NO TRACE OF PUBLIC SPACE?
SEARCHING FOR PUBLIC URBAN LIFE IN LILONGWE
This work is about public spaces in Lilongwe. No, it is not about football fields as I was jokingly asked a number of times. This work assumes that public space is determined by the public urban life being lived in a given context. It is, therefore, strongly shaped by local cultures, lifestyles, and everyday occurrences. As such, public space is less understood as a physical entity but more as a performative practice (Sennett 2017) and a platform for social intersections (Simone 2010). In Lilongwe’s formal urban planning, however, public space appears to have no place and, if at all, is much more concerned with its spatial aspects than the nature of its publicness. This lack of discourse around public space subsequently materializes in Lilongwe’s urban form - which is troubling. Part of the motivation for this work is driven by the incongruence that when planning fails to accommodate public urban life, it will find its place elsewhere. This is both desirable and problematic: It is problematic because Lilongwe is, in addition, strongly marked by spatial segregation that translates to socioeconomic and racial segregation so that public urban life predominantly unfolds in pre-determined pockets of the city. This, however, goes against the grain of one of the key characteristics of public space which is its openness and inclusion for people of all walks of life. The fact that public urban life still unfolds and finds its ways in Lilongwe’s urban fabric represents the desirable aspect of its current state in Lilongwe. This work traces these unacknowledged public spaces by Lilongwe’s urban planning sector. I explore and illustrate where the publics in Lilongwe can be found instead and how they create and shape public space in the city. Football fields belong to this category, however, I opted for less visible examples that I encountered during my field research in Lilongwe, including water kiosks, the Labor Office, Kachere in Chinsapo, WhatsApp groups, a churches square in Kauma, Blazo players at the Craft Market, the Area 13 Market, and a home plot in a high density residential area. The latter three are presented in more in-depth case studies while the other examples serve more as introductory case studies for further research. None of the case studies presented aim to be exhaustive but are utilized to make a point with regard to public urban life and potential interpretations of public space which are, finally, assembled in five Food For Thoughts. They aim to inspire future decision-making processes concerned with public urban life or public spaces, especially in Lilongwe’s urban planning sector. Moreover, they can, for one, fill up the void created by the absence of public space debates and, secondly, not only fill it up but fill it up with ideas of public space that are deeply connected to local public urban life and not imported from other, foreign, or EuroAmerican practices. In this manner, this work further aims to show how the legacy of colonial town planning and dominant global practices in urban planning can be challenged by adopting a southern perspective that is based on truly local insights (De Boeck 2010; Myers 2011; Roy 2009; Watson 2009). Looking at local public urban life can subsequently also serve as a foundation for a more grounded understanding of Lilongwe’s urbanity (Jenkins 2013). What kind of city is Lilongwe, after all? The answer most likely lies somewhere between neatly collected statistics as well as everyday practices that do not fit into single digits or words. But one can assume that the answer does not lie in any of the currently circulating master plans, land use plans, and zoning schemes as neither addresses Lilongwe’s publics although it so profoundly determines a city’s urbanity.
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INITIAL SITUATION

1

TAKULANDIRANI:
WELCOME TO LILONGWE
TO THE NON-MALAWIAN AUDIENCE

What images you might have of Malawi, do not mistake them with images you have seen from other parts of Africa. Malawi is not like Mali, neither is Lilongwe like Nairobi, Johannesburg or Lusaka. Each city of Africa is as unique as is Paris, London, New York, Buenos Aires, and Tokyo. Lilongwe differs from these cities in so far as it rarely triggers a specific image in people’s minds unless one is already familiar with it. Fueling the imaginary machines of our minds with fodder that stems from Malawi and less from stereotypical associations and assumptions, I begin this work with a fairly elaborate introduction in order to elucidate my field of research. Yet this can only be understood as a cursory introduction to life in Malawi and Lilongwe.

TO THE MALAWIAN AUDIENCE

You already know Malawi better than I do and perhaps ever will. This work is based on my lens, my view of Malawi. Please be kind and keep in mind that I have tried to free myself from Western biases by opening my ears and eyes rather than opening my mouth when I visited your country. The following pages are an account of what I have heard and seen but as a European I will never be able to entirely shake off my European lens. Pepani, my sincere apologies. Therefore, do not (only) pick on mistakes I might have made (though please do express them to me) and, instead, use my work as a medium to understand Western minds in Malawian contexts. While Western scholars carry the additional burden of an exploitative colonial past (and present), I believe both the global north and south must find means to arrive at a common discursive ground. I hope my work can contribute to this.

Note: Words marked with a star * signal that they are listed and explained further in the Glossary. All images depicted are my own unless otherwise indicated under Notes.
AZUNGU, AZUNGU!

BOSSMAN WE ENJOY HARSHARDSHIPS.

LILONGWE IS AN APARTHEID TOWN.

I WALK A LOT, I MEAN A LOT LOT.

WE KNOW EVERYONE IN THIS AREA
AND WE SAY HELLO AND BRING
FOOD FROM THE MARKET.

15 YEARS AGO, THINGS WERE
SLOOOOOW, NOW THINGS GO FASTER.

IF YOU DON'T MAKE THIS FENCE, THE
GOVERNMENT WILL TAKE IT FROM YOU.

YOU KNOW, CORRUPTION IS EVERYWHERE.

YOU THINK THERE ARE NO
INDIAN WOMEN IN THIS TOWN
BUT ON INDIAN HOLIDAYS
THEY ALL COME OUT AND YOU
WONDER WHERE THEY HAVE
BEEN HIDING ALL THE TIME.

IN THE LAST SIX WEEKS, SINCE I MOVED TO
LILONGWE, I HAVE BEEN SPENDING THREE
OUT OF SIX WEEKENDS AWAY. - THIS IS PRE-
CISELY HOW MY PAST THREE YEARS IN LI-
LONGWE HAVE PRETTY MUCH LOOKED LIKE.

I WOULD LIKE LILONGWE TO HAVE MORE GREEN SPACE
LIKE MULANJE, LESS LITTER AND LESS SOIL AND DIRT.

NEXT TIME YOU MUST EAT AND COME WITH THE INTENTION TO CHAT.

I'VE SEEN IT ON TV. WHEN THE SUN COMES OUT, EVERYONE IS OUTSIDE.
WE SEE THE SUN EVERY DAY. WE DON'T CARE SO MUCH.

IF YOU ARE PREGNANT, YOU MUST MARRY THE MAN WHO IMPREGNATED YOU.

THIS IS AFRICA.

LIFE IS TOUGH WHEN YOU ARE POOR.

PROMISES CAN BE BROKEN.

BREAK-INS OR ASSAULTS – WHAT'S WORSE? -
PANG'ONO PANG'ONO',
SLOWLY SLOWLY

MALAWIANS ARE VERY FRI-
ENDLY BUT THEY ARE NOT
NECESSARILY YOUR FRIENDS.

YOU ARE MOST WELCOME.
It is rainy season in Malawi. The landscape blooms in deep green colors sprinkled with the occasional yellow flower. Red dust clouds fly through the air whenever a car passes by. As I cycle down on the sides of a road, the dust stings in my eyes. The road itself is paved while the leftover space to the right and left of the road is unpaved and reserved for pedestrians, cyclists, a green stretch of grass, a drainage canal, and the occasional street vendor. I stop to buy a mandasi for 50 MK (around 0.50 Euros) from one of the women who is selling them in a large, see-through plastic bucket at a small intersection. Essentially, it is a large ball of dough fried in hot oil with a hint of sweet. I would not consider it my favorite pastry but for some reason I keep returning to it. I decline the blue plastic bag she wants to give me with the mandasi and eat it right away.

I am on my way to town. When I say I am going into town in Lilongwe, it is not entirely clear where exactly I am going to. Technically, I stay in town so where else would I be? I am heading into town to get a few things. Phone credit and a data bundle, for instance, that allows me to use the internet on my phone at lower price rates. My phone credit would run out very quickly otherwise and how else am I supposed to stay in touch with everyone? Since I still have not figured out how I can get the bundle without going to a teller, I keep returning every few weeks. Their nearest office is located in Old Town at the Game Complex so this is where I am heading to. On my very first day in Lilongwe, the parking lot of the Game Complex was introduced to me as the city center and I remember wondering if we were only parking the car to go to the city center. Only later it dawned on me that this was it and why wouldn’t it be? The parking lot is a lot more. So many things happen here, so many people meet here, and so many places can be reached from here. Big ralleys with loud PA-systems use the parking space to find a large audience. Informal Forex traders wait for customers here in the shade of a low-hanging tree. Even fashion photo shoots take place in the parking lot as it forms the backdrop to a life many Malawians may aspire to but know very little of. Like a fortress, the parking lot is surrounded by a number of shops, one of which is the Game shop and name patron of this place. It is a chain from South Africa and it might as well be the most expensive shop in town. But you can probably find anything here what an azungu heart desires and which you will have a hard time finding anywhere else in Lilongwe. Azungu is the general name for white people, no matter if they are Europeans, Asians, or Latinos. If you are not black, you are considered white. The many Indians in town might be the only exception. They are "Indians" (often born and raised in Malawi) and run many of Malawi’s commercial enterprises.

After I have bought my phone credit, I walk to the Tsoka Market. The market is just behind the complex across the Lilongwe River. To cross, I can choose between the many makeshift wooden pedestrian bridges (for a small fee) or a concrete bridge that carries the M1 main road. I take the concrete bridge. Traffic congestion in Lilongwe is at its worst right here. I know why I left my bike at the complex. Cars, minibuses, the occasional 4x4, TukTuk, and loads of pedestrians are competing with each other to keep a straight line on the road. At the adjacent Tsoka Market, a calmer yet no less clear view of the surroundings awaits, marked by a maze of wooden stalls and small alleyways. But luckily, they are organized in clusters. Tailors in one corner, shoes in another, second hand clothes all the way in the back, and pool tables every now and then in between. Vegetables and fruits are not sold here. For this I have to cross over the bridge again and walk to the vegetable market.
INITIAL SITUATION

Malawi's First President [1961-1994]: His Excellency The Life President and Paramount Chief Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, The Ngwazi

IT’S A CULTURAL THING

Malawi is often referred to as the “warm heart of Africa”, alluding to the people’s friendliness and welcoming, peaceul character. My very first chat with a Malawian, sitting in the passenger seat of a taxi truck minutes after having crossed the border, might illustrate why this stereotype has come about. Upon my question what he enjoys doing, he responded: “I enjoy making friends”. Surely, this situation paints a very romantic image of Malawi, yet, I cannot recall having had as many encounters like these elsewhere. To better understand today’s Malawi requires knowledge of its more recent history. Malawi gained independence from the British on July 6, 1964 and, subsequently, entered a one-party-system with the Malawian Congress Party (MCP) as the only ruling party and life president Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda as their autocratic leader. Banda, who was born a Chewa in Malawi’s Central Region, educated in the USA and UK, and a practicing physician before he entered Malawian politics, ruled the country with a conservative “iron rod” (Myers 2003). Under his regime, all adults were pressured to become MCP members and carry a passcard at all times. Censorship was flourishing, businesses had to display an image of the president, women had to dress conservatively without ever showing their knees in public, all men were made to wear short hair including international visitors, members of the Jehovah’s Witnesses were expelled, Asians had to relocate from rural to urban centers, and so on and so forth. Under the one-party-system, there were many rules to Malawi’s everyday life and breaking any one of them could turn into a life threatening case (see Mapanje 2011 for a vivid account of a dissident’s experiences in Malawi under Banda’s regime). The Malawi Young Pioneers, watchdogs of Banda’s autocratic regime, were entrusted with the upkeep of Malawi’s order and to restore order whenever necessary, thus, creating a culture of fear among the Malawian population. Since people would often involuntarily disappear overnight or be “accidentalized”, as the saying goes, while torture and killings were not uncommon, such fears were not unfounded (Mapanje 2011). In 1984, due to international and national pressure, Malawi finally held its first presidential election in which Banda lost his power. After 30 years of a one-party-system, Malawi eventually became a democratic, multi-party nation. Since Banda’s regime only ended little over 20 years ago, many Malawians still have some kind of memory, both nostalgic and horrific, of life under Banda’s rule. His legacy remains very visible and tangible in many aspects of Malawian life today and, as such, lives on well beyond his death in 1997. It is only the younger generation that starts to distance themselves from his legacy in order to explore new ways of Malawian life.

Without underlining its value and relevance, Malawi naturally is more than its hard facts suggest. After all, the Malawi found on paper – think policy papers and country profiles – can merely frame but never fully depict what Malawi means for Malawians. The following paragraphs, therefore, begin with providing a glimpse of what is visible off the papers before also turning towards the hard facts on paper, both being equally relevant for a better understanding of Malawi as well as this work.

THIS IS MALAWI

While different interests and parties have continuously fought over power in Malawi, other powers have kept their stronghold all along - all the way through colonialism, dictatorship, and modernism. To say it in the words of Malawian author William Kamkwamba: “Before I discovered the miracles of science, magic ruled the world” (Kamkwamba and Meester 2013). He is referring to what one could consider the spiritual or supernatural sphere in Malawian culture. For example, the Gule Wamkulu, both a secret cult of the Chawra and a ritual dance with elaborate masks, remain very active and respected by the communities, exemplifying how very much alive traditional beliefs are in Malawi despite its more and more modernizing society. So it comes to no surprise thatanga or witchdoctors are found everywhere in the country, the consumption of albino body parts are believed to bring good luck, and killings can be justified by a fear of vampires. Only rarely this is the case. With this in mind, it may not be hard to understand why traditional leaders or chiefs play such an important role in Malawi, also with regard to more mundane aspects of life. So much, in fact, that the traditional system exists parallel to and cooperates with the political system in a codependent relationship. Some might argue that the former is de facto more powerful than the latter. Within the tribal system, each tribe produces their own traditional leaders, following their respective lineages as chieftainship is hereditary. Tribes in Malawi’s northern and central regions tend to follow patrilineal patterns, while the southern region is predominantly matrilineal. This pattern permeates a Malawi...
their heads is therefore no rare sight. A typical Malawian entires tree trunks to their homes by placing their loads on children of all ages carrying sticks and branches or even most economic option as it is for free. To see women and be cooked and cutting wood from the nearest forest is the direct consequence of this practice as meals need to on portable stoves, usually placed somewhere outdoors is the preparing of food, which is most commonly done Western cultures. Another predominantly female domain the analogy seems to work reversibly too. Breastfeeding in wing your breasts in public in Western cultures. Ironically, In fact, revealing your knees has a similar effect as sho fashion to display their political affiliation, simply for a more ceremonial occasions like funerals, to convey a message - colors come in a vast variety. Women, no men, wear chi-rika under different names. Malawian women wear them as skirts, as dresses, as a head wrap, as a baby sling on the back, to carry luggage, to wrap things, to sit on etc. It is universally applicable, it seems, and the patterns and colors come in a vast variety. Women, no men, wear chi-tenje to keep away dust and dirt, to show respect during religious distinctions can be considered just as prevalent as traditional distinctions and since one has not replaced the other, they live side-by-side. The 'what church do you go to?' question seems just as important and ubiquitous as the origin question, also assuming that one cannot not be a member of a church. Overall, Malawians attach great importance to courtesy. Physically this can entail kneeling, avoidance of eye contact, or, most commonly seen, handshaking with one's right while the left hand touches the other elbow, indicating that one is not armed. Verbally, courteous behavior becomes most obvious in the habitual greeting procedures. Not inquiring about someone's current state, asking 'how are you?', is considered rather rude.

Talking about Malawian culture would be incomplete if there was no mention of chitenge. Chitenge describes the colorful printed cloths found nearly everywhere around Af-rica under different names. Malawian women wear them as skirts, as dresses, as a head wrap, as a baby sling on the back, to carry luggage, to wrap things, to sit on etc. It is universally applicable, it seems, and the patterns and colors come in a vast variety. Women, no men, wear chi-tenje to keep away dust and dirt, to show respect during ceremonial occasions like funerals, to convey a message e.g. by displaying their political affiliation, simply for a more fashionable look, or to cover up knees because it is still largely considered offensive to show bare knees in public. In fact, revealing your knees has a similar effect as showing your breasts in public in Western cultures. Ironically, the analogy seems to work reversibly too. Breastfeeding in public is a customary sight as showing your knees in most Western cultures. Another predominantly female domain is the preparing of food, which is most commonly done on portable stoves, usually placed somewhere outdoors as it produces large amounts of smoke. Deforestation is a direct consequence of this practice as meals need to be cooked and cutting wood from the nearest forest is the most economic option as it is for free. To see women and children of all ages carrying sticks and branches or even entire tree trunks to their homes by placing their loads on their heads is therefore no rare sight. A typical Malawian meal eaten for both lunch and dinner consists of

a highly filling pulp of maize flour or a fine-grained poten-ta, often homegrown or inexpensive to buy, paired with vegetables and, if one can afford it, meat or fish from Lake Malawi. For breakfast, mandasis are a popular snack, a sweet pastry which can be purchased by one of the many women lining the side of the main roads with their mandari buckets. Another popular and low-cost street food dish is chi-waya, i.e. chips, salad, and an egg, deep-fried on a lar-ges metal plate called chiwaya, hence the name. A chiwaya vendor usually "hands out chicken", a "snack-taste", while a customer watches the vendor prepare their full portion.

Slowly but surely, Malawi’s culture of fear, fostered by the previous autocratic regime, is disappearing. Different strands of culture emerge more freely and openly in both desirable and undesirable ways. For instance, there is no dispute that the level of corruption, nepotism and patron-age is high. Likewise, ample poverty is paired with a wish and hypothetical ability to align with more cosmopolitan lifestyles. This is intensified by capitalist notions that enter the country through the presence of international organi-zations, media, and modern technology. The growing num-ber of mobile phones and internet users are further living proof of a wider reception for new flows of ideas and ide-als. Among others, they are filtered through projects like internet.org, which provides free access to websites like Facebook, Wikipedia, and Google in Malawi since 2015. One could debate that such developments ring in a new form of colonialism but for the moment this debate must find its arena elsewhere as it suffices to say: life in Malawi has changed and it continues to change due to its increa-sing exposure to other ways of life in the world.
Along with its British colonizers, a number of tribes with different origins and distinct languages, customs, beliefs, and lifestyles left their mark on the landlocked country in South East Africa now known as the Republic of Malawi. It was first united under the Malawi Empire, from which the country derives its name. Upon “discovery” by explorer David Livingstone, British colonizers gained power and declared the land a British protectorate, referring to it as Nyasaland, and, later on, as Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. After independence from the British in 1964, Malawi received its present name and was ruled by the autocratic life president Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda. Since 1994, Malawi has been governed by a multi-party democracy, currently headed by president Arthur Peter Mutharika. Malawi is divided into three administrative regions, i.e. Northern, Central, and Southern Region, 26 districts, 193 parliamentary constituencies and 462 wards (MEC 2014). The dominant tribes found in Malawi are the Chewa, Yao, Lomwe, Ngwi, Tumbuka, Nyaya, Sena, Tonga, and Ngonde. Among these, the Chewa people have and continue to form the ethnic majority and the Bantu-language Chichewa is one of the two official languages spoken all over Malawi along with English.

The export of tobacco, sugar, and tea dominates the country’s economy while maize is the dominant agricultural produce, being the main staple of most Malawians. The country’s GDP stands at USD 6.303 billion with a per capita income of USD 388 (World Bank Data 2017b) of which one third is contributed by the agricultural sector. It is one of the highest shares in Africa. Moreover, foreign aid plays a significant role as it makes up 20 to 30% of the GDP (GIZ; Raviv et al. 2018). Malawi 2018). Around 40% of government expenditures were financed through foreign aid, but when a massive corruption scandal, commonly referred to as “Cashgate”, was uncovered in 2013, donors became more sensitive and suspended much of their spending (GIZ; Raviv et al. 2018). Around 40% of government expenditures were financed through foreign aid, but when a massive corruption scandal, commonly referred to as “Cashgate”, was uncovered in 2013, donors became more sensitive and suspended much of their spending (GIZ; Raviv et al. 2018). Since 2011, 1GBP was worth 240 MK at the time of research, in spring 2018, the exchange rate had dropped to 950 MK for 1GBP (Reserve Bank Malawi 2018). Malawi covers a total area of 118,443 km², roughly a third of the size of Germany, and it shares borders with Zambia, Mozambique and Tanzania. About one fifth of the country’s land is covered by water including the Shire River, which provides over 90% of Malawi’s electricity through hydropower (ESCOM). More famously, there is Lake Malawi or Lake Nyasa. It is the ninth largest lake in the world and also known as Calendar Lake for stretching over 865 miles in length and 52 miles in width. More mystically, it is also referred to as Lake of Stars for it is believed that one can see the stars reflected in the lake at night. Malawi’s climate tends to be tropical around the lake shores and sub-tropical in higher altitudes. Around 95% of the annual rainfall occurs during rainy season from November to April where mean temperatures average around 25 and 37°C. In the dry season, from May to October, there is nearly no rainfall and mean temperatures range from 17 to 27°C with chances of frost (MET). The landscape of Malawi changes fundamentally with the change of seasons, going from lush greens to dry dust and back every year. Driven by the effects of climate change, the country moreover frequently suffers from floods and droughts. Droughts have evenprompted the Malawian Government to declare a state of national disaster when they led to widespread famines. Due to its proximity to the equator, daylight hours in Malawi stay consistent and rotate roughly between 5:30/0:00 AM-PM year-round, determining much of people’s daily rhythms.

According to the latest national census, around 13 million people live in Malawi (NSO 2010). However, this number can only be interpreted as a bottom estimate since an unknown number of the population shows up in no official records on top of the fact that the census is fairly outdated. The next national census will be conducted this September. On national average, around 1.9 million live per km² and the average household has 4.4 people (UN Habitat 2016). 11 million of the total population lives in rural areas and over 90% of the rural population lives off agriculture on small farms and/or subsistence farming. The largest demographic group is between 10 and 29 years old and comprises around 40% of the total population (NSO 2010; GIZ). The average life expectancy is around 55 years while 10.6% live with HIV/AIDS (GIZ). School attendance is compulsory and free for primary education (Standard 1 to 8) but public secondary schools (Form 1 to 4) only have a capacity for 30% of the eligible students. Public universities absorb even less with a maximum of 4% graduates from secondary schools (Ministry of Education 2014). Literacy rate is at 65.4% (GIZ). Religion plays a very important role in the life of most Malawians who either belong to the 83% Christians, a legacy left by the early missionaries who settled in this country, the 13% Muslims mostly found in the Mangochi and Machinga districts, the 2% of other religious groups like Hindus, Rastafarians, and Jews, or the 2% who do not belong to any religion at all (NSO 2010). In 2015, the legal age for marriage was raised from 10 to 18 as child marriage was and still remains common in Malawi, particularly in rural areas. Homosexuality is highly stigmatized and punishable by law.
13+ MILLION
PEOPLE LIVE IN MALAWI [2008]

40% OF THE TOTAL POPULATION IS BETWEEN 10 AND 29 YEARS OLD, MAKING THEM THE LARGEST DEMOGRAPHIC GROUP

MALAWIAN KWACHA RATES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Currency</th>
<th>Rate (MK)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>2 MK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>240 MK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>920 MK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>1,000 MK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AT LEAST 90%
LIVE ON LESS THAN $2 PER DAY

MALAWIAN CONGRESS PARTY
HASTINGS KAMUZU BANDA [MCP]
1968

CHICHEWAN + ENGLISH
MALAWI’S OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

RELIGION

83% CHRISTIANS

HOMOSEXUALITY
ILLEGAL

LEGAL AGE FOR MARRIAGE
18 SINCE 2017 [BEFORE 15]

HEADS OF STATE

1968 HASTINGS KAMUZU BANDA [MCP]
1994 BAKILI MULUZI [UDF]
2004 BINGU WA MUTHARIKA [UDF/DPP]
2012 JOYCE BANDA [PP]
2014 PETER MUTHARIKA [DPP]

EVERY 5 YEARS
GENERAL ELECTIONS

POLITICAL PARTIES

Note: Figures are presented in USD unless indicated differently; German figures are provided for a greater perspective.
It may appear somewhat off-stranded to talk about cities in a country where the majority of the population lives in rural areas. In Malawi, there are no bustling metropolises or global cities per se and the cities that do exist are still framed by what more resembles village life than city life despite the increasing modern influences coming in. However, as stated above, this is increasingly changing and Malawian selfhood is currently being reconceptualized. Looking at more recent urbanization rates, the numbers show a clear growth in urban centers. To clarify, in 1966, briefly after independence, only 6% of the population lived in urban areas. By 2008, it was already 15.3% (NSO 2010). 77% of urbanization, i.e. rural-urban-migration and urban growth, occurs in Malawi’s four biggest cities: Lilongwe, Blantyre, Mzuzu and Zomba (Manda 2013). Other cities account for only 3.3% of the urban population. In addition, urban areas in Malawi are estimated to grow with an annual rate of 5.2% while the national growth rate is at 2.8% (ibid.). One must note that these numbers vary depending on the source cited which either use official census data or projected estimates as their population threshold.
Malawi’s urban centers, large and small, are fairly well connected, whereas rural communities are less so. In total, the public road network in Malawi covers nearly 15,000 km of which about 3,000 km of roads are paved (Roads Authority Malawi 2017). The road infrastructure in the south is generally more developed than in the north due to the greater number and significance of urban centers. As in most countries of the Commonwealth, people in Malawi drive on the left. Both in rural and urban areas, roads are shared with a number of traffic users, i.e. vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians, which can become very crowded around markets and during rush hours. Without designated lanes, cyclists and pedestrians are vulnerable to traffic accidents, particularly in the darkness of the night. There is no formal public transport system in Malawi. Instead, within and across urban centers, public transport is run by informally managed minibuses who more often than not are overloaded and therefore frequently stopped by traffic police. In inner-city areas, informal bicycle taxis, called kabazas*, can additionally be hired for a low cost. Around bomas*, police roadblocks control incoming and outgoing vehicles by means of random sampling. Main roads, mostly tarmac roads, are more or less in a good condition. Secondary and tertiary roads, mostly unsealed, can range from fairly moderate and safe to a really bumpy ride and may require specialized or non-motorized transport. During the rainy season, flooding forms a serious obstacle and occasionally renders roads impassable. Additionally, a prevalence for small and large potholes, the occasional cattle crossing, and the almost complete lack of streetlights are part of Malawi’s driving experiences.

**INITIAL SITUATION**

**LAKE MALAWI**

Malawi’s urban centers, large and small, are fairly well connected, whereas rural communities are less so. In total, the public road network in Malawi covers nearly 15,000 km of which about 3,000 km of roads are paved (Roads Authority Malawi 2017). The road infrastructure in the south is generally more developed than in the north due to the greater number and significance of urban centers. As in most countries of the Commonwealth, people in Malawi drive on the left. Both in rural and urban areas, roads are shared with a number of traffic users, i.e. vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians, which can become very crowded around markets and during rush hours. Without designated lanes, cyclists and pedestrians are vulnerable to traffic accidents, particularly in the darkness of the night. There is no formal public transport system in Malawi. Instead, within and across urban centers, public transport is run by informally managed minibuses who more often than not are overloaded and therefore frequently stopped by traffic police. In inner-city areas, informal bicycle taxis, called kabazas*, can additionally be hired for a low cost. Around bomas*, police roadblocks control incoming and outgoing vehicles by means of random sampling. Main roads, mostly tarmac roads, are more or less in a good condition. Secondary and tertiary roads, mostly unsealed, can range from fairly moderate and safe to a really bumpy ride and may require specialized or non-motorized transport. During the rainy season, flooding forms a serious obstacle and occasionally renders roads impassable. Additionally, a prevalence for small and large potholes, the occasional cattle crossing, and the almost complete lack of streetlights are part of Malawi’s driving experiences.
Entrance of the Lilongwe City Council in City Center

INITIAL SITUATION
LILONGWE: EMERGING CITY

In order to make sense of present-day Lilongwe, it is necessary to take a look at Lilongwe’s urban planning history. Much of the built environment one sees today has its roots in the last few decades when a small town was turned into the country’s capital. Yet, its spatial and social makeup goes as far back as the colonial era. Today, people who are unfamiliar with Lilongwe’s urban layout will have difficulties to navigate through the city in the beginning as Lilongwe’s logic of planning does not follow a center-to-periphery model. Instead, the city’s urban form appears as if several city parts were linearly scrambled together to make a whole, connected through thin lines of road infrastructure. As part of the Central Region, Lilongwe is located 1,050 m above sea level on the Central African Plateau. The Lilongwe River runs through the city to which Malawi’s capital owes its name. “Topographically the site is difficult”, said architect John Lanchester who was responsible for the master plan in the 1960s on which much of today’s Lilongwe is based on. A large forest, the Linguzi Forest Reserve, along with a heavily rugged hill side, steep rock slopes and a deeply indented river valley mark the city’s natural features. As part of the Central Region, Lilongwe is located as an ally in “black ruled Southern Africa” or to see “South Africa had agreed to support Malawi is unclear. Perhaps to find an ally in “black ruled Southern Africa” or to see “South African companies among the first new industries” in Malawi (Potts 1985; Connell 1972).

HISTORY OF URBAN PLANNING IN LILONGWE

Right after independence in 1964, then president Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda decided to relocate Malawi’s capital from Zomba to Lilongwe. A number of theories attempt to explain Banda’s reasoning. For one, Zomba was the center of the British colonizers. In order to affect a clean break from the colonial past, the new capital had to be relocated. Further, moving the capital from the south to a more central location would ensure better accessibility for Malawians from all regions and induce a more balanced distribution of trade and powers. Historically, the southern region used to receive more investments than much of the rest of the country and, therefore, appears much more developed. Moving to Lilongwe would strategically counter this imbalance in political, economic and social terms. Lastly, some would argue, Lilongwe was to become the new capital because it was much closer to Kasungu, Banda’s birthplace, which was Chewa territory and home to most of Banda’s political supporters (Bose 2017). Turning the small trading town into a representative capital, cannot exactly be described as an easy task. Malawi did not have sufficient funds to finance the relocation and Britain declined to financially support this endeavor. In search of alternative options, the South African apartheid regime eventually stepped in and provided an initial loan of ZAR 8 million (roughly USD 7 million), 60% of it as a grant and 40% as a loan with an interest of 4% (Bose 2017). Why South Africa had agreed to support Malawi is unclear. Perhaps to find an ally in “black ruled Southern Africa” or to see “South African companies among the first new industries” in Malawi (Potts 1985; Connell 1972).

Prolonged changes that followed the logic of modernist apartheid town planning principles and a “clinical degree of orderliness” subsequently marked Lilongwe’s urban development in the late 1960s and thereafter (Potts 1986:226). One could argue that the applied spatial “enframing” tactics, which derived from colonial logics but carried on in postcolonial Lilongwe, laid the groundwork for what would turn Lilongwe’s inhabitants into “inmates of their own villages” (Mitchell 1991[1988]:34). Even if there rests some truth in this statement, referring to Lilongwe’s inhabitants as potential “inmates” might be slightly too crass. Deborah Potts argues that, though, it was a highly influential factor, one should not read too much into South Africa’s influence in the making of the new capital. The urban form of the new Lilongwe was just as much made in Malawi, which then was equivalent to Kamuzu Banda and his regime (1966:226). In reference to Mitchell’s “enframing” tactics, Garth Myers summarizes: “[t]he colonial Lilongwe … was laid out as a segmented plan to replace an order without framework, depended upon containerization into insides and outsiders at a number of spatial scales, and was characterized by an architecture of surveillance and observation” (2003:188). Only in 2010, a new master plan was introduced to Lilongwe’s planning sector, providing a new, updated direction that currently obscurely is valid while it still waits for its legal green light.

In what ways and to what extent Banda’s vision of a truly Malawian capital was achieved, after all, can be disputed. Surely it appears to be at odds with the fact that it was the South African government, the apartheid regime, who made this vision possible. Even more so, that it was South African planners who envisioned how the new capital would look like. One cannot help but wonder why a fighter for independence from colonial oppression would turn to those for support who have institutionalized racial oppression of blacks and coloreds by whites. “He was culturally European and uncertain about his African roots”, it says in Banda’s obituary in an English newspaper (Dowden 1997). Looking at Banda’s biography and the fact that he likened to present himself wearing a horned hat and a three-piece English-style suit, the obituary seems to be closest to what could have reflected Banda’s inner workings. And, though, it still cannot provide a full explanation to why Lilongwe came about the way it did. It does provide an alternative justification to the fact that Malawi was simply unable to undertake the relocation on its own, neither financially nor professionally.
POST-INDEPENDENCE CAPITAL RELOCATIONS

Lilongwe represents only one city in a number of post-independence capital relocations in Africa which were intended to create geographical as well as symbolic distance to former colonial ties and came along with modernist utopian visions for the new capitals. Between 1957 and 1966, nearly two thirds of African nations gained independence, beginning with Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah and including Malawi under his friend Kamuzu Banda.

After Africa’s independence movements in the 1960s and 1970s, it was largely Big Men who took over power over the liberated nation and ruled the country with “despotism, clientelism, and corruption” and a strong “personality cult” (Herz et. al. 2015: 7). It was also the Big Men who would steer their new capitals towards modernization with the aim to “develop” their “underdeveloped” nations without receiving much opposition. The new capitals were then designed after dominant circulating architecture and urban planning models. Thus, modernist architecture entered the realm of many African cities. It was an environment that was increasingly leaning towards rational infrastructures, aiming to “develop” and to attract international donors. But generally, urban development in post-independent Africa was also much spurred by a desire to be seen “by other nations at eye level” (ibid. 9).

1958
Mauritania:
Saint Louis to Nouakchott

1965
Botswana:
Mafeking to Gaborone

1974
Tanzania:
Dar es Salaam to Dodoma

1975
Malawi:
Zomba to Lilongwe

1983
Ivory Coast:
Abidjan to Yamoussoukro

1991
Nigeria:
Lagos to Abuja

Under Construction
Equitorial Guinea plans to move its capital from Malabo to Oyala, which was renamed Ciudad de la Paz („City of Peace“)
When Lilongwe was founded in 1904, the small town primarily served the interests of its British colonizers, which came along with laws that, e.g., forbid the presence of “Africans” within urban areas. It is roughly estimated that about 7,000 Africans, 600 Europeans, and 700 Asians occupied a respective section of the city, today’s Old Town, when Lilongwe’s very first outline Zoning scheme (OZS) was drawn up by a town planner from Salisbury, Zimbabwe (now Harare) in 1955. Though subsequent planning no longer made racial segregation as explicit, the spatial and social composition of today’s Old Town still very much resembles its colonial predecessor since much effort went into building a new capital, less on restructuring the then existing city.

After independence from the British in 1964, W.J. Gerke and C.J. Wijen, two South African town planners, designed the master plan for the geographic and symbolic move. According to their final plans, Lilongwe would develop after a modified linear city with separate central business districts (CBDs), one in Old Town and one in New Town/City Center. In modernist fashion, monofunctional areas and a car-based infrastructure dominated the new urban fabric. Moreover, the new capital was to have an “open and spacious appearance” which is reminiscent of a Garden City. The plan laid the foundation for income-related spatial segregation as there was no provision for mixing of high and low density residential areas. Already when the master plan was presented in 1968 the planners had expressed their concerns with regard to topography, social segregation, and housing. In the end, the new capital attracted more people than the master plan had accommodated for.

The 1968 master plan was accompanied by an outline zoning scheme but then president Kamuzu Banda altered the original version for reasons of political prestige as well as South African donor interests. Most significantly, he a) added two more CBDs to the north, intensifying the city’s linear model and b) moved the Traditional Housing Areas (THAs) in the City Center to a large area in the south eastern periphery, congruent with the colonial African section. The more affordable THAs in the City Center were originally meant to vitalize the brand new part of town, being also of higher density than other closely residential areas. However, neither did this fit the prosperous and modern image of the new independent Malawi, nor was it very profitable. When Malawi’s capital finally moved from Zomba to Lilongwe in 1975, urban development was oriented towards the 1971 OZS. Consequently, contrary to popular belief, it was much more the new OZS and less the master plan that intensified social segregation.

By 1978, it had become very clear that a widespread housing shortage as well as insufficient infrastructure in the form of schools, clinics and designated areas for firewood cultivation demanded a rethinking of Lilongwe’s urban development. When it was evident that the city was not expanding to both the north and south but more to the south and south west, a new residential category was introduced: high density traditional housing. Simultaneously, a zero tolerance policy towards squatting in the City Center was adopted which had begun to grow around the mid 1970s. Further, the new construction of the Kamuzu International Airport was incorporated into the new plan.
JICA’s proposed cluster shape development for Lilongwe’s urban development master plan 2010-2030

For nearly 25 years, the OZS from 1986 served as the only guideline in Lilongwe’s urban planning, until, in 2009/2010, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) proposed an updated master plan. It envisioned Lilongwe’s urban development until 2030. Based on their recommendations, future urban planning would no longer aim for a linear expansion but follow a cluster shape development around several centers which would be connected through an inner and outer ring road and green and open spaces in between. The overall vision was to develop Lilongwe into a primary city and a gateway for neighboring countries. While never fully in effect, the 2010 master plan nevertheless formed the basis for subsequent plans.

The OZS 1986 was less motivated by profound changes to the existing urban structure plan and more by a need to tackle some of its issues, such as more efficient land use, greater focus on the not yet fully developed centers in Capital Hill and Kanengo, and adding Area 56 and 57 to Lilongwe’s jurisdiction. In the face of rapidly growing numbers of inhabitants, the Malawian government had by now developed a certain level of tolerance to squatting as the new OZS also allowed for upgrading and expansion of informally built housing under specific circumstances. The OZS was to be effective until 2000 and when Malawi switched from a one-party to a multi-party system in 1994 the OSZ remained unchanged. Subsequent plans failed to be fully recognized which, in some instances, makes the OZS 1986 still a valid planning document today.

The draft version of the Lilongwe Urban Structure Plan 2013, based on JICA’s 2010 master plan, positively stressed the city’s twin pole centers as unique to Lilongwe. High density mixed zones were allocated around the centers and no additional residential areas were added to Kanengo. Traditional Housing Areas and unplanned settlements are now referred to as “high density residential” or “quasi-residential” to indicate the latter’s intended formalization. Moreover, Area 59 to 62 were added to Lilongwe’s jurisdiction, making the city’s borders grow from 399 to 456 km². As of now, the plan is still in its draft stage and still needs to be gazetted in order to be legally binding despite the fact that some parts of the plan are already in effect or have been implemented.
Today, Lilongwe is divided into 62 administrative areas. The areas stem from the 1968 Master Plan and are numbered according to their time of entry and formal recognition by the Lilongwe City jurisdiction, lies in a geographical order. To indicate a location, the number of the area is given, accompanied by a plot number if possible, although some parts of the city go by their conventional names. The factual boundaries of Lilongwe remain vague as an estimated 76% of the city’s population resides in unplanned or informal areas all around the central parts of Lilongwe. As such, they may or may not find themselves within the administrative city borders (UN Habitat 2011).

Four sectors, namely Lumbadzi, Kanengo, City Center/Capital Hill, and Old Town group the city into different administrative zones that go back to the Lilongwe Capital Hill, and Old Town group the city into different administrative zones that go back to the Lilongwe 1968 master plan. In the north of Lilongwe, Lumbadzi has originally sprung, though, only few traces hint at a time before, life in Malawi is changing but as it goes for nearly everybody, “In Malawi, we don’t plan, we plot”. But what happens when one runs out of suitable plots? As stated before, life in Malawi is changing but as it goes for nearly everything in Malawi, things appear to be moving pang‘ono pang‘ono, slowly slowly, even if the opposite is the case.

LUMBADZI

KANENGO

CITY CENTER + CAPITAL HILL

OLD TOWN

Urban planning and development is spurred by various institutions. The most influential ones are listed here, ranging from government bodies to institutions affiliated to the state. Further, the most significant stakeholders in the private sector and within civil society are also mentioned.

LILONGWE TODAY

Urban planning and development is spurred by various institutions. The most influential ones are listed here, ranging from government bodies to institutions affiliated to the state. Further, the most significant stakeholders in the private sector and within civil society are also mentioned.

LUMBADZI

KANENGO

CITY CENTER + CAPITAL HILL

OLD TOWN

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LUMBADZI

KANENGO

CITY CENTER + CAPITAL HILL

OLD TOWN
Population Density of Lilongwe per km² in 2008

- < 4000
- 4000 - 7000
- > 7000
- no data

Size
450 km²

Population Density
1,479/per km²

Population 2008
674,448

Population 2018
1,200,000+ (Estimate)

Population 2030
2,200,362 (Estimate)

INITIAL SITUATION

Area 3/ Old Town
Low Density Housing

Area 2/ Old Town
Tsoka Market

Area 1/Old Town
Malangalanga Rd

Area 19/City Center
Commercial Area

Area 43
Low and High Density Housing

Area 52/Lumbadzi
Kamuzu International Airport

Area 29/Kanengo
Industrial Area

Area 57/Chinsapo
High Density Traditional Housing

Area 2/ Old Town
Low Density Housing

Area 3/ Old Town
High Density Permanent Housing

Area 4/2
Medium Density Housing

Area 4/7
Low and High Density Housing

Area 1/ Old Town
Malangalanga Rd

Area 27/Chinsapo
High Density Traditional Housing

Area 24/ Old Town
Tesse Market

Area 47
Medium Density Housing
THE STATE OF PUBLIC SPACE IN LILONGWE

Moving in closer from Malawi, over its urban areas, to Lilongwe and its planning history, the following pages will address the state of public space in Lilongwe and illustrate more broadly what motivates this work.
I FEEL BLESSED TO HAVE GROWN UP HERE WITH SO MUCH GREEN AND SPACE.

WE ARE A COUNTRY THAT DOES NOT HAVE OPEN SPACES.

A British-Indian-Malawian lady on choosing to live in Lilongwe and not in the UK.

Betty M. Dube [Ministry of Land, Housing and Urban Development] speaking about public spaces in a meeting with other planning professionals from Malawi.
PEOPLE COME OUT WHEN THERE IS SOMETHING TO BE GAINED.

CULTURALLY THE PEOPLE HERE ARE NOT AS OUTGOING AS IN OTHER SETTINGS.

THERE ARE NO RECREATIONAL PLACES WHERE YOU DO NOT NEED TO PAY.
there is no such thing as public space in Lilongwe? Surely not. Public space, as ambiguous as it is, in essence represents space for/with/of the public. So there must be more to public space in Lilongwe than only open space, greenery and recreation (theoretical concepts of public space are discussed more elaborately in chapter 2).

The following pages illustrate how public space is currently understood in Lilongwe's planning contexts. Moreover, a few selected implementation examples from Lilongwe demonstrate the discrepancies that occur between the planning of public spaces and the experiences thereof when critical debates around public space are absent or being neglected.

Among Lilongwe’s urban planning professionals, the words “public space” are not used very often. Maybe one can hear them discuss it more frequently ever since habitat iii took place in 2016 and since the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 were introduced. But, generally, it appears that there is no clear and consistent understanding of public space in Lilongwe’s formal urban planning sector. In fact, on paper it is not mentioned at all. Planning documents speak of open space, public open space, public land, public buildings and public parks but no public space understood in relation to a broader public sphere. Public space seems to be exclusively perceived as a green or recreational space that is primarily focused on other interests besides the public. Should one then conclude that

there is no such thing as public space in Lilongwe? Surely not. Public space, as ambiguous as it is, in essence represents space for/with/of the public. So there must be more to public space in Lilongwe than only open space, greenery and recreation (theoretical concepts of public space are discussed more elaborately in chapter 2).

The following pages illustrate how public space is currently understood in Lilongwe’s planning contexts. Moreover, a few selected implementation examples from Lilongwe demonstrate the discrepancies that occur between the planning of public spaces and the experiences thereof when critical debates around public space are absent or being neglected.

Exact from Lilongwe’s Outline Zoning Scheme 1986, providing details on “public open space” and “recreational facilities”

NO TRACE OF PUBLIC SPACE

Glossary of Urban Planning in Malawi

Public open space: public park (free open space)

Open space: space in a layout plan left without buildings in order to promote natural vegetation, develop public parks, protect river reserves, for play areas or at road junctions so that buildings do not disturb vehicles. Urban assembly authorities will beautify and landscape the spaces (see local physical development plan)

Public Park: An open space for public relaxation or recreation where anyone has the right to enter without fees. The park may be developed with wooden or concrete chairs and facilities for games. Take away shops and toilets may be provided. Urban authorities properly maintain the area and sometimes may fence the whole area, where vandalism has been noted the local authority can entrust the management of the park into community based organisation, who for purposes of sustainably managing the park may charge token fees.

Public buildings: office buildings, but usually confused with building for public use such as bars or churches, hence areas zoned for public buildings were developed for bars, rest houses or churches in some urban areas. It is advisable to use institutional buildings (free institutional area)

Place: a particular area in space where people and the environment interact over time to give it characteristics distinct from surrounding areas. It also means a particular part of space occupied or unoccupied by a person, object or organisms and may sometimes refer to a position in a hierarchy (see space)

Space: (a) absolute space meaning room available or set aside; (b) relative space, as all economic activities are space users and have spatial dimension. Hence, the geographical view of economic activity is spatial, that is, we have economic space, political space, social space etc.357

“Public space” does not appear in Mtafu A.Z. Manda’s Glossary of Urban Planning in Malawi, instead the definitions above mentioned are given. Having worked as a physical planner, urban consultant, and lecturer in Malawi and as an honorary member of the Malawi Institute of Planners, the author’s aim for the glossary was to “consult widely among colleagues on particular topics in specific disciplines” (2004:3). Though this cannot be simply interpreted as proof for a lack of debate around public space, it does reflect what notions are associated with public space in Malawi. While the glossary was not published by the Malawian Government, it can be considered authoritative as it appears and re-appears in Malawi’s professional planning circles.
Sustainable Development Goals 11

INITIAL SITUATION

Plan source for this map. Professionals served as a conversation with planning by the City Council, as well as conversations with planning professionals served as a source for this map.

THE PUBLIC SPACES FOR DESIGNATED OPEN SPACE + GREENERY

- Lilongwe's urban formal plan space is not anchored in the concept of public space. Since the concept of public space is like voluntarily turning blind and deliberately hindering the development of inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities (SDG 11) which, so the argument, also depend on public spaces with publics being the primary focus. The loss, lack, or decline of public space in Lilongwe must therefore be acknowledged, breached, and become a central element of urban planning debates.

![Image]

PUBLIC SPACE + GREENERY

- Park and Recreation

PROVIDE UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO SAFE, INCLUSIVE, AND ACCESSIBLE, GREEN AND PUBLIC SPACES

![Image]

MAKE CITIES AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS INCLUSIVE, SAFE, RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE

![Image]

ONCE URBAN DEVELOPMENT TAKES PLACE, IT IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO INCREASE OR RECONFIGURE PUBLIC SPACE

![Image]

CHALLENGES TO PUBLIC SPACE IN LILONGWE

ENCROACHMENT on idle land, both in public or private ownership, contributes to the decrease of public space as land is spontaneously taken and informally privatized by an occupant. Rising urbanization rates additionally spur encroachment tactics as well as the loss of potential sites for the public.

YOUNG DEMOCRACY Malawi’s society is still in the process of recuperating from the trauma caused by its former autocratic regime. Previous patterns of behavior and thinking are still very present in the national psyche of the people. It is only now that a younger generation begins to shape their country with new ways of being, detached from personal experiences of the one-party-system. Public urban life is thus going through great changes, accelerated by a more urbanizing and globalizing society and increasingly better living standards. As such, it is not very clear wherein public urban life is heading to and, consequently, what kind of public spaces the public needs and demands.

SEGREGATION based on economic backgrounds produces highly homogeneous environments that are marked by social and racial segregation. Since public spaces have the ability to stimulate greater interactions across different economic and social backgrounds, the lack of public spaces consequently stimulates further segregation. This forms a threat for social cohesion and, moreover, puts even more tension on the effects of Lilongwe’s urban sprawl. Economic and social backgrounds promote further segregation. This forms a threat for social cohesion and, moreover, puts even more tension on the effects of Lilongwe’s urban sprawl.

PRIVATIZATION forms a real threat to public space for similar reasons as in most other parts of the world: short term economic interests are prioritized over more future-oriented developments. In countries like Malawi, where the lack or “mismanagement” of funds seems to be a constant in urban development, partnering up with the private sector presents itself as a feasible solution, though, one might have to question at what cost.
**EXAMPLE 1 BOTANICAL GARDEN**

The Botanical Garden was established in 1988 and is managed by the National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens of Malawi. It is centrally located in Area 14, adjacent to Capital Hill. The total area spans over 118,000 ha. As of now, only a fraction of the proposed plan has actually been implemented for lack of funding. This map is an excerpt from the Lilongwe Botanic Garden Master Plan from 2016 by the Department of Physical Planning and is still under review.

Relatively few people in Lilongwe visit the Botanical Garden. Those who do, that is students and religious individuals or groups, are attracted by the very absence of people, the tranquility and the spacious environment.

**PRICE LIST**

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<tr>
<td>Group (451-500)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**EXAMPLE 2 COMMUNITY GROUNDS**

The place spoils the surrounding air with its stinking toilets that are rarely maintained. It is not surely needs to be razed down.

**FOR CLOSE TO FIVE YEARS, THE FACILITY HAS ALWAYS LOOKED ABANDONED AND NEGLECTED.**

Quote from a Newspaper Article [June 10, 2017] on the dilapidated state of the Community Grounds at Fall Estate.

**THAT'S PUBLIC SPACE. IT HAS GOT INFRASTRUCTURE THERE. IT'S FUNCTIONAL.**

A member of the Lilongwe City Council on the Community Grounds at Fall Estate.

**THERE'S THIS HOTEL, SIMAMA HOTEL. THAT PLACE WAS ALSO A PARK BUT NOW THIS IS A BUSINESS MAN WHO COLLuded WITH PLANNERS IN THE COUNCIL AND TOOK OVER. THEY OBEYED AND DESIGNED THE PARK AND GAVE HIM THAT PIECE.**

An urban planner on the developments that took place right next to the Community Grounds.
EXAMPLE 3 UMODZI PARK

INITIAL SITUATION

Aerial photo of Umodzi Park, comprising of the Bingu wa Mutharika International Conference Center [BICC], the President Walmont Hotel, the Malawi Square, and the Pabwalo Amphitheater. It was officially opened on May 1, 2015 by the Peermont Group. In 2007, after over 40 years, Malawi broke its diplomatic ties to Taiwan and, in 2008, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with China, focusing on industry, trade, investment. Subsequently, Umodzi Park was constructed on the premises of the former Chinese Garden with the help of funding from the Government of China.
EXAMPLE 4 STREETS

For lack of designated sidewalks, pedestrians resort to walking on the side of the road and share the space with everyone and everything that is not welcome on the space taken up by the road.

Pedestrians dominate this unsealed main road. They become slippery when wet and the dry dust causes severe illnesses.

"A CITY MADE FOR SPEED IS A CITY MADE FOR SUCCESS."
Le Corbusier in "A Contemporary City" [1925]

"ABOUT TEN THOUSAND PEDESTRIANS TRAVEL BY WALKING EVERYDAY ON THE M1 SECTION, FROM LILONGWE BRIDGE TO THE JUNCTION WITH MALANGALANGA ROAD IN THE OLD TOWN. THERE IS NO SIDEWALK FOR PEDESTRIANS ALONG THE M1 SECTION."
JICA 2010

Sealed road, unsealed sidewalk. Cars first, pedestrians last?

When pedestrians, cyclists and motorized vehicles share one of the many unlit roads, traffic safety is decreasing.

"SPRAWL SUGGESTS THE CITY HAS COLLAPSED, LIKE A DRUNKARD ON A SIDEWALK, AND IS NOW SPREADING INEXORABLY OUTWARDS."
Robert Kirkman in "The Ethics of Metropolitan Growth" [2010]
SOUTHERN URBANISM

Having established a better understanding for Malawi and Lilongwe as well as the state of public space in Lilongwe, in this chapter, I wish to elaborate on the concepts and theories applied and relevant to this work. They have guided me and can guide the reader’s understanding for my research topic. For this reason, in the following I will focus on southern urbanism, African urbanism, urban planning, public space, and public urban life with some references to methodology within these concepts.

When dealing with cities, we are inevitably confronted with the question of urbanism. What is urban? What is not? And what does it entail? Now, what is urbanism? Simply put, asking questions like these is precisely what urbanism is all about. Urbanism or urban theory revolves around cities and the study thereof where “theory” always a multiplicity is used “as a proliferation of imaginative projects inspired by and productive of the great diversity of urban experiences” (Robinson and Roy 2015: 2). Uniting a plethora of disciplines in one, urbanism contributes to how cities around the world can be perceived, understood, produced and designed though one can understandably never “fully know” a city (Jenkins 2013: 7). But as so often is the case when it comes to academic thought leaders and theoretical debates, much of the discourses held originate in and are dominated by Euro-American thinkers and thinking due to hegemonic powers that are and continue to be at work (Myers 2011). Transnational perspectives on the urban sphere remain the minority although urbanism is so intrinsically tied to the spatiality of its subject matters and different geographies naturally have a heightened significance (Parnell and Pieterson 2015). While urban scholars are well aware of the fact that a dominance of Euro-American discourses jeopardizes a nuanced understanding of the urbanized and urbanizing world, supply seems to struggle to meet the theoretical demands, thus, causing a mismatch between theory makers and theory making. At the end of the day, cities are found everywhere and a mismatch between theory makers and theory making is set in Lilongwe as well as Malawi as well as Africa as a branch of the global south, I will expand on more African discourses jeopardizes a nuanced understanding for my research topic. For this reason, I will focus on southern urbanism, African urbanism, urban planning, public space, and public urban life with some references to methodology within these concepts.

Understanding the city, particularly the southern city, is a tricky objective. Apart from the fact that this goal is - knowingly so - unattainable, there seems to be a widespread feeling, particularly among southern urban scholars, of not doing enough justice to their respective field of research. There seems to be a persistent feeling of missing something, which, however, is hard to articulate theoretically or empirically as the sources of the haze seems just as unclear (Schindler 2017). Edgar Pieterson openly admits that existing urban research has thus far fallen short of capturing ‘unfixable’ aspects of African (or southern) urbanity which remains an ‘elusive mirage clouded by limited data and inadequate theoretical approaches’ (Pieterson in Schindler 2017: 4). Hence, in the face of uncertainty, southern urban scholars work with what is ‘innovable’ and from there carve out an analytical lens that can guide the reader’s understanding for my research topic. For this reason, in the following I will focus on southern urbanism, African urbanism, urban planning, public space, and public urban life with some references to methodology within these concepts.

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WHEN LINKED TO “WIDER CONTEXTS, CONCEPTS, AND IMAGINARIES” OF AFRICA one can understand the colonizers' and their planners’ work, as well as the practice of urban planning, in a broader context. This perspective challenges the assumption that urban planning is a neutral practice, free from political and social influences. Instead, it highlights the ways in which urban planning can be used to achieve specific political and social goals, often at the expense of the people affected by these plans. The theoretical framework presented in this section sets the stage for understanding the ways in which urban planning has been used to shape and control African cities, and how it continues to do so today.

Theorists like Ferguson, Jenkins, and Myers argue that Eurocentric urban planning has had a significant impact on the development of African cities. Ferguson, for example, argues that urban planning in Africa has often been used as a tool for controlling and subjugating local populations. Jenkins suggests that urban planning in Africa has been used to create a homogenous urban landscape, one that is distinct from the diversity of urban forms found in Africa. Myers, on the other hand, argues that urban planning in Africa has been used to create a “figurative white space” in urban Africa, a space that is distinct from the diversity of urban forms found in the rest of the world.

These theories challenge the notion that urban planning is a neutral practice, and instead suggest that it is a powerful tool that can be used to achieve specific political and social goals. By understanding the ways in which urban planning has been used in the past, we can better understand the potential impacts of urban planning in the future. This understanding can be used to inform the development of more equitable and sustainable urban planning strategies.

In conclusion, the theoretical framework presented in this section provides a foundation for understanding the ways in which urban planning has been used to shape and control African cities. By understanding the ways in which urban planning has been used in the past, we can better understand the potential impacts of urban planning in the future. This understanding can be used to inform the development of more equitable and sustainable urban planning strategies.
from the south, less for the south. A decolonized view of cities therefore forms one of the key guiding objectives in southern planning.

How can a decolonized view of cities in southern planning be achieved? How can planners see more through southern eyes? In an attempt to respond to these questions, Watson and her colleagues James Duminy and Neil Smith (2007) propose three main imperatives (2014). They encompass 1) the collection of more and better data, 2) the improvement and updating of planning education, and 3) the formation of an ethics of planning that focusses on “equitable outcomes” and does not yield to liberal values in the process (ibid.). To address these imperatives, Duminy et al. suggest a rethinking of prevailing planning curricula that incorporates a case study methodology and the use of mixed methods to provide detailed data on “events as they actually happened” (ibid. 187-188). It is an attempt to move from prescribed towards more pragmatic forms of planning, guided by questions like: Where are we going? Who gains and who loses, by which mechanisms of power? Is this development desirable? What should be done? (Flyvbjerg 2001). Perhaps this is what Jenkins had envisioned new inclusive approaches in African urbanism to be. The case study methodology does not seek to plant an external idea “upon specific histories and geographies” but to cultivate a “community of inquirers” and, as such, does not impose but listens in order to inform more grounded planning ideas and practices (Healey 2011:188). With Healey’s words of warning in mind, they are not to be used as codified criteria that could end up in rushed copy-cat urbanism.

While a decolonized view of cities in southern planning is a noble long-term rationale worth striving for, Heather Campbell rather focuses on current planning realities that are richly described established with ad hoc actions and little concern for such planning ideals. Her approach outlines how planners can navigate through southern cities as long as they actively engage with the openness to be translated” (Simone 2010: 390). Campbell’s approach can be read as an alternative form of empowerment as it is a means to make those head and visible who may otherwise remain mute and invisible because their knowledge is not being acknowledged. In planning, the underlying question revolves around who or what is actually planning planning (Buckland 2004). This, in turn, points to the fact that the power variable can never be entirely cancelled out. In the end, who will be the judge on whether the analytic or synthetic approach should be applied (Campbell 2012)? Hence, judgment needs to be made on a case-by-case basis, pre-assessing the risks involved in this approach and continuously re-assessing its outcomes.

While urbanism is largely occupied with understanding cities and urban planning with making cities, there are a number of authors in which both fields operate. Social life, architecture, and infrastructures are some of the dimensions in which cities function and to which both urbanism and urban planning are dedicated to. In my research, I focus on the concept of public space which can be understood as yet another urban category. In order to illustrate a theoretical understanding of public space in more detail I expand on EuroAmerican debates around public space, i.e. from where the concept has originated and evolved from. I will then depart from there and pair understandings of public space with a southern perspective as described above in order to arrive at a theoretical framework that can be used productively in the context of my field of research in Lomé, Togo.

What is public space? To put it in a nutshell: it is a difficult question and there is no clear answer. Notions of public space differ strongly while each is plausible in its own right. It is not to be mistaken with open spaces, which describe a spatial separation in more technical terms, for example the space that creates distance between buildings or makes room for light and greening (Greenberg 1990). Further, a number of scholars distinguish between what we call public space and the public realm or space (see for example Low and Smith 2006 or Arrin and Thrift 2002) but, following Don Mitchell’s (1995) argument, the former can also be read as the materialization of the latter. So, what is being said about the public realm and space can also be translated to what can be said about public space. In an attempt to cluster notions of public space, Lynn Staeheli and Don Mitchell have meticulously put together what definitions are being used in academia and, interestingly, how often. In their statistics on “public, publicity and public space”, they focus on definitions of “publicity” or “publicness”, which describes relationships between public and private space or, in other words, “the public turned on itself” (ibid. 2007: 704-795). This, simultaneously gives valuable clues on what can be understood as private as it is connected to the public beyond the need for exclusion. Looking on Jeffrey Wainwright’s analysis of literature in political theory (1995), they begin with four different conceptual stands of public space. Thus, in a “liberal-economic” reading, the public is equivalent to “the state and its administrative functions”, the “Marxist-feminist” stance attributes the public “to the state and economy”, and those supporting a “new public virtue” model locate the public in a “community, the polity and citizens” while the private is located in the household or “private property”. Lastly, the public can be connected to the “radical public” who perceives of public space as a “static container but as a dynamic and performative process or, in other words, an act or speech that is produced through which they come up with a list of definitions of public space as well as a list on the importance of public space, ranked according to how often they were encountered in their sources (see page 76). This data supports what I stated before: Notions of public space are not widely and depending on who is being asked one might receive very different though very plausible definitions. So, for the moment it suffices to say that there is no agreement on a clear-cut definition of public space and, I would argue, there is also no need for it. Although the definitions listed by Staeheli and Mitchell allow for an openness to be translated" (Simone 2010: 390). From there, Jürgen Habermas pushed the second school of thought towards perceiving public space as a communicative space through “any medium, occasions, or events” that facilitates open communication among strangers and, as such, enables the acting out of democracy (Sennett 2017; Habermas 1985). From their sources, there are a number of other scholars who have focused on how public space primarily describes a political and/or communicative space, including Kurt Levin and Barbara Low (2016), Sharon Zukin (2015), Sally Low and Neil Smith (2006), Sophie Watson (2006), Susan S. Fainstein (2005), Leo Strauss and David Moi (2004), Don Mitchell (1995), Michael Sokirko (1996), Nancy Fraser (1996), Iris M. Young (1996), David Harvey (2012) and Henri Lefebvre (1968) to name only a few.

The first school of thought can be ascribed to urban scholars like Richard Sennett and Alsdorf-Maître Simone and it also informs this text. It understands public space less as a predominantly political or communicative but, first and foremost, as a cultural space (Sennett 2017). Public space is less as a static container but as a dynamic and performative process or, in other words, “an act or speech that is produced through which they come up with a list of definitions of public space as well as a list on the importance of public space, ranked according to how often they were encountered in their sources (see page 76). This data supports what I stated before: Notions of public space are not widely and depending on who is being asked one might receive very different though very plausible definitions. So, for the moment it suffices to say that there is no agreement on a clear-cut definition of public space and, I would argue, there is also no need for it. Although the definitions listed by Staeheli and Mitchell allow for an openness to be translated. PUBLIC SPACE + PUBLIC URBAN LIFE
DEFINITIONS OF PUBLIC SPACE

PHYSICAL DEFINITION [E.G. STREETS, PARKS]
MEETING PLACE OR PLACE FOR INTERACTION
SITES OF NEGOTIATION, CONTEST OR PROTEST
PUBLIC SPHERE, NO PHYSICAL FORM
OPPOSITE OF PRIVATE SPACE
SITES OF DISPLAY
PUBLIC OWNERSHIP, PUBLIC PROPERTY
PLACES OF CONTACT WITH STRANGERS
SITES OF DANGER, THREAT, VIOLENCE
PLACES OF EXCHANGE RELATIONS [E.G. SHOPPING]
SPACE OF COMMUNITY
SPACE OF SURVEILLANCE
PLACES OF OPEN ACCESS – NO OR FEW LIMITS
PLACES LACKING CONTROL BY INDIVIDUALS
PLACES GOVERNED BY OPEN FORUM DOCTRINE
IDEALIZED SPACE – NO PHYSICAL FORM

IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC SPACE

DUE TO FUNCTION [E.G. WALKING, GATHERING]
SOCIALIZATION, BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION, DISCIPLINE
DEMOCRACY, POLITICS, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS
SITES OF CONTEST
SITES OF IDENTITY FORMATION
PLACES FOR FUN, VITALITY, URBANITY, SPIRIT OF CITY
BUILDING COMMUNITY OR SOCIAL COHESION
SITES OF IDENTITY AFFIRMATION
LIVING SPACE [E.G. FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE]
JUSTICE

in terms of its spatialities alone but much more considered a practice where “the public becomes a vehicle through which diverse facets of urban life can intersect” and where “people [come] together without having to be integrated” (Simone 2010: 118). In this sense, public space cannot exist without its actors and actresses composing it and, consequently, closely tied to the anthropological cultures that are inherent in any action (Sennett 2017). Sennett describes the so-called performative or dramaturgical school as follows:

“We are interested in the street clothing, customs of greeting, rituals of dining and drinking, ways of avoiding eye contact, the places people crowd together and the places where they keep their distance, when people feel free to talk to strangers and when they do not, the bodily gestures which excite a stranger’s sexual interest and the bodily signals which forbid it – it is from these minuteud of behavior that a public realm [or space] is composed” (ibid. 588).

Simone expands on the performative nature of public space and emphasizes its capability not only to express cultural backgrounds but also to reconstruct them. “Publics”, so he says, are “about forms of being together or of being connected that go beyond the specific details of what a person does, where he or she lives and comes from” (2010:117). Public spaces, subsequently, facilitate a “common arena of life” that does not necessarily require a membership card or a sense of belonging (ibid. 119). This is not to say that membership and belonging becomes redundant as hierarchies of power remain intact and maintain their trajectories. In contexts where the “common arena of life” represents an essential element in fulfilling a need, however, say even survival, alternative “public works” can emerge thanks to the nature of public space. It creates a kind of unknow support network where people are no longer primarily perceived as individuals but as “infrastructu”e with the potential ability to fulfill a need, no matter what the cultural background (ibid. 124).

None of the three schools aim to exclude one another as they emphasize different foci in order to arrive at a collective goal, i.e. creating a living space everyone wants to live in (however unattainable it may be). So, in true spirit of its nature, not only definitions of public space can overlap and include one another, also research on public space is very inclusive. While the first two schools focus more on the democratic foundations of society, the latter focuses on creating ritual bonds but both thrive from each other’s approach. Some of the noteworthy scholars who have made ritual bonds, in a broad sense, their prime interest in the production of public space include Ervin Goffman (1959), Henri Lefebvre (1981[1974]), Michel De Certeau (1984), George Perec (2010[1975]), Guy Debord (1967[1970] and Lucius Burckhardt (2004). In addition, some urban scholars and professionals have emphasized how ritual bonds can also nurture economic bonds, among which one can find Jane Jacobs (2011[1961]), William W. Whyte (2001[1980]), and Jan Gehl (2010).

Naturally the question arises how public space defined by performative practices can materialize in the physical world of the urban sphere without falling into the trap of treating the built environment in cities as a mere backdrop, as a “stage set” for public practices or public urban life. After all, it is within and through what cities have to offer, including streets, buildings, materials, organizations and institutions as well as situations, rhythms, sensory experiences, city dwellers and so on, how public urban life or public space as a practice is acted out. Slightly more to the point, Kim Dovey views public spaces as “the primary site where a sense of ‘common’ becomes embodied in everyday life” (2016: 11). So through interaction, adoption and appropriation of the urban sphere by a multitude, public urban life can emerge. Consequently, when the urban sphere ceases to welcome public life and, instead, shuts its doors, barricades food, public urban life declines, given that modes of inclusion often go hand in hand with modes of exclusion. Such developments can be observed in a variety of examples in cities around the world, invigorated most strongly by modernist visions, neoliberal processes, and vast geographies of securitization. They tend to prioritise rational architecture, privatization, as well as an architecture of fear that, in its worst case scenario, creates a “city of walls” - all of which are only some examples how contemporary urban lifeworlds inhibit the ability for people to perform among strangers (Sennett 2017; Caldera 2001).

In order to overcome the crisis or challenges of public space without inflicting its ideological and numerical decline, Sennett proposes a move from a closed system to an open system in how we shape our world or, more precisely, build our cities. Closed systems, according to Sennett, are too “over-determined”, too “preplanned” and blindly follow rigid, functional forms for their purity, rationality and ability to exercise power and control (ibid. 589-590). Characteristic for open systems is their flexible and unfinished form and planning. They begin and end with
skeletons” that allow for enough space for potential change, making them particularly resilient (ibid. 600). Besides this, a common theme with regard to urban form, their most significant difference lies in their varying goals. The closed system aims to create boundaries, open systems rather to create memberships or borders. In allegory to natural ecologies, Sennett describes the distinct differences between these two concepts as such: “borders in a closed system identify with porosity, whereas closed systems have a preference for enclosure. What porosity entails in the urban sphere is perhaps best described by Walter Benjamin when he explains how “building and action interpenetrate in the courtyards, arcades and stairways...to become a theatre of new, unforeseen constellations.” The stamp of the definitive is avoided…” (ibid.). On a more hopeful note, porosity is the inexhaustible law of the life of this city, reappearing everywhere” (1997: 169-171).

Porous, open systems nurture public spaces in which “people react to, learn from, who are unlike themselves” - ideally - but as it is the case with most ideals, they represent goals to strive for, less reflections of reality, and such is the case with public spaces, too (Sennett 2017: 587). Porosity is particularly vital when the ideal public space, as described here actually has ever existed, exists or will ever exist in any part of this world. A number of scholars have written about this topic, arguing that the ideal public space as described here actually has ever existed, exists or will ever exist in any part of this world. A number of scholars have written about this topic, arguing that the ideal public space as described here actually has ever existed, exists or will ever exist in any part of this world. A number of scholars have written about this topic, arguing that the ideal public space as described here actually has ever existed, exists or will ever exist in any part of this world.

While notions of public space are various and can differ strongly, it appears that a large question mark looms around what kind of public spaces match contexts that are not based in a Euro-American public urban life. In other words, what kind of public spaces encourage and emerge from public urban life that is different from the Malawian one? Public space can nearly always also be equated with urban space (Low and Smith 2009). This mode of thinking about cities has changed little in recent history. It is then not so hard to understand why urban planning appears to clash so vehemently and continuously with urban realities in non-European contexts where European planning principles have been and continue to be at work. Lilongwe stands at the birth of transforming from a village city to a metropolitan city. In this sense, it represents a “city yet to come” (Simone 2004a). On this basis, it can be observed that while most traditional scholars, professionals, however, have taken a closer look at this city with the intention to first understand and then to induce change. Rather, it often goes the opposite way. So it appears to be about time to take a moment to reflect and to explore the nature of public spaces in Lilongwe with the help of ideas that are inspired by what Europeans call “spaces of tolerance” (Amin and Thrift 2002). This may be more in sync with everyday life and, as Sennett argues, may promote more commonplace urban dwellers, i.e. people with “a sense of comfort and security in the midst of strangers” (ibid. 597-597).

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Main business and commercial road in Area 2. On weekdays, this road is crowded with traders, shoppers, worshippers, and plenty of other people trying to gain something from the hustle and bustle of this place. On Sundays, most commercial activities come to an halt, revealing the naked physical environment of Old Town, the historical heart of the city.
3
MAKING SENSE OF LILONGWE
RESEARCH DESIGN
I am writing on the topic of...

Because I want to find out...

So that I can understand...

Why public spaces from a Euroamerican point of view attract so few people in Lilongwe and where public urban life occurs instead

What constitutes public space in Lilongwe and thus Malawian urbanity which essentially represents the foundation for any form of urban development in Malawi.

Public space in Lilongwe
Upon a trip to Lilongwe in spring 2017 (3 months), I managed to outline a research topic in a field that would no longer be entirely foreign to me during my second trip in April/May 2018 (2 months). In the months between I kept in touch with some of the inhabitants so I could stay in the loop with what was happening in Lilongwe. During my second trip to Lilongwe, I began with tracing public spaces in the central areas of the city by mapping places of everyday center and places where people in Lilongwe gathered. By means of go-alongs, as outlined by Margareth Könenbach (2003), with a number of subjects I explored different kinds of public urban life and, thus, created an inventory of public spaces in Lilongwe (see page 96-97). Go-alongs allowed me to observe the unobserved and public urban life through the eyes of inhabitants and less through my own Eurocentric eyes. Though I still cannot claim to have seen things in its full size as my external vision can always only be partial, I can be seen as an attempt to get closer to a more grounded understanding of Lilongwe’s public urban life without imposing an external reading on the local context. Go-alongs also proved to be helpful when the research was more Chichewa spoken around me than English. In these cases, “communication” between the informants and me consisted of silence, broken English, gestures, and movements, which, in a way, were telling much more than an interview could have. But luckily, most of the time I was able to resort to an English speaker who could transcribe my findings for me and respond to further questions or clarifications. In total, I conducted eight go-alongs which lasted between three hours to an entire day, i.e. as long as there was daylight. I partly selected go-along partners according to different socioeconomic backgrounds or was referred to them through existing contacts. They led me to informal and formal parts of Lilongwe, either by foot, minibus or car. My partners included both men and women between the ages of 19 and 41. Since the selection of my go-along partners were indirectly guided by my existing social network, I used several different patterns of Lilongwe as a methodological supplement in order to further broaden my inventory of public spaces. Once I had collected around 200 potential public spaces in my inventory, I began to narrow down places of interest for my research. In a second stage, I selected eight case studies where I conducted more in-depth empirical studies. The selection was based on differences to EuroAmerican public spaces, from my point of view, as I also kept in mind that the research findings would first reach an EuroAmerican audience (and only later a Malawian one). Five of the case studies are discussed as brief introductions for potential further research, three examples are presented in more depth as they seem particular noteworthy for Lilongwe’s current public sphere. The selected examples make no claim to cover the entirety of Lilongwe’s public urban life, rather they serve as thought-provoking impulses that strongly encourage urban practitioners to incorporate more of such urban realities in Lilongwe’s future urban development. During research, I oscillated between silent observer, more company, and conversation partner and collected data by means of participatory methods, drawings, storytelling, and narrative interviews. I documented my findings in field notes, photographs, videos, voice recordings and the occasional artefact. With the help of a smartphone I was able to do much of my documentation but, as I knew from my first trip to Lilongwe, it also represented a highly helpful tool for getting and staying in touch with informants, namely via WhatsApp. A lot of people in Malawi either use the messenger on their own smartphone or have access to somebody who can serve as a substitute for them. WhatsApp also worked as a communication tool in such a variety of settings that it felt like second nature when, for instance, the Director of Land, Housing and Urban Development messaged me on WhatsApp to schedule a meeting, or when I was sending photos to Malawian protestors, or when I entered a conversation with over 250 members of my WhatsApp group. It also enabled me to connect with urban planning experts with whom I conducted semi-structured expert interviews in order to collect Malawian perspectives and voices on my research topic, as well. The qualitative data collected in Lilongwe was paired with statistical data, existing maps and plans, relevant gray literature, Malawian literature and further information from different media. By applying urban assemblage and producing an urban ethnography, I finally arrived at different contributions to what constitute Malawian urbanity?
Doing anthropological field research in order to collect qualitative data has been a contested field ever since its beginnings, given it is so intrinsically connected to colonial manners. In a way, it seemingly permits the researcher to speak on behalf of others, justified by knowledge that is informed by a more or less long-term presence in the respective field. “Being there” (C.W. Watson 1999) has been a steady mantra in field research, knowingly outlining an unattainable goal for any anthropologist. Now, despite its imperial past and a certain sense of impossibility, doing field research also appears to be one of the least detached ways of reflecting contemporary human realities which, after all, is exactly what it is meant to do. By openly producing a non-objective account for scientific audiences, field research does what other sciences might be unable to do: produce knowledge that makes no claim to be universal and, more so, makes its subjectivity very clear. With this in mind, I am aware and also wish to draw attention to the fact that my research and findings presented here can only be read and understood as one narrative of many, though, with a hope that this narrative is shared by many. In this manner, my position as a researcher more resembles the role of a writer as I am telling my story and my view of things observed, which, in turn, are heavily influenced by socially constructed perceptions I carry with me from Germany to wherever I go (Clarke 2003). Particularly in the context of Lilongwe, one that is so profoundly different to my usual living environment, my role as a researcher and the lens applied to this research should not only be clear to me but also be clear to any reader of this work (Whyte 1993[1943]). That being said, I am a female urban scholar in her late 20s with an academic background in cultural anthropology. I have bicultural roots due to my German and Taiwanese parents and, therefore, oscillate between Asian and European lifeworlds. I grew up in Germany, i.e. in a democratic country that is part of the EU and that has a social welfare system. I was privileged enough to attend school and university up to the master’s level, to travel to numerous countries on various continents, and to have never experienced poverty or hunger myself. In Germany, I would belong to the middle income group, in Malawi I was a member of a white high income group. During my stay in Lilongwe, I was living in a shared house in a central area where my house mates and I could afford to hire a house- hold employee, a gardener and a few guards who would have an eye on the surrounding walls and the gate. Most of the people and lives I have based my field research on have little in common with the life that I know, which is not to say that I should be deemed an incompetent candidate for this task. Erving Goffman once said: “The first day you’ll see more than you’ll see ever again. And you’ll see things that you won’t see again” (1974), meaning to say: we all become blind in our everyday routines and sometimes somebody who is not part of the routine can see more than the actual person who is confronted with it day by day.
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PUBLIC SPACES IN LILONGWE
Public urban life in Lilongwe has many faces and it is impossible to show all of them. In fact, a comprehensive overview of Lilongwe’s public urban life would reveal a thorough misconception thereof as there can be no such thing as an overview. Like there is no African “type” of cities, there are also no “types” of public urban life. In this work, public urban life is understood as the framework that encompasses public practices. While practices follow certain rhythms, each exercise practiced is unique in its own, hence, no type. People are not automated beings and neither are their urban environments static. As such, public urban life, like life itself, is fleeting and continuously reconfigured from one moment to another. Depictions of public urban life then merely represent snapshots, images of singular moments and, more importantly, cannot be categorized, nor programmed. Public urban life has its own ways of carving out public spaces, may it follow the path as envisioned in urban development plans or not, which has vast consequences for the city’s urban development.

This is particularly the case in cities like Lilongwe which “appear dynamic and static at the same time”, implying that “sometimes conditions change with remarkable speed” while it is not entirely clear how, why, and who is causing the changes (Simone 2005: 6).

This work perceives public space less as space shaped by materialities in which certain practices occur but as space that only comes to exist through public practices. They are being produced and come to exist because practices besow spaces with meaning through the cultural layers found within them, so the argument here (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]). In a world where Western culture has more often than not reigned over other cultures, it appears just about time to scrape the local ground for unaccredited potentials for public space. Especially so, when foreign ideas have largely shown to be unsuitable.

In this chapter, the attention is drawn to eight examples of public urban life as encountered in the field of research of which three are presented as zoom ins in more detail. The other five examples can be regarded as entry points for further research and provide a broader view of public urban life as found in Lilongwe. The selection is based on what - to my European eye – appeared “non-European”. But they were also selected in order to illustrate the great diversity of public spaces in Lilongwe, all of which have thus far been widely ignored.

In an effort to emphasize the practice-based nature of public space, the titles of the examples presented in the following are extended by an -ing suffix that grammatically turns nouns into progressive verbs (one could also speak of public spac[ing] instead of public space). They are meant to function as a continuous reminder that public spaces are constructed through what people do, less the other way around, though it plays a role in how people and materialities interact and which the following examples attempt to illustrate.

Note In the presented case studies, the actors are highlighted in a different color in order to emphasize who or what is behind certain practices and who or what shapes public urban life.
INVENTORY OF PUBLIC SPACES
INTERSECTIONS OF PUBLIC URBAN LIFE

FOOTBALL FIELD
GOLONGOZA CAMP
GATED RESTAURANTS
PARKING LOT
CHIBUKU HUT
ALCOHOL
MARIHUANA/CHAMBA SHADE
CHISAKASA [CHAT HOUSE]
SMALL DIRT PATHS
SIDE OF MAIN TARMAC ROADS
FRIDAYS 8-11 AM AT THE CHINSAPO MATERNITY WARD
KACHERE
FLOODED BROWNFIELD
PILE OF GARBAGE
DIRT PATH OR SQUARE IN FRIDAYS NIGHTS IN CHIGWIRI HOMES
MINIBUSES
HITCHHIKING
ADMACR CENTERS
FIXED SALES POINTS OF STREET VENDORS (FOOD, FRUIT+VEGETABLES, COAL, MEALS, ELECTRICITY, PHONE CREDIT, NON-EDIBLES)
SERVICE POINTS FOR CUTTING HAIR, WATCHING MOVIES, PLAYING MUSIC
PUBLIC OFFICE
PUBLIC SCHOOLS
PRIVATE SCHOOLS
NURSERY BUILDING
CHURCH PREMISES
INFORMAL MARKETS WITH TEMPORARY STRUCTURES
FORMAL MALL COMPLEX WITHOUT TEMPORARY STRUCTURES
AFRICAN BIBLE COLLEGE (ABC) CAMPUS
ASSEMBLIES OF GOD CAMPUS
SHOPPING MALLS
GATEWAY MALL
CROSSROADS
CITY MALL
OLD TOWN MALL
PACIFIC MALL
EXECUTIVE MALL
SHOPPING COMPLEXES
SANTA PLAZA
GAME COMPLEX
SANAA
WATER KIOSK
LIKUNI PETROL STATION
PLACES OF CONSUMPTION
WESTERN RESTAURANTS
CLUBS
BARS
PRIVATE GYM
CHEZNETEBA
BWANDILO AT NIGHT
LARK’S
GOLDEN PEACOCK
FOUR SEASONS
UMODZI PARK
GOVERNMENTAL BUILDINGS
CIVIC OFFICE
ROAD TRAFFIC DEPARTMENT
IMMIGRATION OFFICE
CAPITAL HILL
LABOR OFFICE
WATER BOARD
ESCOM
CRAFT MARKET
MLAMBE CENTER
STANDING IN LINE AT A BANK
PETROL STATIONS
M1 MAIN ROAD
CIVO STADIUM
BINGU STADIUM
BUS DEPOTS
LABOR OFFICE
MALANGALANGA
INTERCAPE TOTAL STATION
BUS STATION BEHIND M1
PUMA STATION
KAMUZU YOUTH INSTITUTE
TSOKA MARKET
KAUMA MARKET
AREA 13 MARKET
CHINSAPO 2 MARKET
POOL TABLE
BAWO GAME
PAINTED DRAUGHT BOARD
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN CHINSAPO
STREET LIFE ON MAIN ROADS
WEDDINGS
FUNERALS
SWIMMING POOLS
STREET CORNERS
KABAZA STOPS
MANDASI VENDORS
TREES ON THE SIDE OF THE STREET
BOTANICAL GARDEN
LINGADZI FOREST
RIVER
RIDING A BICYCLE
TAKING A TUKTUK
ACROBATICS BEHIND A HOUSE
REED MATT
BWANDILO
CHIWAYA STALLS
ASSEMBLIES OF GOD
REVIVAL GARDEN
LIBRARY
WUHAN SUPERMARKET
SHOP FRONTS
KHONES
STREET CURBS WITH COOKER/Stove
DRAINAGES
SUPERMARKET
OLD CHIBIKU
NEW CHIBIKU
SHOPRIGHT
SPAR
KAPANI
7/11
CHURCH
ENGAGEMENTS
TRADITIONAL CEREMONIES
AREA 3 MARKET
CURTAIN MARKET
MADSOCC
AZUNGU PLACES
PRIVATE SCHOOL EVENTS
ACTIVITIES
BUNDA MOUNTAIN
KAMUZU DAM
HOTELS
LODGES
SIMAMA
BRIDGEVIEW HOTEL
WAKA WAKA HOTEL
KIBOKO HOTEL
LATITUDE
MADIDI LODGE
MANGOCHI MOTEL
KORTASIA
ROSE GARDEN
MABUYA CAMP
KUMBALI
EDEN LODGE
WALMONT HOTEL
UFULU LODGE
JOHN’S SHOP
ROAD INTERSECTIONS
SELF-CONSTRUCTED BRIDGES
THICK BUSHES
PRIVATE CARS
WIFI HOTSPOTS
SOLAR PANELS
PHONE CHARGING BOOTH
ELECTRICITY
LIGHT
BRAA/BBQ
COMMUNITY GROUNDS
PLAY CENTERS
JUMPING CASTLES
FUNCITY AMUSEMENT PARK
GOLF COURSE
CHINSAPO SECONDARY SCHOOL HALL
TV SETS
PA-SYSTEMS
TOWN HALL
SUGAR CANE
BILLBOARD CONSTRUCTIONS WITH STAIRS
CULTURE CLUBS
ROUNDABOUT
PUBLIC HOSPITAL
HIGH MAIZE FIELD
HOOP + STICK
WHATSAPP
BODY-SIZE MIRRORS
CARLSBERG GREENS
FORESTS
MAIN ROADS AT NIGHT
FUNCTIONING STREET LIGHT
DEVIL’S STREET
NETBALL FIELD
...
SELECTION OF CASE STUDIES
Water kiosk in Chinsapo [Area 57]

Women getting water from the water kiosk in Chinsapo [Area 57]
Piece workers waiting for a job outside the Labor Office at the Lilongwe District Council. Men wait for potential employers in front of the labor office building next to the main road. Many of them look for a job in construction. Job-seeking women sit separately behind the building and are often hired as household employees.
A selection of conversations held in a WhatsApp group with 256 members...
Water is life and, therefore, part of everyday life. Most of rural Malawians source water from boreholes but the situation is slightly different in urban areas (JICA 2010). The Lilongwe Water Board (LWB) predominantly supplies the city with water through communal standpipes, also called water kiosks. They target high density residential areas in peri-urban locations, which, overall, house over three quarters of Lilongwe’s population (UN Habitat 2011). This makes water kiosks an integral part of public urban life for the majority of Lilongwe’s inhabitants. Each water kiosk is designed to serve around 50 households with an average of 4 to 5 people per household. The first water kiosk was constructed upon establishment of the Water Board in 1947 (LWB). By 2009, the LWB had installed nearly 500 water kiosks. According to a survey in 2017, over 90% have access to clean water, nonetheless, many residents of Lilongwe remain vulnerable to water-borne diseases. Cholera outbreaks, for instance, form a real risk residents of all areas are aware of, even if the chances of actually being affected vary. In addition to that, existing water kiosks cannot keep up with the demand and they often face a number of shortcomings, such as punctured pipes, lack of formal contracts with kiosk operators and spiked water prices. Though things are steadily improving, having access to clean running water at home is a luxury only few inhabitants of Lilongwe can experience.

At one of the water kiosks in Chinsapo [Area 57], general opening hours are roughly from 6 to 10 AM and 3 to 6 PM. Mornings are busier than evenings. The key, which comes in the shape of a water valve, is with the key keeper, usually a woman living closeby, who has been contracted to manage the water kiosk. She also collects the 20 MK for 20 liters or 40 MK for 40 liters as advertised in handwriting on the water kiosk. Once a week, an employee of the water supplier comes to collect the water fees and checks the meter.

The key keeper, in return, receives a steady income. She stands out as being the only woman carrying a purse in which she collects the banknotes. Most fellow women have wrapped a chitenje around them, in various colors and to different degrees of wear-and-tear. Placing one’s plastic bucket behind those who came first forms the queue and enables its owners to roam around without being cut in line. Often only one pipe is in use so waiting times give a good reason for a chat before everyone goes their ways just to meet again a little while later or the following days. Fetching water is a female domain, so water kiosks are predominantly female spaces as well as for children. The occasional unmarried man joins in and he may appear slightly out of place but he is “most welcome”, as people say. With efficiency in mind, most women opt for the 40 liter buckets despite the heavy load. One assists one another by placing the heavy buckets on each other’s heads because this is how the water is carried home.

Water kiosks, along with water tanks and pumps, do not only span a network that caters to those seeing clean water. They also orchestrate the daily movements, particularly for the women in Chinsapo, who often walk more than 20 minutes to the closest water kiosk. As such, footpaths are forged, faces are familiarized, news are being exchanged, and social ties and disconnects come to the forefront. Most interestingly, fetching water takes the domestic sphere, literally, to the streets. The fact that water kiosks are also used as places of encounter outside opening hours is living proof for their pulling power beyond being a source of water. For instance, a group of teenage boys might mingle underneath a water tank, listening and dancing to some music, or there can be two young women who appropriate the water kiosk and turn it into a bench to have a better chat. In this sense, water kiosks represent major nodes in neighborhoods like Chinsapo where, in a way, hardships can also be softened by being shared.
The Labor Office, or „Rabor“ as people say (R and L are pronounced the same in Chichewa) is found in the Lilongwe District Council (LDC) building. It is centrally located in Old Town, close to commercial shops, banks, markets and transport hubs. During weekdays and daylight hours, many people pass through the premises for a multitude of reasons. One specific group will be given attention here: piece workers.

When passing by the institutional area, one cannot help but notice the unusual high number of men sitting around in the dry green grass, underneath trees, and leaning at walls, seemingly waiting for something. At a first glance, it is not clear what they are waiting for; in a second thought, they do not seem to know either. Nonetheless, from all corners of Lilongwe they flock here to find work without any intention to apply for a job at the Labor Office. Instead, they run their very own labor office, outdoors, in public, on institutional land, with their very own welfare system. They are contracted on a work-on-demand-basis for however long employer and employee agree to. More euphemistically one could say they are freelancers. „We want quick and big money“, somebody explains without a hint of megalomania. Whether these piece workers make „quick and big money“ is a matter of the beholder. One informant says that he has been coming here from Monday to Saturday since 2013 (others have been around since 2011). The minibus station is right next to the Labor Office but he cannot afford public transport so he walks up to an hour from home to „Rabor“ and back again. He used to be employed by a construction company before where he had earned slightly over 1,000 MK (ca. 2.50 Euros in 2013) per day while as a piece worker he can earn between 3,000 to 5,000 MK (ca. 3.50 to 5.80 Euros in 2018) - if he finds work. How does one find work? „You simply ask me. You are my human resources now“. This is to say, people find the piece workers, less the other way around. Competition is hard and it gets harsher during dry season when even more people cover the earthen ground. The central location of this outdoor labor office is essential for the piece worker’s income as they depend on high visibility and open accessibility for both themselves and their potential employers. If nobody knows you are looking for a job, how is one to give you a job? At the labor office, the rules of the game are fairly straightforward. Not only for the men waiting here but also for the women who come with the same intention but sit separately from the men. They mingle and wait for a (good) job offer in „their“ corner while sitting on the bare ground on their colorful chitenjes. Waiting, a seemingly tedious affair, never seems to lead to boredom however, so they say. The men exchange news from their respective areas, they chat, listen to radio, play Bawo*, eat local sugar cane or groundnuts, play with their phones (note: no smartphones), listen to the preachers who come here every noon, or, simply stay quiet and think of their families at home. When there is food, it is being shared. When somebody is missing, which means he has found a job, it is noticed as everyone knows each other’s faces. Backpacks hang from the tree branches, signaling that one is always ready to do work. A brand new building, much bigger and modern, is currently being constructed opposite of the current office building and the LDC will soon move in although it is unclear how soon. Given the close proximity between the old and new building, existing patterns, networks and ties are likely to remain fairly the same. Heightened security measures, e.g. the walls around the new building, however, might trigger some changes. Currently, the LDC building seems to have a fairer relaxed policy for those who enter the building and who prefer the adjacent outdoor „office“, creating both an accessible and affordable meeting ground on formal premises for those living in informal areas and empowering them with a means to make a living.
In Malawi, trees are abundant and play a vital role not only as a resource for wood or in terms of ecology and aesthetics. Trees are being "used" in a variety of ways. People frequently use their roots and stems as seating or tables, the branches are used as hangers and, most importantly, the crowns are pleasant umbrellas that protect from both sun and rain. The shape of the tree sets the parameters of usability. Certain trees have even gained a symbolic significance due to their shape. Baobab trees, for instance - majestically large, comically corpulent and often very old - are considered sacred and people "visit" a tree to worship it.

Then there is the kachere tree, a "very big tree where people from different tribes meet and share their problems and help each other", as an inhabitant from Lilongwe describes it. Traditionally, the kachere tree, a ficus, marked the assembly point where a traditional leader or "chief" would make announcements while the community would gather and listen in its shade. Though the traditional use of the kachere tree is still very much alive in Malawi, the uses have expanded and evolved from there. Particularly in urban areas, where traditional worlds mix with modern lifestyles, the changes become most prevalent. In Chichewa, "kachere" no longer only refers to a specific tree and assembly point, it has become a synonym for meeting points in general. This is exemplified, for instance, in the naming practice of rest houses and lodges, which incorporate the word "kachere", emphasizing that in the home away from home one will meet "people from different tribes", too. Most interestingly, in Chinsapo [Area 57], the term "kachere" has even been elevated to the name of an entire neighborhood. Subsequently, in this context, kachere is not necessarily associated with its traditional understanding, being a tree for gatherings, but also with a particular location in the urban fabric of Lilongwe. While Kachere in Chinsapo was named after a still existing kachere tree, marking the location of this neighborhood, the neighborhood itself has grown, expanded and, become a namesake. So there is a Kachere shop, a Kachere hairdresser, and a Kachere prison - none of which have any relation with the kachere tree and its assembly character. However, there are also exceptions. The Kachere Market is one. As it is the nature of markets, it attracts vendors and customers from around the area and those attracted by the crowds, forming a nucleus of public urban life within Chinsapo. It runs along a more or less straight dirt road and besides the typical commercial activities, one can observe that the market also serves as a place to stop for a chat, where one visits each other, where children play, where news are being exchanged and where one can show face to see and be seen. In this manner, the market has become a landmark in Chinsapo, a location that can be identified by both local residents and those coming from elsewhere as Kachere is also a fixed stop on Lilongwe's minibus routes coming from Old Town. Remarkably, despite being a somewhat prominent place within Chinsapo, there is no sign, not a name plate nor an indicative line, that would officially pay tribute to Kachere as a neighborhood. It shows up in no maps, no plans, no drawings. But it exists - in the minds of the people. To know about the Kachere Market or "kacheres" in general then requires to know people who know and tell you about it. In a way, kachere trees and its conceptual offsprings can thus be read as indicators for already existing public spaces in Lilongwe's urban fabric, even when they have not materialized (yet) in Lilongwe's formal geographies. Different to planned public spaces, they were born from a tradition and are flexible enough to accommodate transformations that go hand in hand with the changes of public urban life.

So, when a tree turns into a lodge or a neighborhood, it can still retain its "kachere character" but, other than town halls or memorial towers, these landmarks were not artificially built but planted organically. Thus, they potentially provide a socially more sustainable and fertile soil for public urban life that is less imposed and more at ease.
Religion plays a very important role in the life of most Malawians, which the country largely owes to its long and influential history of missionaries. It began in the 19th century when British colonizers and explorers like David Livingstone carried “Christianity, commerce and civilization” to Malawi (Nkomazana 1998). This first put a halt to the brutal and bloody slave trade by the Arabs and then also introduced a previously non-existent education and health sector to the country. The construction of missionary schools and hospitals improved Malawian living standards significantly and up to today missionaries enjoy a rather positive reputation. Most Malawians are Christians (83% in 2010), the second largest group is formed by Muslims (13%), a legacy left by the Arabs and particularly prevalent in Malawi’s Southern Region. Most Christian Malawians attend services on Sundays, while some are Saturdays. One cannot help but notice that practices of worship are part of everyday public life not only in church. They enter all kinds of situations even though its presence has begun to shrink among younger generations in urban areas. Still, an overwhelming majority regularly prays before eating a meal and after meetings. Frequently, one makes references to God in their speech. It appears, being a devoted Christian is part of public decency, no matter if one is a faithful service attendant or not. So, for many Malawians, attending church service on weekends is an un debating deed practiced religiously nationwide. An inhabitant from Lilongwe explains why. “There are two reasons why Malawians attend church. For one, church is the center point for spiritual guidance and God’s connection. Secondly, to ensure a respectful funeral that is according to faith’s protocol. Not for yourself…when you are dead, you are dead…You don’t want to disgrace your family. If there is no protocol, there is no control over the burial, and your family is the ones who are going to choose the clothes and the ceremonies. You have to plan it and have it”. Among young people, church services are not a place to socialize, neither do many believe in the need to go. So on Sundays, most businesses and offices close, work is put down and the chitenje is replaced by a suit to go to church. Most church buildings in Lilongwe are solitary structures, in Kauma*, however, not only one but several churches line the road. Somewhat resembling a church or churches square, it is here where Kauma’s inhabitants meet each other on weekends. One can rest assured that one’s family, friends, and neighbors as well as unknown faces of the same denomination will be around. In Kauma, church services are in Chichewa but there are also a number of English services in Lilongwe that accommodate non-Chichewa speakers. During service, men and women sit separately unless one is married. Before and after service, one can mingle, representing one of the few spaces where a married man and a married woman can be seen together in public without raising eyebrows. Children play in the open space around the churches as well as in the last row of seats in the church. Some people, particularly children again, snack from a small cone of popcorn during mass which they bought outside for 20 MK from a street vendor. Some devoted church members come to church early to attend bible school or to exchange anecdotes from the past week in which they personally witnessed God’s workings. The square fills up and empties again in steady flows as church services begin and end at different times. Never is there a feeling of overpopulation. One can comfortably spot familiar faces and have a chat before parting just to see each other, latest, next weekend again.

On special occasions like weddings, churches become an attraction not only to those of the same denomination but for all wedding guests. A woman from Lilongwe, who used to be a regular wedding crasher” as a teenager comments: “Everybody thinks they are invited” so usually, in the afternoon, when snacks and drinks are being served, the number of “guests” suddenly swells up, “It’s private but it becomes public when nobody will stop you”, the woman explains and adds “because of your skin color, they will give you a chair”, referring to the special status of azungus.

Churches in Lilongwe tend to be very inclusive places as religious denominations generally have an interest to grow. The fact that many Malawians foster a deep connection with (a) God produces a not so insignificant pulling power of public urban life. Due to the great attraction of Sunday and Saturday church services, public urban life in Lilongwe is given a steady rhythm in which many other forms of public urban life must operate, too. To acknowledge the fact that certain beliefs and temporalities can override other forms of public urban life appears to be yet another crucial aspect of Lilongwe’s public spaces.
“In countries like Malawi where mobile phone companies ask for an arm and a leg for SMS service, WhatsApp is god-sent.” This is how a journalist begins his newspaper article about WhatsApp in Malawi, bringing the secret of its success to the point. WhatsApp, a free messenger application that works with most mobile phones capable of connecting to the internet, is widely used in Malawi. It represents a means of communication ranging from informal chitchat among friends to professional discussions with superiors. On some government websites, WhatsApp numbers are even given as an optional contact. Why, despite many other alternatives, is WhatsApp so ubiquitously present in Malawi’s society? Perhaps due to the fact that it is affordable, fairly reliable and it offers a few additional services a text message simply could not do for you, such as sending images, videos, and recordings. Perhaps WhatsApp was just in the right place at the right time. In 2009, Malawi’s two mobile operators TNM and AirTel introduced mobile-broadband and, in the same year, WhatsApp entered the market. Both, TNM and AirTél offer daily, weekly and monthly WhatsApp bundles customers can purchase to use only WhatsApp specifically. Fact is, WhatsApp has become nearly everyone who can also does, uses WhatsApp and their group chat function. By now, the majority of Malawians own a mobile phone but it still belongs very much to the urban domain as ownership rates in urban households are at 85% and only 42% in rural households (MACRA 2015). Through WhatsApp groups, the real time messaging application transforms into a broader social media platform that allows WhatsApp users to connect on all matters of concern. Its significance in Malawi’s society is exemplified by the fact that other social media platforms, like Facebook, are even being used to connect on WhatsApp. Something along the lines of “oh I hate WhatsApp groups, I’m already in so many”, can frequently be heard, yet boycotting WhatsApp groups rarely becomes an option as the benefits and their presence in and for public debate are too vast to ignore. From finding likeminded people, to exchanging news and knowledge, to doing business, WhatsApp often facilitates the discussion of current affairs as well as the first contact between two or more strangers. As such, it embodies a space where time is being shared while being in separate locations. Moreover, it functions as a virtual prequel to a potential meeting in urban space which, in a way, turns the place of encounter into a public space, though admittedly, it is a very selected public. With this in mind and depending on the context, the member limit of 256 people per WhatsApp group can either be read as an annoying technocratic feature or as a welcome gatekeeper, ensuring that any given public is exclusive to 256 members only.

"IN COUNTRIES LIKE MALAWI WHERE MOBILE PHONE COMPANIES ASK FOR AN ARM AND A LEG FOR SMS SERVICE, WHATSAPP IS GOD-SENT."
Bawo can be played nearly everywhere and it is being played nearly everywhere. To shed more light on the workings behind playing Bawo in Lilongwe’s public sphere, a specific site is presented here. The site is located on the premises of Lilongwe’s Craft Market next to the Post Office. It is in the heart of Old Town, on the edge of Area 3.

Before one can see them, one is likely to hear them. Tap, tap, tap, TAP. It is the sound of people playing Bawo. Depending on the material of the board and the seeds being used, the sounds may come out shrill, clunky, and brassy or slightly dull, heavy, and muffled. Either way, the sounds are produced by the movement of seeds, perhaps in the shape of marbles, beans, or shells, hitting a metal or wooden board. Players move one or several seeds from one pocket to another and, oftentimes, finish their last move with a smash, signaling to the other player that it is his or her turn. Likewise, these signature sounds work like soft sirens, luring in players and spectators alike. In the soundscapes of Lilongwe, the Bawo taps can easily get lost in the shuffle. Once one pays attention to these sounds, though, they seem to appear from, literally, every corner of the city. Wherever there are small or large crowds, Bawo games are not far to be found.
THE NAME OF THE GAME IS BAWO

Bawo or bao (pronounced: bawo) is being played up and down the eastern coast of Africa. In fact, different variations of it are being played all over Africa, in Asia, the Caribbean, South America as well as some parts of Europe. Bawo belongs to the class of mancala board games in which the goal is to capture and obstruct the opponent by spreading seeds or similar objects (mancala is derived from the Arabic term: zuwa). While Bawo is Malawian, it is played on a board with four rows, other variations only have two or three and also follow different rules. The historical roots of Bawo are disputed. Some claim that it even goes as far back as to the Ancient Egyptians. In any case, there is an agreement on the fact that Bawo has already been played for many generations and will most likely be played for many more generations to come. Bawo is being played on a district, regional and national level, in both rural and urban areas. Interestingly, it is played across all generations, genders, tribes, religions, and socioeconomic strata, though, to various degrees of enthusiasm. Many learn how to play the game already at a young age and hardly a Malawian passes through childhood, graduating to adolescence... without having learnt bawo. Even the urbanized youth more familiar with reggae or hip-hop culture has at some point in his life been exposed to this "count-and-capture: board game" (Chimombo 2009). One might not actively pursue playing it but the rules are known to nearly everyone, despite the fact that the rules of the game can be fairly complex. The rules are hard to make out only by watching other players. Much of what occurs on the board might not exactly reflect what is going through a player’s mind as the movements do not necessarily show every single step towards making the move played. "It is important to count" an avid Bawo player clarifies. It is important to count the number of seeds in a pocket, on the board as a whole, and the number of pockets one can traverse with a move. Bawo is very much a mathematical mind game that requires much skill and experience if one aspires to be a good player. There are two sets of rules how Bawo can be played, a basic and advanced version. In all seriousness, they are also commonly referred to as "women's and childeren’s version" and "men's version", somewhat reflecting how gender roles are broadly perceived in this country. The basic version is easier to learn and play, the advanced version works like the basic version but starts with a more complex setup.

In order to learn the rules and to become an advanced player, one needs to have time to "waste time", as some would say. For many people in Malawi, time spent on something that does not earn you something is a luxury one cannot afford. If one, however, has so much time at hand because nothing is being gained anyway, leisure time comes in excess and pastime activities like Bawo turn into welcome distractions. In urban areas of Malawi, both women and men are equally considered breadwinners even though not everyone necessarily works for an income for varying reasons. In any case, women additionally carry the burden of taking care of the domestic sphere. So, spending of time, it is impossible to ignore that the majority of Bawo players seen in public are men. It is men of different age and social standing but it is nearly always only men. Upon asking a woman from Lilongwe why she barely plays Bawo despite the fact that she knows the rules and enjoys playing it, she confirms: "It is a game for men. They have nothing to do. They have time for this". Women, as she is implying, need to do the cooking, and washing, and take care of the children and, therefore, do not have time to waste time with playing Bawo. Anyway, she much more prefers to chat, she adds. So it happens that one mostly sees groups of men playing the game and only in few cases one may spot the odd woman playing as well. Similar gender divisions are found in a number of other pastime activities, for instance, in football and netball, the former being a predominantly male activity, while the latter is mostly played by girls and women.

As already briefly touched upon, when two players get together to play a round of Bawo, oftentimes they do not stay alone for too long. Bawo is generally a game made for two but offering entertainment for many. Rarely is it played in the privacy of one's home as playing Bawo outside appears to be just as much a feature of the game as the board and its seeds itself. Thus, it is deliberately set up in prominent places where the public is sure to spot the players. Spectators and other eager players then join and surround the two players, closely paying attention to every move, commenting and debating in both excitement and despair once a move was made. Silence, however, generally wraps the thoughts of a Bawo player. One could compare it to the atmosphere of a chess or tennis game. Bawo games are shows without conscious performers as the performing artists are usually entirely taken up by the game, paying little attention to its audience. A game usually does not last longer than 15 to 20 minutes, experienced players barely take a minute to make out what will be their next move (continuously counting and counting). When there is no board to play on, a Bawo game can easily and economically be set up by digging a few holes into the ground and collecting a few seeds. Some claim that this is how Bawo originally developed on the lake shores of Malawi, by digging holes in the sand on the beach. In this manner, Bawo represents a very social and inclusive game where technically everyone interested in watching or participat- ing is welcome. Depending on the social make up of a Bawo setting, however, they can also trigger feelings of intimidation, disturbance, or perhaps even hostility. If there is money involved, for instance, players also begin to scan the spectators carefully before slipping a banknote under the board. Rarely anyone would openly admit that they are gambling. For one, in a religious country like Malawi, gambling is frowned upon and regarded as an evil of society.
HOW TO PLAY BAWO

BASIC VERSION

Set Up
1 Board
12 Seeds per person

Goal
Capture all of your opponent’s front row seeds OR paralyze your opponent by leaving him/her with only one seed in each pocket.

Organization
Each player owns 2 rows of seeds, a front and a back row. Front and back rows are not visible to the opponent. The starting row is determined by the number of seeds. If there are an odd number of seeds, use an empty pocket as the starting row. The first player is the one who has more seeds in the front row. If you moved clockwise (left) before, you need to start one seed to the right of your first pocket (in the front row). If you moved counterclockwise (right) before, you need to start one seed to the left of your first pocket (in the back row).

Capture
If your last seed ends in an empty pocket, your turn is over.

Proceed with the front row (a single seed is placed in each pocket).

Move
Start moving by picking up all of the seeds in one empty pocket and drop one seed in each pocket. You can choose whether to move clockwise or counterclockwise. Your last seed dropped determines whether you can carry on moving and spreading your seeds.

Spread
If your last seed ends in a back row, and the pocket is not empty, your turn is over. You can carry on moving and spreading your seeds.

Turn Over
If your last seed ends in an empty pocket, your turn is over.

Capture/Eat
If your last seed ends in a front row opposite your opponent’s seeds, you can capture all of the seeds in the pocket attacked. Only the front row can be attacked.

Move
If your last seed ends in a back row and the pocket is not empty, your turn is over. You can choose whether to move clockwise or counterclockwise. Your last seed dropped determines whether you can carry on moving and spreading your seeds.

Capture
If your last seed ends in an empty pocket, your turn is over.

Proceed with the front row (a single seed is placed in each pocket).

THE BAWO ARENA

Lilongwe’s Craft Market is located on the premises of Lilongwe’s Post Office in the very center of Old Town, amidst bustling businesses, shops, banks, traffic and all kinds of city commotion. Originally, the market developed from a few informal stalls with simple sheets or self-constructed structures. Today, it extends to more than 30 stalls, all lined up where perhaps otherwise there would have been more parking spaces. As of mid 2017, some of the informal structures were replaced by more permanent structures that are made of concrete walls and corrugated iron roofs in contrast to wooden branches, cardboards, plastic and wires. While vendors did not pay any market fees before, as technically they had only created the market through encroachment, the permanent structures can only be used for a monthly fee of 8,000 MK (ca. 9,50 Euro). Despite the extra costs, the benefits seem to outweigh the financial burden. Particularly the roof is being welcomed by the vendors and enables them to still be confined to their temporary structures. “When it rains, we can’t sell while the others make business. It’s not fair”, one of the vendors explains and who is waiting for more permanent structures to be built. Simultaneously to the renovation work at the Post Office, they were constructed as part of a public sector program endorsed by the current president. The Post Office has now become the MULAME CENTER, shining bright in red and yellow colors. It is also known as One Stop Public Service Delivery Center, where Lilongwe’s inhabitants can collect passports, drivers’ licenses, D cards, birth and death certificates and manage paper work for their vehicles all in one place on top of sending their regular mail. Increased by the extra costs, the benefits seem to outweigh the financial burden. 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The One Stop Public Service Delivery Center, generally referred to as mlambe center, was opened in 2017 in response to the public service stations in Lilongwe that struggle to cope with the masses coming to their offices and dealing with their requests (mlambe is the Chichewa word for “baobab”).

The Craft Market is accessed through a two-lane vehicle entrance that leads directly onto the parking lot. Car traffic is moderate though consistent, the same can be said about pedestrians coming in and out.

The parking lot is located in a highly central location of Lilongwe and, as such, does not only attract visitors of the Post Office, the mlambe center, or the Craft Market. The parking lot encompasses any open space between the buildings and the market stalls as long there is enough room for a car to pass through. Parking for a day costs 100 MK (ca. 0.12 Euros).

BAWO SETTING AT THE CRAFT MARKET

PERMANENT STRUCTURES
As of spring 2017, the informal Craft Market has been slightly re-developed and permanent stalls were put in place where there were only self-built stalls before. The Craft Market, now fully acknowledged as such, was further elevated from its surrounding roads.

TEMPORARY STRUCTURES
Most craft vendors started out with a simple blanket or sheet to sit on. Some constructed their own market stands to be more on eye-level with potential customers, leaving skeletons of wood and wire behind at night. As the parking lot is lined with large trees, the vending space is fairly shaded. Some craft vendors can be seen making their products on the very same spot, for example, carving a wood figurine, though this has become a rarer sight these days.

SECOND EXIT
Technically, the parking lot is not an enclosed space as there is a second exit that leads back onto the M1 main road. However, it is much less used, perhaps due to the fact that it is not clearly visible from the main parking lot and that often dense traffic awaits outside. Most people take the main entrance and exit the same way.
Bawo sitting behind a self-built structure next to a permanent structure at the Craft Market in Old Town.
Market congested at this very Lilongwe and is frequently stretches all the way from the M1 main road. A painted canvas, for example, could cost up to 40,000 to 70,000 MK (ca. 50 to 70 Euros), an enormous sum in a country where the average wage is around 30,000 MK (ca. 35 Euros) per month. When there are no customers around, a game of Bawo can extend to long hours. Should there be customers, interested in looking at or buying something but the vendor is busy playing, without being asked, fellow colleagues will call for him as well as cover his position in the game. This can be the same person or not but the vendor will jump up so he can take care of his business immediately. In a way, the Bawo setting at the Craft Market provides ideal conditions for a good Bawo game. The seating area comfortably sits at least eight people, while doubling the amount of people would be no problem either. Spectators can stand around and still have a good view on the board and the moving seeds. It is shady with a soft breeze, easily accessible, and it is rather quiet and tranquil despite the bustling cars only few meters away and the great amount of people passing by each day. Also, during the game, vendors can play or watch while keeping one eye on the premises around them. At the end of the day, a vendor’s prime interest is to do business so, in this context, Bawo is less used to waste time but to kill time in between transactions. Moreover, there seems to be common agreement on the fact that Bawo players here follow the rules of the more advanced, “men version”, not the basic “woman friendly” version. After all, all players and spectators are men. It can be Steven himself, who conveniently plays right next to his stall. Or a young man who frequently comes to play and always seems to listen to music or the radio, even without hearing or saying a word. It is unclear. Could be another elderly man with short grey hair or it could be in dark grey suits and bright white shirts, clinging to their smartphones as they watch the games unfold. It could also be a vendor’s friend from Zambia who has heard of Bawo and sees it being played for the very first time at the Craft Market. Although there are plenty of vendors who sell artistically crafted Bawo boards in their stalls, even selling them at a great profit, the Bawo board being used in this setting is of simple wood, minimalist, without carvings, and appears slightly worn out. Mats are additionally used for seeds. Both the board and the manacles belong to one owner who can be regarded as the game keeper. His game set is brotherly shared and he can rest assured that his “friends” (as people say no matter if one is a close friend or a stranger) will take care of his belongings even in his absence. Nevertheless, it so happens that things are “misplaced”. When a Bawo game disappears, whatever the reasons may be, it is quickly replaced as the Bawo show must go on.

How is all of this relevant to the game of Bawo being played at the Craft Market, one might ask. In short: very much. This particular Bawo setting has come to exist due to several circumstances that are tied to the place, people, and objects surrounding it. First off, the site of this Bawo setting is predominantly frequented by the vendors of the Craft Market themselves, exclusively all male. They used to play on wooden benches as it is common fashion in Lilongwe. Nowadays, they have a seating area made of stacked concrete slabs. In the shade of a large tree stuck behind a temporary stall, the seating area was once a steak plow bucket of the vendor who is based right next door. In fact, his stall stands where the border-line between permanent and temporary structures begins, now currently being the last permanent post. Steven (name was changed by the author) thought it was too “wominte” to wait around and simply built the seating area from concrete slabs to carry the objects back and forth. Particularly since the vendors either walk or make use of public transport. To be extra sure, the vendors collectively pay four night guards who have an eye on what is essentially their income, social security, and safety net. When the vendors get ready for their customers, the first round of Bawo is soon to be played. Idle time is a good time to play and morning seems to begin slowly despite the fact that there is already plenty of people and cars going in and out of the parking lot of the Market. It seems that arts and craft shoppers do not necessarily have rush hours for the art of strolling through an arts and craft market is also one that defies time. So here they meet: the idlers and flâneurs. Despite the associations that may come up, in a way both being waste-ters of time, there surely is no time wasted when there is business involved. Vendors overload a potential custo-mer with purchase options, mostly verbally, sometimes literately. If the bait is not attractive enough one can ask for “a good price” through the “good price” generally stays higher in other locations in Lilongwe selling similar products. When there are no customers around, a game of Bawo can extend to long hours. Should there be customers, interested in looking at or buying something but the vendor is busy playing, without being asked, fellow colleagues will call for him as well as cover his position in the game. This can be the same person or not but the vendor will jump up so he can take care of his business immediately. In a way, the Bawo setting at the Craft Market provides ideal conditions for a good Bawo game. The seating area comfortably sits at least eight people, while doubling the amount of people would be no problem either. Spectators can stand around and still have a good view on the board and the moving seeds. It is shady with a soft breeze, easily accessible, and it is rather quiet and tranquil despite the bustling cars only few meters away and the great amount of people passing by each day. Also, during the game, vendors can play or watch while keeping one eye on the premises around them. At the end of the day, a vendor’s prime interest is to do business so, in this context, Bawo is less used to waste time but to kill time in between transactions. Moreover, there seems to be common agreement on the fact that Bawo players here follow the rules of the more advanced, “men version”, not the basic “woman friendly” version. After all, all players and spectators are men. It can be Steven himself, who conveniently plays right next to his stall. Or a young man who frequently comes to play and always seems to listen to music or the radio, even without hearing or saying a word. It is unclear. Could be another elderly man with short grey hair or it could be in dark grey suits and bright white shirts, clinging to their smartphones as they watch the games unfold. It could also be a vendor’s friend from Zambia who has heard of Bawo and sees it being played for the very first time at the Craft Market. Although there are plenty of vendors who sell artistically crafted Bawo boards in their stalls, even selling them at a great profit, the Bawo board being used in this setting is of simple wood, minimalist, without carvings, and appears slightly worn out. Mats are additionally used for seeds. Both the board and the manacles belong to one owner who can be regarded as the game keeper. His game set is brotherly shared and he can rest assured that his “friends” (as people say no matter if one is a close friend or a stranger) will take care of his belongings even in his absence. Nevertheless, it so happens that things are “misplaced”. When a Bawo game disappears, whatever the reasons may be, it is quickly replaced as the Bawo show must go on.

When the midday sun rises, some of the vendors might have made a fortunate sale already, others might not even sell anything by the end of the day and hope for better chances the next or the following day. Either way, surely a round of Bawo has been played already and a few men from nearby offices might have joined the street vendors crowd. It is not uncommon to see the same faces on a regular basis. Bawo might be a simple board game but some take it more seriously than one could expect from a game that is also played by children. Around lunch time, that is between noon and 1 PM, a woman halfway joins the Bawo setting. Halfway, because she did not come to play Bawo but to take advantage of the Bawo setting. Carrying a large bucket on her head, covered up by a chil-ienge cloth, she regularly comes by to sell lunch meals. It is local Malawian food for 500 MK (ca. 0.65 Euro) per plate, a price that can hardly be beaten anywhere in town. Between Steven’s shop and the Bawo players, she puts down her heavy bucket and serves meals* with an assortment of relishes. Some vendors and other customers from the area wait for their plate, eating it on the spot or wherever they just come from. Sometimes Steven buys a plate too: “When there is money, I eat. If not, I don’t.” Along these lines many of his colleagues, or many impoverished Malawian in general, cope with the fact that sometimes the stomach must remain empty for a while if one wants to survive. Is this potentially painting too dramatic image of the situation at hand? In Malawi, where widespread hunger and poverty is part of many lives and the cause for many deaths, one can arguably say that such circumstances are much closer to reality than those we see in the west. “When there is money, I eat. If not, I don’t.” Along these lines many of his colleagues, or many impoverished Malawian in general, cope with the fact that sometimes the stomach must remain empty for a while if one wants to survive. Is this potentially painting too dramatic image of the situation at hand? In Malawi, where widespread hunger and poverty is part of many lives and the cause for many deaths, one can arguably say that such circumstances are much closer to reality than those we see in the west.
setting that, in its size and prominence, no longer can be found in Lilongwe. Several Bawo boards would be play-
ed at the same time, forming rows after rows of pockets with eager players and spectators mingling around the rectangular spectacle. This came to an abrupt halt when Lilongwe’s City Council, by law, righteously „removed” the players from what is essentially public land or, to be more exact, land that rests in the hands of the city. Sup-
posedly, some people began misusing the designated recreational space for their personal commercial activities. Supposedly, they were moving too close to the adjacent main road and one feared that they would clutter and con-
gest the street which, admittedly, is already happening a few meters further up the road. In the end, it is not entirely clear why the Bawo players were removed from Lilongwe’s Town Hall. Not even members of the City Council can say for sure, though one can safely suspect that the Bawo players themselves probably had little to do with it as the developments were driven by pure politics. As of now, the open space has been restored to a Bawo-free zone through which a number of pedestrians daily cross through, little more, little less. For the Bawo players at the Craft Market it seems wise to remain in the shadows of the market’s elevated leftover space, tugged between a high traffic road, a busy sidewalk, the stalls, a parking lot and an institutional building in order to carry on as usual by min-
ding their (own) business and playing Bawo in between.

There is no dispute: Bawo is intrinsically tied to the public urban life all over Malawi. So, one must righteously wonder why, in Lilongwe, Bawo games are so often confined to the city’s hidden corners, shady niches, and earthen ground although it is a game that thrives off its public display. Does a game played so enthusiastically across an entire nation not deserve to be paraded? Why, curiously enough, is it not recognized as an official game in Malawi while football and cricket is? Uganda did it for Omweso, another variant of Bawo, so what is stopping Malawi to show pride in its local games? Perhaps the answer lies in the less obvious. In his work on Bao players in Zanzibar, Alexander De Voogt states that players were perceived as “idlers” by Zanzibaris and they believed “that the game disturbs your social life, as if it was a dangerous addiction” (1995:4). Though Zan-
zibar is predominantly a Muslim island, one can perhaps make an analogy to Malawi’s Christian conservatism when it comes to matters of public display. In this sense, Bawo is perceived as a practice that is to be avoided, being associ-
ated to gambling men, bawoism, and noisy soundscapes. As such, it appears to threaten Lilongwe’s envisioned order as inherited by Banda’s vision of the new capital and so strongly marks Lilongwe’s urban fabric produced on pa-
paper, plans and policies. One could wonder why the po-
tentials behind the Bawo game are foster shunned than explored. Being a game that covers all of Malawi’s so-
 Socioeconomic strata, Bawo could be seen as a blueprint for more socially cohesive public urban life. On top of that, an active Bawo community embodies an active agent in the conservation of a valuable tradition that, in the face of more modern (and foreign) pastime activities, risks to lose ground in the urban framework of Malawi’s urban centers.
Two men playing bawo at the Craft Market
Bawo setting at the Craft Market looking on to the parking lot and the Mlawu Centre

A typology of bawo boards as seen in Lilongwe: boards made out of wood, soil, painted wood, and metal.
AREA 13 MARKET
The Area 13 Market is located within Lilongwe’s City Center. There, a number of informal restaurants offer Malawian dishes for lunch in makeshift structures inside and outside the Capital City Market building. The market is situated in Area 13, hence its name.

Kawale

A single-level modernist building made of red brick and colorful metal gates stands slightly off-center within a wide open space that is marked by red earth and numerous large trees. A golden plate on a wall inside the building reveals its former glory. It reads: “This Capital City Market was opened by His Excellency The Life President Senior Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda on the 12th of September, 1978”. But nobody really refers to this place in that way anymore because, in all reality, it has changed. This used to be a vibrant place where vendors would sell vegetables, fruits, and other produce to the people. But with the rise of large Western-style supermarkets in the area, many people started going to the supermarket, leaving the Capital City Market fairly deserted. Nowadays, only little produce is sold, and the main commercial activity revolves around a small informal market that is located in an open space inside the square market building. A total of 42 informal restaurants have set up shop in the large courtyard inside the square market building as well as the wide open space around it. These self-built structures made of wood, branched, and wire sell local Malawian meals with a variety of dishes that is incomparable to any other commercial place in town and forms a unique attraction for Lilongwe’s city dwellers.
POLITICS AND HUNGRY STOMACHS

Despite its central location, right in the middle of the City Center of Lilongwe, visitors to the Area 13 Market will have a hard time identifying its centrality other than by their own commute. No other building or infrastructure can be seen from the open space of the Area 13 Market. There is one main road from which most customers arrive and a few hundred meters further, there are some office buildings. But, generally, the Area 13 Market stands by itself. One hundred meters further, there are some office buildings.

In informal contexts, however, this estimate is rather vague. The Area 13 Market runs from Monday to Friday, a few restaurants also open on Saturdays. Though technically the restaurants are open all day, only lunch is being served. How many people exactly take their lunch meals here each day is hard to say. Some restaurants claim to sell more than 200 meals, smaller restaurants sell around 60 meals.

A ONE-OF-A-KIND MARKET IN LILONGWE

Most visitors drive to the Area 13 Market. This will inevitably take them to the African Unity Avenue as two paths off the avenue can somewhat be considered the main entrance of the Area 13 Market. One of the paths is a tarmac road that leads to a parking lot in front of the market building, equipped with roughly 40 designated parking spots. The other path is a dirt path, significantly more bumpy and with a small but obstructive curb. It leads directly to the open space around the building where most of the informal restaurants are located. During lunchtime, nearly all of the open space is covered with parked cars as the incoming cars far exceed the parking lot’s capacity. Private cars form the main mode of transport but only few customers come alone due to the tight parking situation and to save time and money on the commute. Minibuses also drive between the City Center and the Area 13 Market who have quickly detected the high demand for such a route. Pedestrians use a footpath on the opposite end of the market. The Area 13 Market runs from Monday to Friday, a few restaurants also open on Saturdays. Though technically the restaurants are open all day, only lunch is being served. How many people exactly take their lunch meals here each day is hard to say. Some restaurants claim to sell more than 200 meals, smaller restaurants sell around 60 meals. With a total of 42 restaurants and assuming that each plate equals one person, one could estimate that even in its lowest capacity, a few thousand people visit the Area 13 Market on any given day. As with many enumerations in informal contexts, however, this estimate is rather vague. Yet, it does provide some sense of the market’s scale.

The physical structures of the restaurants cannot be compared to the polished and solid structures of Lilongwe’s formal restaurants. They are makeshift structures, a fact that is clearly visible. Each restaurant often has a specific name which might be as temporary as the business but for the time being is colorfully displayed in different colors of paint. A number of restaurants are lined up along a more or less straight path, others have formed a solitary corner and others prefer the direct vicinity of the market building, either huddling around its walls or using its inner courtyard as the foundation for their restaurants. Almost all of the restaurants offer sheltered and roofed seating areas, some even protect from curious eyes by means of higher walls. If one prefers to sit in the open space under the shade of the trees, even at a table that is build around a tree, that is also possible. As makeshift as the restaurant structures so are the facilities in informal contexts, however, this estimate is rather vague. Yet, it does provide some sense of the market’s scale.

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object will be repaired as will and skill permit and used as long as possible. As before, most customers who come to eat at the Area 13 Market, work in the offices in City Center. This becomes very visible in the outward appearance of the main clientele. Bright shirts, leather shoes, fancy dresses, and high heels are no rare sight here though it certainly is in most parts of Lilongwe outside the City Center. A restaurant vendor stresses, that it is not only office workers who enjoy their lunch offerings as blue-collared workers from as far as Kanengo, the industrial north of Lilongwe, or Old Town, the bustling commercial area in the south of Lilongwe, also make up their clientele. Moreover, nursery students, whose school is more or less located within vicinity, also form part of the customer base.

All of the restaurants have a similar set up, therefore, the code of conduct is always fairly similar, too. During peak hours, that is lunch time between noon and 1 PM, long queues form in front of the restaurants’ entrances with customers waiting for their turn to be served. One is first confronted with a buffet-style table offering staples like brown or white nshima or rice and a number of side dishes, neatly packed up in medium-size containers. Their lids are kept closed to keep the food warm until a customer asks to see its contents. For lack of a menu, the containers represent the menu. The vendors then serve the selected dishes on plastic plates that have three compartments, an ideal utensil for the usual Malawian nshima-vegetable-meat dishes. Each dish comes with a plate of food, one can choose to sit down at one of the restaurant’s tables or consume the meal elsewhere as a take-away. For those well-down customers, there will be complimentary drinking water and buckets of water with soap to wash hands as Malawian dishes are eaten with your hands. Cutlery is only seen in the hands of the workers who prepare the food. Many people pray before they eat and those who enjoy spicy food add one or two kambuzis to their meal, small orange and very hot chilies that are grown in Malawi and given to anyone upon request. A few soda vendors near the Area 13 Market in bright orange carts and umbrellas, selling sweet and cold refreshments. Cocoa-Coca and their products are as present in Malawi as in other countries. But Coca-Cola products, which are generally cheaper, are more popular for its tastes and its cheaper price. During a meal, one may be approached by one of the street vendors selling things like shirts, ties, belts, or leather shoes, and their products are as present in Malawi as in other countries. But all street vendors are generally cheaper, are more popular for its tastes and its cheaper price. During a meal, one may be approached by one of the street vendors selling things like shirts, ties, belts, or leather shoes, clearly targeting the numerous men who come and go in formal work attire. Female visitors can likewise purchase makeup and purses. In addition to that, there are Air-Tel and TNM booths, both local phone service providers, where one can buy phone credit. Moreover, groundnuts, bananas, and oranges are sold to finish off a hearty meal with a snack or dessert. By 2 PM, latest 3 PM, only few customers are left and vendors begin with cleaning and packing up, preparing to knock off by 4 PM in order to be back home before daylight is gone. When the great numbers of cars have disappeared, the area’s wide, open space becomes visible again.
STATIONARY STREET VENDORS
Street vendors with more or less fixed locations, excluding restaurants, sell things like refreshments, phone credit, shoes and make up. Also, a few local stalls have set up shop in one corner of the market. Some vendors make use of the market building and turn its stairs and walls into a point of display and sales.

RESTAURANTS
All restaurants are set up in a somewhat similar manner. Food is selected at a non-self-service buffet where one can choose between different staples, meats and vegetables and pays 1,000 MK for one plate. Each restaurant provides robed table and chairs as well as water containers with soap to cleanse one’s hands before and after the meal. The majority of customers work in City Center or at Capital Hill and can be referred to as white-collar employees though people from as far as Old Town or Kanengo come to the Area 13 Market for lunch.

WATER TAB
Just outside the market building, there is a water tab where one can fill up 40 liter buckets for 50 MK each. It is needed for cooking (e.g. rinsing ingredients, boiling water, plucking chicken), drinking water, and for customers to wash their hands as local Malawian food is eaten without cutlery.

MOBILE STREET VENDORS
Mobile street vendors roam the Area 13 Market area and sell a variety of things. Oranges, bananas and groundnuts are usually sold by female street vendors. Male street vendors sell anything from shirts, ties, belts, watches, mosquito nets, CDs etc.

PARKING
The designated parking area stays nearly empty most of the time, due to parking conditions for cars and motorcycles. Only during lunch hours, the parking lot becomes fully crammed and cars resort to parking in the dirt wherever one can find space.

FIRE
On February 15, 2018 around 11 PM a fire, probably caused by malfunctioning power lines, destroyed great parts of the market building. The remnants of the destruction still need to be cleared and it remains uncertain what point of time this is going to happen - if it will happen at all. There is rumor that renovations will commence in August or September this year. Until then, everyday life continues to revolve in and around the damage.

AGRICULTURE
While most produce offered in the restaurants is sourced locally from various suppliers in the region, a few vendors are taking it to the next level by planting vegetables right on the premises of the Area 13 Market.

BAWO
This game of Bawo is played on the steps of a small red-brick pyramid only few meters away from the building lunch commotion. Spectators sit around, either on chairs or on the pyramid itself. The center of the game might also be around.

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The "Bitter Leaves House" inside the courtyard of the market building was opened by Stella about two years ago. She proudly mentions that she runs the only restaurant offering bitter leaves, hence its name. She opened her restaurant business after having saved enough money by working at a different restaurant in town. Upon visiting the City Council and the civic offices in Kawale (Area 7), filling out forms, paying a fee of 500 MK, and speaking to the chairman, she was given a space to set up her restaurant. There are no standards as to how exactly the temporary structures are supposed to be built. Stella had simply gathered the materials for the construction from different places and built it with the help of her friends from Area 23. Stella originally stems from Karonga in the north of Malawi and belongs to the Tumbuka tribe. In 2005, she moved with her then husband to Area 23 in Lilongwe and has never moved ever again. She lives rather central with her children in her own house. Her now ex-husband has moved back to Karonga and they plastically communicate via phone. This is the only remaining tie she has to Karonga ever since her parents also passed away in 2005. She enjoys city life and likes Lilongwe "too much", she says, in her colorful shirt and elaborately braided hair. She is a businesswoman and she cannot imagine living in a village again. "I am not strong", she explains, implying that she also thinks herself unfit for a rural farm life and, thus, believes to be better off in Lilongwe. She proudly mentions that she runs the only restaurant in Lilongwe that serves traditional Malawian dishes. The "Bitter Leaves House" is a unique spot in the city center where one can experience authentic Malawian cuisine. The restaurant is located in the courtyard of the market building, offering a unique dining experience in a traditional setting. Visitors can enjoy dishes such as nshima (a staple dish made from pounded maize), ndole (stir-fried vegetables), and nyama choma (grilled meat). The menu also features traditional Malawian drinks and spices to complement the dishes. The restaurant is open seven days a week, from early morning until late at night, offering a wide range of options for those seeking a taste of authentic Malawian cuisine in Lilongwe.
During the peak selling period, the atmosphere turns slightly more intense. Plates need to be served neatly but quickly with portions that are not too big and not too small. After all, much competition is waiting all around. Some of the workers change their clothes, dodging chitenje for more modern and cleaner clothes. Stella retains her stylish appearance when cooking and when selling. It is also her who has a cheerful chat with the odd customer, relying on the fact that her employees ensure a smooth procession of filled plates. After the last customer has left, a calmer atmosphere returns. Employees get a chance to eat lunch before the cleaning starts. Plates, pots, knives and spoons are washed, the fireplaces are cleared, the plastic chairs, and everything is put in place so the next workday can start with a clean slate. Stella uses this time period to rest a little and to do the finances. Between 1 and 2 PM, a civil servant from City Council comes around to collect the daily market fee of 200 MK (ca. 0.24 Euros). Smaller restaurants pay only 100 MK (ca. 0.12 Euros). “If he doesn’t show up, you do not pay”, she adds with a smile. Stella’s relations to the Area 13 Market are purely business-related and though she gets along with her colleagues she considers them merely colleagues. “Here, I cannot make friends. If you make friends, business cannot work”, Stella explains. “Better to have no friends here, better to have friends at home”. The vendors help each other out with small things like changing money or lending missing condiments and they talk “but not much”. Other vendors, who have been part of this restaurant community for much longer, less surprisingly, do not share this notion. Despite the financial hardships Stella has to endure, she embodies a single Malawian mother from the north who is able to sustain a running business in Lilongwe that pays for her employees’ salaries, her children’s education and a fairly moderate lifestyle thanks to the existence of the Area 13 Market.

WHAT ABOUT PUBLIC URBAN LIFE?

The Area 13 Market emerged from a few rather insignificant food stalls to a food market with a voice. From a simple business-oriented enterprise to a community-oriented gastronomic sector in Lilongwe. But due to its informal status, it remains highly vulnerable and it lives off the City Council’s on-going tolerance for its existence. Its continuous existence, one could claim, is strongly tied to the market’s customer base and how they are attracted by the space. As the market’s past has shown, the informal restaurants have to make room whenever the planning authorities have other plans for the market’s location in mind which are much driven by neoliberal logics. At the same time, parallel neoliberal logics ensure the continuity of the Area 13 Market since much of the market’s attractiveness circles around its nearly unbeatable value for money. This even attracts those who, to put it bluntly, fill one hand with their hands, is the misme and chicken, it is the plastic chairs, it is the open space, it is the central location, it is the temporal rhythms, it is the unsettled ground, and it is the shared feeling of being hungry at lunch hour, all of which create a common arena of life. In this sense, the Area 13 Market represents a valuable attraction but, according to voices from City Council, its mode of conduct must be recalibrated. Formalization, regulation, hygiene and building standards as well as fees and taxes are only a few keywords that ring in the air. But what if the restaurant vendors do not comply with City Council’s plans or simply cannot afford it? What will be at stake with regard to Lilongwe’s public urban life at the Area 13 Market? When looking at Lilongwe’s highly closed urban form that is marked by high levels of segregation and securitization, places like the Area 13 Market are in short supply. What is unique to this place is the informal character, it attracts people from different socioeconomic groups who tend to stay separate in other environments, either physically or in hierarchical terms. At the Area 13 Market, different locals are able to come together to share the same activities, premises, and interests, if only for a moment that lasts as long as a lunch break. It is here where informal and formal worlds do collide but are blurred as they become part of an environment that is not explicitly based on underlying hierarchies. Through the production and consumption of food and through the shared space on the premises of the Area 13 Market, boundaries are turned into porous borders and several of Lilongwe’s public, both customers and vendors, come together who otherwise rarely do. It is the preparation of food that is done side by side, it is the smoke that stings everyone’s eyes, it is the carpooling, it is the washing and eating with your hands, it is the misme and chicken, it is the plastic chairs, it is the open space, it is the central location, it is the temporal rhythms, it is the unsettled ground, and it is the shared feeling of being hungry at lunch hour, all of which create a common arena of life. In this sense, the Area 13 Market represents an unparalleled common ground for a democratic public space that is so rarely seen in Lilongwe. As such it has the potential to work as a platform that does not simply carry on with inherited patterns of behavior of inclusion and exclusion but explores what other forms of public urban life could be possible, too.
Market building at the Area 13 Market, opened in 1978 as Capital City Market.

Cars are parked wherever there is space at the Area 13 Market as the designated parking lot in front of the market building cannot accommodate all the cars entering during lunch hours.
Stella and her five employees are preparing lunch in the market building next to other restaurant owners.

Lunch is usually served until around 2 PM.
HOME PLOT
It is estimated that over one million people call Lilongwe their home, three quarters live in high density residential areas. For this research, a family in Chinsapo has provided access to their home plot and enabled a glimpse into the daily public choreographies that occur in the privacy of their home. Another family’s home in Kauma can serve as a contrasting example.

**Strolling** is the general mode of conduct when walking on Chinsapo’s small dirt paths. Tugged between the loosely scattered residential plots, they are everywhere. Uneven patches occasionally cross the path, residues from the heavy rains that regularly flood them during rainy season. A fast-paced sprint could therefore easily turn into a stumble. So, even when walking routines have long been memorized, careful and cautious steps set the general pace. Strolling has yet another advantage: one will notice what those in a hurry will not. Here is an example: When leaving a side road in Chinsapo’s Catholic area behind and turning into one of the small dirt paths, one walks past a small yet sizable maize field to the right. Soon after, a small toilet booth made of red mud bricks and a wooden door appears to the left. A clear beaten path in between the maize field and the toilet booth hints at a good amount of foot traffic, regardless of the fact that one is technically intruding into somebody’s private plot. Going straight, one will pass side-wall after side-wall. But generous glimpses into people’s courtyards wrapped in open space will sprinkle the view. If one makes a right turn after the maize field, however, one inevitably enters one of the many courtyards that lie half-hidden behind the house walls of somebody’s home. There is little that could actually stop anyone from entering, no walls, no gates, no fences, no barriers. This particular one belongs to the Chisale family, that is mother and
Red is the color of the soil under one’s feet, the color of the mud brick walls which are made of the very same soil, and the color of the dust that lightly covers the green plastic buckets under the washing lines, the beige sandals next to the veranda, the veranda’s smooth and black-painted floor, the wooden and torn stools standing around here and there, the metal cooking stove placed behind a column, the white woven plastic mat on the ground, and the green leaves of the plants that are found in the large courtyard of the Chisale family. Most objects around have a rusty look, no matter if they have been exposed to the soil for ten days or weeks or months. So, regularly, all members of the family will at one point or another grab a hand duster made of reeds and sweep the floor clean from whatever waste might have piled up until the red ground is only red again. The young ones seem to enjoy playing with the sweeper, the older one’s will grant them their play so long they do not realize that it is not a toy but a tool for a daily chore, namely *akussessa* (“sweeping” in Chichewa). In Chinsapo, an unplanned high density residential area of Lilongwe, the Chisales have constructed three separate houses on their plot. One for themselves, the largest building, one neighboring building that is rented out, and another building which still needs to be finished and is meant to be rented out in the future. All of them are single-story buildings like nearly all of the houses in Chinsapo and most of Lilongwe, no matter whether in a low, middle, or high density residential area. The courtyard, father and their six children between the age of 6 and 24. It is the space in which the family welcomes friends and relatives, invited or uninvited, and where nextdoor and nearby neighbors, and other familiar and less familiar faces regularly get together. No pre-arrangements are necessary. When approaching the sudden clearing, trying to spot somebody in the courtyard, the residents of the house might have already spotted the visitor. Promptly everyone involved reacts with a greeting that is adjusted according to who is speaking and who one is speaking to. **The standard greeting “Muli bwanji?” (How are you?) is suitable to use with anyone, younger generations might simply ask and respond “Bu?” - “Bol!” (short form for “bonjour” or good day in French). Depending on how well one knows the spontaneous visitor, the person will stop and come around for a longer chat. Others will simply say “zikomo zikomo” (thank you, thank you) and continue their stroll, still speaking as they walk off. Ear contact seems sufficient. Those who are new to the place might have to deal with the three dogs at first who, turn all tame once a family member gives them a gentle shout. “Babol Brigadeer! Spike!”. Since most faces are at least somewhat familiar, the dogs usually stay fairly calm. THE PUBLIC IN THE PRIVATE

Note: There are no official maps of Chinsapo, indicated locations are mere estimates based on aerial photos.
The functions of the kitchen are split into an outdoor and indoor part. Doing dishes and cooking is done outside while the dishes and the food is stored inside the house.

Most activities are done outside. If it is dry and not too hot out, a mat is placed on the floor in order to keep the red soil off one’s clothes and to sit on it while one is sticking around.

The Chisale family has a fairly large house with a large living room. The TV set receives a lot of attention though oftentimes it is only running so one can listen to music or a show. TVs are just as entertaining to be listened to, less watched.

The veranda or, more commonly known, the khonde forms one of the center pieces of the house. It is its outdoor entrance and it can be used for eating, tables, plates, board, etc. all at the same time.

The Chisale family has a fairly large plot with a fairly large open space. When sitting on the khonde, one has the best views as one can overlook everything that is going on. On the further end of the plot, the Chisale’s face a wall, however, it is not meant for enclosure but to draw borders.

The majority of Malawians cook on metal stoves that run on charcoal. They produce a lot of smoke and are therefore better to be lit in the open space of the plot.

There is a number of ways children and youths can play with the materials nature has provided. The red soil, for instance, works as a great drawing board. One could also dig soil, build things, and play a variety of games.
tugged between the three buildings and an open-ended wall, is fairly large and forms the central space on the plot. Although the Chisales have a relatively large living room into which one directly enters when stepping through the main door, most activities and encounters occur outside in families to use as well, the neighbors regularly come by with their buckets in order to fill them up with water. Upon asking whether the neighbors pay for the water, the answer is no. Some engage in parties prepared the food at the same time on the same wing companionship but also of saving on expenses, used perhaps due to the fact that there is no other neighbor or path attached to this space. It is engulfed by greenery, a residential cul-de-sac, to which the Chisales also stop by their neighbor’s house. It is a much smaller building with a much smaller courtyard, facing away from the Chisale house. It appears less convivial though no less welcoming. Boundaries seem to exist only in terms of courtesy. For instance, when food is served, the Chisales and their neighbors do not eat together, even when both families to use as well, the neighbors regularly come by with their buckets in order to fill them up with water. Upon asking whether the neighbors pay for the water, the answer is no. Some engage in parties prepared the food at the same time on the same wing companionship but also of saving on expenses, used perhaps due to the fact that there is no other neighbor or path attached to this space. It is engulfed by greenery, a residential cul-de-sac, to which the Chisales also stop by their neighbor’s house. It is a much smaller building with a much smaller courtyard, facing away from the Chisale house. It appears less convivial though no less welcoming. Boundaries seem to exist only in terms of courtesy. For instance, when food is served, the Chisales and their neighbors do not eat together, even when both families to use as well, the neighbors regularly come by with their buckets in order to fill them up with water. Upon asking whether the neighbors pay for the water, the answer is no. Some engage in parties prepared the food at the same time on the same wing companionship but also of saving on expenses, used perhaps due to the fact that there is no other neighbor or path attached to this space. It is engulfed by greenery, a residential cul-de-sac, to which the Chisales also stop by their neighbor’s house. It is a much smaller building with a much smaller courtyard, facing away from the Chisale house. It appears less convivial though no less welcoming. Boundaries seem to exist only in terms of courtesy. For instance, when food is served, the Chisales and their neighbors do not eat together, even when both families to use as well, the neighbors regularly come by with their buckets in order to fill them up with water. Upon asking whether the neighbors pay for the water, the answer is no. Some engage in parties prepared the food at the same time on the same...
in this community know each other one way or the other while strangers are quickly spotted and familiarized. “We know everyone in this area and we say hello, bring food from the market and so on,” an inhabitant in a high density residential area remarks. To see friends is common practice to simply pop by entirely unannounced at their homes. So it comes to nobody’s surprise when two girls slowly stroll towards the Chiwela’s courtyard, greeting the family and looking for their friend Sabina, the third born. Sabina promptly approaches them, standing slightly away from the rest of the present people, to have a more intimate chat with them right on the spot. The girls know each other from school and live nearby. One of the girls is holding a phone in her hands which she wants to sell. Although she has graduated from school already, she still has not found employment. “I only stay right now because I have a phone to sell”, she explains her situation. Sabina promptly approaches them, standing slightly away from the rest of the present people, to have a more intimate chat with them right on the spot. The girls know each other from school and live nearby. One of the girls is holding a phone in her hands which she wants to sell. Although she has graduated from school already, she still has not found employment. “I only stay right now because I have a phone to sell”, she explains her situation, seemingly without a hint of disconcertment. Finally, there is the people who actually come over on invitation. Sunny streets, markets, and other known landmarks could serve as a meeting point, too, but it is more common to invite someone to one’s home when the meeting is to last longer. If finances permit, Malawian hospitality is usually framed by some form of consumption which, in the end, is most conveniently and economically done at home. This may come in the shape of liquids like tea or tosiba (a milky drink made of fermented cereals) or a full meal with nshima and vegetables. The architecture and layout of most dwellings seem to offer the most enjoyable spaces to simply be around. Eating with your hands without worrying about dropping something on the ground, biting on sugar cane and spitting out unwanted parts of it after the juice has been sucked out, tossing empty groundnut shells, picking on a pile of dried maize cobs, playing with your pets, drawing in the red soil, playing games that require objects like rocks and sticks and so on and so forth.

WORLDS APART IN LILONGWE

Lilongwe’s neighborhoods differ greatly in appearance, form, use, and experience when one compares the extremes in high and low density residential areas. So much that it is hard to believe that they belong to one urban entity. High density residential (HDR) areas, that is to say those which were and/or are unplanned, are generally located the furthest away from the central business districts. They particularly expand to the south and southwest of the city but are found all around Lilongwe. Low density residential (LDR) areas are much more central, nevertheless, motorized vehicles are the standard mode of movement for its residents. This can be explained by the fact that a) Lilongwe is such a sprawling city even in a central location commutes can stretch to several kilometers just to reach a place “close by” and b) their residents generally belong to a higher income group as they can afford this kind of living. Conversely, those living in non-central locations have to commute even longer with the additional impairment that for its residents motorized transport oftentimes is simply not affordable. Thinking in black and white rarely fares well as reflections of realities but in this case it might be closer to the truth than usual. Income disparities are high in Lilongwe which materializes in real estate prices, in the costs of living, and in the racial make up within one area. HDR areas largely form the home of Malawians and other African communities whereas Lilongwe’s inhabitants of Asian or Western descent almost exclusively reside in middle to low density residential areas. In Lilongwe, planning of residential areas is embedded in the prescribed standards set in the ‘Urban Zones Scheme 1986’. It is still being used regardless of the existence of a new master plan that employs smaller plot standards because the new plan has not been gazetted yet. Accordingly, HDR plot sizes range between 375 to 600 m² and standard LDR plots range around 2,000 to 4,000 m² (JICA 2010). Houses in HDR areas are usually made of sun-dried or burned mud bricks and standard LDR plots range around 2,000 to 4,000 m² (JICA 2010). Houses in HDR areas are usually made of sun-dried or burned mud bricks with red or corrugated iron roofs. Buildings in LDR areas use more durable construction materials that are naturally more expensive. Consequently, rental prices in HDR areas range somewhere between 5,000 to 15,000 MK (ca. 6 to 18 USD) a month.
House in Area 43, a low density residential area in Lilongwe. This building is surrounded by a large garden and a long red brick wall. It is not shared with another household. Gates protect the gate 24/7 but there is also an additional alarm system that goes off when intruders try to enter. All gates, doors, windows as well as the khonde come with burglar bars. Each of the three bedrooms is equipped with an "emergency button" and flood lights are switched on during the night for extra protection. There is ample space for parking in front of the main entrance. The main road outside the plot’s gate is paved and extends onto the neighbors’ walls but the neighbors’ homes themselves remain hidden.

House in Area 57, a high density residential area in Lilongwe. This building is surrounded by open space that is marked by a flat surface, red soil and very little green. The road is only a few meters away from the house. The house itself has two rooms, in total they are slightly bigger than the size of two double beds. To sit outside, the residents put a reed mat on the ground for lack of a khonde. Next door neighbors live in similar buildings. Their entrances face the same courtyard and together they share one space. With a simple padlock, the wooden door is locked up and a few lace curtains protect from unwanted glances through the windows.

Top to bottom: Low, middle, and high density residential areas in Lilongwe (Area 43, 18, 57)
Streetscape in a low density residential area of Lilongwe [Area 3]

In areas like Chinsapo, it is hard to ignore that the home plot appears to play a significant role in the social life of its inhabitants. One can even perceive them as the dominant place where people meet and where spontaneous encounters are stretched to prolonged ones. As such, accessible open spaces on private plots within HDR areas form a string of meeting points that go beyond public grids like markets and water kiosks. Understanding them as mere substitutes to coffeehouses, restaurants, and hotels, however, where it is more common to meet in more Western-oriented and higher income contexts of Lilongwe, would not do justice to the nature of these spaces. After all, Chinsapo offers a gastronomy and entertainment infrastructure for smaller budgets too, for examples in the form of tea houses or street food vendors, but they seem to lack certain “stay” qualities that make them less attractive for meetings. Spending remains a great influential factor. No matter how small the price, a price is still more than no price. Since spending is such a determining factor, meeting outside of Chinsapo is also not the general mode of conduct as it is tied to expenses for transport or to long and tiresome walks as an alternative. Subsequently, one is somewhat confined to a certain radius from one’s home plot.

Why the home plot remains the preferred site of being and staying is also tied to the lack of suitable alternative places within one’s area. Chinsapo, for instance, does not have playgrounds so children play wherever they see fit. Thanks to the open space of the home plot, children can play right there on the spot. Many home plots in HDR areas are comparably more often frequented by different people as opposed to those in other density areas and those homes who have gates. These are only some of the reasons why the home plot is somewhat confined to a certain radius from one’s home plot.

On another note, the concept of going out, leaving one’s home for a good amount of time, is not particularly engrained in Malawian culture, given that the streets used to be a place to fear under the Banda regime. Though governmental militias no longer tend to stop and frisk people on the street, the national psyche has not yet forgiven. As a result, unconsiously or out of sheer habit, people rather stay at home. Unless there is something to be gained, financially, spiritually, politically, or recreationally, they seem to see no reason to go out. Instead, one paradoxically waits in the private sphere for the public to come by and...
A typology of houses in high density residential areas in Lilongwe

lie several distinctive social urban frameworks, a plurality, that is merely loosely connected. Within such landscapes, gated housing becomes yet another game changer as it solidifies the particularity of a private plot, disarming its power to also be open to a public. In Chinsapo, more and more plots are constructing such walls. Not necessarily to keep people out, though this surely can be a significant aspect. Another more practical attitude drives up the construction of walls. As a former police man living in Chinsapo explains: “If you don’t make this fence, the government will take it from you”. Given that land rights can be highly vulnerable in HDR areas and do not strictly follow the rules of formal land tenures, inhabitants protect their lands by simply demarcating clear boundaries, in the hope that they will formally be respected.

Likewise, only goes out when one can enter another private realm shortly after. Perhaps another brief example from Lilongwe’s urban lifeworlds can make the importance of a private open space for one’s public life a bit clearer.

Dorothea lives with her husband and her three year old daughter in a rather untypical plot in Kauma, another HDR area in the north of Lilongwe. Her house does not overlook a spacious courtyard and the khonde is walled in on all sides, leaving only a small opening for the entrance. Instead of wide views, the inhabitants face the green wall, or the “jungle” as Dorothea calls it, of her neighbors when they sit outside. Her neighbors are Rastafarians, own a large plot and have planted all kinds of produce on their land, encircled by a bamboo fence. Though the scenery might appear rather picturesque, Dorothea does not enjoy it at all. Barely any people come by on the small, hidden dirt path that winds between her house and the neighbor’s plot. Thieves have taken advantage of the house’s remoteness and stolen valuable things like a car battery or cooking pots from Dorothea’s household which she is unable to replace. “I’m alone”, Dorothea exclaims at one point and simultaneously explains the root of her pain. While the setting of her home technically offers all the facilities she needs, its remote character and feeling of enclosure causes her discomfort as she grew up with a different way of living. In consequence, Dorothea frequently visits her good friend and neighbor who lives in a building that overlooks a fairly open space and where a plethora of people are found day in and day out. Among people who are busy washing their baby in a plastic bucket, sowing their broken sneakers, doing their hair, while chatting with her friend on the elevated khonde, this is where she feels more at ease.

Being on home turf does not automatically imply that one enters a private, domestic space. A residential plot much more fluctuates between private and public modes and moments. They can switch and be distinguished through the most subtle changes like visibility, sounds, silence, intimacy, familiarity, and temporality. As much of the domestic work occurs outdoors and unenclosed, private practices often become part of a wider public and thus are not perceived as private. The private plot that invites the public, however, represents a public space that rarely becomes the site of encounters with strangers, therefore, being the site for a very selected public. In this way, it is owed to the fact that HDR areas are spatially contained and secluded from wider publics that would facilitate more encounters with the other. This can be attributed to the city’s urban sprawl and its planning background.

As such, the social urban framework in Lilongwe is less one that is interconnected on multiple layers. It is much better understood in terms of several distinctive social urban frameworks, a plurality, that is merely loosely connected. Within such landscapes, gated housing becomes yet another game changer as it solidifies the particularity of a private plot, disarming its power to also be open to a public. In Chinsapo, more and more plots are constructing such walls. Not necessarily to keep people out, though this surely can be a significant aspect. Another more practical attitude drives up the construction of walls. As a former police man living in Chinsapo explains: “If you don’t make this fence, the government will take it from you”. Given that land rights can be highly vulnerable in HDR areas and do not strictly follow the rules of formal land tenures, inhabitants protect their lands by simply demarcating clear boundaries, in the hope that they will formally be respected.
This is a plot in Chinsapo, a high-density residential area which became part of Lilongwe in 2010 with the introduction of the new master plan. Several households share the open space that is directly looking onto a main road. There are no gates, no walls, only a few trees slightly frame the plot.
5

THE PRODUCTION
OF PUBLIC SPACE

ANALYSIS + RELEVANCE
Having introduced singular moments, or snapshots of public urban life in Lilongwe through selected case studies, this appears to be a good moment to take stock and to look back on what motivated this research and in how far I was able to find answers to my research questions. Driven by my inability to find public spaces in Lilongwe’s planned landscape that were for the public and also used by the public, I embarked on a research journey to find out why this was the case and where they could be instead. When I discovered that none of the leading and guiding planning documents even mentioned nor hinted at the composition of Lilongwe’s publics, I was slightly less surprised than. How is a city to have public spaces when the city planners have not made room for it in the first place? But since there is always some form of public urban life as long as there are people in Lilongwe, I continued my journey with a certainty that I would find public urban life, though, the question only remained how. Eventually, I have found some of Lilongwe’s public spaces by advancing an understanding for public space as a public practice. The case studies are a result of this approach. Examining public practices or public urban life more closely, further enabled me to arrive at a better understanding for Lilongwe’s urbanity which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. To sum up for the moment: Lilongwe’s public spaces are not planned by urban planners and, subsequently, public urban life moves between informal spheres. Among others, they are marked by modes of survival, acts of conviviality, homogeneous lifeworlds, temporariness, and shared experiences and challenges. In the end, there are traces of public spaces in Lilongwe, one must only know where to look for it or know the people who can show you where and who can take you there.

In order to expand on how the specificities of the case studies can be applied to produce clearer images or imaginaries for Lilongwe, I will take my findings as a cue to linking them to wider trajectories (Cinar and Bender 2007). In appreciation of the versatility of public urban lives found in Lilongwe, this work offers no best practices, scenarios, or potential drafts for future public spaces. There can be no one-size-fits-all solution for public spaces. Especially so, when none of the previous sizes have fit, given that EuroAmerican perspectives so often override Malawian point of views. Instead, five Food For Thoughts are assembled here, extracted from an axial reading of the case studies which address issues around urban mobility, temporalities, private and public distinctions, gender roles, and the inviability of planning. These extracts are not exhaustive, any additions are therefore most welcome. But it is important to note that they do not represent stringent rules to how public spaces can be created or “improved”. As its use of the term suggests, they are meant to stir the mind. They can, more usefully, be read as frameworks for future decision-making processes that deal with public urban life and public spaces in Lilongwe or, more generally, urban Malawi. While the Food For Thoughts are applicable to all case studies, with a few exceptions, some examples serve as a clearer lens than others. Examples of public urban life that have particularly informed a Food For Thought are, therefore, given a particular mention. As a whole, they are especially directed towards the urban planning sector, not as a form of criticism but as inspirations for future public spaces that are truly born from the public and therefore for the public.
PRODUCTION OF PUBLIC SPACE

PUBLIC/PRAXIS as extracted from the case studies

source water supply, the city with water, high density residential areas design a water kiosk install a water kiosk remain Vulnerable to water-borne diseases being affected by a water-borne disease fill up with the demand face shortages open water kiosk available with a key keeps a key filling water by a water kiosk collect water fees advertise price in handwriting collect water fees living close by a water kiosk water at home remain vulnerable to water-born diseases supply the city with water

INVENTORY OF PUBLIC URBAN LIFE

source water supply, the city with water, high density residential areas design a water kiosk install a water kiosk remain Vulnerable to water-borne diseases being affected by a water-borne disease fill up with the demand face shortages open water kiosk available with a key keeps a key filling water by a water kiosk collect water fees advertise price in handwriting collect water fees living close by a water kiosk water at home remain vulnerable to water-born diseases supply the city with water

PUBLIC/PRAXIS as extracted from the case studies

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT 1

MOBILITY DETERMINES PUBLIC URBAN LIFE

Being a city that is highly marked by urban sprawl as well as high containerization in its urban form, one’s mode of transport strongly influences the potential intersections of public urban life one can traverse in Lilongwe. Whether one makes use of a private vehicle, bicycle, minibus, kabaza, or simply walks by foot, one’s dominant mode of transport outlines the parameters of one’s public urban life as well as one’s exposure to other forms thereof. Since one’s mode of transport is also strongly connected to a person’s spending power, the parameters are further indirectly tied to a person’s socioeconomic background.

While all modes of transport hypothetically are capable of taking a person from A to B, each representing a form of urban mobility, each mode’s maximum scope is explored to varying degrees. The majority of Lilongwe’s inhabitants walks, often for hours, as the city was built to accommodate more motorized, less manpowered forms of mobility. But since walking long distances is a rather strenuous task, it is avoided until it can no longer be avoided.

The success and failure of public spaces in Lilongwe is tied to a public that is (in)mobile as it shapes where one can engage in public urban life and where not. Public urban life in Lilongwe is, therefore, restrained and acted out in homogeneous publics. Lilongwe’s Community Grounds, for example, could present itself as an attractive site for Lilongwe’s communities, as its designated function implies. However, it ignores the fact that not all communities have a means to regularly travel to the grounds and, therefore, loses its attraction for public urban life. Moreover, limited modes of mobility have the effect of intensifying the containerization of social lifeworlds as exemplified in the Home Plot[ing] case study. Home plots foster public spaces within one’s home area but less beyond. As a result, they are marked by rather homogeneous public urban lives and, simultaneously, deprive other inhabitants of Lilongwe of the opportunity to also partake.
Leisure time is a precious good among Lilongwe’s inhabitants. This has several reasons. For one, the landscapes of poverty in Malawi as well as in Lilongwe are vast. Making a living in order to „survive“ (as people say in direct translation from Chichewa to English) thus often prescribes how many city dwellers spend their time. And „it is a struggle“, as one inhabitant puts it. To find employment that pays sufficiently for one’s living expenses is something that the majority is not lucky enough to find as Malawi’s economy is struggling all the same. As a result, informal economies thrive in Lilongwe’s urban fabric and come with its benefits and vulnerabilities. The Labor Office[ing] and Bawo[ing] examples showcase some informal economies, many other forms can be encountered in Lilongwe’s public sphere, driven by the fact that the dominant mode of transaction is direct and face-to-face. As such, informal economies are also strongly linked to Lilongwe’s public urban life. Being in public often forms a requirement for those who are „hustling“ to make a gain (Thieme 2017). How else will potential customers, employers, or generally, a pool of people with enough spending power to conduct a transaction become aware of one’s economic activity?

But informal economies do not only require a public, they also take up time, a lot of time. Transactions may or may not come in on a rolling basis. To be there when transactions do come in is therefore essential to one’s income generation. Hence, one cannot afford to be elsewhere and spend time on much else. Except for Church[ing], Religion plays such an important role to many Malawians, so there must always be time for worship and prayer. Lilongwe’s operating hours accommodate this public practice.

Another component that influences public urban life due to time constraints stems from a more gendered perspective as was made visible in the Water Kiosk[ing], Bawo[ing], and Home Plot[ing] case studies. In Malawi, it is largely women who dedicate their time to domestic chores, such as getting water, doing the washing, cooking, and the general upkeep of the household. This, in turn, leads to little time for much else, too (this aspect is picked up in Food For Thought 4).

In a final comment, it is important to recognize that time constraints may be perceived as detrimental to the public urban life that could emerge if one was given more time. In a different reading, however, limited time could also be perceived as a crucial element of Lilongwe’s public urban life as it likewise produces a kind of public urban life in which inhabitants can „waste time“ within the limited time given.
People in Lilongwe assemble in pockets, that is to say, they mostly remain in their respective areas and only rarely traverse pockets or areas outside their habitual radius. The city’s urban form and its enframing tactics greatly contribute to this condition. As is the nature of segregated cities, this statement holds particularly true for lower income groups. One’s finances may not permit to extend one’s radius and they are also not meant to (see Food For Thought 1). Higher income groups, in a way, also assemble in pockets – in gated pockets mostly – but they can span their horizons further which enables them to tap into greater quantities and varieties of pocketed public urban life. As a result, for those who are more or less confined to their domiciles, private spaces in the shape of residential plots in private “ownership” (ownership in its most flexible sense) turn into alternative sites of encounter.

The Home Plot(ing) case study illustrates the workings behind the public urban live that occurs in the private space of somebody’s home. It further outlines the potentialities that lie in such private spaces or, to pick up the previous terminology, public private pockets. By producing temporary or rather momentary public spaces, the private space oscillates between being the domestic site of a family and being a meeting place. These kinds of public private spaces follow more convivial logics and are not to be mistaken with those that follow corporate interests and neoliberal logics as one would generally associate public private spaces with, occasionally also dubbed pseudo-public spaces. This is not to say that neoliberal logics are not to be found here but it is not its prime focus. There is little „pseudo” about the publics that assemble in these private realms as the publics found here are not lured in with hidden private interests in mind but, quiet contrary, rather show up spontaneously and unannounced without the owner’s knowledge. In this manner, the publics have a greater chance of being perceived as a nuisance, even when general courtesy does not reveal it, than to turn into the owner’s next cash cow.

What can be learned from these private public spaces is that a certain degree of porosity in terms of accessibility is a crucial element of public urban life in Lilongwe. When a city succumbs to vast landscapes of enclosed private space, for instance through gating and securitization measures, without simultaneously offering potential moments of public urban life within its private sphere, it will lead to the detriment of public urban life as a whole.

The WhatsApp(ing) case study could make an argument for how enclosed private spaces could maintain porous borders without tearing down walls. Through WhatsApp groups one can invite and grant a familiar or unknown public access to one’s private sphere, even if it is highly selective. In this manner, WhatsApp groups (or other similar modes of communication) might be able to facilitate a virtual backdoor to the public urban life that would otherwise remain enclosed and fully private.
Matrilineal and patrilineal patterns are part of Malawi’s culture. Gender divisions are therefore much en-grained in the psyche of most Malawians and carried beyond the traditional practices they originated from. The Labor Office, Water Kiosk, Bawo, Area 13 Market, Church, and Home Plot case studies all depict in one way or another how gender roles are acted out in Lilongwe’s public urban life. Already the fact that six out of eight case studies speak of varying gender-based practices hint at how deep gender roles run through Malawi’s society. In this context, gender is understood as the division between men and women. Other gender markers are not acknowledged in Malawi’s conservative publics and generally tabooed into the private realm. Yet, pockets of exceptions are emerging among younger generations.

Gender divisions materialize in Lilongwe’s public urban life in different ways. It is the physical distancing from one another, e.g. at the Labor Office when both men and women are searching for employment at the same time but not exactly in the same place, or at church when unmarried men and women do not sit together and take a seat on opposite ends. It is also the dominance or reign over a specific space in which only one gender group acts in, e.g. in the practice of playing Bawo, getting water from the water kiosk, adopting the role of a chairman, going out on weekends, and taking care of the household.

While gender divisions are actively lived without much resentment on either sides, it must be noted that gender divisions are not always as clear-cut as it might appear. Though men’s and women’s lifeworlds differ greatly in Lilongwe, public spaces are nonetheless being shared. Direct contact and physically being in one space does not necessarily form a requirement for shared spaces. Instead, shared public urban life can emerge from practices of approximation. One may sit separate but both men and women sit together in a common arena of life. Also, gender divisions rather represent porous borders than strict boundaries as exemplified in the Bawo game which is mostly played by men but women are just as much invited to play, too. Gender divisions are, therefore, better perceived as guidelines for general modes of conduct and mannerism within Lilongwe’s public urban lives, not as strict codes and rules.
The final Food For Thought in this work, yet not nearly the final insight that could be extracted from this work, revolves less around the processes behind the specificities of Lilongwe’s public urban life. It is much more informed by what the processes around public practices in Lilongwe are, revealed by the practice of research itself. Part of doing research was to dig in Lilongwe’s maps, plans, and drawings at the respective planning bodies. It proved to be no easy task and, finally, not very fruitful either as some plans were slowly falling apart and “misplaced”. What was revealed in the planning offices, however, is that the majority of Lilongwe’s inhabitants do not know and also have no means to know how Lilongwe is currently being shaped on paper and what plans urban planners keep in their drawers. Part of Lilongwe’s public urban life, consequently, are the invisible plans, unfinished projects, unheard-of ideas that so tremendously have an impact on public urban life once the plans are revealed and implemented. Malawi’s capital relocation to Lilongwe tells its own tale but there are also a variety of examples of smaller scale in Lilongwe’s urban fabric.

The Kachere[ing] case study illustrates how meeting points, so present in the minds of so many city dwellers, are not represented in formal planning. What is represented in formal planning, is presented only to the few. How many people in Lilongwe did not know about the plans of the Botanical Garden or Umodzi Park before it was drafted and built? How many people knew that the Area 13 Market was meant to become a fire station before the idea was dropped and shoved into a shelf? Who can tell the craft vendors next to the Bawo[ing] setting when they will also be given the promised permanent market stands? Who knows what happens with Labor Office[ing] when the District Council moves into its new building? At various intersections of public urban life, the lack of knowledge about Lilongwe’s planning sphere becomes clear through its invisibility. Reversibly, one could wonder whether the public is likewise invisible to Lilongwe’s urban planning sector as current plans and understandings seem to suggest.
One could stop here and take the theories and methodologies applied, the insights and Food For Thoughts strategically well-thought-through, and promptly follow suit to this works demand to create room for public spaces in Li-longwe. Before one enthusiastically starts this not so minor project, there are a few things that need to be addressed with regard to public space and Lilongwe’s urban development. As stated before, public space is only one of many elements that make up a city. In order to be able to produce public spaces in Lilongwe, one must first also understand the parameters in which it is acting in. This inevitably leads to questions around urbanity and urban planning which will be the focus of the last chapter in the book with the hope that it could become the first chapter in a new kind of public space found in Lilongwe.

A WORD ON LILONGWE’S URBANITY

Allow me to pause here for a brief mind game and to dwell on a question that implies alternative presents, pasts and futures for cities in Africa. What would African cities look like today if colonialism had never happened? What if African urban areas had evolved from African regions and had not been imposed by colonizing powers? European cities and current conceptions of public space surely did not grow and transform fully detached from transnational influences and without conflicts, however, European cities also have the chance to evolve more gradually without external forces (perhaps from Africa?) abruptly imposing their values onto them. So again, what would African cities look like today if colonialism had never happened? What would Lilongwe’s urban evolution be like if it was specifically catered to African terrains and lives only? Just to spin a thought in the style of Falco Calvini, would there be roads and cars, would there be all the mountain networks in all honesty? Could we imagine an elaborate funicular network in its place, saving cities from the task of fixing potholes year after year on half-broken roads? Would there be market squares or could there be underground markets that shield off the hot sun and heavy rains? Would there be more nomadic cities with fixed and permanent locations, catering those who resent being bound to one location but in want of enjoying the advantages of city life as they travel? Fact is, we will never know what could have happened if European colonizers had not arrived on African lands as much as we will never know what would have happened to European cities if African colonizers had come to Europe. History happened as it happened and a return to precolonial Africa, a move back to ancient or vernacular cities, would denounce the evidence that did take place and the lifeworlds that are a product of exactly the road taken, including everything that pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial history has produced. It is still producing in a much less linear way than these terms might suggest. Indulging in nostalgia, alternative worlds, or what-ifs as games are above all, therefore, rather counterproductive and should be treated with great care in order to avoid building pipe dreams that are finally too use to anyone. But it is important to understand where contemporary cities in Africa are from and after what logics they have been shaped. Naturally, cities in Africa (as much as any other cities in the world) need to be regarded and closely examined in the way they now are in order to come up with truly productive ideas and visions for where the continuous urban evolution is going to.

So, what kind of city is Lilongwe? This question looms lar- gely over questions around public space, too. After all, it is the public and their urban lives that essentially make and shape a city. Questions around public space, therefore, also simultaneously invite questions around a city’s urba- nity and are just as much related to my research question. When master plans are being ignored, building projects only halfway finished, and zoning tend to perpetrate more subdivisions than function, Lilongwe’s plans, maps and drawings tell very little about what Lilongwe actually stands for. In order to find representations of Lilongwe that are better suited to depict its realties on the ground, the most reliable source, in the end, may simply be one’s own pair of eyes. Yet, even they can easily be deceived by Li-longwe’s surface. Much of what is part of Lilongwe is invis- ible to the simple observer and one must dig deep in or- der to find clearer reflections of Lilongwe’s public urban life. While there are limits for this kind of excavation as public urban life does not always want to be found, this work can be perceived as an attempt in excavating and representing the hidden spaces of Lilongwe that interest me as an architectural visualizations. Embarking on a quest for Lilong- we’s public spaces by digging through its leading planning documents, by looking for the designated great spaces and recreational spaces, and finally, by following the public to where the public goes, this work has sharpened the view for Lilongwe’s public urban life so well its upbuilding. In this manner, the approach applied here can also be read as a means to re-learn learning, that is how knowledge can be generated when knowledge about a city’s urban life is scarce (McPhater 2018).

In how far is it relevant to understand Lilongwe’s public urban life and urbanity? Because it outlines and sets the stage for Lilongwe’s future public spaces as his approach is guided by sympathy and empathy can serve as a useful guideline for Lilongwe’s future public spaces as his approach is guided by cultural understandings of space and therefore, closely tied to Lilongwe’s public urban lives (2017: 598). "Sympathy he understood as identification with the ways of life, and particularly the suffering of another, as in the adage ‘treat thy neighbor as thyself.' Empa- thy he took to be a different kind of regard: curiosity about lives the observer cannot pretend to understand."

Richard Sennett 2017: 598

Once planning has turned passive, what is the role of urban planning in a city like Lilongwe then? Ultimately, cities do not need to be planned in order to be cities and to carry out their own lives. The case studies in this work are a testimony to that. Does this make urban planning redundant in Lilongwe? The answer is no. The profession of planning, in the end, has come to its existence because it is planners who have been trained to keep a clear view of what is going on in a city and to trace the demands people pose for their lives in a city. For Lilongwe’s pocketed public urban life, this entails that the pockets are better off to be connected, to be transformed from dots into lines of public urban life, allowing the city of Lilongwe to grow together and not apart (Simone and Pieterse 2017). This is not to romanticize public space as a catalyst for more democratic publics as the notions of segregation run deep in Lilongwe and can hardly be overcome overnight. It much moreacknowledges that the city needs breathing spaces in order to avoid a social combustion, given that the landscapes of the kinds of Lilongwe that interest me are tied to Lilongwe’s future public spaces as his approach is guided by cultural understandings of space and therefore, closely tied to Lilongwe’s public urban lives (2017: 598).

A Malawian urban planner commenting on the state of planning in Malawi over deliberate oversight to political and neoliberal power plays. Whatever the case may be, at the end of the day, Lilongwe’s planning sector reserves only few seats for its performing actors and actresses. While public urban life produces public spaces, at worst, urban planning seems to reduce them. Is urban planning then a solution or part of the problem that Lilongwe does not seem to have public spaces that specifically cater to the public? If it is part of the problem, the planning sector loses ground on being able to do what their profession at least stipulates to be doing, that is to formally create and produce livable urban spaces. So, instead, public space and urban space is produced informally, unguided and unaware of the challenges that come with it as those who produce these spaces have little means to see the bigger picture. The increasingly densifying peri-urban areas and sparsely populated central areas set in a highly sprawling urban environment are only one of many effects that can be ascribed to the planning sector’s passiveness.

ALTERNATIVE FUTURES FOR LILONGWE

A Malawian urban planner commenting on the state of planning in Malawi...
One could argue that Lilongwe’s public urban life has been deprived of exploring its full potential. In one way, this work shows that it has not because it has found means of expression despite or because of no formal recognitions and accommodation in Lilongwe’s urban fabric. In a way, this work also shows that there are certain aspects to how public urban life has been deprived of what it could have otherwise been if the city’s urban form would not spatially segregate and cluster its inhabitants to fulfill a vision of the city that is embedded in a “clinical degree of orderliness”.

In the course of my field research, I was able to assemble an inventory of public spaces by going along with Lilongwe’s inhabitants. I then narrowed down eight case studies of which three were examined more closely on the basis of depicting different modes of public urban life in Lilongwe. From there, I was able to extract five Food For Thoughts that are relevant for Lilongwe’s future urban development, not only with regard to public spaces but also for understandings of the city’s urbanity. With this being said, none of the answers I have found, provide a final and definite answer to my research questions. As I need to emphasize again, it is my interpretation, my understanding, and, there is no right or wrong answer. There are simply many answers to these questions. This is what I have learned and take from the overall research process: Thinking in binaries, in public/private or planned/unplanned rarely sheds more light into any field of inquiry. Where it gets interesting, albeit tricky, is what lies between the binaries. This is where people’s realities can be found and should be looked for.

As a European scholar researching in an African context, it seems natural to also ask what cities in Europe can learn from cities like Lilongwe. Perhaps, it is a lesson in broadening the lens for public urban life for it is highly diverse, yet, it seems under appreciated. Public spaces are much more than squares, parks, public facilities, and streets. Public urban life is more than drinking coffee in the sun, going for a run, or sitting on a bench as formal planning sometimes seems to imply. Naturally, other pockets of public urban life exist in European cities, too. However, I would argue, that it is harder to find. Formal planning has a much stronger grip on European cities than it has in Lilongwe. Lifeforms deviating from the plans are therefore not as „openly public” as in Lilongwe where life nearly always deviates from the plans.

In research, oftentimes the end of a research project splinters into more questions than answers and this work is no different. How can grounded urban realities, such as Lilongwe’s public urban life, find a heightened recognition in decision-making processes with regard to urban planning? How can public interests overcome private interests that are pushed in the prevalent planning practice? How can planning realities and practices be united with other urban realities in order to arrive at a planning practice that does not work against but with the public? These questions require to know who is planning planning and how the planner/s go about it. As such, examining planning practice as opposed to planning systems can serve as an entry point for further research. Moreover, this work as well as much of its theoretical frameworks have primarily dealt with public urban life in Lilongwe during daytime which is much owed to the fact that research on everyday life comes with a few not so insignificant security concerns, particularly as a woman. Nonetheless or particular so, this forms yet another point of entry for further research worth exploring as so little is known about the workings behind it. Based on a few first observations, Lilongwe’s nocturnal life appears even more pocketed, more compartmentalized than its daytime equivalent. This naturally invites a comparative approach.
GLOSSARY

AZUNGU
Azungu or also Mungu is the Chichewa term for “white person”, i.e. anyone who has no black skin color. Azungu is more polite than Mungu but both terms are frequently used. In its original sense, azungu supposedly referred to the “wanderers” or European explorers who came to Malawi. As they all happened to be of light skin color, the term azungu became equivalent to “white person”.

BAWO
Popular boardgame in Malawi that is played with a bawo board and 64 seeds. See Bawo[ing] case study for more details.

CALIFORNIA
Secound largest city in Malawi and economic center located in the Southern Region. It is named after David Livingston’s birthplace in Scotland and resembles cities like Nairobi.

BOMA
In its original sense, boma refers to the enclosure of livestock. In British colonies, boma additionally signified government offices with fortifying walls. Though, today, boma no longer necessarily refers to some form of enclosure, the term is still commonly used in Southern Africa in reference to governmental offices, particularly in remote areas.

CHICHEN
Colorful piece of cloth that is being worn by Malawian women. It is also worn by the Chewa tribe in the south west of Lilongwe.

COUNCIL
Malawi is divided into 35 councils from city, town, and municipal to district level. They have been mandated under local government law to undertake urban planning, surveying, rating and land development (Manda 2013).

COUNCIL COMMISSION
A voting district demarcated by the Electoral Commission under Section 8(1) (a) and (b) of the Electoral Commission Act in order to determine the number of representatives in the National Assembly.

KABAZA
Boma was found all over Lzongwe. They usually wait at a fix stop for customers. Their bicycles are equipped with cushions and a mount to hold on to.

KAMUZU BANDA
First president after Malawi gained independence from Britain. The autocratic leader and ill president reigned over the country for 35 years and fostered a culture of fear among Malawi’s population.

KALIMBA
High density residential area located in Area 43, in the north of Lzongwe.

KHONDE
General term to describe the veranda-like plinth in front of Malawian houses. Though they differ greatly in shape, size, and appearance, a khonde is always slightly elevated from the ground and usually covered by a roof.

LAKE MALAWI
A lake located in Malawi, hence its name. It also borders Tanzania where the lake is named Lake Nyasa. It is the world’s ninth largest lake and also known as Lake of Stars or Calendar Lake.

LILONGWE
Malawi’s capital and largest city in the country. It is located at the bottom of the Zomba Plateau in the Southern Region.

MALAWI
Landlocked country in Southern Africa. It shares borders with Zambia, Tanzania, and Mozambique.

MNUZU
A city in Malawi’s North Region. It is the third largest city in Malawi after Lzongwe and Blantyre.

MALAWI’S OFFICIAL LANGUAGES
Chichewa and English are Malawi’s official languages.

MATHEMATICIAN
A bawo board and 64 seeds. See Bawo[ing] case study for more details.

NSIMA
Pulp made from maize flour and national staple in Malawi. Different forms of nsima can be found in many other countries in Africa.

PANZONGO PANZONGO
Chichewa term for slow, slowly.

PEPANI
Chichewa term for sorry.

THANK
Chichewa term for welcome, literally translating into “you are most welcome”, and often used when somebody wants to extend an invitation, e.g. to enter somebody’s home.

URBAN AREAS
There is no clear definition of what comprises Malawi’s urban areas by Malawi’s administration. Different institutions use different definitions. The National Statistics Office categorizes urban areas on the basis of non-agricultural activity, population concentration and the level of service delivery and a minimum total population of 5,000. The Physical Planning Department considers declared planning areas as urban areas as well as central place functions with regard to a hierarchy adopted in 1987. This leads to a confusion of urban and rural boundaries, creating a challenge for urban authorities.

WARD
A bawo board and 64 seeds. See Bawo[ing] case study for more details.

ZI KOMO KWAMBIRI
A Chichewa term for “white person”, i.e. anyone who has no black skin color. Azungu became equivalent to “white person”.

REFERENCES

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I want to begin with thanking Prof. Dr. Monika Grubbauer for not only guiding me through my master thesis but also for being my intellectual mentor since day one of my master’s degree. Your thoughts have always been thought-provoking, your grounded nature a reassuring sign of optimism, and your subtle humor a calming reminder that we must not take everything too seriously. We share this planet with so many people, we might as well enjoy each other’s company. Ich danke dir vom Herzen.

Likewise, I wish to thank Prof. Dr. Christine Hentschel, who I met only late but fortunately not too late in my studies. Your sharp commentaries and encouraging energetic nature has certainly left a lasting mark not only on this work but also in my thinking. Thank you for going on board with me.

In addition, there are more than two handfuls of people in and outside of Malawi who deserve to be thanked here. First and foremost, I want to express my gratitude to everyone in Lilongwe who granted me access to their very own worlds. Thank you for letting me go along with you, ask, listen, see, feel, and document. Also, thank you to those who agreed to meet with me and to simply talk about urban Malawi, its everyday life and its planned dimensions.

Particular gratitude goes to Wonderful Hunga, CCODE advocate and a virtuoso of words. Thank you for lending me your eyes and sharing with me Lilongwe’s context that remains invisible to so many but to you. Much of this work is a tribute to the richness of our discussions, to the ease of each other’s understanding, and, last but not least, a friendship I am happy to have found. Your name is your game. Ndathokoza*, Wonderful.

I further want to thank Tjark Gall, Nina Fräser, Dr. Bernd Kniess, Dr. Alexa Färber, Dr. Amanda Hammar, Dr. Rasmus Christian Elling who all helped me in one way or another to make sense out of my thoughts and not to lose my train of thought.

In an eternal instance, I thank my family who, both in worry and in support, have always put up with my thirst for the unknown. I know you will continue to do so.

Finally, I say thank you to you, dear reader. We can choose to dig our minds into anything we want and you chose to dig it into public urban life in Lilongwe – I feel honored and appreciate your interest with the hope that you discover ed one or two things that were able to enlighten, surprise, even offend, amuse or touch you. In any case, I hope my work was able to stir your mind.

To all of you Zikomo kwambiri*. 

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*Ndathokoza and Zikomo kwambiri are words in Malawi Chichewa language that mean thank you.