Youth, alcohol and the forging of community in Malawian hip-hop music

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Abstract

This article examines youth, rap music, and alcoholism in Malawi. Alcohol abuse is one of the pressing social problems and has led to death in several instances. Government efforts to stem the problem are confronted to a prominent discourse among Malawian youth that extols the virtues of alcohol consumption. Focusing on hip-hop music, this paper draws upon the notion of waithood to explain this youthful glorification of alcoholism. I suggest that for the young artists and their followers in Malawi, alcohol and drug abuse are means of escape from their disillusionment with the state and society. Withdrawn into a fantasy world of their own that takes them away from the realities of poverty and lack of opportunities in Malawi, I argue that this abuse and glorification of alcohol in popular music is a form of subversive agency that challenges conventional structures of public authority (represented mainly by the government).

Keywords: alcohol abuse, Malawian hip-hop, Malawian urban music, Malawi youth, language.

About the author

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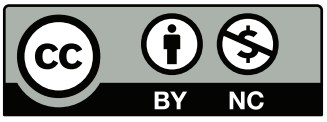
Funding details and disclosure: the author received no funding for this research.



Introduction

In the hook of one of his songs, entitled "Mowa", the Malawian rap artist Mafo asks the question, "Akazi ndi mowa ife timakonda cha?" ('What do we prefer between women and beer') (Mafo 2018). The uniform response from the rest of the young men providing backing vocals is a resounding, "MOWA!" ('BEER!'). The singer then goes on to sing the glories of beer, which he prefers over women. For a short period, this song became a hit in Malawi, with very little, if any, condemnation directed towards it (McBrams 2018). The content of this song, and the public response to it, links directly to the matter that this paper intends to address. It is an example of how music is used to transgress, reframe, and indeed demolish boundaries.

Alcohol and drug abuse has been a growing concern in Malawi for the past few years. This particularly involves the drinking of alcohol by the youth, including primary and secondary school, and university students. Although the consumption of alcohol has been ongoing for decades, it is only since the years 2007 and 2008 that the alcohol has become cheaply available in the form of sachets, better known by the Chichewa name *masacheti*. These sachets "quickly [became] popular among both adults and children due to their low price and availability" (Hoel et al. 2014, 100). Since then, the government has without success attempted several interventions to stem this malaise. The subject has been covered in the local media, whose reporting has included informing the public of deaths that have resulted from the consumption of some of these cheap liquors on the market. Both print and online news outlets, such as the *Daily Times*, *The Nation*, and *Nyasa Times*, have also featured interviews with public personalities such as chiefs and politicians, who bemoan the effects of the alcohol on the country's youth. In some cases, the articles have featured medical personnel, who provide more medically focused explanations of alcohol's effects on the human anatomy. In all the media reportage, rarely do we hear from the consumers of the substance.

The development of this paper stems from the understanding of the situation of the youth in Africa as being one of waithood, which Alcinda Honwana (2012, 4) defines as "a prolonged adolescence or an involuntary delay in reaching adulthood, in which young people are unable to find employment, get married, and establish their families". This is a group that, like many other Malawians, grapples with problems of poverty and economic stability. Most of the youth who are unable to continue with their education spend an "inactive" period of approximately five years before acquiring any gainful employment, if they are lucky (Garcia and Fares 2008, 15). The job market is hardly broad enough to accommodate this group, most of whom lack university education. This is compounded by the fact that a lot of the youth are positioned in a period of transition, from being dependents to being independent, and are experiencing the biological changes that come with their age. AIDS, which has taken a heavy toll on the populace of Malawi, has also particularly affected the youth. The argument is that this very same situation of stagnation and frustration becomes fertile ground for musical creativity, leading to the development of a culture that, through singing about alcohol consumption, highlights the creation of a counter-public inhabited by the youth.

Against this background, there are a number of questions that the study attempts to address. The main aim is to seek an explanation for songs glorifying alcohol. How do we explain the tendency for the Malawian youth to sing about alcohol in hip-hop music? Furthermore, what is it about these songs that make them popular, especially to other young listeners? Specific questions include: what is the link between the consumption of alcohol and the assertion of masculinity? What sort of vocabulary is used to talk about alcohol in the songs? How does the topic of alcohol in the songs help in the creation of cohesion among

the youth? This paper is an attempt to highlight the discourse that is being produced, not just about the youth, but by the youth themselves.

The next section explains the mode of collecting the sample songs, as well as the conversion of that data into a form usable in the analysis. I also discuss the theoretical lens and the concept of the public sphere, which is central to the paper. This is followed by a brief discussion of the existing literature on the subject, both in Africa more broadly and in Malawi itself. This is followed by a discussion of the concept of youth, and then proceeds to discuss specific songs, particularly those that explicitly connect youth with the intake of alcohol. The last section discusses yet more songs, buttressing the argument that the topic of alcohol in the songs is used by the youth to create an alternative public sphere.

Methodological notes

All the songs were accessed on YouTube, purposely selected, and downloaded from www.malawi-music.com. In other words, I selected songs that explicitly address the subject under study: the intake of alcohol in relation to the creation of a public sphere inhabited by the youth. The study applies the methods of literary analysis to the lyrics of the songs. A total of 11 songs were collected. The songs were then transcribed in order to have the lyrics in written form. All the songs collected were performed by male artists. This by no means implies that alcoholism is social problem for Malawian men alone. But there is no doubt a connection to ideas about masculinity. Although the discussion is mainly based on the lyrical content of the music, there is also occasional reference to the visual content (in music videos) where it has relevance to the discussion.

Taking an interdisciplinary approach involving youth studies and popular culture, the study reads the music as both an exposition of the experiences of the youth, and also as a literary artform representing a blend of Western and local aesthetic trends. Accordingly, this is also reflected in the theoretical tools used to analyse the music. A key concept utilized in this paper is that of the public sphere. Following Habermas ([1962] 1991), scholars have sought to contextualize the notion of the public sphere in Africa and especially the role of popular culture in defining political experiences and action (see, for example, Willems 2012).

Central to the African critique of the public sphere is the emphasis on its fragmentation and the role of popular culture in the constitution of multiple publics. In an early critique, Nigerian sociologist Peter Ekeh (1975) remarked that a Western view of a unified and shared public sphere was untenable in Africa given how colonialism had disrupted precolonial African social formations. Accordingly, Ekeh argued, colonialism had created "two publics", the civic realm of national and state bureaucratic officialdom and a primordial realm of ethnic and other primary loyalties. In these circumstances, a shared popular culture plays a great role in how the chasms between civic officialdom and the informal context of everyday life are negotiated. Specifically, Karin Barber (1987, 3) writes that "In Africa ordinary people tend to be invisible and inaudible", and often find songs to be one of "the principal channel[s] of communication". Similarly, Susan Andrade (2007, 86) argues that, in Africa, the notion of the public sphere "cannot encompass the breadth of political processes and political expression, except those of the local elite". This explains the emergence of alternative public spheres, including that inhabited by the youth. It is within this context that I argue for music's role in creating a sense of community, based on shared struggles.

The primary basis for this discussion is the identification of youth waithood as a situation that spurs their creativity, including artistic creativity. However, the nature of the songs is equally important, especially the way in which they challenge authority, manifested

through parental and government restrictions on the behaviour of the urban youth. A rebellious nature is a common feature of rap music across the globe. In Malawi, it resonates with a point Fetson Kalua (2014, 44) advances about the newer music trends, writing that they "gesture towards the artists' tendency and daring to get under the skin of power as a means of challenging and addressing cycles of political violence and oppression that the people of this country have endured […]". In addition, the songs highlight the articulation of a new esoteric public sphere that is inhabited by the youth. This particular sphere stands out due to the anti-authority tone often found in its voice. Lastly, the presence of alcohol in Malawian hip-hop music is expressive of a wish to escape from the frustrations of waithood, such as poverty and lack of employment opportunities.

An overview of the existing literature

There is already a growing scholarly interest in hip-hop music in Africa. Mwenda Ntarangwi's *East African Hip Hop: Youth Culture and Globalization* (2009), as well as the collected essays in Eric Charry's *Hip Hop Africa: New African Music in a Globalizing World* (2012) and Marina Terkourafi's *The Languages of Global Hip Hop* (2010) are just a sample that provides ample evidence of the bustling social analysis of this music genre across the continent, and indeed the globe. Other scholars highlight the agency accorded by hip-hop and related musical genres to the youth within the continent. Examples include David Kerr's work on the linguistic dynamism of hip-hop music in Tanzania (2015, 2018), Catherine M. Appert's (2016, 2018) work on the hip-hop genre in Senegal, Imani Sanga's (2011) work on the rap and "Bongo Fleva" genres in Tanzania, Janne Rantala's (2016) discussion of politics and rap music in Mozambique, Wonderful Bere's (2008) and Rekopantswe Mate's (2012) discussions of the "Urban Grooves" genre in Zimbabwe, and Bhekizizwe Peterson's (2003) work on the Kwaito music genre in South Africa. This is just a quick overview and there is much more that could be covered in a more careful survey of the emerging field of African hip-hop studies. We cannot delve into a discussion of the findings of the research from all these areas. They are mentioned here in order to present evidence of academic interest in African hip-hop trends. The music of Malawi is important not merely because it adds a new geographical dimension, but more significantly, because of the way we may read the youthful experiences of social marginality and waithood of the artistes as a cradle for their musical creativity.

More locally, within the Malawian context itself, there has also been some interest in the musical genre of hip-hop. Seebode (2012), in particular, discusses the emergence of rap music as a form of choice among the youth, particularly since the Kamuzu Banda era in 1994. Another pair of researchers, John Fenn and Alex Perullo (2000), display interest in the language choices of hip-hop artists in Malawi. A recent study by Namusanya (2019) is also of interest in its focus on drug addiction in Malawian urban music. John Lwanda, who has written quite a lot on Malawian music, barely touches on the new forms at all in any of his work, implicitly suggesting that Malawian hip-hop music is not what counts as an "authentically" local genre (see Lwanda 2003, 2008, 2009). However, that is a position that may be countered by the current proliferation of this genre, and its popularity among the youth. What is of interest in this paper is the way the use of alcohol is addressed in the genre of Malawian hip-hop (also known as Malawian urban music) and how the addressing of this subject also expresses the forging of a unique public sphere, populated by the youth. One thing that must be noted is that the domain of hip-hop music in Malawi is primarily populated by the male youth (Gilman and Fenn 2006; Seebode 2012), a point that has

also been noted about artistes on the continent in general (Charry 2012). Additionally, the dominant themes that are to be found in the hip-hop songs performed by female artistes revolve around romantic relationships.

Malawian youth and alcohol: the Midori factor

The concept of youth, much as it is in common usage, is not easy to define because it tends to be context-specific. Honwana (2012, 11), for instance, argues that basing the definition of youth on age has not worked because "age categories are not natural; they constitute cultural systems with particular sets of meanings and values". Various countries also have their own definitions of youth. Youth, according to the Malawi National Youth Policy (2013), for example, is between 10 and 35 years. Most of the hip-hop artistes fall within this bracket. That the activities of the youth in Africa may be connected to the creation of an alternative public sphere can already be gleaned from the work of Diouf (2003, 3), who speaks of an emerging "irruption" of the youth into the public sphere, where they are increasingly regarded as a threat. Importantly, we might realize from the start that the platform of hip-hop music affords a voice to the younger members of the country's citizenry. This is related to a point raised by Nancy Fraser in her critique of Habermas ([1962] 1991). She observes that, in reaction to the bourgeois public, counter-publics emerged that "contested the exclusionary norms of the bourgeois public, elaborating alternative style of political behaviour and alternative norms of public speech" (Fraser 1992, 116). Fraser's focus is on the feminist subaltern counter-public, but in this article, I argue that in Malawi the youth also constitute a similar category. Indeed, despite registering a few political and social successes, the position of the youth remains relatively marginal (Seebode 2012, 237). Hip-hop music is an example of an alternative form of public speech that has been embraced by the youth. Indeed, according to Halifu Osumare (2012, 84), within many countries in Africa, "hip-hop […] is an important tool in shifting power and offering young people a modicum of authority in shaping their personal lives and national affairs". In their research on youth languages in Africa, Nico Nassenstein and Andrea Hollington (2016, 175) raise a similar point, noting that hip-hop music has contributed to the creation of a global linguistic repertoire among the youth, one that allows them to "reflect fluid identities in a globalized world". The issues that are raised in the songs are those that are pertinent to the youth. An important factor to consider in the emergence of hip-hop music in Africa is exactly the fact that "youth culture [which includes hip-hop music] rises as a form of resistance to the hegemonic culture of adults" (Mandala 2017, 30). What then is the place of alcohol in this resistance?

We can begin to address this query by considering a case in point, one of the most popular of the banned drinks in Malawi, a liquor called Super Midori. So popular is the drink that it is often featured in hip-hop music songs, not in condemnation, but rather in praise. At least three songs feature the drink in their titles. The first is Astrol's (real name Slade Sambani) song, which is simply titled "Midori", an emotional expression of praise for the drink, as articulated by a young man who religiously devotes all his time to the imbibing of alcohol. The opening lines of the song suffice to support the argument concerning the role of alcohol in the lives of the youth. The song starts as an interview, in which Astrol is asked why he never raps about school, but only focuses on alcohol. In response to the interviewer's question, Astrol raps:

> *Sukulu ndinasiya kalekale/Anzanga mumandiseka mumati ndine mphale/ Akazi amandikana amati ndine stoner/ Amandiona daily ndikusuta fodya/ Zamunthu sindilabada/Ndipatse bawa sindikana/Ndipatse pen, ndipatse kope,*

zovaya geri sitimvana/Akazi oyesa maya alibe ntaji kwa ine asise/N'nakwatira bawa, fodya ndi cocaine aise/Ghetto youth alibe ntaji please move on/ Tizingoyaka daily basi opanda season

(I dropped out of school a long time ago/ friends you mock me saying I am a loser/ girls rebuff me saying I am an addict/they see me smoking cigarettes daily/I don't worry about other people's opinions/I will not refuse if you offer me beer/I will refuse if you offer me a pen, a notebook, or try to send me to school/girls who test me have no chance at all/I am married to beer, cigarettes and cocaine/a ghetto youth has no opportunities in this life/ We will just be getting high daily regardless of the season) (Astrol 2017)

The narrative that the rapper presents in the song is evocative of the dire situation in which the youth in Malawi find themselves. One of the common features of waithood is the failure to complete formal education (Honwana 2012, 24). Failing to succeed in school leads most of the youth down a path of depression, where the only recourse appears to be alcohol. This is an attitude that we find in the other artistes to be discussed in this paper. Much as he acknowledges the situation of hopelessness and despair, he admits that there is one avenue that remains open to him, the path of Midori.

Another ode to the drink, entitled "Ghetto Hennessy (Midori Gang)" by the rapper Toast (real name Gomezgani Kambwiri) articulates a group identity formed around alcohol consumption. "Ghetto Hennessy" is an apt case study since the rapper accurately captures the idea of defiance and community that is at the heart of this article's argument. This song is perhaps one of the best examples illustrating the way the hip-hop music scene articulates a sense of freedom that is to be found with the assistance of alcohol.

In the chorus of the song, the rapper sings,

In the ghetto ain't nobody have no money so no Hennessy
In the ghetto ain't nobody have no money so no Heineken
What we sipping on…?

MIDORI-DORI, MIDORI-DORI.
(Toast 2017)

These lines alone illustrate the idea that alcohol is the ultimate recourse for the youth who are feeling the pinch of poverty. As is the case with many other forms of hip-hop in Malawi, there is some appropriation of Black American culture. In fact, the line "sippin on Midori" echoes lines often mentioned by the late American rapper 2Pac, who often expressed a fondness for "sippin on Hennessy", which is again directly mentioned in the title.

However, instead of a straightforward appropriation, the rapper chooses to identify with the Ghetto Hennessy, which is the illicit drink, Midori. This drink is the cheapest that the youth can afford, and it frequently replaces the more expensive drinks, Hennessy and Heineken.[1] In his claim to be sipping on the banned drink, we see a deliberate challenge to authority. In her book, *The Africanist Aesthetic in Global Hip-Hop*, Halifu Osumare (2007, 72) observes that "Youthful rebellion forms the ubiquitous connective marginality of hip-hop, where most nations' young people are able to identify with hip-hop's rebellious youthful nature". It is no surprise therefore that we find such a rebellious tone in Malawian hip-hop. It is exactly this sort of production that raises concerns about "the bodies of young people and their behaviour, their sexuality and their pleasure" (Diouf 2003, 3). Drinking Midori is an expression of masculinity through daring to do that which is forbidden by the government.

[1] Hennessy is a French cognac, often associated with the upper class. In recent years, however, it has come to be a status symbol among Black American rappers. Heineken is a Dutch lager, which is imported into Malawi from South Africa. As an imported beer, it too has gained a high status amongst the youth.

It is therefore an expression of the Freudian death drive through the drinking of that which has left many dead in its wake, but also in the deliberate provocation of the government authorities. The challenge is emphasized even more when Toast says "*tikumwa plain plain*" ('we are drinking the alcohol neat'). Diluting the liquor would be tantamount to admitting the diminishing of one's masculinity. Drinking the alcohol neat, on the other hand, is indicative of resilience and endurance, which is an indirect commentary on the way the youth endure various other hardships in their everyday existence.

The consumption of drinks such as Midori could be explained as the final recourse for the youth, who find that the world has not availed any opportunities to them. This is quite clear in Astrol's song, where the artist claims that the drinking of Midori is because he failed to succeed in school. Similarly, P4ce and Ace Oji (2017), another pair of rappers in the country, stress that they will drink Midori even if it kills them. The idea is therefore to live for the moment since the future is uncertain. In such lyrics we find the expression of a form of escapism into a world that parallels the real one. The world of alcohol consumption for the youth casts a hue over the environment around them, where the "high" is the only ultimate objective. This is obviously a sad state of affairs, but there is logic in such a perspective. When Toast tells us that "In the ghetto ain't nobody have no money so no Hennessy", he is emphasising the point that there are hardly any opportunities available for the youth in the ghetto. As Honwana (2012, 47) notes, waithood is compounded by the fact that Africa has among its highest unemployment rates among the youth. Songs such as these are therefore expressive of the hypocrisy of a circumstance where the youth have easy access to cheap alcohol, but difficulty in finding healthy and sustainable livelihoods through jobs.

The visuals of "Ghetto Hennessy (Midori Gang)" are equally crucial to our interpretation of the song. Hip-hop music has always relied on its visual impact in order to effectively convey its message. That is why it is always important to remember that rap music is part of a wider hip-hop culture, which relies heavily on visual aspects such as clothing and graffiti. The Malawian hip-hop music videos continue this trend. The hip-hop artist embodies a certain ethos which is first and foremost to be interpreted in the way he looks: his clothing, his tattoos, his drinks, his weapons. These all contribute to the creation of a particular persona that he wishes to portray to society. The psychologist Carl Jung argued that human beings often create a persona that they project onto the world. The persona exists as "a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and on the other to conceal the true nature of the individual" (Jung [1943] 1966, 264). That is the ideal "them" that they wish the world to see. In Malawian hip-hop music, this persona is of the individual who is inseparable from his liquor, a figure that we also find in Black American rap music. One of the forms of criticism that has for a long time been levelled against African hip-hop is the mimicking of Black American culture. This also involves the visual aspect. However, despite the obvious origins of the hip-hop genre, we have to acknowledge that the appropriation of this "foreign" culture results in something that is altogether new (Motley and Henderson 2007). The novelty comes mainly in the form of the synthesis with local cultural imaginaries. Nilan and Feixa (2006, 8) observe that "[y]outh cultures are always emphatically local, despite globally-derived details, since youth are embedded in immediate and embodied economic and political relations". Another way to view this is to adopt Stephanie Newell and Onookome Okome's (2014, 8) argument that "urban popular art reveals that African urban dwellers often produce ingenious responses to the flows of local and international commodities and resources in their cities". These scholars have in common the argument that what we are witnessing is a synthesis of the foreign and the local, re-

sulting in an artform that is quite novel.

In the song, the rapper paradoxically attempts to create the idea of affluence, which is at odds with the constant reference to the poverty in which the youth exist. The message is that, whereas they may lack various other opportunities, at least cheap liquor is in abundance, so much so that they can afford to bathe in it. After all, as the rapper sings, "*midoridori kungovumba ngati manna*" (Midori is in abundance, just like manna) (Toast 2017). This is a deliberately subversive element, where the rapper draws upon biblical imagery to describe the abundance of the liquor. One could extend this image further to indicate that the youth regard themselves as the Israelites, under the oppression of the Egyptian pharaoh, only to be rescued by the one true God. In this case, the Midori is God-given, which is an argument that may be marshalled against those who ban the substance.

Forging a community identity

Regarding new platforms for voicing the concerns of the youth, Honwana (2012, 134) argues that hip-hop music is evidence of new forms of citizenship among the waithood generation. This point could be applied specifically to the songs examined in this paper. The stress on alcohol consumption is just one part of a wider emphasis on consumerism often reflected in hip-hop culture. One's identity is forged around what one owns, often including clothes, cars, and controversially, women. This is also to be observed amongst Malawian rappers. In Malawi, "urban youth exerted their own cultural preferences and power within their practices of cultural consumption" (Mandala 2017, 3). Central to this identity formation is the consumption of alcohol, which helps to establish one's status.

A glimpse at some of the lyrics by a few of the hip-hop artists supports this fact. In the song "Mkalabongo" by Tonik, the rapper says "*Bro osazimva, suli ghetto ngati sumakala ubongo*" (Tonik 2016), stressing the point that ghetto credit, as it were, can only be gained through the drinking of hard liquor. If one really wants to be seen as being "ghetto", then one has to partake of this hard liquor. Similarly, Mayar Noel (2014) sings "*Ali ndi bawa amatonyada*" (he who has alcohol can walk around proudly). Such statements confirm the place of alcohol as a status symbol among the youth, or even as a fashion accessory. Also clear is the fact that such lyrics set aspirations for the youth, who then might begin to regard alcohol as the key to entering this community.

The songs about alcohol at their core express for the need for communal belonging. The notion of a Midori Gang, for example, is one that shows strength in unity. In most of the songs, there is the idea of the individual as part of a community. However, this is a sense of community that is not forged on any sense of Africanness, as perhaps one might have found among the Negritude poets. Instead, as Evan Mwangi (2007, 321) argues in a similar context, "[t]he personae and characters presented in the music have loose rural roots, and, instead of lamenting alienation from traditional culture, they celebrate their unsure identities in the city in a grammar that seems impatient with notions of national purity and rural stability…". It is in part for this reason that we prefer to term this an alternative public sphere, or a counter-public, since it has parallels that exist within the same geographic space. Mwangi's argument explains the constant reference to the ghetto as a shared space of suffering and endurance. The reference to this space is found in many of the songs. For example, in the song "Peter Mutharika", Shozie (real name Ken Kalore) extends an invitation to the president of Malawi to visit the youth in the ghetto, where many frustrations abound. Like Toast, the underlying conviction in the song is that government authorities do not really care about the plight of the youth. As Kyc Nyimbo (real name Kelvin Yamikani Chaguza) observes in his song "Machesi", "regimes do change but things don't change" (Nyimbo 2017). This ig-

noring of the youth is at the government's own peril. The ghetto comprises the masses who struggle just to make it, one day at a time. In contrast to the earlier forms of Malawian hip-hop, which expressed an elitist, standoffish position, the current songs embrace the community. In that sense, the rap artist sees himself as the voice of that community. Of course, in this case, it is mostly the community of the youth, who regard the government authorities as failing to pay heed to their plight. Toast (2017) further argues that the community "ain't got no king" as "they all deserve a spot", again emphasizing the fact that the poverty in the ghetto enforces a sense of equality that at the same time creates a bond between its inhabitants.

This paper stresses the point that, as far as hip-hop music is concerned, the best form of community is to be found where the youth gather to drink beer, as expressed in Kyc Nyimbo's statement that one cannot find him at home. Instead, he is always to be found where people are drinking alcohol, precisely the same statement that fellow rapper Slessor (2017) makes in "Ku Shabini". "Ku Shabini" takes its name from *shebeen*, another constant referential point in Malawian hip-hop music. The South African origin of the term denotes a place where men gather to purchase and drink (often illicit) liquor. It may therefore be identified as social watershed. Certain aspects of this definition have been carried over into the Malawian setting (Rogerson and Hart 1986, 156). For example, in K2B Block's "Malonda" (2016), despite the apparent identification with market people that the song expresses, and the highlighting of the economic difficulties faced by the average Malawian person, the rappers indicate that their hard-earned money "zimakathela ku shabini" ('all ends up at the *shebeen*'). The *shebeen*, therefore, and particularly the alcohol that is found there, is a space that allows the purging of frustrations that mount due to economic hardships.

Ruth Mandala (2017, 2) argues that the youth in Blantyre (a city in Malawi), in particular, "often created alternative spheres in which to live their lives as urban youth". This is a point that is not to be ignored. It recalls the coffee houses that Habermas ([1962] 1991, 30) highlights as being fora for discussions on the state of the society. Within Malawi, Japhet Mchakulu (2018) tentatively identifies these spaces as being university campuses. However (as he himself cursorily notes), these cater for a limited percentage of the youth, given that many of the youth do not make it to university for a variety of reasons. The hip-hop music platform manifests itself as a more accessible space for most of the youth.

In hip-hop music, the label of the "Ghetto youth" captures this idea of belonging. Both Kyc Nyimbo and Toast refer to themselves as "Ghetto youths", an identity that is embraced by most of the other artists. One of the definitions of the ghetto youth, according to Kyc Nyimbo, is the lack of money, despite having a degree. That is how difficult life is. Even the women, as materialist as they have become (in his opinion), do not find him attractive. The solution, in his opinion, is "kuyaka ngati machesi" ('being set alight like a matchstick') (Nyimbo 2017). In youth lingo, *kuyaka* ('burning/being set alight') is used colloquially and metaphorically to refer to getting high, specifically by ingesting alcoholic drinks. To liken himself to combusting like a matchstick emphasizes the intensity of the high that he seeks, which will offer an escape from his state of joblessness and frustration. As the rapper stresses, for the contemporary ghetto youth, "akasangalala ndiye kuti wamwa ka bawa" ('the only time he is happy is when he drinks some alcohol') (Nyimbo 2017). Another crucial aspect of the ghetto youth is the idea of constant hustle, as reflected in Slessor's (real name Slessor Munthali) "Pa Chiwaya" (2015), where he points out that a ghetto youth never rests and never goes on holiday. This may initially seem like the articulation of an admirable work ethic. However, the same point is used to express the fact that the ghetto youth is always drinking or drunk, as Astrol points

out in "Midori".

The sense of community is so strong that those who act in ways that undermine it risk being ostracized within this group. One way in which one may endanger the community is by simply not buying beer for their colleagues. "Sagula mowa"[2] by Charisma, featuring Donzo, is another song that reveals the adulation of alcohol. However, this is a song that expresses a common rhetoric surrounding the imbibing of alcohol by youths. As this paper has already highlighted, the drinking of alcohol is usually a communal event. It serves to unite the drinkers in their intoxication as well as in their common woes, forging what may be termed an intoxicated identity. Therefore, the actual buying (not just drinking) of the alcohol is also supposed to be a communal activity, in the sense that everybody is supposed to pitch in. Slessor's "Ku Shabini" hints at this point. However, Charisma's "Sagula mowa" ('[He] does not buy beer') is a song that emphasizes it better. The message of the song is directed at one particular individual, who does not contribute to the purchasing of the beer. In describing this individual, Charisma raps:

> *Amabwera ndi ya u phanza*
> *Amabwera ndi ya u Tarzan*
> *Mowa wanga womwe*
> *Mpaka kundichitira nkhanza*
> *Pamapeto ndikusanza*
> *Nde mwapindula chani braza?*
>
> (He comes looking like a bouncer/he comes looking like Tarzan/I have bought the beer/But he uses force to drink it/And ends up vomiting/What have you benefited from this, my brother?) (Charisma 2017).

The song is therefore a mockery of the said individual, who relies on brute strength, cowing others into sharing their alcohol, only to vomit afterwards. The song also features a refrain "Uyo uyo", which is a jeer from the rest of the drinkers, using their united position to mock and shame the misfit.

From the few examples above, it is clear that there is a certain sense of pessimism that rides alongside the jubilance expressed in the songs. On the one hand, one finds an escape through the alcohol, an outlet for frustrations. In addition, as we see in songs such as "Ku Shabini", there is a sense of belonging that is shared by all the youth who drink alcohol. On the other hand, there appears to be a grim acceptance of the lot of the youth in contemporary Malawi. Kyc Nyimbo, for example, acknowledges the fact that the educated young man is likely to face death after barely two years of drinking *mkalabongo*. Interestingly, however, the liquor is not blamed for his death. Instead, it is the government authorities who, through their control of the public sphere, have not made available opportunities for the youth to thrive in an environment where they do not feel the need for recourse to cheap alcoholic drinks (Nyimbo 2017).

There is quite heavy use of specialist vocabulary in the songs, terms that have been developed by the youth over time. This has the effect of creating bonds through the specialist language, as well as keeping outsiders out. The new "speech community" has gained power through the use of terms that effectively keep others out of the conversation (Moto 2001, 320). It would be prudent to sound a caveat, at this point, drawing from the observation by Nassenstein, Hollington and Storch (2018, 14) that what is often deemed youth language in African town and villages may also be used by other members of the community, who may not necessarily belong to the same demographic. Much as this may be true of other terms, popularised through social media, it does not apply to terms used to refer to alcohol. For instance, one will rarely find beer be-

[2] The popularity of this theme of not buying beer can be seen in the fact that in the early 2000s, another Malawian artist, Albert Khoza, released a song with the very same name. One may also connect this theme to the popular tradition of singing about alcohol, as in the *mitungu* songs of northern Malawi (see Banda 2013).

ing referred to by its general Chichewa term, *mowa*. Instead, the commonly used phrase is the colloquial *bawa*, used exclusively among the youth in Malawi. Another common colloquial term is *mkalabongo*, which designates both the drink and the beer drinking location. The name *mkalabongo* literally means 'that which scratches the brain'. It is used to highlight the intoxicating/stimulating effect of the alcohol on the mind of the drinker, who feels that his brain has been 'scratched'. At the same time, the name incidentally refers towards the potentially lethal effect of the liquor on the brain of the drinker. As Moto (2001, 321) points out, language serves the purpose of "[establishing] a strong social bond, identity and the expression of solidarity". The language choices in hip-hop music are particularly important. As Fenn and Perullo (2000, 82) observe, "The English language pervades rap musical performances in Malawi, but it occurs alongside and is often interspersed with Chichewa". While this is true, in actual fact, the reverse trend is increasingly observed, where the rap is predominantly in Chichewa, but occasionally sprinkled with English.

Conclusion

Following Alcinda Honwana's arguments about waithood as an important social factor in explaining the experiences of frustration among African youth, I have argued here that alcoholism is an important register of such frustration among the youth in Malawi. This youthful alcoholism, I have also suggested, permeates the expression of musical creativity by young artists in Malawi. While alcoholism and musical expressions are both social avenues for Malawian youth to escape their frustrations, neither profoundly obliterates their reality of waithood. As is also the case elsewhere across Africa, many young men and women continue to be denied opportunities for productive lives that would enable them to thrive.

I have shown that the lyrics of the songs of young artists are a fruitful avenue for examining the plight of the youth in postcolonial Africa and their frustrations with their governments. In the context of Malawi, I have also shown that instead of addressing this youthful frustration through policies that foster youthful creativity and productivity, the government views these youth as a threat to the social and political order in the country. The government's policies of cracking down on the youth and on the associated issue of alcoholism only reinforce the sense of marginalization felt by Malawian youth.

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