

Transnational Governance and the Pacification of Youth: the Contribution of Civic Education to Disempowerment in Malawi

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Introduction

Whenever there is reason to highlight the limited rewards of liberal democracy in sub-Saharan Africa, the national elites are usually the first to be accused. The elites may be understood to include not only the Head of State and a handful of other ruling and opposition leaders, but also the wealthiest segments of the commercial class, sometimes complemented with senior civil servants and religious leaders. Critical analyses focusing on elites can be illuminating, exposing those who most conspicuously wield political and economic power (see Good 2001). However, such critiques may also end up obscuring the social and political dynamics involved. They often seem to build on the expectation that if only the self-serving agendas of national elites could be better controlled, transitions to genuine democracy would ensue. The evidence in this paper shows that certain inequalities are more entrenched than what these expectations suggest. I also argue that these inequalities cannot be reduced to 'objective' class antagonisms. My intent is not to exculpate national elites but to implicate a broader cross-section of agents and agencies – some national, others foreign – in hijacking democracy and human rights.

An exclusive focus on national elites as the enemies of democracy can be challenged on at least three counts. First, especially since the onset of multipartyism, elites must be conceived of in the plural, with the new prospects for competition making earlier reciprocity and mutual interests among elites somewhat obsolete (cf. Bayart 1993). The implications for democratisation are, therefore, rather more complex than what a categorical condemnation of national elites allows for. In particular, little will be achieved if analysis is guided by, in Werbner's words, 'a bias, notoriously well established among social scientists, against elites, as if they were the curse of liberal democracy' (2002: 130). Pluralism fosters a politics of recognition, bringing to the fore the long-suppressed diversity of many sub-Saharan nations (Berman et al. 2003; Englund and Nyamnjoh 2004). Counter-elites emerge to challenge those who pursue particularist interests under the guise of national leadership. Because these processes may yield both liberals and warlords, the actual consequences for democratisation cannot be determined without empirical investigation. Moreover, much as the widespread imagery of political leaders as 'fathers' and their subjects as 'children' can facilitate exploitation and abuse, the same moral ideas may also direct attention to the rights of dependants (see Schatzberg 2002).

Second, the focus on national elites obscures the appeal of such hierarchical notions among the non-elite. This oversight is especially unfortunate when the analytical

purview is extended to non-governmental organisations (NGOs). A conspicuous feature of new democracies world-wide, NGOs have attracted considerable donor support as agencies that are believed to provide independent voices.¹ Although the executive directors of some NGOs undoubtedly belong to the educated and affluent elite, much of their work among so-called beneficiaries, often spoken of as ‘the grassroots’, is conducted by modestly educated and lowly paid officers and volunteers. The evidence in this paper shows that these NGO and project personnel maintain the same distinctions towards ‘ordinary’ subjects as the elites. Despite their cherished ability to criticise power, activists, and not least those claiming to promote the cause of democracy and human rights, are quite as much embedded in entrenched inequalities as anyone else and often fail to resist the seductions of status distinctions. Thus a focus on national elites would miss an important dimension of democratisation as it is being introduced to the populace. Taking activists’ rhetoric for granted, the focus would fail to notice how their practice actually contributes to maintaining inequalities.

Third, the case of NGOs and various human rights projects not only demonstrates the importance of considering other agents than elites, it also indicates how democratisation is embedded in transnational political processes. The focus on national elites is likely to assume specific spatial relations in which power is located in national urban centres (for a critique, see Guyer 1994). Both the masses and NGOs are placed ‘below’ the state, with critics attaching great hopes to a ‘civil society’ that would challenge and resist the elites ‘from below’. Yet the fact is that many NGOs and human rights projects depend on complex transnational links for their material and political survival. As such, they may challenge or, as is the case here, support the state not ‘from below’ but as agencies with capacities that are equal, if not superior, to those of the state (see Lewis 2002; Migdal 2001). A concept of transnational governance is central to the argument of this paper, pointing out the need to understand how African activists and their foreign donors together deprive democracy and human rights of substantive meaning (cf. Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Jenkins 2001).

The shift of focus from national elites to a broader range of agents and agencies should not be seen as a denial of *elitism* as a central aspect of democratisation in countries like Malawi. On the contrary, the salience of elitism as a cultural disposition appears more clearly precisely when the focus is thus expanded. It is a cultural disposition partially shared by both African activists and foreign donors, a habit of thought and practice that conceals entrenched inequalities in a rhetoric of popular participation. While some aspects of that rhetoric may appear new – such as the appreciation of ‘community’ as the locus of democracy and development – the ways in which it is put into practice frequently suggest historical parallels with both the colonial rule and post-independence autocracy. More precisely, elitism maintains the status quo not by promoting self-professed elites but by associating democracy and development with particular indices and institutions, many of which bear little relevance to the impoverished majority. Those who become, often with support from foreign donors, the vanguards of democracy are the progressive ones, the enlightened few leading the way out of darkness. In contrast to some definitions of democracy, the starting-point are not the actual concerns and aspirations of the people, their particular situations in life and experiences of abuse, but democracy and human rights as universal, if abstract, values. It is the task of this paper to show how this

preoccupation with abstraction both fosters elitism and undermines substantive democratisation.

As a cultural disposition, elitism carries historical resonances with colonialism and is one of the ways in which contemporary transnational governance assumes an undemocratic content. Elitism is inseparable from the actual political and economic conditions it helps to maintain. As an illustration, consider how empowerment, a key concept in the current rhetoric, has become vacuous. When the democratic transitions began with the demise of the Cold War, Malawi was one of the countries where empowerment became closely associated with political and civil liberties, human rights defined as *freedoms* (*maufulu* in Chinyanja/Chichewa). This definition was understandable after three decades of ruthless dictatorship, but its severely confined notion of rights quickly diminished the significance of the democratic transition. Squabbling over political and civil freedoms, the ruling elite and its non-governmental watchdogs effectively silenced public debates on social and economic rights. An impression of robust democratic processes was thereby created, not least for the benefit of foreign donors, but structural inequalities were hidden behind the notion that ‘poverty alleviation’ was basically a technical issue. Empowerment, in effect, became *disempowerment* by confining the scope of what could be discussed by using the notions of democracy and human rights.

The above remarks do not seek to trivialise political and civil freedoms; nor are they based on a hierarchy of rights that, for example, the ‘founding fathers’ of newly-independent African states deployed to justify repression (cf. Shivji 1989). The best minds of political philosophy have long since discarded a hierarchy of rights in favour of an appreciation of how various rights and freedoms constitute one another. Amartya Sen (1999: 36), for example, has argued that freedom has both a constitutive and instrumental role in development. Freedom is, in other words, both the primary end and the principal means of development. Sen’s argument takes issue with those who have doubted the importance of political freedoms in ensuring economic development. The instrumental role of freedom reveals how ‘freedom of one type may greatly help in advancing freedom of other types’ (Sen 1999: 37). Moreover, Sen warns against rhetorical assertions of democracy’s contribution to development. ‘The achievement of social justice’, he writes, ‘depends not only on institutional forms (including democratic rules and regulations), but also on effective practice’ (Sen 1999: 159).

Whereas Sen argues with critics and despots who claim that economic prosperity is a more urgent objective than political freedoms, Malawi’s experiments with democratisation represent the opposite extreme. They demonstrate the perils of isolating political freedoms as the essence of democracy. This paper explores civic education as a central arena where the meaning of democracy and human rights is defined in Malawi. Elitism is apparent in the ways in which civic education contributes to making distinctions between ‘the grassroots’ and those who are privileged enough to spread the messages. In 1998, James Tengatenga, a Malawian intellectual and more recently an Anglican bishop, was bold, if not heretical, enough to criticise the patronising attitudes underlying the apparently participatory approaches to civic education in Malawi. Despite their democratic pretensions, he argued, they ‘suggest *coming down* to the people. Even when [civic education] is referred to as blending or being one with the people, one can’t help but notice the

condescension' (Tengatenga 1998: 188; emphasis original). Tengatenga's criticism may have been too much ahead of its time, or too politically incorrect, to attract the attention it deserved. This paper takes his criticism a step further by showing how a leading civic education project has marginalised people's own insights into their life situations. At the same time, well-meaning activists believe that their knowledge of rights has not yet touched the lives of the masses. Activists seek to 'enlighten' the masses. They refer to this process with the Chinyanja/Chichewa verb *kuwunikira*, which connotes the shedding of light. Activists see themselves as the torchbearers, the ones who bring light to the darkness.

The distinction between those who need help and those who can provide help is familiar from the world of charity (see Bornstein 2003; Garland 1999). Here, as in civic education on human rights, the providers of assistance feel that they have something that others lack. Moreover, the objective is not to upset the balance between those who receive help and those who provide it. Charity differs from structural change, whether by legislation or revolution, in that it presupposes a categorical distinction between the advantaged and the disadvantaged. The former help the latter to sustain themselves, while the distinction itself remains virtually intact. In a similar vein, the civic education project on human rights examined here involves little that would actually enable the disadvantaged to lift themselves from their predicament. The fact that this troubling observation is largely unnoticed in Malawi indicates how natural the distinction has become even among human rights advocates.

The purpose of this paper is to show how the distinction underlying civic education is a consequence of active effort, not a natural state of affairs. The crucial question, in effect, is not *who* do civic education but *how* they assume their position. I present in this paper observations from my ethnographic research among the representatives of a major civic education project in Malawi. Funded by the European Union, the project has a nation-wide network of salaried civic education officers, while the reach of the project is made even more comprehensive by a large number of volunteers, known as para-civic education officers. Research on how these two groups of people are recruited and trained reveals an emphasis on status that few in the Malawian context can afford to resist. The differentiation of officers and volunteers from the targets of their civic education is a hidden lesson of civic educators' training. Through certificates, closed workshops, common appearance and human rights jargon (often in English), a commitment to the project and its particular world-view is generated. Crucial to this emerging quasi-professional identity are those disadvantaged and poor Malawians, often known as 'the grassroots', who are excluded from the group. The civic education project is, in effect, an instrument of transnational governance. It pre-empted popular protests by maintaining old patterns of elitism.

Civic education: promises and perils

Civic education is a relatively recent phenomenon in Malawi, one of those interventions that define the 'new' Malawi (cf. Englund 2002a). Ralph Kasambara (1998), a prominent Malawian human rights lawyer, has described how independent civic education could not take place in Kamuzu Banda's Malawi. Primary schools had a subject known as civics, giving a deliberately unspecific view of government, while the Malawi Young Pioneers visited villages to impose physical and agricultural

training on adults. As with much else that took place in public, the glorification of the country's Life President was an integral part of this activity. Significantly, the public protests that culminated in the 1993 referendum on the system of government needed little civic education to stir them. Although Kasambara describes the Catholic bishops' Lenten Letter in 1992 as 'the first major attempt in civic education' (1998: 240), a more accurate description is that it gave a voice to the grievances that had long plagued the Malawian populace. Malawians hardly needed to be educated about 'the growing gap between the rich and the poor' and other injustices. They lacked channels to make their complaints heard.

The referendum in 1993 and the general elections in 1994 introduced a need for new kinds of information delivery. The very idea of these exercises, particularly the concept of free and fair elections, needed to be clarified, not least against persistent misinformation from the outgoing government.² Pressure groups, which eventually became political parties, and the Public Affairs Committee (PAC) were among the first to take up this challenge. The PAC included representatives from churches and other religious organisations as well as from the Malawi Law Society and the Chamber of Commerce, and its primary task was to engage in dialogue with Banda's regime. Civic education was largely voter education, while the independent press that began to emerge in 1991 quenched the thirst of literate Malawians, particularly in urban areas, for alternatives to the official rhetoric. The Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), then the only local radio station, spread voter education to an even larger audience.

The successful conduct of the elections raised the question of what role civic education would play in a country that had ostensibly achieved universal political and civil freedoms. As Kasambara (1998) has noted, political parties' civic education initiatives quickly degenerated into partisan campaigning. At the same time, there was no doubt that whatever democratic reforms the new government was able to launch, information about these new institutions and laws would not reach Malawians by itself. Particularly unfortunate was the fact that the MBC once again became the mouthpiece of the ruling party and failed to be the objective conduit of information that many had hoped; Television Malawi (TVM), established in 1999, had the same fate (see Kayambazinthu and Moyo 2002). A study of Malawians' awareness of their rights enshrined in the new constitution and other laws revealed, several years after the 1994 elections, widespread ignorance (HRRC 1999). A similar, more sophisticated study, also conducted several years after the transition, indicated comparable problems in Zambia (Chanda 1999).

The Malawian study has, however, a condescending approach that is absent in the Zambian study. Rather than being content to list the empirical results from a survey on Malawians' awareness of democratic rights, the study speculates on their intellectual capacities to gauge the idea of human rights in the first place. It laments that 'the level of illiteracy in Malawi as in other Third World countries is quite high, so high that many people do not have the necessary intellectual competence and capacity needed to articulate such a subject as human rights' (HRRC 1999: 54, 68). While the study points out that human rights need not be incompatible with Malawian social and cultural realities, it conveys the need not only for more information on specific legal provisions but also for the education of the masses on the idea of human rights. It is important to keep in mind that condescending attitudes are never far below

the surface in the Malawian context of civic education. The evidence in this paper shows how activists in human rights NGOs and projects have forged a style which asserts their special status in several subtle ways. Their penchant for titles, formal credentials and the English language, for example, resonates with both Banda's vanity (Phiri 1998) and the expressions of power elsewhere in postcolonial Africa (Mbembe 2001).

The contrast to Zambia must not be exaggerated, but it is illuminating to consider how the approaches in the two studies may lead to different notions of civic education. The Zambian study was written by Alfred Chanda (1999), chairman of the Foundation for Democratic Process (FODEP), who stressed the limited awareness of human rights among such groups as academics, teachers and students. FODEP works, in effect, with these and other educated Zambians in an effort to create a nation-wide network of experts who can facilitate others' claims and demands. The aim is not so much to educate millions of Zambians on abstract concepts, or even on specific laws, as to ensure that there are competent persons to monitor human rights violations. In Malawi, on the other hand, human rights NGOs and projects have often assumed the responsibility for training their own personnel who are, often very soon after their recruitment, sent to villages and townships to conduct meetings. A notion of 'signposting' (*kulozera*) has been developed by the project that is in the focus of this paper. It refers to civic educators' duty to direct people to relevant organisations and authorities when they receive questions, regardless of whether those organisations and authorities have the capacity to assist. 'Signposting' represents, in effect, one of the ways in which the project disengages from a direct involvement in ordinary Malawians' predicament.

Human rights activists' tireless touring of Malawi to educate the populace on the concepts of democracy and human rights has, in any case, given them a *raison d'être* between the elections. Kasambara (1998) ended his review of civic education with the dismal note that it had reached an impasse. Had he written his review in 1999, when the second post-transition general elections were held, or thereafter, he would have noticed a new boom in civic education. Although several international donors have supported these initiatives, Denmark and the European Union have been particularly generous. The above-mentioned study on Malawians' awareness of human rights was conducted by the Human Rights Resource Centre (HRRC 1999), which had been known as the Danish Centre for Human Rights until 1997. The Danish involvement had begun in 1996 with training activities and various grants for Malawian NGOs. HRRC continued this work, becoming the resource centre it name suggested with its own library and other facilities. Its grants supported the emergence of a whole range of Malawian human rights NGOs, but the abrupt withdrawal of Denmark from Malawi in 2001 made HRRC dependent on a number of donors.³

The single most important intervention in the field of civic education took place on the eve of the general elections in 1999. The European Union started to fund a comprehensive project of voter education, known as the National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE). While the Republic of Malawi is the official 'owner' of the project, it is managed by the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ). It also claims partnership with a number of organisations in Malawi and Germany, including the PAC, but in practice NICE uses its elaborate structure of officers to pursue its own civic education project. After the 1999 elections, NICE expanded to

cover five thematic areas: Local Democracy, Environment, Food Security, Gender Development, and HIV/AIDS and Health. According to its own leaflet, the main objective is ‘to promote democratic values, attitudes and behaviour at grassroots level in both urban and rural Malawi through the provision of civic education services’.⁴ By the end of 2002, these ‘services’ were provided by 29 district offices, three regional offices and a national office, employing over 40 professionals and over 90 members of support staff. The reach of the project was greatly enhanced by over 10,000 volunteers, known as Para-civic education officers.

Finding a NICE job

With its systematic effort to have an office in every district, NICE is an outstanding example of a project whose coverage of the country is virtually equal to the state. District offices ensure that this coverage extends to villages and townships through a network of volunteers, closely supervised and trained by full-time officers. ‘Every second village’ belongs to the orbit of NICE, I was told by Project Manager, a German expatriate leading the entire operation from the National Office in Lilongwe. Although he and many others in NICE’s professional staff emphasise their association with ‘the grassroots’, the fact is that NICE fits uneasily into a vertical state/society opposition. This opposition – common in the minds of activists, scholars, donors and the general public far beyond Malawi – situates the state ‘above’ society which, as a consequence, either challenges or supports it ‘from below’ (for critiques, see Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Lewis 2002; Migdal 2001). Yet NICE, despite the apparent ‘ownership’ by the Malawian people, is a transnational project that participates in governing Malawi with resources that in many cases exceed those of government departments.⁵

Crucial to the work of governance that NICE performs, even despite itself, are the many subtle ways in which its officers and volunteers create a sense of belonging to an exclusive community of human rights experts. If vertical images are at all accurate in this context, it is ‘the grassroots’ that are placed ‘below’ NICE. Among salaried officers, the sense of exclusiveness begins already at the recruitment stage. Vacancies for civic education officers receive hundreds of applications, but only a few are selected for interviews. A university degree is not a requirement for civic education officers, and most of them have a background as teachers in primary schools, with some also having experience as journalists. During the interviews, the candidates receive the same set of questions that examine whether they understand the notions of democracy and human rights. The recruitment process also includes an assignment which tests the candidate’s acumen to defuse difficult situations during civic education. These situations are typically politically charged, and the candidate is expected to show his or her skill in avoiding the expression of political views. According to the rules of NICE, political partisanship is one of the greatest mistakes that a civic education officer can make (see below). Active members or officers of political parties are not, therefore, allowed to join NICE in any capacity.

After recruitment, several factors serve as incentives to commit oneself to NICE. For civic education officers, for example, a competition has been established whereby they can earn a salary increase.⁶ Each officer is evaluated by the National Office every year, and they can earn up to 100 points for excellence in civic education, 20 points for administrative skills and five points for some innovation of their own.

Every 40 points brings a salary increase of 40 kwacha (about \$0.55). In 2001, the lowest overall score was 63 points, while a regional officer received the best result, 90 points. Para-civic education officers, despite their position as volunteers, are likewise enticed to work for NICE through, for instance, competitions that test their capacity to mobilise ‘the grassroots’ for public meetings. Districts are divided into zones, some of which follow constituency boundaries and others the boundaries of chiefdoms. Different zones are occasionally asked to compete over the number of meetings that they organise, or over the number of participants in those meetings. The winners get prizes, usually cash, for their efforts.

Frequent workshops and seminars deepen officers’ and volunteers’ belonging to NICE. Their stated objective is ‘capacity building’, but as my account of workshops for volunteers shows later in this paper, their immediate outcome is an appreciation of the distinction between NICE and ‘the grassroots’. Workshops serve this purpose at every level of NICE’s internal hierarchy, with officers spending a considerable amount of their time in attending them. National workshops, for example, are organised no less than four or five times a year. They are organised by one of NICE’s three regional offices and attended by national, district and regional officers. National workshops often have guest speakers, including academics from abroad, and their topics vary from the specific training and administrative skills needed in NICE’s work to more general issues pertaining to its thematic areas. Regional workshops, on the other hand, are organised every second month, and they bring together national and regional officers. Regional officers, in turn, have the duty to conduct workshops with district officers. The combined effect of these workshops is that all officers are in constant collaboration with their peers and superiors in the NICE hierarchy.

Workshops have a monetary aspect that represents an interesting contrast to the meetings that officers and volunteers hold with ‘the grassroots’. Officers attending workshops not only get their transport costs reimbursed, they also receive daily allowances whose total value, especially among high-ranking officers, can surpass their monthly salaries.⁷ ‘We have to give them something’, an officer in the National Office remarked to me, but critical to the constitution of hierarchies in NICE’s work are the ways in which its officers dismiss similar claims for compensation among ‘the grassroots’. The highest-ranking officers have developed a concept of ‘goat culture’ that is intended to pre-empt any material demands that they may encounter during civic education exercises. A regional officer began to explain the concept to me by saying that ‘not all is lost to Westernisation’. Malawian villages, he continued, still have a community spirit which comes to the fore during, for example, weddings. Villagers assist each other by contributing firewood and food. In a similar vein, villagers who receive NICE for a visit should not expect money but, on the contrary, they should feed officers and volunteers. Eating together, the regional officer said, makes people feel closer to NICE. It gives villagers, he concluded, a feeling of ownership.

The official information leaflet from NICE likewise defines ‘goat culture’ as a practice that ‘intensifies team building by utilising local resources at grassroots level by preparing and eating food together while discussing issues’. Hidden in such statements are the ways in which officers and volunteers actually differentiate themselves from their hosts. Officers are able to hire appropriate vehicles for their travels to remote venues of civic education, often arriving in large four-wheel drives

to villages where the ownership of a simple bicycle is a sign of affluence. When I accompanied officers and volunteers during their visits to villages and townships, I could observe that officers also freely flaunted their mobile telephones, suits, elaborate hair-dos and high-heel shoes in front of impoverished village crowds. Under such circumstances, 'goat culture' represents little else than an attempt by the well-off to manipulate local moral codes for their own benefit. Ordinary Malawians have long been exposed to such manipulations, from the concept of *thangata* during late colonialism (Kandawire 1979) to various projects involving 'community participation' in postcolonial times. Common to these initiatives has been the use of idioms of 'assistance' in mobilising people for projects that, in many cases, have been clearly exploitative.

NICE officers' access to allowances and various paraphernalia of smooth professional life is, in other words, in a sharp contrast to how they see their relationship to 'the grassroots'. While ordinary Malawians are expected to assist NICE officers to carry out their civic education 'services', officers' sense of an exclusive professional community also presupposes their unquestioned devotion to certain hierarchies within NICE. Hierarchical relations permeate the NICE structure from officers to volunteers. While regional officers oversee district officers, office assistants, who from 2002 have also been used in delivering civic education, are most directly controlled by district officers. Volunteers, known as para-civic education officers, also have a hierarchy of coordinators and ordinary volunteers who assume different responsibilities in their zones.

One effect of frequent workshops and strict hierarchies is that top officers are able to monitor closely the messages that civic education puts forward in NICE's name. This is particularly conducive to maintaining the non-partisan status of NICE which, as mentioned, is a recurrent theme during recruitment and subsequent training sessions. For example, when PAC and several other human rights watchdogs engaged in a heated debate with ruling politicians in 2002 over the question of a constitutional amendment to allow President Muluzi to stand for a third term in office, NICE stayed quiet. Its highest-ranking officers convened internal workshops to advise lower-level officers on how to react to questions about the issue from volunteers and 'the grassroots'. Paradoxically, by insisting that officers and volunteers decline to participate in any such discussions, NICE merely served the interests of the ruling party that wanted to spread its own propaganda.⁸ At issue is not only a contradiction between NICE officers' civic education messages that exhort participation in public life and their own timidity in addressing political disputes. The issue is also the way in which NICE, an organisation with a capacity to reach the majority of Malawians, contributes to undemocratic governance by remaining apolitical on issues that threaten to rip the nation apart.

The pacification of youth

A major challenge that NICE faces in its attempt to remain apolitical are the views and aspirations among its youthful volunteers. Although officially only those who are at least 20 years old can work as volunteers, it is difficult to control this requirement. I have met volunteers who say, privately, that they are as young as 17 years, while the vast majority of volunteers are still in their early twenties. At every meeting or workshop I have attended about two thirds of the volunteers have been men.

Studies from elsewhere in Africa have shown that youths, particularly young men, are a volatile force in political developments, all too easily enticed into violence (Ellis 1999; O'Brien 1996; Richards 1996). Malawi's two postcolonial regimes appear to have understood this by creating special youth organisations in the ruling parties. During Banda's regime, the Youth League and the Malawi Young Pioneers safeguarded discipline and obedience in their neighbourhoods and villages (Englund 1996). In Muluzi's Malawi, the Young Democrats, the youth wing of the United Democratic Front, grew increasingly important in enforcing loyalty towards the head of state (Englund 2002b). In both cases, physical violence was integral to young people's political role. At the same time, both examples from Malawi also support the observations from elsewhere in Africa that rather than being a counter-force in society, youths are often manipulated by their elders (cf. Bayart et al. 1992).

One of the differences between the one-party state and political pluralism is, however, the fact that a larger number of parties and organisations, such as NICE, present new opportunities for identification. Malawi's young population, on the other hand, also faces unprecedented frustrations as the contradiction between aspirations and opportunities becomes sharper. The new dawn in politics in the early 1990s was not followed by widespread prosperity. If anything, the new government fed unrealistic expectations by claiming to empower youths and women, in particular, through new educational and economic opportunities. The Youth Credit Scheme and various credit schemes for women, benefiting mainly those who were well-connected to the ruling elite or who already had profitable businesses, failed to establish small-scale enterprises as viable sources of income generation (Chinsinga 2002: 26). The introduction of free primary school education in 1994 created chaotic scenes throughout the country as the number of teachers did not match the spiralling number of pupils, with unqualified teachers and a lack of teaching materials making quality education a distant dream in most schools at both primary and secondary levels. The pass rate for the school-leaving examinations in secondary schools has been particularly dismal from the mid-1990s onwards. While the pass rate was 48 percent in 1990, by 1999 it had fallen to just under 14 percent.⁹

Under such circumstances, NICE's demand for a vast pool of volunteers is bound to be welcomed by youths, who find their prospects for educational and economic success shattered. Many of these youths are not willing to work for political parties, viewing party politics as the deceitful pursuit that the Chinyanja/Chichewa term for 'politics', *ndale*, suggests.¹⁰ They find alternatives to politics in popular culture, churches and other religious communities, journalism and non-governmental organisations. Yet while many of them continue to keep a close eye on politicians' manoeuvres, they are systematically taught to keep their political opinions to themselves once they join NICE.

NICE participates in the pacification of youth as a volatile political force by requiring non-partisanship, on the one hand, and by offering them both symbolic and material trappings to enhance their status and self-esteem, on the other. Although volunteers receive monetary rewards usually only when they attend workshops outside their own areas, the mere belonging to NICE distinguishes them from the rest. NICE volunteers are able to approach directly such local dignitaries as village headmen, church elders and party officials, they conduct civic education and obtain from NICE certain crucial

symbols of their special position. All volunteers receive a letter of introduction and a shining white T-shirt that bears NICE's emblem. Moreover, at some workshops regional or district officers present them with certificates. One regional officer described to me, with neither irony nor apology, these certificates as 'symbols of power'. By flaunting certificates and official letters in their houses and during civic education, volunteers participate in their own small way in the display of power that, as in much of postcolonial Africa (cf. Mbembe 2001), uses such documents as resources for status distinctions.

The desire for status

In order to gain a deeper insight into the process whereby youthful volunteers come to take apolitical civic education for granted, their training workshops must be considered. For ease of reading, I focus here on one workshop, but the conclusions I draw from my participation in it apply, in my experience, to other NICE workshops as well. This workshop was held in 2002 to train volunteers, known as para-civic educators or PCEs. Both a regional and district officer were in attendance and directed the proceedings. 31 volunteers participated, out of whom 21 were men and 10 were women. With the exception of four volunteers who were above 30 years old, all were in their early twenties or even younger.

The purpose of the workshop was to equip the volunteers with skills to carry out civic education, known as *maphunziro*, 'studies'. Most volunteers had already conducted civic education for several months, even years, and the workshop was one in a series of meetings between officers and volunteers. As such, the impact of the workshop was not simply the acquisition of new skills but also a renewed commitment to NICE as an organisation. By coming together, volunteers from different 'zones' and full-time officers could negotiate, explicitly and implicitly, what it means to belong to NICE. As my analysis below shows, crucial to this negotiation was the production of certain hierarchies and status distinctions, both among NICE representatives themselves and, above all, in relation to the assumed targets of civic education.

Implicit in the proceedings was the effort to construct 'the grassroots' as the object of civic education. This was achieved through an explicit focus on volunteers as resourceful individuals who possessed knowledge and skills that benefited 'the grassroots'. Volunteers, in other words, were *made* to appear as those who can assist 'the grassroots'. The distinction hardly exists prior to the arrival of such organisations as NICE. All volunteers are from the same social setting that they are supposed to assist, embedded in many complex ways in local social relationships. Moreover, the distinction between the volunteers and 'the grassroots' was achieved at the workshop not through a discussion of the messages that civic education spreads but by training the volunteers to understand *how* the messages should be presented to their audiences in villages and townships.¹¹ Striking was the fact that volunteers' previous knowledge about their social world, including their facility with basic courtesies, was made into 'skills' (*luso*) and codified in exotic-sounding English concepts.

The first item on the agenda, after the opening prayer and a discussion on workshop rules and expectations, was the question, 'What is NICE?' (*NICE ndi chiyani?*). Although most volunteers had heard the answer to this question at virtually all the workshops they had attended before, its purpose was clearly to reaffirm both the

official answer and the volunteers' commitment to NICE. A volunteer drew the NICE emblem on a flip-chart, and the officers explained at length the involvement of the European Union and the German agency GTZ. This apparently direct link to the outside world, where affluent white people fund NICE, is crucial to volunteers' identification with the specific role assigned to them in the organisation's hierarchy. Volunteers are able to imagine their belonging to a transnational community. It is, moreover, a transnational community that promises an alternative to the networks of patronage that ruling politicians maintain by exploiting foreign aid. Yet a similar desire for access to external links, a similar salience attributed to what Bayart (2000) calls 'extraversion', underlies both the governmental and non-governmental strategies.¹²

Another initial theme, repeated over and over during the workshop, was the non-partisanship of NICE. The district officer, for example, announced that 'we are not politicians' (*ife sindife andale ayi*) and that 'we do not have a party' (*tilibe chipani*). She and the regional officer used on several occasions during the workshop the verb *kuwunikira* to describe the purpose of NICE's civic education. Its most appropriate translation in this context is 'to enlighten', from the concrete meaning of 'to shed light on a spot with a lamp or fire to see a thing' (*walitsa pamalo ndi nyali kapena nsakali kuti uwone chinthu*; Centre for Language Studies 2000: 349). They stressed the need to invite local party functionaries to civic education sessions and to show them equal respect by applauding them when they spoke. The officers also explained that the colours in the NICE emblem resembled those that the Malawi Congress Party uses, but it was every volunteer's responsibility to prevent misunderstandings among 'the grassroots'. In a similar vein, the regional officer later rejected a suggestion from one volunteer to hoist flags on the location where NICE held meetings. Because Malawi's political parties also used flags, he explained, ordinary villagers would be confused if NICE also had a flag.

This effort to avoid identification with political parties – from specific parties to the general manner in which they conduct rallies in Malawi – has an immediately obvious reason. Many areas are sharply contested in current multiparty politics, and the Young Democrats of the UDF, mentioned above, have intimidated and assaulted supporters of other parties across the country. Yet the stress on non-partisanship, coupled with the idiom of enlightenment, also contributes to a distinction in another sense. The representatives of NICE seek to convey the impression that they are not consumed by the passions underlying political squabbles. In effect, they are not only outside politics but also *above* it. It is NICE that can invite all the parties to its meetings, giving their officials equal representation while reserving to itself the privilege of distributing non-partisan information. As I was able to observe during the sessions of civic education in villages and townships, this non-partisanship provided little 'enlightenment' when the impoverished crowds confronted NICE representatives with questions about the causes of their predicament.

The audiences that civic education officers and volunteers encounter are diverse and often vociferous. Workshops like the one discussed here are, therefore, important in inculcating self-esteem and self-confidence into NICE representatives. In addition to the imagined external links and their position above politics, volunteers were also introduced to certain individual characteristics that set them apart from 'the grassroots'. These characteristics of individual volunteers (*zomuyenereza munthu*

kukhala PCE) were initially identified in small groups that subsequently presented their findings to the two officers. A recurrent theme was education, the need for a volunteer to be ‘educated’ (*wophunzira*), ‘someone who has been to school’ (*wopita kusukulu*) and ‘smart’ (*wozindikira*). Each time the regional officer asked others to endorse these characteristics presented by small groups, the response was invariably a loud and enthusiastic ‘yes!’ (*ee!*). The issue of education clearly struck a chord with the youthful gathering of volunteers. Although volunteers are formally required to have only the primary-school leaving certificate, most of them belong to the category of young people who have, as mentioned, unsuccessfully pursued secondary education. By offering a context where youths can feel that their education has not been wasted, NICE also ensures commitment to its cause.

The emphasis on education is not, of course, merely a consequent of the current crisis in Malawi. It resonates with the fact that formal, Western-style education has represented an unrivalled channel to personal advancement in both colonial and postcolonial Africa (Mbembe 2001; Simpson 2003). The current crisis of expectations and opportunities in Malawi makes the quest for academic success more desperate than ever. During the workshop, volunteers’ self-esteem was also enhanced by frequent references to the neat and clean appearance as one of their defining characteristics. Several participants emphasised the need to ‘take care of oneself’ (*kudzisamala*), particularly by washing oneself frequently (*kusambasamba*). The emphasis was also on smart clothes, with nobody mentioning modesty in dressing that would suit village settings.

This fascination with appearance, with personal cleanliness, not only gave the impression that ‘the grassroots’ had particular problems with hygiene, it also resonated with another legacy of colonialism as a ‘civilising’ mission. Several scholars writing about southern Africa, for example, have demonstrated a close correspondence between ideas of hygiene and self-improvement in the patterns of consumption, medical work and domestic relations that various colonial agents introduced (see e.g. Burke 1996; Comaroff and Comaroff 1997; Vaughan 1991). In Malawi, such patterns have continued to symbolise progress, embodied no less by Banda’s puritan style than by Muluzi’s flamboyant mode of dressing. Few volunteers can afford suits or elaborate dresses, but many of them wore at the workshop fashionable jeans and the kind of sportsgear that African-American youth culture has made popular across the globe. The regional and district officers embodied success by clothing themselves in a suit and a dazzling white dress, respectively.

To situate the emphasis on cleanliness within wider colonial and postcolonial processes is not to produce a far-fetched historical analogy. Large-scale historical processes boil down to such mundane and taken-for-granted dispositions as the emphasis on personal hygiene. It consolidates existing inequalities. As my fieldwork in rural Malawi has taught me, ordinary villagers generally do take a bath once or twice every day, but their poverty does not allow for patterns of consumption that distinguish the well-off as conspicuously perfumed and fashionable citizens. However unlikely NICE’s volunteers are to attain these patterns of consumption, the emphasis on cleanliness at the workshop expressed the *desire* for a status that would set them apart from those who were considered to need civic education. By imagining themselves as particularly clean, the volunteers also imagined themselves as

belonging to the category of Malawians who have historically had the power to define what progress and development consist of.

The supremacy of English

Another mechanism of status distinction, also resonating with wider colonial and postcolonial processes, concerned linguistic resources. Most participants, and especially the regional officer, spoke a language that was a curious mixture of English and Chinyanja/Chichewa. While English expressions and words often appear in the spoken language of urban dwellers in the region (see e.g. Kashoki 1972; Kayambazinthu 1998; Moto 2001), the regional officer's discourse made a notion of 'code switching' between different languages and registers somewhat spurious. Consider, for example, how he responded to a volunteer's question about involvement in conflicts that occur in villages:

Izi zikachitika inu mukapereke lipoti kuofesi. A kuofesi akaona nkhaniyo ndi yofunikadi kuti pakakhala mediation...chifukwa m'mene mukakambirane nkhani ija...ambirife sitanapange training ya kufield ya conflict resolution.

When these things happen, you should report to the office. When people in the office see that the issue is important, that there should be mediation...because how you could discuss that issue...many of us have not done training in the field of conflict resolution.¹³

Although the substance of the regional officer's reply, suggesting that conflicts should be reported to district offices as few volunteers have been trained to mediate in them, could have been expressed in Chinyanja, he chose to formulate his reply with words from English. The impact was to make Chinyanja seem like a language that lacked the vocabulary used in 'conflict resolution', with even 'discussing' (*kukambirana*) becoming a technical procedure that only those who were specifically trained could perform.

Another common strategy among Chinyanja-speakers who want to use English is to introduce English expressions with the verb *kupanga*, 'to do' or 'to make'. In the above extract the regional officer used this verb to refer to 'training in the field of conflict resolution'. The next extract is from his explanation of the difference between 'dominant participants' and 'docile participants'.

Amafunikano pamsonkhano, koma kofunika ndi kupanga notice, kupanga control. Pali ena amati madocile kapena timid participants, anthu ofatsa, ali phee. Amenewa kofunika ndi kupanga jack-up.

They (dominant participants) are also needed at the meeting, but it is necessary to notice (them), to control (them). There are others who are called docile or timid participants, quiet people. It is necessary to jack-up them.

The regional officer used in this short extract three times the verb *kupanga* to enable him to say in English what the activity at issue was. Such uses of English, commonly followed by all participants at the workshop, are based on linguistic patterns that are widespread in the region.¹⁴ They have developed independently of the official Anglo-American standards of English and are inadequate communicative tools for, for example, African immigrants in Europe (cf. Blommaert 2001, 2002). Yet their specific effect in the Malawian setting is to create distinctions that contribute to local inequalities.

Several studies have shown the high esteem that Malawian elites attach to English, with many insisting that their children speak only English (see Matiki 2001; Mtenje 2002a, 2002b; Moto 2003).¹⁵ To be sure, a person's recruitment to a formal occupation usually presupposes good knowledge of English. Malawians who have the habit of using English in their everyday interactions with other Malawians often seek, consciously or unconsciously, to associate themselves with those few who have succeeded in their educational and professional life. Here they maintain another colonial legacy that had its most extreme postcolonial result in Kamuzu Banda's Anglophilia. He never spoke Malawian languages in public, he always dressed in the most conservative costume to be found in the modern English wardrobe, and he established the 'Eton of Africa', Kamuzu Academy (see Short 1974). However detested he is among contemporary human rights activists in Malawi, his thirty years of rule did much to entrench the colonial legacy of regarding England and the English language as the prime sources and symbols of progress.¹⁶

The frequent use of English during the workshop supported two tacit objectives. On the one hand, by referring to various skills and methods in civic education in English, the participants were able to make them seem like elements of an exclusive body of knowledge. The participants were, for example, taught that *Open Air Technology* refers to the use of materials and facilities that are available at the venue of civic education. *Information Market*, in turn, is a method whereby the audience is asked to write down their preferred topics on cards and to display them as in a market. When NICE representatives are unwilling to consider some of the topics, they either ignore them or give the audience *Signposts* to other organisations. *Edutainment* and *Energisers* were also among the technical English terms that the volunteers were asked to learn. Both refer to the importance of entertainment in civic education.

On the other hand, the participants could also detach themselves from 'the grassroots', understood to be dependent on Chinyanja/Chichewa and other Malawian languages, by bemoaning the problems of translation. These problems appeared time and again during the workshop, because, for reasons that were never explained, the regional and district officers used English concepts as the foundation for their discourse. For example, they first mentioned such concepts as 'poster', 'report', 'sitting plan' and 'experience', among several others, in English and then asked the audience to suggest equivalents in Chinyanja. While for some concepts the equivalents were quickly identified, many others prompted volunteers to lament the poverty of Chinyanja (Chichewa), exclaiming, for example, that 'Chichewa is problematic!' (*Chichewa ndi chovuta!*). Despite the existence of, for example, *chidziwitso* for 'poster' and *kaundula* for 'report', *positala* and *lipoti* were established as the translations.

These attitudes to translation were another indication of the desire to associate civic education with symbols and resources that were external to the reality of 'the grassroots'. Volunteers, under the officers' leadership, moved between two languages, one associated with quality education and opportunities, and the other with impoverishment, disadvantage and ignorance. The civilising and progressive undercurrents become apparent when one realises that the movement between the languages was one-way. In their efforts to find word-for-word rather than idiomatic translations for English concepts, the participants saw English as the unquestioned source of discourse. If Chinyanja equivalents were not forthcoming, the problem necessarily was in this language, not in English. Here the workshop upheld the

inequality of translation that also underlies the official translations of human rights discourses in Malawi and Zambia. The fact that ordinary Malawians, with no background in translation, embraced the same inequalities is a measure of their resonance with wider historical processes.

Educating elders

The tacit teachings at the workshop, from personal cleanliness to language use, were crucial to the transmission of more explicit messages. The overt theme was to train the volunteers to acquire ‘skills’ (*luso*) to be deployed in civic education. While such issues as cleanliness and language served to enhance volunteers’ status and self-esteem, the issue of ‘skills’ revealed in a more obvious way how a distinction towards ‘the grassroots’ was a pre-condition for civic education. A central item on the agenda was ‘the skill to teach elders’ (*luso lophunzitsa anthu akuluakulu*). This item recognised the challenges of conducting civic education among adults, particularly elders, who are customarily seen as the embodiments of wisdom and authority. The very notion of ‘teaching’ (*kuphunzitsa*), rather than, for instance, ‘conversation’ (*kukambirana*), betrayed NICE representatives as those with knowledge.

The challenges of imparting this knowledge received somewhat ironical remarks from both the volunteers and the officers, often provoking laughter. A volunteer, reporting from a small-group discussion, observed that ‘elders do not make mistakes, they merely forget’ (*akuluakulu salakwa, amangoiwala*). The district officer also stressed that ‘we do not disagree, we only add a little bit’ (*sititsutsa, timangoonjezerapo*). The meaning of elders ‘forgetting’ and NICE representatives ‘adding’ something was immediately apparent to the volunteers. Their ‘skills’ included subtle ways of making elders agree with civic education experts’ indisputable knowledge.

The idea that elders’ knowledge was somewhat deficient was expressed in various ways. The most common strategy, for both volunteers and officers, was to refer to ‘villages’ (*midzi*) as one category and to give examples of ignorance and false beliefs there. ‘In villages they believe that Aids is caused by witches!’ (*kumidzi amakhulupirira kuti edzi imachokera kwa afiti!*), one volunteer exclaimed. The officers warned, however, against embarrassing elders in public. A better strategy was to solicit several viewpoints on the same issue, and when the right answer appeared, the civic educator would start repeating it in different forms. The intent would be to make the crowd accept the message without appearing to impose it on them. Elders, in turn, would seek to avoid embarrassment by aligning themselves with the emerging dominant view. In their work of gradually overcoming resistance, volunteers would also encourage those individuals in the crowd who appeared to understand quickly the civic education message.

Several techniques are at civic education officers’ disposal to persuade the crowd to accept their viewpoints and messages. Adults differ from children, it was observed during the workshop, in that they want to feel equal to their teachers. In this respect, the volunteers were advised to perfect the skill of ‘lowering oneself’ (*kudzitsitsa*) in order to adopt the ‘level’ appropriate to the crowd. For example, when teaching youths they should ‘take the level of youths’ (*kutenga level ya anyamata*), and when teaching chiefs they should ‘take the level of chiefs’ (*kutenga level ya mafumu*). As with politicians, so too with other social categories – civic educators alone move

between different categories at will, enlightening those who remain trapped in their particular world-views and roles. This workshop was one among many to induce the volunteers to regard themselves as being outside and above ‘culture’ (*chikhalidwe*) no less than politics. ‘The grassroots’, also known as ‘villages’, existed as the audience of messages that only civic education officers fully understood.

Several aspects of their training contributed, therefore, to youthful volunteers’ identification with NICE and its practice of civic education. These disillusioned school-leavers had found an organisation that improved their self-esteem by defining them as intrinsically different from the impoverished multitudes. Certificates confirming participation in training workshops, formal letters, personal appearance, linguistic resources and various ‘skills’ distinguished them from ‘the grassroots’. Consistent with their new status, they would categorically condemn, for instance, villagers’ ideas of causation in afflictions such as Aids, while conveniently ignoring the extent to which witchcraft gripped the imagination of educated Malawians (cf. Lwanda 2002). Volunteers’ particular concern was to ‘teach’ elders, betraying a generational tension that has increased in the region as youngsters face greater constraints to advancement than their parents often did. Here NICE’s pacification of youth also controls inter-personal and inter-generational tensions. These tensions have occasionally culminated in witch-finding movements, especially in the context of rapid economic recession, with elderly people accused of holding back prosperity (see Auslandander 1993). By using the messages on democracy and human rights as their swords, civic educators are unlikely to unleash physical force against elders.

Revelations and hidden agendas

‘Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation is like a lamp in the darkness’ (*ACentre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation ali ngati nyali m’mdima*). With these words ends an audio tape where a Malawian NGO, through the performances of the popular comedians Izeki and Jacob, informs the masses about their constitutional rights.¹⁷ The idioms of light and darkness, of enlightenment, are by no means confined to NICE. Civic education programmes in Malawi on human rights commonly use them to convey how radical the new message is. While the above quote identifies the NGO itself as the source of light, activists generally consider their civic education on new laws and democratic principles as having this revelatory potential. There can be little doubt about the need for such revelations. In a country where the only mass media worthy of the designation, namely the radio, continues to be used as a tool of misinformation by ruling politicians, information on new laws and rights is not easily available. The paramount task of organisations providing civic education is to carve out a space where the substance and implications of human rights can be debated.

This paper has raised doubts about the success of civic education in Malawi in carrying out this necessary task. Civic education on rights and democracy has gained new momentum after 1999, but its relation to taken-for-granted hierarchies in society remains poorly recognised. My fieldwork among the staff members and volunteers of NICE has made me understand the practical constraints such organisations face. Precisely because NICE is a well-funded project, it attracts ambitious young Malawians like, to continue with the metaphor, a lamp draws insects in the dark. Although these youths are often genuinely concerned about the state of democracy in their country, an effect of their training workshops is that identification with certain

quasi-professional markers overrides identification with the targets of their civic education. The allure of status distinctions is irresistible in a country where youths face an unprecedented contradiction between their aspirations and opportunities. After having been fed on a diet of hopes for progress and personal advancement during their school years, the last thing most contemporary Malawian youths expect is to be identified with the poverty and disadvantage where they started from. NICE provides one context to satisfy the desire for status.

The social and economic crisis in which NICE operates is only one aspect of the reason why its civic education may not empower the masses. The crisis undermines the radical potential of civic education when it is combined, first, with a specific view on education and, second, with the impact of the Malawian state on civic education programmes. As mentioned, NICE announces, in its public relations materials, that its main objective is ‘to promote democratic values, attitudes and behaviour at grassroots level’. It is this emphasis on values and attitudes that most directly contributes to the possibility that civic education on rights merely maintains entrenched inequalities. NICE’s objective, calling for behavioural change, may be seen to address the need to educate people both ‘about’ and ‘for’ human rights (cf. Engelbronner-Kolff 1998: 14). Yet it falls short of enhancing the capacity of the disadvantaged to confront the power relations that underlie human rights violations. No Freirean ‘pedagogy of the oppressed’ (Freire 1970) is involved in the idealistic belief that right values and attitudes, in the absence of transformative action against structural inequalities, are enough to institute democracy. Especially disturbing is the fact that NICE assigns to ‘the grassroots’ the duty of changing attitudes. It is a subtle way of avoiding to mention the wider power relations that make ‘the grassroots’ the audience of civic education in the first place.

This avoidance of mentioning power, already seen in NICE’s insistence on non-partisanship, is essential to the smooth running of the project. The state in Malawi retains considerable influence over the precise content and capacity of foreign-funded projects. As explained earlier in this paper, the state is not ‘above’ the donor-sponsored ‘civil society’ as a more encompassing structure. Some NGOs are superior to the state in their capacity to reach the populace and to offer their employees considerably more attractive salaries and transnational links. Yet the balance between the state and the non-state is precarious, forever subject to negotiation. A law requiring the registration of NGOs has recently come into force, giving the state a final say in defining legitimate organisations. Diplomatic confrontations are also important weapons in the arsenal of the state to control and curtail the operations of organisations whose foreign donors are represented in the country.

This tension is particularly apparent in NICE’s case, because its status as a ‘project initiative’ is a source of constant ambiguity. While its donors emphasise its ‘ownership’ by the Republic of Malawi, cabinet ministers and senior government officials have often interrogated NICE’s expatriate Project Manager about its true identity. A presidential adviser has reportedly accused NICE of acting ‘like an NGO’ without being registered as such. Paradoxically, amongst expatriate donors and Malawian civil society activists, such accusations serve to strengthen the belief that civic education projects are politically consequential. Rather than seeing these accusations and threats as one way of cowering human rights NGOs and projects into non-political themes, they are taken as evidence for the impact of civic education.

‘We must be getting it right since the government wants to close us’, a highly placed NICE official remarked to me.

NICE is, in point of fact, an example of how a civic education project with transnational links contributes to undemocratic governance. As Hodgson (2002: 1093) has noted in a Tanzanian context, while the ‘donor community’ encompasses a wide range of actors – some secular, others religious; some willing to challenge the state, others acquiescent – most donors prefer to sustain themselves by depoliticising the interventions they sponsor. The trend is common among externally-funded NGOs and projects, with the initial excitement with ‘empowerment’ in new democracies changing into ‘service delivery’ (Fisher 1997: 454). Note, for instance, NICE’s promise to provide ‘civic education services’. From the content of its messages to the ways in which it channels popular frustrations into distinctions towards ‘the grassroots’, NICE depoliticises civic education and controls popular challenges to the state and the global order.

Notes

¹ ‘The NGO question’ has been the topic of extensive critique. For a selection of overviews and case studies, see e.g. Barrow and Jennings 2002; Bornstein 2003; Dorman 2002; Fisher 1997; Howell and Pearce 2001; Tvedt 1998.

² Kamuzu Banda, for example, repeatedly warned that multipartyism would usher the country in chaos.

³ The Danish government announced that corruption and human rights violations had prompted it to withdraw its aid, a criticism keenly taken up by the Malawian opposition and independent newspapers (for an analysis, see Englund 2002b: 15-17). The fact that a populist right-wing coalition came to power in Denmark received little attention in Malawi.

⁴ National Initiative for Civic Education: Making Democracy Work – Take Part in Public Life (a leaflet, no date of publication).

⁵ For its second phase of operation, extending from 2000 until 2004, NICE was granted 7.4 million Euros by the European Union. Although its district offices do not generally have vehicles and their access to computers is limited, they do not face problems with unpaid bills and salaries that frequently impair the functioning of government departments. The lack of vehicles in NICE district offices is eased by their capacity to hire transport for visits to distant places, while salaries and daily allowances paid at workshops make officers’ income higher than what they would get with similar qualifications in government.

⁶ In 2002, civic education officers’ monthly salaries varied between 22,000 and 25,000 kwacha (about \$300 and \$330). It should be noted that salaries exclude daily allowances that are paid for attending workshops and that can even double an officer’s monthly income.

⁷ Daily allowances are important to Malawian professionals in both NGOs and civil service. For an account of the role they play in Malawian civil service, see Anders (2002).

⁸ President Muluzi banned all demonstrations on the issue, effectively giving the state media the chance to campaign for the third term without opposition.

⁹ The dramatic decline in the standards of primary and secondary education was a direct consequence of the Muluzi administration’s populist policies. The Educational

Statistics for 1997 released by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology revealed, for example, that three million pupils attended Malawi's 4000 primary schools. In Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSS), which cater for those who do not qualify for conventional schools, the proportion of qualified teachers among the teaching staff was just one percent. In 2000, a presidential commission of inquiry into the crisis in secondary education found that the proportion of candidates writing the Malawi School Certificate of Education ('O' levels) in CDSS had increased from one percent in 1990 to 51.3 percent in 1999. In 1999, the pass rate in conventional schools was 27.5 percent and in CDSS 3.6 percent.

¹⁰ In fact, the monolingual Chinyanja dictionary does not even list formal 'politics' as one of the meanings of *ndale* (see Centre for Language Studies 2000: 251). Both meanings that it gives refer to deceit that one does against the other, whether in physical or verbal contest.

¹¹ The content of civic education messages is the subject of different workshops, often led by foreign experts on democracy and human rights. These workshops are usually open to full-time officers only, while volunteers learn the messages from the manual *Gwira Mpini Kwacha* ('grab the hoe handle, it's morning'; see Cairns and Dambula 1999). Published by the Public Affairs Committee (PAC), it is commonly used among organisations that conduct civic education on democracy and human rights.

¹² I stress similarity, because in both cases extraversion brings resources to individuals and organisations to engage in various local and national projects. I have elsewhere discussed the need to analyse further different strategies of extraversion, pointing out how in some religious communities the boundaries between the external and the internal become blurred (see Englund 2003).

¹³ Three dots represent micro-pauses of more than two seconds. They do not represent, for example, omitted words.

¹⁴ See Simpson (2003) for examples from Zambia on the uses of 'jack-up' in local English. A further example of the distinctions between civic educators and 'the grassroots' is the fact that this kind of language featured more in civic educators' internal workshops than during their sessions in villages and townships.

¹⁵ A case in point is Malawi's parliament, where English has all along been the only language, despite many parliamentarians' evident difficulties to express themselves in it. Many Malawians, including parliamentarians, have recently become more positive towards a bilingual or multilingual language policy for the parliament (see Matiki 2003). However, a counter-opinion claims that a parliamentarian's inability to speak English means that he or she 'has not been to school' and is therefore incompetent, see e.g. 'Aphungu asamalankhule Chichewa', *Tamvani (The Weekend Nation)*, 7-8 June 2003.

¹⁶ Another well-known aspect of Banda's contradictory character was his respect for Chewa ethnicity and language (see Vail and White 1989). It is worth mentioning that this respect was largely nostalgic, even if it contributed to consolidating his power in the Chewa heartlands of Central Malawi. Banda saw that the proper place of the Chichewa language was in the villages, embedded in timeless traditions, while advancement through the science and education of the modern world was possible only through English.

¹⁷ *Dziwani Malamulo a Dziko Lanu* ('know the laws of your country'). An audio tape produced by the Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation with funding from the GTZ-Democracy project, no date.

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