picture, male youth wearing earrings, necklaces and urban youth hairstyles are portrayed as thugs. While some youth feared such labelling and refrained from the condemned practices, others were bold enough to embrace new identities while defying societal expectations. Nonetheless, considerable liberation for most youth came with the repeal of the Decency in Dress Act.

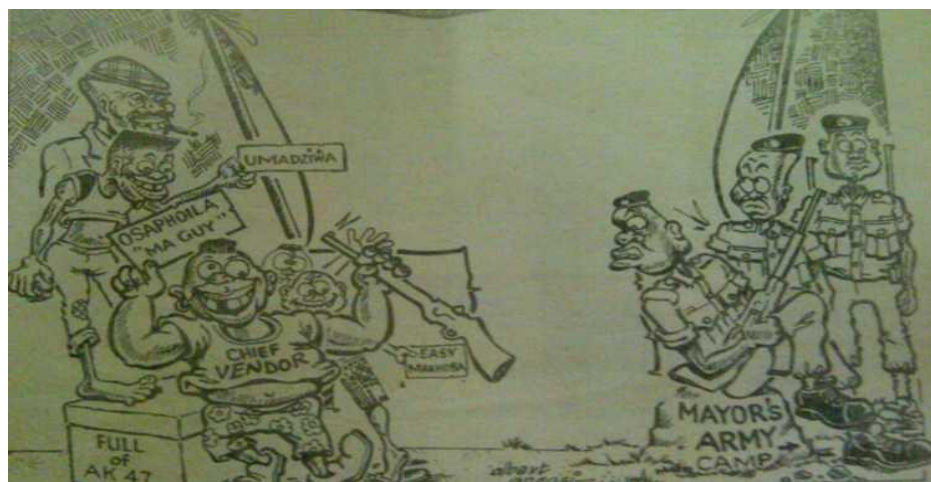


Figure 16: Two cartoons showing perceptions of society towards youth hair styles, the wearing of jewellery and house dance interpreted as immorality and criminality

Source: Malawi News newspaper, Feb 13-19, 1993

Although not necessarily within the scope of this study, urban youth also had a codified language best understood by themselves as seen in the second picture. This suggests that youth had a consciousness of their identity as a distinct category with communications whose meanings they sought to keep from outsiders. Generally

scholars agree that social classes make use of codified language within their groups to enforce identity and hide meanings.⁵ Besides dress, music and dance, youth also used codified language to enforce their identity. This is therefore an area deserving further research in the history of urban youth practices in Blantyre.

5.3.2 Repeal of the Decency in Dress Act

Much freedom in the appropriation of dress came with the repeal of the Decency in Dress Act following the referendum of June 1993. There were at least two reasons for this development. First, as Malawi was approaching general elections in the following year, all manifestations of the repressive one party regime needed to be removed.⁶ Moreover, as human bodies were to be used for the purposes of political campaign, the Decency in Dress Act had to be repealed so that political parties could freely campaign.⁷ Second, by the 1990s it had become clear that the Act had failed to regulate urban dress especially among youth. While publicly the argument was that the Act had served its purpose, the moral panic which had been previously expressed by nationalists and other urbanites had by this time reached the point of moral defeat.

Speaking during deliberations in parliament, the Attorney General expressed:

Mr Speaker Sir, following discussions earlier this year at the annual convention of the Malawi Congress Party, it was agreed that in view of changing times and increased interactions between people of various nationalities, now in Malawi, perhaps the Decency in Dress Act has now served its purpose in fostering a sense of decency in the mode of dress and personal appearance among Malawians and its retention is no longer necessary.⁸

⁵ C. Van Onselen, "Worker Consciousness in Black Miners: Southern Rhodesia 1900-1920," *Journal of African History* Vol. 14, No. 2 (1973 pp.237-255

⁶ C. Kambili, "Ethics of African Tradition: Prescription of a Dress Code in Malawi, 1965-1973," *Society of Malawi Journal* Vol. 55, No.2 (2002) p.93

⁷ OT Wiseman Chirwa

⁸ Munlo as quoted in Kambili, *Ethics of African Tradition*, p.92

Paradoxically, although the Act had been in operation, it had failed to completely dictate the dress choices of youth. Thus, its repeal was not as a result of a manifestation of a 'sense of decency' among the youth. If anything, it was an admission of the state's failure to create hegemonic culture and shape the lives of youth whose practices had continuously changed, thereby making the Act and its stipulations obsolete. It is safe to conclude that at this point in its history; Malawi was facing a serious identity crisis as its restrictions could no longer fit with the times.

Following the repeal of the Act, female youth re-appropriated previously banned clothing such as miniskirts and tight jean trousers. Male youth, on the other hand, intensified the wearing of earrings and chains, the braiding of hair and the wearing of bandanas.⁹ Generally the repeal of the Act was a welcome development to youth. Indeed, asked about the morality of repealing the Act, one youth commented that "we have to adjust to the new atmosphere. Our friends in other countries have been doing this ever since and I see nothing wrong with repealing this Act."¹⁰ In another case, Lexa dressed in an American stone wash tight jean commented: It is given every youngster is happy with this new freedom of dressing, what more do you want?¹¹ Arguably, this and other related developments, to an extent, intensified the contestations within society as some members of society felt that the dress practices of youth compromised Malawian tradition and identity.¹² **Figure 17** illustrates some of the fashions engaged in by male youth following the repeal of the Act. In the

⁹ A bandana is a triangular or square piece of cloth tied around the head or around the neck for protective or decorative purposes, Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia

¹⁰ P. Kachinziri, "Mixed Reactions over Decency in Dress Act," Malawi News Newspaper, December 4-10, 1993

¹¹ P. Kachinziri, "Mixed Reactions over Decency in Dress Act," Malawi News Newspaper, December 4-10, 1993

¹² Ibid

picture a young man is wearing a bandana (headgear) following the repeal of the Decency in Dress Act.

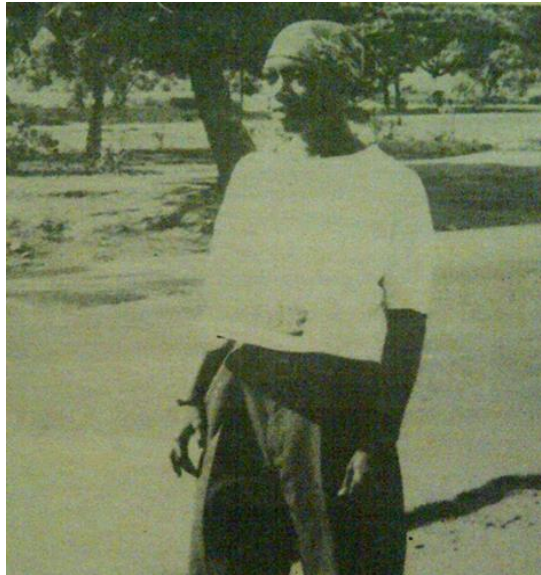


Figure 17: A young man wearing a bandana following the repeal of the Decency in Dress Act. The side note read, “One cannot imagine this is a boy, look at the head gear he is putting on. That’s decency in dress?”

Source: Malawi News Newspaper December 1993

The repeal of the Decency in Dress Act as a historical event greatly impacted on urban youth dress practices in Blantyre. By 1995 young women dressed in tight jeans, baggy trousers, mini-skirts and clothing with long slits. On their part male youth had fashionable haircuts, dreadlocks, t-shirts, baggy trousers, jean trousers, sneakers and clothes with Rastafarian colours. These dress appropriations alongside music tastes resulted in the invention of new identities and communities especially among male youth. On one hand, youth who listened to hip-hop and rap music were identified as belonging to a subculture of *Yos* and homeboys with their baggy trousers, big t-shirts, baseball caps, sneakers and sports shoes. On the other hand, those who listened to reggae, grew dreadlocks and wore Rastafarian colours (green, gold and red) belonged to the Rastafarian subculture. However some youth navigated both identities to meet

particular ends at particular times while others only appropriated a few elements in identifying with a particular subculture. For example, some male youth in Ndirande wore Rasta colours although they were not themselves Rastas in religion.¹³ Belonging to these identities meant making oneself vulnerable to othering. For example, rastas were associated with terror, rape, violence and drug addiction although that was not a reflection of who they really were.¹⁴

To attain the various identities youth bought clothing from shops and *kaunjika* markets. However, most youth frequented the *kaunjika* markets as they offered cheap and fashionable clothes. From the pile of clothes they deliberately selected clothing which was in line with the identities that they wished to embrace thereby demonstrating agency. While some did their shopping at the Limbe market, others visited Lunzu market on Sunday the market day.¹⁵

5.3.3 Media and Youth Dress

In the late 1990s developments in the media industry mediated the dress practices of youth. First, in 1998 DSTV a paying television was introduced by Arise Limited. In the first few months the company offered free to air services beginning in Blantyre.¹⁶ Through DSTV, youth were exposed to fashions of music celebrities especially on Channel O, and MTV, both popular music videos networks.¹⁷ For example, in 1999 the Spice Girls a British pop girl group popularized the Step by Step, Spice world and Destroy shoes which were platform shoes with thick soles worn by members of the

¹³ Malawi News newspaper, October 28-November 3, 1995

¹⁴ Malawi News March 28- 3 April, 1998, Face to face with Deguzman Kaminjolo

¹⁵ Mackson Kazombo, "Kaunjika Changes Dress Mood in Blantyre" in Malawi News Newspaper, February 11/17, 1994. p.4

¹⁶ Malawi News Newspaper, 2-8 January, 1999

¹⁷ OT Patrick Kalamula March 27, 2014

group. Similar shoes worn by male youth were called boosters. Locally these shoes were known as *chiphwanya mchenga* because of their large soles which had the capacity to crush sand. The fact that these shoes acquired a local name suggests that despite their foreign origin, in Blantyre the shoes acquired local meanings. The popularity of the shoes was also enabled by the availability of Asian shops, Tanzanian stalls, vendors and *kaunjika* shoe markets.¹⁸ Through the music channels and other stations female youth were also exposed to crop tops and other dress items not prescribed by society.

Second, from 1999 the *Malawi News Newspaper* placed posters of American celebrities in funky clothing. Such content worked towards finding a clientele among youth who bought the weekend paper to see the latest celebrity fashions.¹⁹ For instance, in April 1999 the paper placed a poster of Janet Jackson, an American musician and actress dressed in a cropped shirt which was a short blouse or shirt that exposed one's navel.²⁰ It was also in 1999 that cropped shirts became common among urban female youth in Blantyre. Arguably, therefore, the increased presence of youth fashions in the media offered an avenue which when tapped into allowed youth to make decisions regarding their dress thereby inventing new identities.

5.3.4 Contestations over Dress

The appropriation of new dress forms especially following the repeal of the Decency in Dress Act resulted in contestations from various quarters. First, there existed internal struggles within the class of youth. After their gaining victory over the nationalist morality, the differences among urban youth began to manifest especially

¹⁸ OT Dyna Mbwini June 1, 2014

¹⁹ OT Chikondi Mangulenje

²⁰ Malawi News newspaper, April 24-30, 1999

along the lines of gender. While they enjoyed certain appropriations, some male youth sought to hinder female youth from inventing identities and controlling their bodies. Commenting on female youth dress after the repeal of the Decency in Dress Act a young man stated: “we are not happy with the wearing of miniskirts by girls. The only way to control the situation is for government to repeal the Rape Law.”²¹

This statement demonstrates the seriousness of the disgust in this male youth as this problem had to be dealt with even if the solution was to be something as extreme as rape. Such extremity in attitude was demonstrated in the way female youth were treated when dressed in clothing that other people consider unacceptable. For example, during a Kanda Bongoman music show at the Chichiri Stadium in late 1993, some young men stripped girls wearing miniskirts because they were ‘displeased’ with the girls’ dressing.²² While on the streets of Blantyre, vendors most of whom were youth booed female youth and called them *alendo* connoting that their dress was not Malawian and did not reflect Malawian identity. In some cases the vendors stripped female youth of their clothes as a way of discouraging them from dressing ‘inappropriately’. This hostility withstanding, female youth persisted in asserting their urban identity through dress.²³ These ambivalences in youth’s practices towards one another demonstrate the heterogeneous nature of youth as a class.

Contestations over the dress practices of youth were also present in religious circles. Here the morality employed centred on how certain dress types impacted on other people. For example, when asked to comment on miniskirts, a member of CCAP

²¹ P. Kachinziri, “Mixed Reactions over Decency in Dress Act,” Malawi News newspaper, December 4-10, 1993

²² Kambili, *Ethics of African Tradition*, p.92; Malawi News Newspaper October 30-November 5, 1993

²³ OT Dyna Mbvwinji, June 1, 2014.

commented: “Our church does not allow miniskirts in Church. It is common knowledge that Christians should not do things that would distract others.”²⁴ Similarly, when an SDA pastor was approached on the church’s stance on miniskirts, he stated: “As a church we discourage women from wearing miniskirts especially at church but we have not excommunicated anyone for wearing a miniskirt. We do not have a problem if they wear miniskirts anywhere except in church.”²⁵

Basing on the above arguments, one would deduce that the contestation over dress in religious circles centred on the religious space itself and not necessarily other spaces. Such a stance on miniskirts allowed manipulation as youth dressed for occasion when going to church and wore miniskirts at other times when the church was not involved. It can be concluded that the Church did not have a religious reason for banning miniskirts. If anything, it was simply an issue of the distraction that such attire would bring to those attending worship. Nevertheless, it was generally the case that the more religious youth were not taken up by the dress practices. Preachers spoke in the strongest terms against these fashions and discouraged their members from appropriating them.²⁶

Society in general and parents in particular, contested the dress practices of youth. Female youth who dressed in miniskirts, see-through clothes and crop tops were considered immoral, loose and lacking respect for their bodies.²⁷ Thus, to some people, respectability stemmed from one’s clothes. In fact in 1999, a parliamentarian suggested that miniskirts once again be banned and the dress code be revisited. He

²⁴ Malawi News newspaper, August 14-20, 1999

²⁵ Rex Nzumara, Malawi News 14-20 August 1999

²⁶ OT Mr Nseula May 15, 2014

²⁷ Malawi News newspaper, August 14-20, 1999

argued that owing to miniskirts, cases of rape were increasing and HIV/AIDS was rapidly spreading.²⁸ However, others contested this viewpoint and argued that in the late 1960s cases of rape were high despite the ban on miniskirts only that most cases were not reported. It was further argued that, according to police records, most of the rape victims were not dressed in miniskirts. Therefore, these pressures to review the dress code were interpreted as a manifestation of patriarchal desires to control women and their bodies.²⁹ Consequently, the calls for reform were ignored by government.

Within the home, parents contested with the children over what constituted appropriate dress. In order to avoid conflict with parents, youth created alternative spheres in which to engage in their preferred dress practices as argued by Gramsci in his theory of hegemony. For example, most female youth left their homes dressed in the 'acceptable' clothing, and carried the preferred ones in a bag. After going a safe distance from home they changed into the clothes which their parents disapproved.³⁰ Others simply wore a *chitenje* on top of a pair of trousers or miniskirt which they removed when it was safe to do so. This is similar to the experience of female youth in Ghana where girls hid their fashionable clothes in bags and wore them only when they were out of the house or in the homes of friends whose parents were more understanding or abreast with the times.³¹ These practices demonstrate the contradictions characteristic of youth cultural practices where on one hand they seek to be liberated from society and its demands and yet on the other they wish to conform to its demands.

However, for most female youth, the desire to conform to practices engaged in by

²⁸ Malawi News Newspaper, August 14-20, 1999

²⁹ P. Paliani, 'Should Society blame rape on miniskirts?' Malawi News, August 14-20, 1999.

³⁰ OT Dyna Mbywinji June 1, 2014

³¹ B.M. Sackey, "Apuskeleke: Youth Fashion craze, Immorality or Female Harassment," p. 61

their peers posed a risk. Girls who could not afford to dress up sometimes entered into sexual relationships with older men so as to gain the money with which to access the practices fashionable at the time. This exposed some girls to early pregnancies and STIs including HIV/AIDS.³² Nonetheless most girls saved money from their pocket money in order to buy for themselves the clothes they could not request from their parents.³³ With time though, society became more used to the clothes, hairstyles and adornments of urban youth. Besides youth's clothes, reservations also extended to shoes that youth appropriated in the late 1990s. Generally, most parents viewed these shoes as demonstrating recklessness and therefore not befitting responsible youth. Although parents and guardians cannot be homogenised, attacks made on this fashion suggest that for the most part, female youth purchased these shoes on their own. Priscilla and Kisa from Ndirande whose picture appear in Figure 5.4 saw nothing immoral with step by step shoes and saw the contestations surrounding the shoes as simply a demonstration of older people's failure to accept the fashion trends of their generation. Priscilla observed, "most parents have a negative attitude towards these shoes as they stereotype them as recklessness. This is not true because I wear the shoes just to look fashionable without any evil intentions." Commenting on her generation and its associated fashion, Kisa stated: "in order for people to look smart, they need to follow fashion trends. Parents should know that each generation has its own type of fashion and this is ours."³⁴

³² OT, Chikondi Mangulenje, Bangwe. May 18, 2014

³³ OT Chikondi, Bangwe

³⁴ Views expressed by Kisa from Ndirande in Malawi News Newspaper, December 2-8, 2000



Figure 18: Kisa and Priscila from Ndirande wearing fashionable chiphwanya mchenga shoes

Source: Malawi News Newspaper December 2-8, 2000

5.4 Urban Youth Music and Dance 1993-2000

Between 1993 and 2000 the most popular genres among urban youth were house, reggae, ragga and rap. There were several ways through which youth accessed this music. These included radio stations, music shops, vendors, youth networks and entertainment outfits. To begin with, radio offered the most popular source of music for youth in the 1990s as was the case in the earlier periods. In the first half of the decade, MBC was the only radio station in Malawi however following the liberalisation of the media, several other stations were opened.

These included MBC Radio 2 in 1997, Power 101 FM in 1998 and Capital FM in 1999 all of which influenced urban youth music and dance practices in several ways. First, the stations had music programmes that particularly targeted urban youth. In

fact, some of the radio stations such as Power 101 were particularly geared towards the facilitation of urban youth cultural practices as it targeted the urban population aged between 15 and 35. This in effect informed the nature of music that the station played.³⁵ For example, Radio 2 FM had Ragga Street, a programme which initiated many youths into ragga music.³⁶ For example, Vic Marley, a popular dancehall artist in the early 2000s started to experiment with the genre in the late 1990s whilst at Kaphuka Secondary School in Lunzu.³⁷ In order to own the music, youth recorded it off the radio onto blank tapes or overwrote on old music tapes whose music had become obsolete. Recording music allowed youth to own music without having to purchase it while giving them the freedom to consume it at their own convenience.

Second, the stations had urban oriented youthful DJs who initiated fellow youth into certain music and dance practices. For example, in his teenage years Radio 2 FM DJ Philip Kalindawalo owned a lot of cassette tapes and played music at parties organised by his peers. Similarly, DJ Lorraine Kansungwi, loved music whilst growing up and often operated as a music toaster at parties and rap contests in her teenage years.³⁸ What this means then is that radio brokered urban youth cultural practice by offering a wider platform on which youth could initiate fellow youth into the latest global youth music practices. Third, the stations organised live musical events to facilitate urban youth music and dance practices. For example, 101 FM regularly organised youth events sometimes in collaboration with the corporate world. For example, in 1998, in collaboration with BAT Mw Ltd 101 FM organised an all-night music show at Legends night club where the station's DJs Hitman and Banto

³⁵ www.fm101.mw

³⁶ Raggamuffin, abbreviated ragga is a sub-genre of dancehall music and reggae in which the instrumentation primarily consists of electronic music www.wikipedia.org/wiki/ragga

³⁷ M. Seyani, "Hi! Ho! Lest we forget", Malawi Nation Online, October 18, 2013

³⁸ Malawi News newspaper March 21-27, 1998

played music to youth who patronised the event.³⁹ However access to music at such spaces was limited to those who could afford to patronise whether from the financial or moral perspectives.

Youth also accessed music through the purchase of cassette tapes from music stores and vendors in Limbe and Blantyre.⁴⁰ For most youth especially those still in school, the money used was saved from the pocket money given to them by their parents.⁴¹ This reveals the agency of youth in creating realities for themselves despite economic constraints. By diverting the little money earned from its intended purposes, youth demonstrated their desire to share in the general urban youth music practices and therefore an urban youth identity. However, knowing the limitations in obtaining all the music on the market youth lent each other music which they duplicated.

Besides radio and music stores, youth created networks among themselves which were particularly important in accessing the latest and rarest music. Recounting how he and his friends obtained music Patrick who lived in Nkolokosa said:

We had a network of friends who sourced music and shared it amongst ourselves. For every genre of music there was one who mostly collected so when we needed music we knew from whom to get it. In fact our network was so resourceful and had the latest and rarest tracks especially in the case of ragga music. If we did not have a particular track within our network, nobody else in Blantyre did. In fact, Radio 2 DJs most of whom lived in our neighbourhood, collected music from us which they then played on the radio. The advantage that we had was that one of our friend's brother living in the UK sent our friend the latest music within a week of its release. So using the hi-fi sound systems that some of us owned in our homes, we reproduced the music in tapes and distributed it among ourselves and other youth who were looking for music.⁴²

³⁹ Malawi News Newspaper November 7-13, 1998, p.7

⁴⁰ OT Bon Mapeto, Zingwangwa May 18, 2014

⁴¹ OT, Patrick Kalamula, March 27, 2014

⁴² OT Patrick Kalamula, March 2014

This testimony reveals that youth had the agency to create a favourable environment which enabled access to global youth practices that informed their own. Furthermore, by tapping into a fellow youth who had access to latest global music, youth created the reality of accessing the latest music, one which did not initially exist. Moreover, in as much as radio impacted on urban youth music practices, youth also impacted on the radio by influencing what was played thereby indirectly initiating fellow youth into certain music and dance practices.

In addition, entertainment outfits offered another means through which youth initiated each other into certain music and dance practices. One of these outfits was Teenagers Cultural Development which in 1998 organised a fashion catwalk at the Motel Paradise followed by a disco whose music comprised of mostly rap and ragga. It is interesting that this outfit purposed to facilitate the cultural development of teenagers by organising such events as fashion shows and discos.⁴³ Thus, in as much as these practices may have been contested considering their origins, the practices offered to the youth the opportunity for embracing culture in the context of the urban space. This confirms that from the perspective of urban youth rap and raga were as much a part of urban youth lives in Blantyre as they were to the youth in Jamaica and United States of America where these music genres originated from. To them, they were as local as they were global and offered a source for the formation of new identities. However, these outfits also took advantage of youth's need for self-invention and engagement in alternative cultures from what was available in the dominant society. Therefore they used that need to make money as these events were accessed at a fee. Nonetheless, the youth were not mere victims of consumerism. Instead they were active participants

⁴³ Malawi News Newspaper February 14-20, 1998

who sought to satisfy their need for culture.

Similarly, social spaces in Blantyre afforded youth opportunities for consuming music and dance. These included French Cultural Centre, BAT ground, Blantyre Youth Centre, Motel Paradise, Pa Kudya Entertainment Centre, Trade Fair, Shire Highlands and secondary school halls within Blantyre.⁴⁴

Finally, television also offered an important source of music especially in the late 90s. With the coming of DSTV in 1998, youth of different classes accessed international music on Channel O. Here youth watched performances in rap, rhythm and blues, reggae as well as raga all of which facilitated their own appropriations. Most importantly, television allowed for the appropriation of dance moves.⁴⁵ Although Television Malawi was launched in March 1999 its influence on urban youth was to be seen in the succeeding years.

5.4.1 The Localisation of Music

Beyond just consuming global youth music the youth in Blantyre made and produced music often as a social activity. For example, in the early 1990s, rap groups and artists emerged who included Rank Rappers, Black 4 Boys, Young Black Niggas, Trio Niggas, Boys Lazy, Krazy Hooligans, Fat Boy, General KC, Mad Spark, Crazy Monks and Tackie T among others.⁴⁶ Interestingly, some of the names employed by these rap groups seemingly celebrated values discouraged by society. For example, Boyz Lazy in fact meant lazy boys while Krazy Hooligans meant crazy criminals,

⁴⁴ Online conversation, Ken Limwame; OT Patrick Kalamula; OT Fatsani Kalonda May 15, 2014

⁴⁵ Malawi News Newspaper, January 2-8, 1999

⁴⁶ OT Ken Limwame April 23, 2014; Chikondi Ndalama, 'The Slam Dunk Rap 'n' Raga Festive Event set for Blantyre Youth Centre,' www.allafrica.com

both qualities disapproved by society. These youths may not have been lazy or crazy in practice; however nicknames offered opportunities for creating alternative identities and realities. While in the preceding years youth had demonstrated levels of adherence to societal ideals, in the democratic dispensation the youth embraced rebel identities which resisted values embraced by older members of the society. In turn this granted youth a sense of control over their own lives beyond the purview of elders.

The argument that globalisation does not result in homogeneity of culture is fitting in explaining the music practices of urban youth in Blantyre. While some youth merely copied the music, others negotiated the global rap and ragga music with local elements such as language, music and cultural traditions. One of the groups that did this was the Rank Rappers comprising of Rogers and Ken, students at Limbe MCDE. The duo turned traditional songs into rap as a means of promoting traditional culture among their fellow youth something which was very strange at the time. Also contrary to the typical lyrical content found in international rap music, the duo composed spiritual rap songs, which they performed at the Pentecostal Church at Chichiri.⁴⁷ Their creativity withstanding, some members of society protested their use of rap as a medium for gospel music arguing that the genre was immoral and therefore inappropriate for carrying a gospel message.⁴⁸

Rough Age, a ragga group comprising five school friends: Macalocs, Arthur, Gerald, Takoma and Rodwell localised the subgenre by blending it with traditional music. In their song *Payere Payere Fisi Anadya Mkazache* released in 1992, the group combined ragga, traditional Manganje music and foreign funky music and created a

⁴⁷ Malawi News Newspaper, September 31 - October 5, 1993.

⁴⁸ Ibid

unique local sound. Apart from the localised beat, the message in the song was also relevant to Malawians as local wisdom was employed in the content.⁴⁹ Thus the genre though originating from Jamaica was localised in Blantyre.⁵⁰ What these localisations tell us is that youth were not unthinking and passive consumers. Rather they were creative agents who negotiated the appropriations with their other identities.

The making of music amongst youth in the town became relatively easy following the opening of several recording studios in Blantyre. Unlike in the preceding years when music could only be recorded at MBC, by the late 1990s several recording studios sprang up including Studio K, MC Studios in Naperi and Studio 106 in Chigumula.⁵¹ These studios offered opportunity for youth to record music thereby receiving radio airplay and attaining status in urban youth circles. Privileged youth recorded music on their family's hi-fi sound equipment which allowed one to record vocals alongside an instrumental.⁵²

5.4.2 Contestations over Urban Youth Music and Dance

In view of the many realities that youth had created and practices in which they engaged, contestations followed not only over the practices but also the urban space. First, members of society contested youth's preference for urban music and dance practices over the traditional ones. In their view, traditional practices needed to take dominance in the urban space as they would in that case reflect a true Malawian identity. For example, Zione, a dancer in the Sambang'oma Dance Troupe lamented: "I do not know why most fellow youth have forsaken our culture and concentrate on

⁴⁹ OT, Takoma Mambucha, September 18 2014

⁵⁰ Young n Free Column, Weekend Nation January 6-7, 2001

⁵¹ Patrick Kalamula March 2014; Malawi News newspaper April 24-30 1999; Malawi News Newspaper July 39, 1999

⁵² Patrick Kalamula, March 2014

western type of dances.”⁵³ However, just as she found economic opportunities through the performance of traditional music and dances, other youth found opportunity in the appropriation of alternative dance practices such as freestyle, stomping and house which had international popularity among youth at the time. Having skills in these dances offered youth opportunities for attaining status and popularity among their peers.⁵⁴

Urban youth music and dance practices were also contested on the basis of morality as members felt that their engagement with it was characterised by immorality. First, through some of the music videos consumed by youth which exposed them to nudity, obscenity and other elements condemned by society. Second through the practice of night entertainment locally known as *pungwes* which though not particular to urban youth were not only popular amongst them but were also accessible to juveniles. Parents argued that *pungwes* threatened cultural values as girls dressed inappropriately and immorally while boys fought over girls. Moreover they also complained that at such venues minors were exposed to beer drinking and other ‘immoral’ behaviours. Parents also complained that youth were spending too much time at Legends and Pat’s night clubs instead of engaging in other meaningful activities.⁵⁵ What was at issue therefore other than the practice itself was the question of space, particularly the question of whether or not youth were eligible to access such spaces.

Interestingly some youth held contrary views and argued that they had the right to access such spaces. Linley, 13, was found drinking at the Legends night club by a

⁵³ Malawi News newspaper, October 9-15, 1993

⁵⁴ Malawi News newspaper, September 11-17, 1993

⁵⁵ Malawi News Newspaper, July 17-23, 1999

Malawi News reporter. When asked what she was doing there, this was her response: “My parents are aware of my drinking habits and they do not ask me where I am going at night, let alone weekends. Who the hell are you to ask me why I drink beer?”⁵⁶ If her response is anything to go by it may be safe to conclude that parents were not a homogeneous group as others did not see anything wrong with their children clubbing at night.⁵⁷ However it may also be reasonable to argue that minors who engaged in such practices were rebellious, if Linley’s tone is anything to go by. Nonetheless, the question of whether or not it was right for youth go to nightclubs was highly contested owing to differences in moralities.

5.4.3 Urban Youth Dress 2000-2012

Between 2000 and 2012, urban youth dress varied from the practices prescribed by society. While such dress forms did not always result in struggles, they demonstrated that youth were active creators of their urban experience. Although the appropriated dress items had particular meanings and histories in their places of origin, in Blantyre they obtained new meanings. Here they signified modernity, cosmopolitanism and a certain degree of savvy or coolness.⁵⁸ There were several factors that necessitated the making of urban youth dress. First, the media in the form of television, magazines and newspapers brokered the dress practices of youth. Inspired by international music celebrities whose identities most youth admired, youth appropriated dress practices that offered opportunities for identity and reality invention. Second, Blantyre had several places where youth could purchase distinctive youthful clothing the most important of which was the *kaunjika* market. This source not only had cheap and

⁵⁶ Linley as quoted in the *Malawi News* newspaper of July 17-23,1999

⁵⁷ G. Banda, “Disco Threatens Cultural Values in Malawi,” *Malawi News* newspaper, July 17-23, 1999.

⁵⁸ E. Moyer, “Keeping up Appearances Fashion and Function among Dar es Salaam Street Youth,” *Etnofoor*, Vol. 16, No. 2, (2003) p. 101

fashionable clothes, but also allowed for the ownership of unique pieces.

The other sources were shops owned by people of other nationalities such as Tanzanians, South Africans, Nigerians and the Chinese. Although most of the youth were still in school they were able to buy the items they could not request from their parents using savings from their pocket money initially meant to be spent at school. However for youth who could not afford to buy certain dress items, the deficiency was not a hindrance. Youth lent each other clothing to allow members in their circle of friends to have the opportunity of inventing new identities albeit temporary. For example, in the early 2000s female youth in boarding schools lent each other jean jackets, 2 dollar canvas shoes and bandanas all of which made statements of urbanity. Finally, urban youth held fashion show events which offered opportunities for initiating each other into certain dress practices. These events mostly took place at secondary school halls, and many other social spaces available in Blantyre such as Shire Highlands Hotel and Warehouse Cultural Centre.

5.4.4 General Urban Youth Dress

There were some dress practices that were generally practiced by both male and female youth. These included the 2 dollar canvas shoe popularized by South African kwaito artists, the bandana and jean jackets both popularized by American R 'n' B and hip hop artists. To acquire these items youth demonstrated agency by using their pocket money, searching through the pile of clothes in *kaunjika* markets or borrowing from friends. However the appropriation of these dress items was not without contestations. For example, the wearing of bandanas locally known as *mbandana* especially by male youth incited contestations from the society. The squared piece of

cloth worn as a headband or head gear (*mpango*) did not resonate with society's idea of masculinity as both items were understood to be gendered. Thus most male youth dressed 'appropriately' in the home and wore the *mbandana* when in the company of friends although a few were able to do that within the home. However, in as much as society viewed male youth who wore the *mbandana* as being immoral, youth perceived their ⁵⁹ practices as appropriate. To them what they wore was neither a headgear nor a headband. Instead they wore a bandana as a symbol of cosmopolitanism and a marker of an urban youth identity.

The appropriations that youth made were localized through the assigning of local names and meanings as was the case with bandana. The other means to localisation was through substituting an item with one that was made using local materials. For instance, in hip hop culture the wearing of gold chains is a common practice signifying kingship or royalty. Thus, instead of the gold chains youth wore 'African bling' which was basically wooden necklaces and bracelets locally made in Malawi. In all this youth recreated certain appropriations to fit within the conditions and circumstances existent locally.

5.4.5 Urban Female Youth Dress

The dress practices of female youth combined elements in the dominant culture and appropriations made from interaction with the urban environment. As did older women, youth dressed in skirts, dresses and blouses. However their dresses and skirts tended to be shorter and clung more to the body. While the morality of society demanded that female bodies be covered and cleavage be hidden when in public,

⁵⁹ OT Upile Maseko, August 6, 2014

some female youth held conflicting views. Consequently conflicts ensued between parents and daughters regarding appropriate dress. Recalling the experience with her mother Naomi said:

I cannot remember the number of times I argued with my mother over my dress. Even when my skirt was of knee length she would say, ‘that is too short, you should not show your knee cap. You need to dress respectfully’. She also spoke against my cleavage showing clothes arguing that my skirt was tight but it was because she did not understand my generation.⁶⁰

Thus, although female youth embraced certain dress forms prescribed by society that was often accompanied by manipulation.

However there were other dress practices particular for female youth which included hipsters, pedal pushers, jean trousers and spaghetti tops. Hipsters were low rise trousers that sat at least 3 inches lower than the belly button which were tight around the hips and flared at the bottom. Initially the fashion was popular among American youth but spread to youth in other parts of the world including Blantyre. Pedal pushers on the other hand were calf length trousers often worn tight to the skin also popular among female youth globally. Although the wearing of trousers by females reappeared in 1993, some members of society found the practice inappropriate for religious and traditional reasons. As a result, the wearing of trousers by female youth was characterized by contestations both within and outside the home. Certain levels of freedom were however enjoyed by youth in boarding school who engaged in these dress practices during weekends without fear of parental control.⁶¹ While at home, youth devised ways of negotiating their relationship with parents or guardians and

⁶⁰ Naomi Mbiri, Chitawira, August 6, 2014

⁶¹ OT, Kupatsa Phiri, August 8, 2014

their identity as urban youth. For example youth put on a *chitenje* to hide a hipster whilst at home and removed it when not in the presence of their parents. When they sought to dress a certain way at various youth events or in the company of their friends, youth left home in the appropriate clothing but changed into their preferred clothes when it was safe to do so.⁶²

The act of wearing and covering up also demonstrates the dilemma which urban youth generally faced. While on the one hand they wished to please their parents, on the other they sought to have and maintain an urban youth identity. This reveals that the relationship between youth and elders was not always characterized by conflict as cooperation was equally important. The attitude that most adults had towards youth dress practices and also from female youth's testimony it can be deduced that for the most part female youth bought the clothes themselves from their own savings.⁶³

Apart from conflicts with parents, female youth who dressed in items such as tight trousers, miniskirts, short dresses and crop tops also faced contestations from the society. Generally, they were labelled as loose as their dress did not reflect the respectability of a morally upright woman. Commenting on young women's dress, a male resident of Blantyre noted: "It is just a matter of time until urban women in Malawi start walking naked in the streets. They cover too little these days, many are wearing handkerchiefs in the name of miniskirts or they put on trousers that are too tight that you wonder how they ever got into them in the first place."⁶⁴ He also attacked half top blouses (crop tops) that some young women wore, arguing that women were not considering how their dressing affected men. However, other

⁶² OT, Chikondi, Bangwe, May 18, 2014

⁶³ OT Chikondi, May 18, 2014

⁶⁴ A Blantyre resident quoted from the Weekend Nation Newspaper, November 3, 2012

urbanites were of the view that labelling a woman because of the way she dresses was wrong since people hold different moralities which guide their actions. Writing in her column *Zina Kambu, Zina Leku*, Rabecca Theu argued that those whose moralities did not allow them to dress in certain ways needed not attack those who did because their actions in fact stemmed from different beliefs and values.⁶⁵

Female youth on the other hand had different ideas regarding the way they dressed. A 21 year old woman expressed: “if you are a woman and you don’t have a skirt or a tight low waist trousers or a blouse which shows the cleavage of your breasts or buttocks, then you may be out of fashion.”⁶⁶ Such views as expressed by this female youth demonstrate some young women’s notions of femininity at the time. While older members of society felt respectability entailed reservation, some members of the new generation felt the body needed to be embraced and celebrated. By following global dress practices, female youth situated themselves socially and made statements of their identity. Nevertheless, such practices brought young women into conflict with other urbanites different from them in age or in levels of urbanization. This case is similar to what Sackey discusses in her study, *Apuskeleke: Youth Fashion Craze, Immorality or Harassment* which is a study on urban female youth dress in Ghana.⁶⁷ In the study, Sackey reveals that in urban Ghana female youth who dress in short, skin tight outfits are harassed, insulted and labelled as being loose. Despite the condemnation from society, some of the youth return the insult, beat up their male harassers or just persist in dressing that way because they think that their human rights extend to freedom of clothing. Thus apuskeleke is both embraced and despised.

⁶⁵ Rabecca Theu, *Zina Kambu, Zina Leku*, Weekend Nation newspaper, September 15, 2012.

⁶⁶ Quoted from the Weekend Nation Newspaper, November 3, 2012

⁶⁷ B.M Sackey, “Apuskeleke: Youth Fashion Craze, Immorality or Female Harassment,” *Etnofoor, Fashion and Hypes* Vol. 16, No. 2 (2003) pp. 57-69

These contestations over dress were best manifested when females dressed in miniskirts and trousers were beaten and stripped by vendors in town for not dressing traditionally in early 2012.⁶⁸ However this was a contradiction as the space was not traditional and its material culture was far from being traditional. Therefore it was unreasonable to expect urban youth culture to be traditional. Beyond tradition however, the perpetrators also used religion and argued that trousers were men's clothes and therefore not appropriate for women. Interestingly some of the victims were not Christian and even if they were, clearly they did not subscribe to the view of their attackers. Nevertheless, the harassers considered it their responsibility to enforce their own moralities on everybody else. Occurrences of women being stripped were also evidenced in Zimbabwe, Kenya and South Africa.⁶⁹ Perhaps this reveals the dilemma that is faced by most African countries standing between modernity and tradition, continuity and change.

5.4.6 Urban Male Youth Dress

The dress of male youth also often did not fit with society's ideal dress. Instead, male youth appropriated several dress practices from the urban environment inspired by global trends. While some of these appropriations did not result in contestations such as the wearing of combat trousers, track suits, running shoes and designer clothes, other appropriations did. These practices included sagging, the braiding of hair traceable to hip hop culture originating from Black American youth, and the growing of dreadlocks traceable to Jamaican youth. Sagging was the wearing of trousers or shorts significantly below the waist thereby exposing one's underwear. It was an emblem of resistance and affiliation with a resistant subculture (hip hop) that

⁶⁸ "Malawian Women Protest over Trouser Attacks, BBC News, January 20, 2012

⁶⁹ Ibid

demanded defiant masculinity and hardness.⁷⁰ Locally the practice was known as *kukhwefula* and was especially popular amongst urban youth who listen to hip hop music and identified with hip hop culture locally known as Yos. So although the practice was appropriated as an identity marker, it was also a way of resisting the society through non conformity to its ideals. As expected, the practice received criticism from parents and preachers alike while those who engaged in them were labelled immoral. Thus often youth negotiated the practice of sagging in consideration of where they were.

Male youth also groomed their hair in dreadlocks, cornrows and distinctive haircuts all of which did not fit in with society's idea of morality. These practices were also appropriated from global youth music scenes such as dance hall and hip hop. Fully aware of the conflicts likely to emanate from their practices, youth created alternative spheres in which to engage. For most, school or college was the space in which they freely engaged in the braiding of hair as there was no parental supervision. However during holidays some shaved the hair while others kept an Afro or wore a beanie to hide the hair from their parents and guardians.⁷¹ However there were some parents who had no problem with such hairstyles.

In order to escape censure from the members in their religious community, youth joined religious faiths which were more tolerant. These included the English cultured churches or the Pentecostal churches that were popular in the 2000s. For example, when Fatsani started growing dreadlocks, there were concerns from his family that the Catholic Church would not accept him and church members would label him as

⁶⁷ V. K. Baxtera & P. Marina "Cultural meaning and hip-hop fashion in the African-American male youth subculture of New Orleans," *Journal of Youth Studies* Vol. 11, No. 2, (2008) p.7

⁷¹ Ibid

immoral and lacking parental guidance. As this was an identity that he sought to portray, Fatsani left the Catholic Church and joined the Blantyre Baptist Church which was English cultured and did not condemn the growing of dreadlocks by young men.⁷²

5.5 A Call for ‘Morality’

The appropriations made by youth were repulsive to religious leaders and community. To that end, the leaders made public denunciations of urban youth dress practices. For example, the Malawi Council of Churches in November 2012 called on government to introduce and enforce morality among youth. What is interesting is that this morality was not only to be enforced on Christian believers but on the general population. Part of the Malawi Council of Churches communiqué read as follows:

The council has noted with regret the degenerating and sometimes immoral dressing of the people, where some move around almost naked, with dropped trousers in men and bare breasted in women as some of the examples, despite rich spiritual and cultural values. It has also unfortunately been noted that men use women’s dressing or clothes including earrings and go as far as braiding their hair.⁷³ While people have the right to dress as they please, they should not lose the sense of responsibility. We know people have freedom and rights to dress, but rights must go with responsibility. Many people, especially the youths are not dressing properly, exposing their body parts.”⁷⁴

Some Malawians did not agree with the idea of the church imposing its morality on the citizenry or the government enforcing morality on Malawians in general and youth in particular. They argued that what these church leaders were saying fit within the Christian morality and therefore needed to be promoted within the Churches as

⁷² Fatsani Kalonda, Nkolokosa May 15, 2015

⁷³ The Malawi Council of Churches Communique as quoted from Nyasa Times article: Malawi Council of Churches Communique on Contemporary Issues of November 16, 2012

⁷⁴ Reverend Alex Maulana, Chairperson of Council of Churches as quoted in the Nation Newspaper, November 18, 2012

Malawi is a secular state. Generally also, citizens dreaded the idea of giving the state power to dictate the lifestyles of people especially in a democracy.⁷⁵ Consequently, efforts to have government enforce Christian moralities failed. Therefore youth continued to invent and reinvent identities through dress.

5.6 Urban Youth Music and Dance 2001 -2012

The period between 2001 and 2012 experienced much development in urban youth music and dance practices compared to the preceding periods. Centring on hip hop and dancehall music, the practices allowed for the formation of communities, political and social commentary, economic survival and the construction of identities. There were a number of factors that facilitated this. To begin with, Blantyre had several radio stations all of which broadcasted special programmes for youth. These included Radio 2 FM, 101 FM Power, Capital Radio, Star Radio, MIJ FM and Joy Radio. For example, 101 FM had programmes such as *Youth Roots and Culture show*, *101 Hip hop Show*, *Dancehall Reggae show*, *Reggae jamming show* and *Gowelo Beats* all of which catered for urban youth.⁷⁶ Radio was an important broker of urban youth music in at least two ways. First, it allowed for the simultaneous consumption of music by youth which resulted in the creation of community among them as they listened to the same music at the same time. Second, radio allowed youth to be exposed to their fellow youth music practices from which they got inspiration to also produce music. Third, youth were motivated to make music so as to receive airplay on the radio stations and attain status amongst friends. The location of the stations within the city meant that youth could deliver the music or give to a relative or friend working at the radio stations. Finally, youth were able to own music by recording the music played

⁷⁵ The Nation Newspaper, November 18, 2012

⁷⁶ www.fm101.mw

on the radio. When finding a blank tape was problematic, youth simply wrote off the tapes whose music was out of date.⁷⁷

The second influence on the music and dance practices of youth was television particularly DSTV channels and Television Malawi. DSTV which was more available to privileged youth offered access to international music through channels such as Channel O and MTV. However, most youth were initiated into certain music and dance practices through Television Malawi. First, Television Malawi sought to promote youth talent, good citizenship and increase their awareness on the career options available.⁷⁸ As such, the station had several programmes for youth in which local and global music videos were played while issues concerning urban youth lives were tackled. For example, in the early 2000s, TVM had *Youth Magazine*, from 2007 had *Touching Base* and from 2010 had *Urban Lounge*. Through these programmes, the station exposed youth to the latest global youth music while allowing local youth to initiate fellow youth. The location of the station in Blantyre enthused youth to make music so as to appear on national television and attain status among their peers. According to the Head of Programming at the station, 99 percent of the local music videos played at the station were brought in by youth themselves. Only a few videos came through friends and family and very few were sourced by the station.⁷⁹ Thus the existence of the station was a motivation to youth as they saw opportunity for inventing new identities, creation of realities and the attainment of and attainment of status.

Second, the television station beamed programmes from international stations such as

⁷⁷ OT Jayne Shausha Bangwe May 18, 2014

⁷⁸ Catherine Kunje, Head of Programming, MBC TV, Kwacha Studios, August 5, 2014

⁷⁹ OT Catherine Kunje, August 5, 2014

TV Africa and BET international which also impacted on urban youth music and dance practices. For example, in the early 2000s urban youth appropriated South African Kwaito music and dance brokered by TV Africa. Through kwaito music and dance, and the skills mastered youth attained status among their peers.⁸⁰ While some dance moves were copied from music videos, most were choreographed by youth themselves: “some of us who had choreographic skills taught our friends the dance moves especially when it came to group dancing which was common in kwaito.”⁸¹

Third, music in the form of cassette tapes and later compact discs was purchased from shops and vendors. As in the former periods, most youth reproduced music by recording the music borrowed from their friends to allow for personal ownership. However from around 2002 when CDs replaced tapes music was mostly owned through the burning of music. Although burning could not be done for music played on the radio, the practice opened opportunities for youth. Firstly, a CD unlike a cassette tape had the capacity to store an unlimited number of songs and all one needed was music in a computer. Secondly, the burning of music opened opportunities for money making. Some youth who owned computers opened shops where clients, mostly fellow youth accessed music at a fee. In view of high levels of unemployment among youth, this offered a viable way for making money as new music was continually produced while youth sought to have the latest music. For example, Peter from Ndirande whose brother had a computer, speakers and an amplifier opened a CD burning business at Ndirande market. Using the speakers Peter played the music that was trending at the nightclubs that youth frequented as a way of advertising. Thus as a business person he always stored the latest music on the market

⁸⁰ Upile, August 6, 2014

⁸¹ Upile, August 6, 2014

so as to be marketable.⁸² The burning of music was also an advantage to youth as it was a cheaper way of owning music compared to buying.

Another technology that facilitated the music and dance practices of youth was the internet. This was especially the case from the mid-2000s. Using the internet, youth downloaded music of global youth from YouTube which they incorporated into their own cultural practices. At first this applied to a limited number of youth who had access to computers. However from around 2007 youth downloaded music using mobile phones that had internet facilities. Furthermore, the coming in of social media in the form of Facebook and Whatsapp also allowed youth to share music at unprecedented levels. However, the most remarkable development in urban music in Blantyre came with the development of websites where youth could access local music either at a fee or for free. Such innovations were a product of youth themselves. For example, in January 2012, Pempho Kafoteka and Sonyezo Kandoje of Timve Media Group developed a website, Malawi free music download. Sites developed by other youth included: malawimusic.com, urbanmalawi.com and mdubvibe.com. Although access to music reached such unprecedented levels, the development raised concerns over what kind of content youth had access to. Since the internet was not a regulated source as was radio and television, urban youth accessed content considered inappropriate, such as music with explicit language.

Equally important for the making of urban youth culture were the entertainment outfits which organised opportunities for the collective consumption of music and dance. Between 2000 and 2012 there was Black Life Entertainment managed by

⁸² Peter Sailes, Ndirande May 16, 2015

Bywell Chiwoni, Best Entertainment in Society managed by Bright Sitima, Makobidi and Company managed by Andrew Samati, Thambo 'n' E Entertainment managed by Mathambo Lowole, 10plusten managed by Edward Kankhombe and Diverse Entertainment managed by Code Sangala. These outfits were important in the making of urban youth music and dance practices in several ways. First, the outfits created a platform on which youth could engage in music and dance as a group therefore initiating each other in the process. For example, in 2001, Black Life Entertainment organised a hood vs. hood basketball event at the Blantyre Youth Centre where DJ and rap and raga competitions were held.⁸³

Second, the outfits opened opportunities for the construction of identities as well as opportunities for money for exceptional practitioners. For example, in 2010, Diverse Entertainment in collaboration with Plus ten Links organised a dancing competition 'U Got Dance Moves' at the French Cultural Centre. The crew which came out as winners in this competition, Elements Dance Crew from Chitawira, were hired to dance in Tigris' music video. Their participation in this video allowed them to be seen on television therefore attaining status among their peers. Other than that it also exposed them to further opportunities as professional dancers who could be paid for their services.⁸⁴

The final enabling environment for the making of urban music was the availability of recording studios most of which were operated by youth. These studios were important in a number of ways. Firstly, they made it relatively easy for youth to record music and enjoy airplay on radio and television. Such airplay gave youth

⁸³ Weekend Nation newspaper, 14-15 April, 2001

⁸⁴ U got dance moves competition returns, capitalradiomalawi.com, June 13, 2014

opportunities for constructing new identities and realities as they gained popularity and status among their peers. Secondly, recording studios offered youth a means to money making. Most of these recording studios were ‘bedroom studios’ rather than professional recording studios. The youth that operated these studios were often than not without professional music production training but had the advantage of owning the necessary equipment and an interest in music. Thus, privileged youth took advantage of urban youth’s quest to construct new identities through music making and made money out of it. For example, in 2007 Marcus and Graiton Pasanje of Daredevils opened a music studio located in Kanjedza called Lo Budget Records. This was essentially a bedroom studio that was opened using the family computer and the music software that the two brothers had access to. Between 2007 and 2012 Lo Budget Records produced music for several urban youth including Young Kay and Barry One.⁸⁵

The opening of businesses on the basis of urban youth music and dance practices reveal the agency of youth in creating opportunities as well as their resourcefulness which if promoted could help in developing alternative means of survival in the urban space. Other recording studios included Pro Pee Records, Myuzik Pusher Entertainment, Soul Food Records and Audio clinic. By 2012 popular youth in urban music included Piksy, Armstrong, Cyclone, Barry One, Daredevils, Fredokiss, Tigris, Maskal, Blakjak and Lhomwe. An analysis of urban youth music however demonstrated the gendered nature of urban music production in which case more than 80 percent of the artists were male. Basing on the views expressed by two female musicians this was likely the case because owing to the Christian morality people

⁸⁵ Malawi Nation Newspaper, May 24, 2013

hold the view a woman belongs in the home and not the public sphere. Therefore, women who were active in the music industry were considered immoral. Moreover, parents also discouraged their daughters from doing music because of the places they could go and perform.⁸⁶

5.6.1 Contestations over music and dance practices

The music and dance practices of youth were not without contestations. As with the period immediately after democratization, there were concerns over youth's preference for hip hop music for example which originated from among Black American youth and was associated with violence, vulgarity and misogyny. Moreover, hip hop's associated fashion of baggy jeans, big t-shirts and sagging did not fit well with the morality of society. These perceptions towards hip hop made youth associated with this type of music to be considered immoral. The other problem rested in that much of this music was made in English rather than Chichewa. As a result, even among youth, the genre was viewed as not compatible with the local circumstances. For example, although rap and raga constituted the most popular form of entertainment for youth in the city, local hip hop artists hardly received airplay on the radio in the early 2000s.⁸⁷ What is more, during youth entertainment activities such as fashion shows or music shows it was very rare for hip hop artists to perform.⁸⁸ It was only when the music was done in the local language and tackled relevant issues that it began to be accepted as seen in the music played on radio, local television station and live performances.

⁸⁶ Views expressed by Ethel Kamwendo and Wendy Harawa in the Weekend Nation, August 25, 2012.

⁸⁷ Fredokiss Penjani Kalua, August 2014

⁸⁸ Weekend Nation Newspaper , March 26-27, 2005

5.6.2 Localisation of Urban Youth Music 2001-2012

There were several ways through which youth localized hip hop and dancehall which were generally urban youth music in this period. First, they localized the content of the music by using vernacular languages rather than African American English in the case of hip hop or Jamaican creole in the case of dancehall. For example, Vic Marley, a dancehall artist, popular from early to mid-2000s, did his music in Chichewa in such compositions as *Chidikhodikho*, *Pokha pokha* and *Ndikadzamwalira*. Similarly Biriwiri, a popular hip hop duo from around 2006 also did their music in Malawi's national language, Chichewa. Other than using Chichewa, youth went further to employ other local languages such as Chitumbuka and Chiyao in the making of their music. For example, Basement, a hip hop group in their song *Banyamulenge* incorporated Chichewa, Chitumbuka and Chiyao. Similarly in *Ife Tafika* by Barryone released in 2011, he code switched from English, Chichewa and Chitumbuka. In essence through the use of local languages the youth facilitated negotiation and construction of identities in the global as well as the local. The use of vernacular languages also allowed for authenticity as well as connection with the targeted local audience.⁸⁹

Second, youth localized music by blending appropriated sounds with traditional and African ones. This was achieved through the use of traditional instrumentation such as banjo, rattles and drums. For example Biriwiri blended African beats with rap or hip hop music in what they termed Afro-hip hop. In *Mudzionetsetsa*, released in 2006 the duo incorporated banjo and rattles with a hip hop beat to create a distinct local sound.

⁸⁹ OT, Ken Limwame

Similarly, in his *Nyau Music*, Tay Grin another appropriator of hip hop employed the African drum as well as *Nyau* dancers.

Third, youth made renditions of some of the popular music in Malawi's history. While others may argue that this signified a lack of creativity and innovation among them. This study argues that in doing this youth were consciously seeking continuity and connection to Malawi's historical and cultural roots. Accordingly, they were grounding themselves squarely in the Malawian music tradition even as they extended that tradition and put their own imprint. For example, in 2009 Young Kay fused the folk song *Anankabango* with rap to create a love hip hop song in which he proposes love to a girl. Similarly, Biriwiri redid *Mudzionetsetsa* originally done by Fumbi Jazz Band in which women are given advice to be very careful when choosing a life partner.

Fourth, urban youth tackled issues that were relevant to the local context. To that end, youth used appropriated genres such as hip hop to offer social and political commentary in order to make a difference especially to the lives of youth. Generally, since the birth of the modern state in Africa, youth have had very limited opportunities for self-actualization and expression in public. With the entry of hip hop in the public sphere however many youth have inserted themselves into the public arena through social commentary and critique.⁹⁰ Of particular interest is Fredokiss, real name Penjani Kalua whose music dealt with such issues as poverty, unemployment, HIV/AIDS, inaccessibility of education, cost of living, poor governance, drug and substance abuse and many other issues affecting youth. In fact,

⁹⁰ M. Ntarangwi, *East African Hip Hop: Youth Culture and Globalization* (Illinois: University of Illinois, 2009)

he acclaimed himself Minister of Ghetto Affairs as he particularly spoke for ghetto or poor urban youth. His 2012 single ‘Changes’ had the following content:

<i>Zinthu zake zingokhala chimodzimodzi aise</i>	<i>The situation remains the same</i>
<i>kugwira ntchito zakazaka osasintha aise</i>	<i>Working for years but no change</i>
<i>ati akweza malipiro sizikusintha aise</i>	<i>They say they have given increased our pay</i>
<i>mwina mwake timafela kukhulupirika</i>	<i>but things have not changed</i>
<i>mafana auvaya geli koma ntchito osapezeka</i>	<i>Perhaps our faithfulness is what is hurting</i>
<i>zaka zaka makolo fees anapeleka</i>	<i>us</i>
<i>Ma degree diploma akuthela m'deni</i>	<i>Youth are getting an education buy they</i>
<i>ntchito zake akupatsananso pachiweniweni</i>	<i>cannot secure jobs</i>
<i>sakupatsa ntaji olo ufune kupanga geni ,</i>	<i>yet their parents paid school fees for years</i>
<i>ndipanga bwanji mfana ndufuna nsamale</i>	<i>Their degree and diploma certificates are</i>
<i>steni</i>	<i>just being wasted</i>
<i>Mfana walembe entry amsiya</i>	<i>For you to get a job you need to know</i>
<i>mbwenumbwenu</i>	<i>someone</i>
	<i>Even when you want to do business, no</i>
	<i>opportunities are there</i>
	<i>what am I to do? I would like to support my</i>
	<i>mother</i>
	<i>This youth sat for the university entrance</i>
	<i>exam but was not selected because he is a</i>
	<i>Tumbuka</i>

In this song, Fredokiss raises issues of unemployment, high cost of living, low wages all of which, he argues frustrate the youth resulting in drug and substance abuse. Although he was a university graduate, Fredokiss sought to represent youth on the margins of society who more often than not the only medium for expression was their urban culture. Thus in various ways, youth began to employ their music practices as a means to express themselves.

Finally, youth employed music as a means for resisting the values and ideas in the dominant culture and asserting their values and perspectives. Although this was liberating for youth, to an extent it stood to expose them to dangers from which their parents sought to protect them. It needs to be noted that since democratization, the operations of the National Censorship Board were problematic to effect as in the Banda era the Board had been politicised in its functions.⁹¹ In fact in the year 2000, the Censorship Board advertised in the *Malawi News Newspaper* that all artists needed to apply for a permit before any performance arguing that other artists used explicit language and lyrics during shows and these needed to be stopped from doing so. The artists' response expressed a lack of interest in fulfilling such requirements although the Board threatened that artists acting in contempt of the Censorship of Entertainment Act were liable to pay fine or be sentenced to three months imprisonment.⁹²

That notwithstanding, the Act revisited would not have succeeded in controlling urban youth lyrics. Firstly, the radio and the physical markets were not the only sources of music for youth as youth had their own underground channels for circulating music. Secondly, MBC was not the only recording studio or broadcaster as private radio stations and studios had sprung up in Blantyre. Below is an example of a song containing lyrics subverting the values and wisdom passed on to male youth by parents and elders as regards how to relate with females. The song which was in the dancehall genre was performed by Mafo, Legins Boy and Shozie and became popular among youth:

⁹¹ Views expressed by the Chief Censoring Officer of the National Censorship board views in *Malawi News newspaper* October 31- November 6, 1998.

⁹² *Weekend Nation Newspaper* October 7-13, 2000

<i>Akazi amapha? iwe ukunama (x2)</i>	<i>Women kill? That's a lie(x2)</i>
<i>Akazi amapha? iwe, ukunama ndati!</i>	<i>Women kill? I'm saying you are lying!</i>
<i>Ah! iwe apa ndiye wanama</i>	<i>Ah! On this one you are lying</i>
<i>Akazi amapha? Mukuti amapha bwanji</i>	<i>? Women kill? How do they do that?</i>
<i>Simesa mkazi amachotsa nkhowa?</i>	<i>I thought women remove stress?</i>
<i>Ukakhumudwa amabweretsa chimwemwe;</i>	<i>When you are sad they make you happy</i>
<i>Kuchokela kudzinja mpakatu ku chilimwe?</i>	<i>In all seasons, from summer to winter</i>
<i>Mukuti mkazi amapha, nanga mamuna</i>	<i>If women kill? How about men?</i>
<i>bwanji</i>	<i>What's the weapon? What does it look like</i>
<i>chida chophelacho, chimaoneka bwanji?</i>	<i>Is it a knife, a hoe or a panga knife?</i>
<i>ndi mpeni ndi khasu kapena chikwanje?</i>	<i>Where did she cut you? Where did she smite</i>
<i>wakudula pati/ wakukhapa pati?</i>	<i>you?</i>

Throughout the song, the artists assert that the wisdom that women are dangerous is a lie. In fact there are many ways men end up dead beyond their sexual relations with women. Moreover, the artist presents the wisdom as merely a gendered attack on women as women are presented as perpetrators and men as victims. As the song concludes, the persona asserts that he would have as many relations with women as possible. In as much as the song raised some logical points following its wisdom would do more harm than good. Nevertheless as was the case for nicknames, not everything that youth seemed to celebrate was actually embraced in practice. Other than subverting values, the song also had some explicit language which was not acceptable to society. Although the censorship board was not as active measures were often taken to ban such type of music especially from receiving airplay on the radio. However, as already alluded to, there were many sources of music some of which could not be controlled. When a hip-hop artist was asked about the use of explicit language, his response was that music is poetry and free expression is important in

poetry therefore there is nothing wrong with vulgarity.⁹³

5.7 Conclusion

All in all, following democratization urban youth dress, music and dance in Blantyre became more oppositional and widespread as a result of market and political liberalizations as well as the liberalisation of the media. Still based on materialism, the practices were nonetheless accessible to most youth though in varying degrees. In the preceding years, the urban space continued to be a site for contestations over culture, morality and identity. As much as we are talking about identities as cultural or political entities, the context in which they happened was defined by specific spaces. Thus when these spaces widened, there was more freedom and more visibility as it was the case in this period. The account also reveals that spaces as well as identities were not permanent as they kept shifting and taking different forms. However youth fit themselves in these changing spaces and constructed identities upon interaction with such spaces and fellow youth. While the state did not invest in the youth as it did after independence, youth invested in their cultural practices as a means for economic support in a system where unemployment levels were relatively high. Paradoxically, the independence that youth sought in creating alternative identities and culture was superficial as the media in the form of television, music videos, magazines, newspapers and later the internet guided such decisions while in the process the youth were also tied to a consumer culture. The succeeding chapter discusses in more detail some of the culture brokers that facilitated urban youth culture in the years after democratization.

⁹³ Sindiso 'Hayze' Msungama, & Yankho Classic' Zulu, Homegrown African, Chitawira August 6, 2014

Chapter Six

BROKERS OF URBAN YOUTH CULTURE

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter looked at urban youth dress, music and dance practices in the democratic dispensation. It revealed that in this era, various groups of society contested over space and particularly the question of how the urban youth were to dress and the kind of music and dance they were to engage in. Contrary to the ideas of the dominant in society such as elders and parents, urban youth created their own cultural practices from which they got identity, community and sometimes economic survival.

The present chapter discusses the culture brokers that mediated the making of urban youth culture in the period under study but particularly in the years following democratisation. It focuses much on this latter period because of the intensity and the visibility of brokers in this particular period. A cultural broker in this sense should be understood as a person who facilitates youth's appropriation of new cultures by easing the possible tensions and making such cultures more accessible thereby mediating change.¹ Thus, culture brokers were a part of the environment which influenced the extent of urban youth culture in Blantyre. It argues that there is human agency within youth which allowed them to construct new identities that occurred within the context of other players who also had their own interests in facilitating urban youth practices. These included business companies, development agencies, charities and social

¹ M.A. Jezewski, "Culture Brokering in Migrant Farmworker Healthcare," *Western Journal of Nursing Research* Vol. 14 NO 4 (1990) pp. 497-513

campaigners. What follows is a discussion of the different ways in which corporate companies and organisations facilitated urban youth practices to meet their own ends.

6.2 Non - governmental Organizations

Between 1993 and 2012, non-governmental organisations played a key role in promoting urban youth practices particularly music and dance. Basically, their influence was rooted in using urban youth music as a means for communicating certain messages in order to impact on lives of urban youth. The use of such techniques as edutainment speaks volumes on the relevance of urban youth music to youth. For example, in the early 1990s UNICEF, appropriated rap music as an instrument for teaching urban youth about AIDS, a disease which was not well understood then. UNICEF organised a song contest in which contestants were asked to compose and perform an AIDS awareness song. The Boyz Lazy a rap group comprised of five young men won the competition and signed a contract with UNICEF as part of an AIDS campaign targeting fellow youth (see **Figure 19**).² With sponsorship from UNICEF the group produced a 12 song album at MBC with songs on youth and teenage life and toured schools in Blantyre, Lilongwe and other urban centres, sensitizing youth on the dangers of AIDS.³ However, while they raised the awareness of youth, they also initiated urban youth into rap and raga music practices as well as its associated styles such as slang use and fashion. The use of codified language and the embracing of certain dress styles helped in the creation of consciousness and connection between youth and the group.

Using a youth group and music to communicate a serious message was an effective

² Malawi News, September 16-22, 1999

³ At this time the fight against the pandemic was a national emergency response focused on impact mitigation. Later the focus shifted to sector wide response with emphasis on prevention

way of reaching out to the youth as they related to the music, enjoyed it and in the process got the message.⁴ As others have argued, entertainment merged with education is the best medium for speaking to youth as this is the language they are most comfortable with without the feeling of being preached to or lectured at.⁵ Boyz Lazy played this role until 1994 when the contract with UNICEF was terminated.⁶



Figure 19: Boyz Lazy, a popular rap group in the early 1990s

Source: www.malawimusic.com

Banja La Msogolo and Population Services International (PSI) also employed urban youth music and dance to educate and sensitize youth on pertinent issues. The organisations organized rapping competitions in which youth composed rap songs carrying messages on reproductive health and HIV/AIDS. For example in 2002, PSI Malawi organized a youth event at Chichiri Stadium through its Youth Alert program.

⁴ Jeff Kaira, member of Boyz Lazy as quoted in Nyasa Times of June 16, 2012

⁵ OT Penjani 'Fredokiss' Kalua, August 6, 2014

⁶ Malawi News, January 9-15, 1999.

Here the youth competed in composing songs with messages on HIV/AIDS, STIs and reproductive health. Apart from the rap competitions however youth also competed in deejaying and dancing.⁷ Similarly, the Malawi Blood Transfusion organized a Blood Donation Rap and Ragga competition where youth composed rap songs on the importance of donating blood.⁸

These competitions attracted an audience of youth who attended not only to engage in their music and dance practices but also to take advantage of the opportunities that came with winning the competitions. Undoubtedly these events facilitated the development of urban youth music and dance in Blantyre. For example, most of youth who participated in the rap contests became leading urban artists in the late 2000s. A case in point is the Chase Dem Crew a group of cousins from Nkolokosa who patronized these events and won several times but later became Nyasa Gurus a popular dancehall group in the late 2000s.⁹ Similarly, the Daredevils, a hip hop duo made up of two siblings started out in these competitions as a trio called THUGS (True, Humble Unique Guys).¹⁰

Apart from organising these competitions, the organisations also facilitated urban music through radio and television programming targeting youth. For example in the early 2000 Television Malawi in collaboration with NAC and PSI, broadcasted a Youth Alert program aimed at educating youth on HIV/AIDS and reproductive health. However as a way of making the program attractive to youth, local and global urban

⁷ Weekend Nation, October 26- November 1, 2002

⁸ OT Fatsani 'Blakjak' Kalonda, Nkolokosa, May 15, 2014.

⁹ OT, Fatsani 'Blakjack' Kalonda, Nkolokosa, May 15, 2014

¹⁰ OT, Graiton Pasanje, Kanjedza, June 2014

youth music videos were played.¹¹ Similar programmes were also aired on the radio. Thus through the media, nongovernmental organisations created the platform for youth to engage in urban youth music and dance practices while meeting their own goals of reaching out to the youth.

6.3 The Corporate World

The corporate world also brokered the making of urban youth music and dance practices by creating platforms where youth could engage in these practices while in the process they marketed their products. This reveals how in Blantyre youth culture was used by capitalists to accumulate more capital. Brokering in this sense did not involve the introduction of previously unknown practices to youth but rather nurturing and facilitating the growth of urban youth music and dance to unprecedented levels. This was achieved in several ways. First, some companies gave youth an international platform on which to showcase Malawian urban youth music. This was particularly the case for MultiChoice Malawi which organized opportunity for urban youth to perform at its Big Brother eviction shows. For example, Tay Grin performed at the Big Brother Eviction Show of 2008, Theo Thompson performed at the Big Brother Revolution of 2009 while Young Kay performed at the Big Brother All Star eviction show of 2010. These performances exposed the Blantyre artists to international audiences and links and offered them opportunities for money making. Speaking of his experience at the Big Brother show Tay Grin stated:

Big Brother is a great platform since millions of people all over the world watch the show. My performance at the Big Brother gave me the chance to meet a lot of executives who linked me to names on the international music scene. This has helped me perform in several other countries.¹²

¹¹ OT Catherine Kunje, Television Malawi, Kwacha Studios, August 5, 2014

¹² Tay Grin as quoted in the Weekend Nation, Society Column, August 14, 2010.

At whatever level, performance before such a huge audience also spoke of the success of the youths as urban artists. Therefore, such possibilities for international exposure and success in urban music encouraged youth to perfect their art. This is because in as much as MultiChoice worked with local talent, the quality of that talent also mattered to qualify for such great opportunities.

Second, companies organized and sponsored events where youth engaged in urban youth music and dance as a class. For example, in 2000 Black Life Entertainment organized a youth talent concert sponsored by Nali Ltd, Hollywood Cafe, Devras Shop and Universal Ltd.¹³ In the same year, Carlsberg Malawi organized a Carlsberg bash on Hannover Street which many youth attended.¹⁴ The use of the street in this sense depicts a contestation of physical space. Essentially, this was a space for traders, city authorities and vendors. But in going to the streets to party, youth were registering their physical presence and claiming the space as an arena for their interaction. Moreover, they were also pronouncing their identity as urban youth but all this was facilitated by Carlsberg. In organizing and sponsoring opportunities for youth engagement these companies fulfilled their corporate responsibility while making themselves visible among a large section of the urban population. Most importantly however they created opportunity for the consumption of their goods thereby making profits.

Third, companies organized music and dance competitions which facilitated the making of urban youth music and dance practices. For example, between 2005 and 2012 Carlsberg Limited organised annual Sprite regional, national and international

¹³ Malawi News newspaper, December 23-29, 2000

¹⁴ Malawi News newspaper October 21-27, 2000

competitions in disc jockeying, dance and rap. The purpose of the competitions was unearthing talent among youth and creating a platform on which youth could interact and share new ideas. Thus the audience, the contestants and the judges were all urban youth. In 2005 the competition took place at Sunset Plaza and in 2008 it took place at the Comesa Hall.¹⁵ In 2006, God Soldiers Dancing Group (G-Soldiers) won the regional dancing competition while in 2012 Fun Boys won. Winning the regional competition opened way for participation in the national competition and ultimately the international one. However winning at whatever level of the competition was prestigious as winners received material prizes often monetary and also earned status and respect among their peers.

Finally business companies facilitated the making of urban music by offering opportunities for employment to urban artists as brand ambassadors. This meant that urban youth were more attracted to the brand through the urban youth with whom they related, while the brand ambassador had the opportunity for making money and therefore escaping urban problems such as poverty and unemployment. For example, Maskal was Access Communications Limited brand ambassador in 2011 while Piksy was Airtel brand Ambassador in 2012.¹⁶ Being ambassador meant being the face of the company and promoting its products and services especially through music. This reveals how youth cultural activities were commodities that attracted a variety of fractions of capital and how capitalists made use of urban youth culture to make more profits.

¹⁵ Nation Newspaper, October 11, 2005

¹⁶ Weekend Nation December 29, 2012

6.4 Club Owners

Owners of nightclubs also facilitated the development of urban music and dance practices among youth. In the process they made their venues popular among youth and thereby increasing chances of making profits. The nightclubs included Cleopatra, a discotheque which was formerly called Legends, the Warehouse, Limbe Country Club, Shire Highlands, Chicago Club which later became Chez Ntemba International Club and Blue Diamond Club.¹⁷ Firstly, these venues offered an opportunity for youth to meet, interact and initiate one another into the latest trends in music and dance.

Secondly, nightclubs organised music and dance events particularly for urban youth. For example, in the late 1990s Pat's Night Club hosted *Pat's Teen Time Slam* every Saturday afternoon which was patronised by youth.¹⁸ Similarly, in 2011 Chez Ntemba Nightclub held dancehall and rhumba dancing competitions every Wednesday. According to the club owner the initiative was aimed at promoting dancing skills among youth in the hope that some would become professional dancers and earn a living through dancing. Although for some this may appear as unconventional and perhaps immoral, the urban music industry proved to be a viable alternative for youth in face of poverty and unemployment among urban youth.¹⁹

The judges for the contests included: Joy Radio DJ Mbuzi (Marcus Pasanje), MBC reporter Ronald Amos, DJ Kennedy Nkombezi of Capital FM and Justice Mponda a journalist all of whom were fellow youth. This emphasizes the point that in as much as other players mediated youth culture, youth themselves were actively involved.

¹⁷ Malawi News Newspaper, November 10, 2010

¹⁸ OT Ken Limwame

¹⁹ Weekend Nation October 20, 2011

6.5 The Africanisation of Dress

Apart from the appropriations that youth made which were for the most part western, from around 2010 youth appropriated dress items which were branded 'African'. Essentially these included clothes and fashion accessories that were made from the 'African print' cloth locally known as *chitenje*. Although the trend was popularised by African fashion designers in the diaspora through the Ankara fashion shows and later celebrities that youth interacted with, the African print was not itself African. Research has shown that what is termed as African print was in fact brought to Africa by Europeans and its origins could be traced to Asia.²⁰

This resurgence of things African may have been a quest to increase the visibility of African culture.²¹ In that case the revival of African culture reflects the contradictions that characterise the quest to create identity whereby the more one seeks to express identity the more culture is recycled. However, this situation may also be interpreted as saturation of capitalism as it was seeking alternative ways to market fashion. Therefore, what we might have here is the politics of naming and the invention of Africanness by outsiders. Tradition was invented such that the new African urban identity became more of a corporate identity bringing in elements from here and there. Nonetheless, the popularity of African fashion allowed urban youth to embrace an 'African identity' without being 'traditional'.

The appropriation of the "African print" in this case was not necessarily a renunciation of imported influences and identities but rather a statement of an urban and cosmopolitan identity. This was particularly apparent in the designs of the clothes

²⁰ T. Akinwumi, "The "African Print" Hoax: Machine Produced Textiles Jeopardise African Authenticity," *Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol.2 no 5, July 2008, p.179

²¹ www.ankarafestla.com

made from the print. Locally, fashion designers also emerged that used the ‘Malawian chitenje’” (**Figure 20**) in their fashion lines. One such designer was Chiku Gondwe of L’Afrique Tailoring Limited who aimed at “making clothes that would make Malawians proud of their heritage and African identity.”²² It was not easy to capture what was Malawian about the clothes as the material and designs were neither Malawian nor African. This confirms that dress as is culture is socially constructed. Therefore in contesting it, the question of authenticity need not arise.



Figure 20: Male youth wearing sagged trousers with African print pockets and top

Source: Nyasatimes 2012

6.6 Conclusion

This account reveals that in as much as youth had agency in inventing their culture and identities, such ends were also facilitated by the involvement of other players who have interests in such practices. Therefore youth culture was equally a product of the social and economic environments that characterised Blantyre. The chapter also shows that urban youth music and dance practices are very important to the lives of

²² Nyasa Times June 1, 2012

youth. As a result all efforts aimed at reaching out to the urban youth need to consider the culture of urban youth. Finally, the account reveals that urban youth music and dance practices constitute an industry which is driven by capitalism and is rightly exploited by businesses in Malawi. Finally the account also confirms that some aspects of African life are not traditional to Africa but were rather constructed at a particular point in history.

Chapter Seven

CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

Chapter six focused on the culture brokers who facilitated urban youth culture in the areas of dress, music and dance. It revealed that in as much as youth demonstrated agency in making their own lived experiences, such processes were also facilitated by other players who sought to achieve their own ends using urban youth practices. Although that reveals a picture of youth as victims of consumerism, it also demonstrates how powerful urban youth practices are in the promotion of business as well as in any outreach effort for youth.

This account closes the discussion on the making of urban youth culture in Blantyre between 1952 and 2012. It affirms the thesis that urban youth made their own dress, music and dance practices different from the prescriptions of the dominant traditional culture. Essentially the study had three main arguments based on its three main objectives: First, to establish whether or not urban youth constituted a distinct social category with practices different from the dominant society; Second, to uncover the processes in the making of urban youth culture by examining the interactions of youth and the social, political and economic environments in Blantyre which shaped urban youth's cultural practices; Finally, to assess the community and official responses to urban youth's cultural practices. A pursuit of these questions was relevant because of the existing gap in knowledge of the historical formations of youth cultures in Africa

in general and Malawi in particular. Therefore this study partly addressed this gap by offering a historical analysis of the lives of youth who are a significant demographic in the urban space in Malawi.

To uncover the history of urban youth culture in Blantyre, the study used as lens two dominant theories that have been employed by scholars of youth culture. First, Karl Mannheim's theory of generations prominent in the historiography of youth culture which advances that youth culture is a product of the historical events that youth experience as well as the influences that surround them. Also, the claim that young people invent themselves and initiate the making of youth cultures rather than partaking in youth cultures initiated by their parents. Second, Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony which proposes that the dominant groups of society create and define a hegemonic culture which serves to support and enhance their powerful position. And that in implicit resistance to this hegemony, youth culture arises in cultural places in which the hegemonic culture cannot penetrate.

Consistent with ideas from Gramsci's theory the account reveals that from the time of African urbanization, youth appropriated from the urban environment dress, music and dance practices that ran parallel to the ideals promoted by the dominant traditional society. This was in a quest to liberate themselves from the control of elders who in controlling culture controlled youth. Generally, the urbanization of Blantyre was characterised by peri-urbanism and close linkages with rural society. As a result, there was a predominance of traditional cultural practices and values within the urban space which was contested by youth. Therefore, in the years of African urbanisation urban youth practices did not emanate from a lack of cultural grounding.

Rather they stemmed from the desire to be independent and identify with the urban space. By embracing urban practices youth created new icons of identities different from village youth and older urbanites. Youth culture not only offered youth new identities but it also gave them a sense of community, offered opportunities for economic survival as well as a means of political expression.

However urban youth culture was not the same in the three political periods: colonial, immediate post-colonial and democratic periods, as the historical events and influences in the periods were also different. In the colonial period urban youth culture was only oppositional in the sense that it was modern and different from what had been in the traditional society. However in the years following independence objectionable youth practices emerged which resulted into moral panics and contestation particularly in dress. Although youth culture flourished in this period, it did so in the context of massive social control from the state and a controlled urban environment. Therefore it was in democratic Malawi that youth culture became more oppositional, visible and an experience of most urban youth.

Nonetheless, urban youth were in no way a homogenous group and their experiences were not the same. For example, urban youth cultures practices were more accessible to those with access to money as its basis was consumerism. At the same time, throughout the period male youth were more actively involved in self-invention as compared to female youth. Throughout the account both groups demonstrated their agency in creating identities and realities for themselves despite their limitations. For example, in accessing urban youth dress, those from poor families borrowed clothes from their peers, or bought the same from cheap markets such as the second hand

clothing markets. In addition, the study has revealed that youth did not passively copy global elements from their urban environment. Instead they appropriated and localized such cultures to come up with something that was local as much as it was global. For example, much of urban music made by urban youth was a blend of African sounds and foreign music. In the same way, dress forms appropriated by youth took up new meanings in Blantyre.

From the account it is also clear that contradictions characterized urban youth cultural practices in Blantyre. For instance, as youth sought to be liberated from traditional culture, they placed themselves under new forms of oppression such as capitalism and consumerism. Nonetheless, youth culture throughout the period of study was not always oppositional. Nonetheless much of what comprised urban youth culture was different and sometimes oppositional to adult culture. Therefore while seeking to liberate themselves from the control of elders urban youth were often trapped between the desire to exhibit difference and the need to conform. This explains why urban youth navigated different identities in different situations. Finally, the contestations that arose from youth practices were sometimes amongst urban youth themselves and in some cases groups of urban youth were used as instruments in enforcing social control. This strengthens the argument that youth were not a homogenous group.

An examination of the environment that influenced urban youth dress, music and dance led to the following conclusions. First, media in the form of film, cinema, magazines, radio, television, newspapers and internet greatly influences the cultures of urban youth. Media with its images and sounds exposes youth to alternative forms of culture and therefore offer a source from which youth appropriate, localize and

embed into their own cultural practices. In effect the multiplicity and availability of many forms of media outlets in Blantyre resulted in the making of urban youth practices at unprecedented levels. In addition, media creates the platform on which youth interact locally and globally. Thus, there was and still is noticeable uniformity in urban youth dress, music and dance practices both within Blantyre as well as with other youth globally. Therefore globalisation has been important in the making of urban youth music dress and dance practices since the urbanisation of Blantyre. Moreover, unlike the misguided view that urban youth's appropriations are an indication of cultural imperialism, evidence suggests that much appropriation made by youth has been on African youth living in Diaspora. Evidently, youth's cultural practices should not be understood as a lack of cultural base but as a demonstration of youth's capacity to adapt to change and make use of opportunities that arise.

Second, the interactions that urban youth have with one another whether in school, neighbourhood, through media and in urban social places also facilitate the making of youth culture. As youth spent less time with their families and more time with their friends, they socialized each other on how to navigate the urban space. Normally the onus was on exposed youth who initiated their fellow urban youth into certain practices especially through organized socialisations such as fashion shows, dancing competitions, rap battles and discos as well as the organization of music and dance crews and entertainment outfits.

Third, the presence of markets where youth could access music and dress items also facilitated youth practices. This should not be overemphasized as often than not, urban youth found alternative ways of accessing such items in the event that they

were not available on the market or they did not have access to the available market. For example, to access certain types of clothing youth tailor made the clothes instead of buying factory made. Instead of buying a new item in a shop, youth accessed a similar item from the second hand market at a cheaper price. In the same way, rather than buying original tapes from the music shops in town, youth made music tapes by dubbing from the radio or duplicating a tape owned by fellow youth.

The political environment to a certain extent also impacted on the available youth culture in Blantyre. For example, in the Banda era there was much censorship of music and images which in turn affected the extent to which urban youth could invent identities. Thus in that case urban youth music and dress were moulded to fit within the moralities of the time through the use of the Malawi Censorship Board, Decency in Dress Act and the Malawi Youth Leaguers. However, in the democratic dispensation with the liberalisation of the media, market and politics urban youth culture attained new dimensions. What this means then is that the extent to which youth culture could be oppositional depended on the environment in which they were operating. In addition, the fact that throughout the account other youth were not involved in processes of self-invention which could place them in conflict with society means that the nature of socialization at home determined the extent to which a youth could upset the ideals of society. However for the most part, urban youth's alternative practices thrived in all political systems, whether colonial, autocratic or democracy. This demonstrates the agency of youth in adapting to political situations and creating alternative spheres for themselves amidst social control from the state, a conclusion consistent with Gramsci's theory.

Ironically, although the state controlled the lives of youth and sought to make them maintain certain identities, it also facilitated the construction of new identities through the promotion of urban youth practices. That reveals the contradictions that were inherent in the state apparatus in as far as its dealings with youth were concerned. For example, in the years after the attainment of independence, MBC the state broadcaster had special programmes for teenagers and the youth which aired global urban youth music and facilitated urban youth music practices. This was notwithstanding the fact that the state was very particular about promoting traditional music and dance in the country.

Fifth, corporate companies also influenced the making of urban youth culture. This occurred either as a means of social reproduction or as a marketing strategy. For example in the 1950s, corporate companies such as Nyasaland Railways and Imperial Tobacco Group offered cinema services as social reproduction for its workers. However in the process they initiated youth into certain urban dress practices. Similarly, as a marketing strategy companies such as Southern Bottlers Limited and MultiChoice promoted urban youth culture by using youth culture as a platform where their goods and services were marketed and consumed. What this tells us is that the environment had an important role to play in shaping youth culture in Blantyre as argued by Mannheim.

Last but not least, the study has revealed that the state and the community responded disapprovingly to urban youth dress, music, and dance practices. Thus the urban space was an arena of contestations as mostly older urbanites contested youth's invention of new identities. Nonetheless, the contestations that characterized culture in Blantyre

represent the struggle of many former colonies in the quest to preserve cultural heritage and therefore cultural independence while at the same time embracing change and new ways of doing things that have come with globalisation. This is clearly problematic as complete continuity can hardly be ensured in an environment which is completely new and perhaps could require new ways of thinking. Nonetheless, beyond the contestations clearly present, cooperation was equally important as youth in some cases created alternative spheres beyond the control of parents and the state.

To control urban youth lives, the state and families resorted to social control which included the use of power and the labelling of youth as immoral. However, such measures were often unsuccessful as the youth created alternative spheres in which to engage in processes of self-invention. This confirms Gramsci's argument about how the dominant groups of society use force to enforce hegemony while the subordinate groups who implicitly resist that hegemony by creating alternative spheres beyond the control of the dominant groups. It is important to notice that immorality attached to youth practices often stemmed from a lack of understanding of urban youth lives. As this account has revealed, urban youth practices have little to do with a manifestation of immoral behaviour and much to do with the desire for independence and a quest for difference. In view of high unemployment levels and poverty among urban youth, urban youth practices offer possibilities for making money that are different from the formal ones created by society. Thus for the most urban youth cultural practices are just a means to dealing with urbanization and its problems. What is important to appreciate therefore is that urban youth practices in music, dress and dance are realities which society simply has to deal with and seek to change only if the practice

itself is detrimental to youth or the society in general. The contestations that occurred between 1952 and 2012 reveal the dilemma of many African countries which wrestle with the desire to maintain traditional and identities and the wish to embrace change. However, these do not need to be dichotomies as hybridity is a possibility in post-colonial Africa considering that neither culture nor identity is a fixed entity. As demonstrated in urban youth lives, it is possible to embrace both and not becoming anything less of African. Urban youth are at best cosmopolitan but this is a choice that they make it is not something that just happens to them.

What this study has found confirms that identities are not rigid. Instead they are fluid and malleable; can be moulded and remoulded and they are transitory in character. Moreover, youth being a transitory stage, its identity is also transitory. Nonetheless, the identities occur because with it they create a specific world which is understood by the youth themselves. In the case of Blantyre, the environment provided the specific tools for the creation of these identities. These included technology, media exposure, demands of capitalism and physical spaces including streets and clubs all of which provided the tools with which youth could work. It is therefore unlikely that the urban youth would have behaved this way if they had grown up in a different environment. This suggests that youth are a heterogeneous group and that each group of youths need to be understood in its own right. The youth discussed in this document had their own world in which they operated.

In the final analysis this study argues that urban youth in Blantyre made their own youth culture mediated by the interactions with one another and the urban environment. While this study focused on dress, music and dance practices there are other elements of urban youth culture which require research. These include urban youth languages, sexuality, violence and drug and substance abuse.

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