'Home is Always Home'

(Former) Street Youth in Blantyre, Malawi, and the Fluidity of Constructing Home

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Home is Always Home

Dedication

The Place We Call Home
Defines our sense of Self   of Time   of Place.

Kofi Anyidoho [1]

For the people who reside(d) in displacement camps in Malawi.
May you (be)come Home.

Home is Always Home

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Acknowledgements

Mutu umodzi susenza denga

One head cannot lift a roof. My fieldwork, the foundation on which this thesis is built, would not have been possible without me having had a nice place to feel at home in. I was fortunate enough to have not one, but two such places during my fieldwork in Blantyre. I owe huge thanks to Sevana, for allowing me into her life, under her roof and into her workplace. Thank you for sharing all those delicious meals and cakes with me and thank you for introducing me to addictive TV series. Ethan, my favourite little person, thank you for all the fun we had together and thank you for understanding why 'Auntie Tanja' kept wanting to cut up newspapers. Shingayi, thank you for sharing your family and home with me! A big thanks also to my second home while in the field: Willie and Kitty. Thank you for welcoming me onto your couch and at your dinner table. I will never forget our gezellige braais (with fillet!) and our evenings watching Dutch television.

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Abstract

For many Malawians the concept of home is strongly associated with rural areas and one's (supposedly rural) place of birth. This 'grand narrative about home', though often reiterated, does not necessarily depict lived reality. Malawi's history of movement and labour migration, coupled with contemporary rapid urbanization, means that the number of people whose lives do not fit this grand narrative is increasing fast. In the current context of extreme poverty, destitution and devastation – the latter due to the flash floods of January 2015 – slum areas in Blantyre city are growing and so is the number of street children and youth. Some of them are taken in by organizations such as the Samaritan Trust, a street children's shelter. This programme aims at taking street youth home by 'reintegrating' them in their (rural) communities. When asked, the majority of (former) street youth adhere to the grand narrative and state their home to be in a rural village. At the same time, this home is a place they intentionally left and do not wish to (currently) return to; hence, they are generally depicted as 'homeless'. I wondered: how do (former) street youth in Blantyre, Malawi, engage with 'the grand narrative about home' in trying to imagine their 'becoming at home' in the city?

My thesis departs from the idea that (the search for) home is an integral part of the human condition. During eight months of ethnographic fieldwork in Blantyre, Malawi, I used qualitative methods – mainly interviews and participant observation – to come to an understanding of the meaning of home for (former) street youth. Some of them, the street girls, currently reside at the Samaritan Trust and the former street youth are boys who used to reside there too. Their home-making practices in relation to a marginalized socio-economic position in a generally challenging economic context point towards more fluid and diverse constructions of home that exist alongside the grand narrative without rendering it obsolete. Under pressure, (former) street youth paradoxically attempt to solidify home – even though home remains fluid in practice. These attempts assist them in coping with life in liquid modernity. At the same time, these attempts are fraught with contradictions, especially when these solidifications are themselves solidified in policies. These policies subsequently hamper (former) street youth's becoming at home in town by following the grand narrative and thus confine their homes to rural areas. I conclude that home can best be seen as a fluid field of tensions (re)created in the everyday, thus leaving space for (former) street youth's roots and routes. An alternative way in which (former) street youth

try to become at home in the city is by searching for a romantic partner to co-construct this (future) home with.

Abbreviations

Samaritan	The Samaritan Trust
Ministry of GCDSW	Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare
IMF	International Monetary Fund
WB	World Bank
CCC	Chisomo Children's Club (NGO running a drop-in centre for street children in Blantyre)

Chichewa Words

Kwathu	Home
Kwanu	Your/their home
Kwawo	His/her home
Bho	Greeting, similar to 'what's up'
Nyumba	House
Mudzi	Village
Basi	Often used at the end of a sentence, meaning: 'just' / 'that's it' / 'enough'.
Eti	Often used at the end of a sentence, meaning: 'isn't it' / 'right'

1 Introduction
Laying the First Stone

Nyumba yoteteza mtima wanga unamanga
Kuyambila foundation mpakana malata.
Young Kay ft. Maskal – Wekha (2014)[2]

'I don't understand.' Kumbukani[3] smiles at me. 'What is it that you don't understand?' he asks. We are sitting together in a coffee shop called Afro Lounge in Blantyre, Malawi. It is 27 May 2015 and although the cold season is approaching, the sun is still too hot to not sit in the shade. We are having a lunch of rice and chicken. I swallow my mouthful and try to properly phrase my question in Chichewa, Malawi's national language. I cannot think of any other way to put it. 'So, basically, you have three homes, but you don't live in either of them?' Kumbukani suppresses a giggle, puts his fork down and chews on his rice before answering. 'You are really serious about understanding this eti?'[4] I nod enthusiastically. 'Chabwino[5] T, I'll tell you one more time.' He chews on his chicken bone, skilfully cracking it between his teeth while sucking out the marrow. He changes his seating position, puts one leg over the other and looks at me intently. 'Kwathu ndi ku Zomba (My home is in Zomba), I have told you that already so many times!' I look at him, puzzled, and I wonder what I am missing here. Zomba is the area in which Kumbukani was born. But he never lived there for any substantial amount of time. In fact, he left before he was a month old.

Kumbukani and I have been talking for almost two hours now and during this time he has mentioned at least two other places as his home, 'kwathu' in Chichewa. He was born in a village near Zomba, spent the first few years

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2   'You have built a fort in my heart, starting with the foundation up to the roof' (my translation), see Annex A (p. 175) for the full lyrics of this song.
3   This is a pseudonym with no specific meaning. Unless mentioned otherwise, all names in this thesis are pseudonyms. I elaborate on this in chapter 4, p. 65.
4   Chichewa for 'isn't it', my translation. Unless otherwise indicated, translations in this thesis are my own. I elaborate on this in chapter 4 pp. 59-61.
5   Chichewa for 'alright, OK'.

of his life in a village close to Balaka and after that he grew up in a village in Chikwawa. Family members living in these places took him in, because his father had died before he was born and his mother passed away while giving birth to him. He does not know exactly how old he is, but he estimates that he must be somewhere in his early twenties. I first met him in 2008 when I was volunteering at a shelter for street children run by a local organization: The Samaritan Trust.[6] In those days, Kumbukani was well known for being a difficult child. He kept running away and, in essence, spent most of his life – as he puts it – 'hustling' on the streets of Blantyre, Malawi's second largest city. Kumbukani: 'You know already that I have been going round in my life, starting in Zomba, Ntcheu, Balaka, Dedza up until Mwanza, at Zobwe, Limbe, Blantyre. I have always been moving.'[7] The fact that he has moved and lived in so many different places is something that he often uses in everyday interactions with other people. He is very social, always makes friends and he is very well known in Blantyre. Whenever I walk the streets with him, I am able to forget that I'm a mzungu[8] because instead of greeting me, people greet Kumbukani – even the little kids that usually follow me around when I pass them alone.

Kumbukani is laughing now. 'T, you are struggling to get me eti?' I start laughing too, because he is right. Maybe it is because I do not understand why someone would call a place home when he has hardly spent time there. Or maybe it is because I know the horrors that he has been through, the reasons why he ran away from places he now suddenly refers to as 'home'. I am so used to him scornfully referring to Zomba as the place he does not want to go to, the place he left, the place that is in his past, that I really do not understand why he now refers to it as his home. I look for the words to describe my thoughts, but Kumbukani does not want to wait for me to find them. I guess he knows what is coming, since he has known me for seven years. Before I can open my mouth he says: 'Look, T, ineyo, kwathu ndi ku Zomba.'[9]

In the past, Kumbukani told me that his home is on the streets of Blantyre: it is where he knows people, where he feels appreciated and safe. Yet, minutes later, he could be telling me a story of sleeping on a store's veranda in the pouring rain without anything to cover him but the constant fear of being

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6   http://www.samaritantrust.org/ (last accessed 12-11-2015).
7   Kumbukani: 'You know already ndakhala ndikuzungulira pa moyo wanga, kuyambira Zomba, Ntcheu, Balaka, Dedza, mpakana Mwanza, ku Zobwe, Limbe, Blantyre. Ndakhala ndi-kuyenda'. (interview, 27-05-2015).
8   White person (foreigner). Also a word that signifies wealth.
9   'For me, my home is in Zomba.'

beaten up by other street youth or the police. Sometimes, when we were talking about home, he would reminisce about his time in a village in Chikwawa, living with his mother's sister, going to school. Back then life seemed good. Or his time in a village close to Balaka, where he was nursed back to life by his aunt who fed him cow's milk when he was still a baby. And yet, when asked directly, or whenever I ask follow-up questions, his story always ends up in Zomba again. I do not understand why.

Constructing a Story

In May 2015, when I was having this talk with Kumbukani, I had already been attempting to understand his ways of thinking about home for a few months. Kumbukani is part of a group of former street boys with whom I have kept in touch ever since we met for the first time at the Samaritan Trust in 2008. I spent eight months volunteering at the shelter and I returned to Malawi in 2012–2013, regularly visiting the children and youth residing there. Samaritan houses both boys and girls, aged from as young as four and sometimes up to the age of 25. During the day, I would attempt to chat with them and ever since my Chichewa had improved enough to be able to participate in basic conversations, we had been talking about their homes. This stemmed from my assumption that their residence in the shelter meant that they were not residing at home. An assumption that might appear logical, but becomes complicated – especially when considering that many shelters are called 'children's homes' – and challenged when talking to Samaritan's (former) residents: street youth.

When talking about home, danger lurks in thinking that it is a concept so commonplace and self-evident that it needs no definition. However, when thinking about defining it, it turns out that what home is, is not easily framed or grasped in categories, boxes, definitions or words at all (cf. Blunt & Dowling 2006; Geschiere 2013; Jackson 1995; Mallet 2004). Home is profoundly subjective, but it also depends on the presence, acknowledgement and consent of others (cf. Geschiere 2009; Yuval-Davis 2006). Home is constructed in culturally specific ways, but there are also many universal aspects to it – especially in the material sense of home as a place to shelter from the elements of nature (cf. Jackson 1995). Home seems to have the connotation of safety and cosiness; yet, for some, it can be a place of loneliness, violence and abuse (cf. Argenti & Schramm 2012 [2010]; Das 2008; Geschiere 2013; Øverlien 2012). These often forgotten, less positive dimensions of home feature – albeit not always as prominently as one might expect – in (former) street youth's

stories about their lives and homes. Kumbukani's story is no exception. Although these dark sides of home will be discussed in this thesis, it is not my aim to focus on the hardships (former) street youth have (had) to endure; I do not wish to portray them as victims (cf. Kilbride 2012; Meijer 1993). Rather, I focus on the situations they currently find themselves in and how they attempt to work towards a better future (home).

For eight months, I engaged in daily conversations and activities about home (in the broadest sense of the word) with those who are often depicted and perceived, both by academics and their surroundings, as homeless (cf. Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003; Van Blerk 2005; Young 2003). I met both girls and boys, but they found themselves in different residential arrangements: the girls resided at Samaritan and the boys had resided there in the past. In the chapters where I discuss Samaritan, the experiences of the girls will thus be more central, whereas the focus of the last few chapters of this thesis will be on the experiences of the boys. As becomes clear from Kumbukani's story, home often came to the fore as a fixed place during our talks; this despite his mobility and having lived for extended periods of time in different places. Home thus also appeared as a place where one sometimes does not necessarily want to reside. In (former) street youth's daily practices however, home was elusive. For example, during their attempts to make themselves at home on the streets of Blantyre or at the Samaritan Trust. So, could it be that home is both fixed and solid, but also elusive and fluid at the same time? It is this interest in street youth's conceptions of home that was a catalyst for my return to Blantyre in January 2015 to start doing the research on which this thesis is based. I was guided by the following research question:

. *How do (former) street youth in Blantyre, Malawi, engage with 'the grand narrative about home' in trying to imagine their 'becoming at home' in the city?*

But, then, only two weeks prior to my arrival, Malawi was hit by devastating cyclones, heavy rainfall and flash floods. Even though numbers are by no means the most appropriate way to describe disasters like this, I present some of them in order to give an idea of the magnitude and impact of the floods (cf. Hoffman & Oliver-Smith 2013 [2002]). By the end of January 2015, over 200 people had died and more than half a million fled their homes to higher grounds.[10] President Peter Mutharika termed the floods a 'national

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10   Among others: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30854140 (last accessed 05-10-2015), http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/02/devastation-disease-deadly-malawi-floods-150225070745817.html (last accessed 05-10-2015).

tragedy,' declared half of the country a 'disaster zone,' and appealed to the international community for (emergency) assistance.[11] Unfortunately, due to a recent corruption scandal (Cashgate), international donors were initially hesitant to respond.[12] The money was (and is!), however, urgently needed. It is easy to imagine that, in a country where the majority of the population depends on subsistence farming, fluctuating weather conditions have a massive impact, not least on food security and the national economy (cf. Devereux 2002; Pauw, Thurlow & Seventer 2010).[13] The Chikwawa region, situated right below Blantyre, was among the hardest hit regions. Already in March and April this year (2015), whole families could be seen on the roads, walking to Blantyre in search of a place to stay after their villages had been swept away by the floods.[14] In the months after, displacement camps were built by organizations such as UNICEF, MSF and the Red Cross. In March, more than 80,000 people had found refuge in over 13 camps in Chikwawa district alone.[15]

Throughout my stay, Malawi was in a state of emergency and dire need. Blantyre, the city closest to the districts where the disaster hit hardest, was flooded with aid workers and NGO staff, but also with people looking for shelter.[16]

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11   http://www.montfortmedia.org/2015/03/floods-storms-leave-thousands-destitute/ (last accessed 05-10-2015).
12   This led Malawians to speculate that the powerful were yet again aiming to take 'the people's money' and that 'Watergate II' or 'Floodgate' was taking place under their noses. I base these statements on newspaper articles, informal conversations with members of the international aid organizations (e.g. Red Cross, MSF) and conversations with Malawians in minibuses.
13   The fact that Malawi is currently experiencing a severe food crisis comes as no surprise (see https://www.wfp.org/news/news-release/world-food-programme-ready-respond-food-crisis-malawi and http://reliefweb.int/report/malawi/malawi-food-crisis-nearly-3-million-risk and http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/26/world/africa/malawi-un-warns-of-a-food-crisis.html (last accessed 05-10-2015) https://www.wfp.org/countries/malawi (last accessed 10-12-2015).
14   Field notes 21-04-2015. Chikwawa is the lowest area in Malawi; it is located in the Shire river valley. Chikwawa in Chichewa also literally means 'the lowest point'. The flood-proneness of the area is underlined by its name as evidenced also by the saying, 'madzi a mvula amanka kuli khwawa'; '(rain) water always goes to the lowest point' (informal conversation, 01-04-2015).
15   http://www.eufrika.org/wordpress/malawilife-at-a-floods-displacement-camp (last accessed 05-10-2015, written by Deogracias Benjamin Kalima based on our visit to the Ngabu Displacement camp on 02-03-2015). See also Annex B, p. 178.
16   This was also observed by Van Blerk & Ansell in 2006. In their research with children on the theme of migration, they found that many of the children residing in Ndirande (a slum area in Blantyre) mentioned floods as a reason for their family's move to the city. In 2000, devastating floods had ravaged Malawi's Southern region, which seems to have resulted in a population increase in Blantyre (2006: 263). Also, Malawi suffered from a severe food crisis in 2001, 2002, which was linked to the devastated harvest of 2000 (Devereux 2002). Currently, a similar pattern of events seems to be unfolding.

At first it felt as if these specific circumstances made my research topic almost misplaced. Inquiries into 'home' became even more emotionally laden and politically charged than they would have been had the disaster not taken place. On the one hand, I was worried about the insensitivity of wanting to know about people's homes, when thousands appeared to have just lost theirs (see photo 1). On the other hand, it meant that most of the people I met were keen to talk and explicit about the subject. In the context of the floods, they had already begun to think about the normalcy and permanency of both their houses and their homes, even if they had not been affected personally (this time). Whereas I had expected to have to explain why research into such a commonplace topic is worthwhile, the floods had – unfortunately – partially demonstrated this for me.

Photo 1
A house in an urban neighbourhood of Blantyre, destroyed by the floods.

The floods, as an event, also point (literally) to the fluidity of social life and everyday lived experience. They force upon us the unexpected and 'always becoming' nature of our lives that humans constantly struggle with. Our constructed houses and homes might feel like the firm foundations on which our lives are built, but perhaps they are better seen as being built on quick sand. And yet, even realizing this, does not keep us from our attempts to create and build homes. Indeed, we keep doing it, even though we know that what we are creating, can be swept away in the blink of an eye. The metaphors for building that I use in the outline of my chapters, are an ode to this human perseverance.[17] We keep constructing, both in the literal and philosophical sense, despite our awareness of the fluidity of our lives and homes (cf. Bauman 2015 [2004], 2015 [2003], 2012 [2000]; Jackson 1995, 2006 [2002], 2013; Turnaturi 2007). In this thesis, I focus particularly on constructing in the philosophical sense of the word, but it is not to be forgotten that a life world

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17   And, of course, also as an attempt to build my argument.

is constructed from both what people say and what people do (cf. Jackson 2013). The latter is clearly more closely linked to the literal meaning of constructing than the former. Paying attention to this interplay between what people say and what people do, the anthropological approach par excellence, a more nuanced picture of home can be constructed. One that leaves room for the ways in which someone like Kumbukani, who is often considered to be homeless, constructs his home in Malawi and his place in our shared world.

Although all of us are continuously engaged in constructing our being at home in the world, as part of our human condition, for some this construction process is much more of a struggle than it is for others (cf. Jackson 1995). Street youth who attempt to construct their home on the streets are challenged while doing so and the same holds for (former) street youth who, after their stay at Samaritan, attempt to construct their being at home in town. These home claims are often denied, challenged or overlooked. So, even though, potentially, all of us could 'lose' our house and home, I want to emphasize that there is a distinction between those who lose or are forced to leave their homes due to (natural) disasters or endemic poverty, and the (transnational) elites; i.e. those who can move around and make themselves at home relatively unchallenged in different places in the world (cf. Bradatan, Popan & Melton 2010; Ritzer 2008: 578). Mobility is power and not everybody's home is challenged or contested in the same ways (cf. Bauman 2012 [2000]; Jackson 1995; Kalir 2015; O'Mahoney & Sweeney 2010). It follows from this that it appears to be easier for certain groups of people in certain parts of the world to (temporarily) lose their home than it is for others. We need to be particularly aware of this when we attempt to understand home from the viewpoint of social groups so often portrayed as 'homeless'.

Constructing an Urban Home

Kumbukani's story is by no means unique. He lives in a country where almost half of the population is below the age of 15 and Malawi is one of the countries with the fastest growing number of 15 to 24 year olds.[18] Malawi is also one of the least urbanized countries in Africa, yet it has the highest urbanization rates, making movement, moving to town and setting up home in new places, a lived reality for many Malawians (Urban Landmark 2013:

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18 http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.423.5926&rep=rep1&type=pdf (last accessed on 31-12-2015). http://www.prb.org/Publications/Articles/2012/malawi-population-2012.aspx (last accessed on 31-12-2015) http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=malawi (last accessed 31-12-2015).

15).[19] More and more people are migrating to town and among them are also many (orphaned) children and youth who end up on the streets (cf. Aptekar & Stoecklin 2014). Of all cities in Malawi, Blantyre is the oldest urban settlement, often referred to as the country's commercial capital. It grew over the years and now has more than 1 million inhabitants (cf. McCracken 2013 [2012]; UN-HABITAT 2011).[20] Most of these do not live in the city centre, but in the slum areas around it. This prompted Blantyre's current mayor, Mr. Chalamanda to state in the Malawi Nation newspaper that the city is 'a big slum'.[21]

Van Blerk and Ansell aptly describe these communities as being in 'a state of continual flux as people and families move in and out depending on the state of employment opportunities' (2006: 262). Most inhabitants are dependent on ganyu, piecework, for their survival, which also means that employment is never guaranteed and income levels fluctuate accordingly. (Episodic) poverty has a big impact on most of the households in these areas and this has led to a steady increase of the presence of street children and youth in town over the years (cf. Retrak 2015).[22] Most of them originate from the southern area of the country; Chikwawa, the region that is known for its harsh climate conditions, poor living circumstances and also the region where the floods hit hardest.[23] It is expected that urbanization will only increase in the years to come, not in the least due to the long-lasting impacts of the floods (cf. Van Blerk & Ansell 2006: 263). Together, these developments will complicate further matters of house and home in urban space.

This trend of urbanization and ever-increasing mobility and movement was also signalled by Michael Jackson – the anthropologist, not the singer. In his book At Home in the World he states that our century is one of 'uprootedness': 'all over the world, fewer and fewer people live out their lives in the place where they were born' (1995: 1; cf. Jackson 2008). Kumbukani's story would be one example of this but the dynamic can also be found on a global level as is evidenced by the growing academic interest in (transnational) mi-

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19   http://www.habitatni.co.uk/docs/malawi.pdf (last accessed on 09-01-2015).
20   For an overview of Blantyre's steep population growth see: http://www.citypopulation.de/ Malawi.html. See also http://malawiproject.org/about-malawi/geography/districts-cities-villages/cities/ and http://www.geohive.com/cntry/malawi.aspx (last accessed on 16-10-2015). Now, more than 1 million inhabitants: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blantyre (last accessed on 16-10-2015).
21   Malawi Nation newspaper 31-03-2015.
22   This was also frequently narrated to me by both expat and Malawian friends. Together with the staff members of The Samaritan Trust, I share their impression.
23   See also The Lower River, a novel by Paul Theroux about the hardships in this region (2012).

grants, return migration and the (fierce) discussions on nation state borders – not in the least when linked to the current 'refugee crisis' in 'Fort Europe' (cf. Anderson 2006 [1983]; Brenner 2004; Geschiere 2009; Johnstone 2004; Nowicka 2007; O'Mahoney & Sweeney 2010; Ritzer 2008; Sinatti 2009).[24] I would argue, in line with what Zygmunt Bauman sketches in his book Liquid Modernity, that the responses to the capitalist mode of production have been the cause of creating a need for this 'uprootedness' (2012 [2000]; cf. Bauman 2015 [2004]). According to Bauman, it was 'the advent of light, free-floating capitalism, marked by the disengagement and loosening of ties linking capital and labour' that strongly influences people's patterns of movement and the need to be mobile – especially for the lower classes (Ibid.: 149; cf. Bauman 2015 [2003]). Or, as Guadeloupe puts it: 'capitalism knows and wants no boundaries' – everything has to be liquid, fleeting, fluid'.[25] In this system, labour and labourers have to be mobile and they can be disposed of at any time, whenever capital moves on (Ibid.: 152). It is in this framework that I interpret Malawi's rapid urbanization and the mobility of the economically marginalized. This framework also begs the question whether this 'uprootedness' means that home is becoming an ever more contested and elusive notion.

But, in the stories of (former) street youth, the latter does not always shine through: home in the first place appears as fixed. They tend to reiterate what I, echoing Lyotard, call a Malawian 'grand narrative about home'. This narrative holds that home is the place where one came into this world; generally, a rural village. Kumbukani clearly affirms this. However, this grand narrative is hard to reconcile with other narratives and practices that are also present. In their daily practices, carried out either in the streets of Blantyre, in the Samaritan Trust shelter or in their rental houses in slum areas close to Blantyre, (former) street youth sometimes challenge the conception of home that stems from the grand narrative. On other occasions, their stories and practices concur with it, which means that challenges to it do not render it obsolete. What I argue in this thesis is that the notion of home, as presented in 'the grand narrative', becomes problematic when it is solidified in the policies and practices used by organizations – both (I)NGOs and the Malawian government – to assist street children and youth. The fluidity of 'home' makes the concept a site for struggles of meaning, struggles that tend to disadvantage the already marginalized even further. In the chapters that follow, I delve into these problems and I also highlight an alternative narrative that (former)

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24   Also, on a more 'popular' level, recently published and popular books about migrants such as Americanah (Adichie 2014) and Ghana Must Go (Selasi 2013) bear testimony to this.
25   Personal conversation with Dr. Francio Guadeloupe, 17-11-2015 on Sint Maarten.

street youth use to construct a home for themselves in an urban place in our shared world.

Building an Argument: Structure of the Thesis

In order to answer my main research question, I discuss several narratives based on intimately entangled aspects of 'home' and (former) street youth's lives. I base my arguments on both their stories and their daily practices. In chapter 1, Deconstructing Home, I present a grand narrative about home that is omnipresent in Malawian society. I trace the history of this narrative and relate its solidification partly to Dr. Banda's laws and policies during and after Malawi's independence. I also show that this grand narrative has never been (and will never be) an accurate depiction of lived reality. In chapter 2, Constructing a Theoretical Foundation, I continue by elaborating on my conceptualizations of home, (former) street youth and home-making practices. I argue that home is an elusive concept and propose a fluid conceptualization of it that allows for the presence of contradictions and the co-existence of different narratives. These conceptualizations form the basis of the empirical analysis of 'home' as constructed by (former) street youth, which sometimes contrasts with, but also affirms the grand narrative. In chapter 3, Methodological Construction Work, I discuss the qualitative methodologies used during my fieldwork and I reflect on how this helped me to create my stories. In the four subsequent chapters, I present the bulk of my empirical data.

In chapter 4, On the Way Home, Samaritan Trust's Policies, I describe the institution and how, due to the fluidity of funding, its policies are influenced by (inter)national guidelines and laws. I discuss Samaritan's program, which consists of three phases that work towards reintegration of street youth with their families. In the final section, I delve into Samaritan's conceptualization of home, which is based on the grand narrative as described in chapter 1. Subsequently, in chapter 5, Home at an Institution, I narrate the experiences of the girls that are currently residing at the Samaritan Trust. Their awareness that their stay there is temporary, coupled with fears about reintegration appears to further hinder, rather than help them. I also highlight the difficulties of staying together as a group of girls. In chapter 6, Liquid Collisions, I then elaborate on how solidifying home takes place in the grand narrative, Samaritan's reintegration practices, but also in (former) street youth's stories and practices – especially when put under pressure. I discuss my experiences of visiting some of the places these youth call 'home' and how this showed me that home can also attain illusive characteristics when one does not live up

to the grand narrative in practice. This creates 'liquid collisions', i.e. attempts to solidify home in the setting of liquid modernity. I focus on explaining why (former) street youth, in some cases, adhere to the grand narrative and why and how they contest this at other times. In this chapter, the experiences of the boys are central since they have already been reintegrated.

In chapter 7, Home is Where the Heart Goes, I elaborate on an alternative way in which (former) street youth attempt to construct a home for themselves. This alternative simultaneously relates to and deviates from the grand narrative. This emerged, in particular, in the (former) street youth's conceptualizations of their imagined future homes. The having or finding of a romantic partner in order to co-create this home is pivotal and a strategy that they trace back to when they were children. This, then, leaves chapter 8, (Be) Coming Home, which concludes this thesis. First, I briefly summarize the text and subsequently I draw my conclusions. I focus on the intricate entanglement of home's solidity and fluidity and how this sometimes leads to liquid collisions. In an alternative home-making story moving through life together, co-constructing their becoming appears to be of vital importance for a sense of being at home in the city for these (former) street youth. Although adhering to the prevalent grand narrative about home (at times), they strive to maintain and establish themselves in town – preferably together with their romantic partner. This has important (policy) implications and I end this last chapter by discussing the many new questions for future research that this raises.

2 **Deconstructing Home**

Kwanu ndi kwanu, mthengo mudalaka njoka.[26]

(Chichewa proverb)

In this chapter, I represent 'the grand narrative on home' that I constructed based on my fieldwork experiences and supplementary readings. This narrative constructs home as the place where one comes into this world, generally a rural village. This grand narrative does not, however, necessarily link to the everyday realities of the people who lived, or are currently living in Malawi, as will be demonstrated in the second part of this chapter. In the third and final part, I will explain how this narrative can pose problems for (former) street youth.

Constructing a Grand Narrative

When wanting to talk about 'home' in a language that is not one's mother tongue, embedded in a culture that is not the culture that one was raised in, one first has to look for the right word(s) to use.[27] This concerns both a word's context and its history since these shape the meaning(s) that are attached to words (cf. Duranti 1997; Dutton 2002). When thinking about translations in Chichewa, a few words spring to mind.[28] The first one is 'nyumba', 'house', and its slang version 'den'. These are often used, yet they only refer to the house itself, the material structure. A word that encompasses a bit more, is the word 'khomo'. This literally translates as 'doorway', but when used with a prefix (pa): 'pakhomo' comes close to meaning home. That is to say, it refers to 'the house, yard, animals and people' that reside there and/or frequent it (Maxson 2011: 75–76). To emphasize your personal link with your house, you can also add 'panga' (mine) to make 'my home': 'pakhomo panga' (Ibid.:

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26   'Your home is your home, the tree houses a snake'. I will return to the translations and interpretations of this proverb extensively later on in this chapter.
27   For this paragraph I have also relied on the Chichewa/Chinyanja dictionary by Steven Paas (2009).
28   As Dutton states, in quoting Mitchell: 'One must enter into the people's way of thinking and feeling' in order for translations to be meaningful in and across cultural contexts (2002: 519). This is the ultimate goal of the anthropological endeavour and one for which ethnography is a particularly suitable method (cf. Leavitt 2014).

75–76). It is thus similar to 'ku nyumba' but it seems to be more popular in everyday use. Also, the work that is done in the household is mainly referred to as 'ntchito za pakhomo'. Especially when talking to women or girls, this combination of words is inextricably linked to their experiences of home (cf. Bowlby, Gregory & McKie 1997; Blunt & Dowling 2006: 95, 110; Nowicka 2007: 78; VanEverey 1997).[29]

However, the most important word in Chichewa when it comes to talking about 'home' is 'kwathu'. Its use is ubiquitous and it is by far the most meaningful word used to describe home (cf. Englund 2002b). Kwathu differs from pakhomo and nyumba in that it implies a strong link to rural areas. It can also be used in combination with the Chichewa word for village (mudzi): ku mudzi kwathu (cf. Englund 2001: 94, 2002b).[30] In this case, it poses a direct question about the place where one was born, overtly assuming that this was in a rural village, or where one's parents originate from (cf. Maxson 2011: 75). Kwathu is also used to refer to bigger 'units' than one's village of origin. C.O., a famous Malawian musician, launched his massively successful debut album titled 'kwathu ku Ndirande' in 2001.[31] Ndirande is a large and, because of its crime rates, infamous slum area in Blantyre. 'Kwathu ku Malawi' is also an often heard expression of patriotism. Whenever I claimed that 'kwathu ku Malawi,' however, people would laugh; surely it is impossible for a mzungu! This illustrates how words are sanctioned by the narratives in which they appear and are used.

Jean-François Lyotard discussed this dynamic in his book The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (1984 [1979]). In it, he explains how narratives 'determine criteria of competence and/or illustrate how they are to be applied. They thus define what has the right to be said and done in the culture in question, and since they are themselves a part of that culture, they are legitimated by the simple fact that they do what they do' (Ibid.: 23). The fact that it is widely regarded as impossible for a white person to have his/her home (kwawo) in Malawi, is an example of this. Lyotard coined the term 'grand narrative'[32] to refer to these kinds of all-encompassing stories about our lived reality, of which stories about our origins or 'our way of life' are an important part. This story in Malawi is very much linked to kwathu: the

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29   I return to this frequently in subsequent chapters.
30   According to Englund, 'mudzi' means both 'home' and 'village', which would further consolidate the grand narrative presented in this chapter (2001). However, since I have not heard the word 'mudzi' by itself being used in this way, I have not included it here.
31   http://www.malawi-music.com/component/muscol/C/170-c-o (last accessed 13-11-2015).
32   He also uses the terms 'metanarrative' and 'master narrative' (1984 [1979]).

general understanding and continuously reiterated story being that the 'real' Malawian lives in a village and works the land.

Whenever I asked people about their home, using any of the different words kwanu,[33] nyumba and pakhomo, this is the story that I heard: Malawians are at home in a village (cf. Englund 2002a, b). It became almost like a mantra. No matter who I asked, I knew what was coming. When discussing 'home' with two employees from CCODE, the affiliate of Slum Dwellers International, one of them started thinking about his own home.[34] His parents came to Blantyre but hail from Nkhotakhota, which is why he says that his home is there. Yet, he has lived in Blantyre his entire life and had no desire to reside in Nkhotakhota. 'That's a very interesting thing you are making me think loud about,' he said to me. In the end, he thinks it is 'just a matter of sticking to your root.' If someone ever told him that their home was in town, 'it's more or less like they have lost their root,' he pondered. At one point, some of the former street youth told me that if I was interested in 'becoming a Malawian,' I should 'speak a lot of Chichewa' and 'do the things that people here do.'[35] When I asked what it is that Malawians do, lots of things were mentioned: 'going to the river, washing, farming', etc. 'But also living in the village.' 'You can't live in town if you want to become a Malawian,' Chisomo, a twenty-year-old former street boy, told me. When I asked why, Kumbukani said that 'in town, you'll live an English life – meaning modern – whereas in the village, you live like a Malawian.'[36] When I asked them whether this meant that people who are born in town are not Malawians, the boys had to think deeply. Eventually, Peter responded rather hesitantly, saying, 'they are Malawians, but their behaviour is different.' Somehow, they are less Malawian in what they do. A real Malawian is born in a village and has his or her home there.

This grand narrative can been seen as emblematic for the way in which Africa was (and still is) often envisioned by people from outside the continent. It fits nicely with the romantic and astoundingly persistent image of 'Africa'[37] as a continent where people live in scenic villages, while regularly practicing

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33   This is to denote 'your home' – kwathu means 'our home'.
34   CCODE is the Center for Community Organization and Development working with the Federation of the Rural and Urban Poor. It attempts to assist urban dwellers in the formalization of their settlements and the improvement of their housing and infrastructure in the broadest sense. (Interview 24-02-2015).
35   Field notes 18-05-2015.
36   'Uzipanga life in English in town, koma ku mudzi…' (Field notes 18-05-2015).
37   I use this concept in inverted commas as I acknowledge its problematic nature (cf. Mudimbe 1988).

ancient authentic rituals. This idea of Africans living a traditional life in their homestead has, in the past, assisted in creating the image of 'the African' as the exotic ultimate Other (cf. Cole & Thomas 2009; Palmberg 2001; Tamale 2011). Many (former) African leaders have tried hard to fight this derogatory stereotype, but Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, Malawi's former leader, did this in his own unique way. In 1946, decades before he came to Malawi to take the lead in the independence struggle, he co-published a book with a missionary, titled Our African Way of Life (McCracken 2013 [2012]: 327).[38] In it, he provided 'a sympathetic account of the workings of African matrilineal societies,' which he later used to draft his 'personal vision of Malawian society' (Ibid.; cf. Forster 1994: 487). Based on this, I argue that Banda's policies and politics from 1964 up to 1994 have been geared towards solidifying 'the grand narrative about home,' which explains part of its power today.

In 1957, Banda returned to Malawi, then still called Nyasaland, after having spent more than forty years abroad.[39] During his time overseas, Banda 'had developed the kind of nostalgia for his home culture that affects expatriates everywhere' (Forster 1994: 486). This resulted in a glorification and admiration for village life, including the 'traditional patterns of obedience' of the young to the old and the men to the women (Ibid.: 490). By taking this position, Banda was not only trying to make 'his people' live in the ways he felt they should live, he was also trying to consolidate his power. He was very opposed to aiding the creation of a substantial educated elite (Ibid.). Much of his public support came from people in villages, also because his 'neo-traditional brand of Malawian nationalism resonated effectively at village level in many of the Chewa-speaking parts of the country' (McCracken 2013 [2012]: 447; cf. Forster 1994: 493). As one of Banda's followers once told him: 'It is uneducated savages in the villages who followed you first, Ngwazi. Those are the people who are following you' (McCracken 2013 [2012]: 435). Thanks to this popular support, it came as no surprise that, following independence in 1964, Banda became Malawi's sole leader in 1966. In 1971, he declared himself 'life president' and continued ruling the country with an iron fist (Englund 2006: 15; McCracken 2013[2012]: 374, cf. Meredith 2013 [2012]: 176, 379; Mkandawire 2010: 25; Verheijen 2014: 34; Woods 2015). Not only did he install a Censorship Board to regulate language use and the arts – Banda clearly saw the power that resides in controlling narratives – he also killed

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38   The rest of this chapter relies heavily on the excellent and well-reviewed historical work carried out by John McCracken, which resulted in the book A History of Malawi 1859 – 1966 (2013 [2012]) – the most comprehensive of its kind.
39   He spent most of his time in the USA, England and Ghana (McCracken 2013 [2012]: 326–327).

opponents by detaining them 'for several years without trial' or, as he proud-
ly claimed, fed them to the crocodiles in the Shire River (Englund 2006: 15;
Woods 2015: 60–61).[40]

Banda maintained that all his atrocities were committed in the belief that he
was doing 'his people' a favour. He had been 'impressed with the notion of
the "good village", which meant that his vision 'of the good state of affairs in
Malawi was very similar to this notion, albeit extended to include the whole
nation' (Forster 1994: 493). From the beginning, Banda's politics were based
on a specific conception of who a Malawian is, or ought to be. He 'celebrat-
ed' Malawians' diverse ethnic backgrounds, but he also put his own tribe,
the Chewa, firmly 'at the heart of the nation state' (McCracken 2013 [2012]:
458). In his opinion, the Chewa people, 'the tribe most closely associated
with the ancient Maravi Empire,' were the backbone of the nation of Mala-
wi (Ibid.: 449). Moreover, and this should not come as a surprise, the 'real'
Chewa people, who spoke the 'real' Chewa language, could be found in the
villages (Ibid.; cf. Englund 2002b). He also emphasized the participation of
chiefs, headman and traditional power structures, even though, during colo-
nialism, many had come to see them as in the pockets of the foreign powers
(McCracken 2013 [2012]: 455). Banda, of course, carefully chose which chiefs
received his blessing 'according to his own interpretation of Malawi history'
(Ibid.). There are still echoes of the effects of Banda's cultural politics today,
in the form of a grand narrative.

In a focus group with approximately ten girls aged between ten and 17, I
asked everybody where their home was, and, initially, most of them named
the area we were in as their home, despite the fact that I had used the word
kwanu in the question. When I asked them why this was the case, all of them
changed their answers to reflect both where they were staying now and where
their home village was. One of the girls explained to me: 'yeah, in the whole
of Malawi we say so because most of us in towns came because our parents
came to seek employment or do whatsoever, but the real home is in the orig-
inal district we mentioned.'[41] Another girl added 'our parents […] came from
elsewhere, so we call home where my mother came from originally.'[42] This
points towards ethnic affiliations, since most people in the South of Malawi
are part of matrilineal descent systems (cf. Telalagić 2014: 4). Clearly, even
though the girls in this group all reside in an urban area and had initially

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40   Many intellectuals and political opponents thus went into exile – a history that still influ-
ences and politicizes notions of home in Malawi (Woods 2015).
41   Focus Group, Machinjiri, 02-04-2015.
42   Ibid.

mentioned this area as their home, when asked explicitly, they conveyed the notion that people could not have their home in town, since everybody in town originates from somewhere else. In a different focus group with a different group of girls, I asked whether they would still consider their village of origin their home, even if they had not lived there (for a prolonged period of time). All of them said yes.[43] They also all agreed that you could have only that one home, and not one in town and one in the village.

All of the girls also said that they would not be able to feel at home in a different country, such as Mozambique. This reminded me of an older man I had met a few months earlier. I had been sitting outside Road Traffic in Blantyre, when he came to sit next to me.[44] I greeted him and we started talking. I asked him where he stayed[45] and he answered that his house was in Nancholi, an area of Blantyre. He had lived there for more than 35 years already and he enjoyed staying there. Yet, when I asked him 'kwanu ndi kuti?' he immediately responded 'kwathu ku Mozambique'. He thus located his home in a rural area in Mozambique, even though he had fled Mozambique in the 1980s during the civil war (he even showed me his bullet wounds to prove it) and had not been back since. In fact, he expected never to return, because he simply did not have the money for transport. Maybe when he died, he mused, then his daughters might pay to make sure that he is buried at home, in Mozambique. This points in a direction that can be substantiated by scholarship on the topic; namely, that in more African cultures and countries, the idea of tracing one's origin and/or 'home' to a rural village is the norm (cf. Geschiere 2009, who discusses this same dynamic for Ivory Coast, Cameroon and – albeit to a lesser extent – Kenya (pp. 201–202); Geschiere 2013: 208). However, it is important to realize that although it might be a similar grand narrative, it plays out differently in different contexts.

What I have described above is what I call 'the grand narrative about home' that is prevalent in Malawi and several other African countries. Yet, although most people reiterate this story, its 'narrative gaps' also become instantly clear (cf. Harding 2000). In that sense, the 'true,' archetypical Malawian 'always seems to be receding' (Geschiere 2009: 38). The girls who were asked about home initially mentioned the place where they live now (and often have been living their whole lives), even though this is in town. Only when asked explicitly did they adhere to the grand narrative. As my fieldwork con-

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43 Focus group, Chilaweni, 24-04-2015.
44 Field notes 27-02-2015.
45 Mumakhala kuti?

tinued, I kept coming across other narratives and practices regarding home and the grand narrative started to appear increasingly unstable.[46] Towards the end of my research, I was talking to a bartender and two other people in a bar in Northern Malawi. I was on a short break and the guys had asked me what I was researching, so I told them that I was looking into 'home'. They immediately started laughing: what could one possibly research about home? Home is just home – what's interesting about that? I asked one of them where his home was in two different ways (kwanu ndi kuti and ku nyumba kwanu ndi kuti) and his answers were different. I told him that this was exactly what I was interested in. He had left the village that he was born in a long time ago; yet, he still referred to it as his home, whereas the place he had been living in for 27 years now, was only his house? 'Why doesn't your home move when you move?' I exclaimed. At this moment, a Rastafarian who had been listening in on our conversation could not control himself anymore: 'look, honey, the mudzi doesn't move, OK? You can move, but your home doesn't move with you.'[47] We move, our villages do not.

Postmodern Lived Reality

As the above makes clear, most Malawians adhere to 'the grand narrative' when talking about their home. But, as time went by, I became increasingly doubtful as I came to realize that most of the people that were telling me this story, did not necessarily adhere to it in practice. Lyotard sees this as a consequence of 'the condition of knowledge' in our times (1984 [1979]: xxiii). He termed this 'postmodern' because of the 'incredulity towards metanarratives' (Ibid.: xxiii, xxiv). According to Lyotard, people no longer believe in these all-encompassing meta-, or grand narratives, which then – ironically – become the new grand narrative of our times. However, this incredulity should not be taken to mean that grand narratives no longer exist or are no longer used in our everyday thinking and communication: they do and they are. And although science was often in conflict with narrative – because they are based on different systems of legitimation – science is now widely regarded as a narrative too: crudely put, a story among other stories. This leaves space for contestation and, since I am a child of my times, this seems to me a productive way to 'do' science. Postmodern knowledge, in this sense, opens up possibilities, because 'it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces

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46   See also Harding's conclusion that narratives that use narrative gaps tend to be extremely unstable (2000: 86).
47   Field notes 17-06-2015.

our ability to tolerate the incommensurable' (Ibid.: xxv). Grand narratives obscure these differences by making them unintelligible (cf. Bauman 2015 [2004]: 17–19).

I thus decided to delve into Malawi's history,[48] since a grand narrative, like the one about home, can be seen as a remnant of the past: a story that used to be true but which is now being surpassed by modernity, rapid urbanization and globalization. But this does not seem to be the case with regard to Malawi. Looking at Malawi's 'tribal composition', movement clearly comes to the fore.[49] The Ngoni, mostly portrayed as a warrior tribe, originate from South Africa and 'raided' their way up to central Malawi. The Yao, also regarded as a warrior tribe, came up from Mozambique and subsequently participated in long distance (slave) trade, connecting them to (among other places) the Tanzanian coast. Both the Sena and Lomwe people arrived from Mozambique as well – having fled war or the harsh labour regimes – only to end up on plantations in Southern Malawi. The Tonga and Tumbuka tribes in the North of Malawi have always been closely associated with tribes found in present day Tanzania and the Congo. Finally, the Chewa people, descendants of the Maravi kingdom, can trace their origins back to parts of the Congo, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The ancient history of the current nation state of Malawi is thus riddled with movement (McCracken 2002, 2013 [2012]; Englund 2002a, b; Van Blerk & Ansell 2006: 258; Verheijen 2014: 31; cf. Clifford 1997; Geschiere 2009: 28).

The early colonial administration went to great lengths in their attempts to curb the movements of the population of Malawi, then still called Nyasaland – a desire motivated by the onset of capitalism and their subsequent need for labourers on the plantation fields (McCracken 2013 [2012]: chapter 3, cf. Bauman 2012 [2000]). This turned out to be extremely difficult, because inhabitants were used to moving around, not least because of their agricultural activities and – especially in the Chikwawa region – the inhospitable natural environment (Ibid.).[50] In 1891, this led to the introduction of 'a six shilling hut

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48   Based on McCracken 2013 [2012] chapters 1–5, but also http://www.earth-cultures.com/cultures/people-of-malawi (last accessed 14-11-2015).
49   I am aware of the problematic nature of the term 'tribe' and the shift in anthropology (in the late 1970s) towards the use of the (equally problematic) term 'ethnicity' (cf. Comaroff & Comaroff 2009; Eriksen 2002 [1993]). I choose, however, to use 'tribe' here, because people in Malawi tend to use this word themselves when referring to their 'ethnic identity'.
50   This would be an argument for the idea that labourers had already been 'liquid' before capitalism reached its liquid stage. This would refute Bauman's theory (Bauman 2012 [2000]). I am grateful to Dr. Francio Guadeloupe for pointing this out to me during a conversation (Sint Maarten, 17-11-2015).

tax' (Ibid.: 79).[51] In order to get the money for the hut tax, people were forced to work on plantations and thus forced to settle and start leading a sedentary life. This policy had catastrophic effects when a famine struck the Southern region in 1900, instigating mass-migration to Blantyre in search of food, jobs and help (Ibid.: 80).[52] Labour migration, with Malawi as the long term 'supplier of labor for the more developed economies of the south,' is often thought of as 'the single young man oscillating at relatively regular intervals between his rural village and urban place of employment' (McCracken 2013 [2012]: 83, 183). But before the 1940s and 1950s, migrants would often take on several jobs in succession, which led them 'ever further south before eventually returning home' (Ibid.).[53] 'The grand narrative about home' thus seems to fit, yet not as tightly as it has often been portrayed.

In the 1930s, cities began to slowly grow in Malawi, providing new challenges for those who migrated towards the towns. As McCracken describes (Ibid.: 233):

> Confronted both by the uncertainties of urban living and also by the belief that ultimate security was most likely to be found back in one's rural village, migrants sought refuge in a host of cultural associations, among them ethnic, burial and mutual aid societies, linking them with their kinsfolk in the cities as well as with their rural homes.'

The insecurities of town-life were thus mediated by not severing the connections with those one had left behind in the village, making sure that one would always be able to return there. The village, however, remained the main residential place for most Malawians, with only a few living 'in villages fringing the town' (Ibid.: 288). These villages were called 'peri-urban' and, surprisingly, their population turned out to be 'remarkably stable' – especially in cases where women could still work the land while the men went further into town to 'fetch' money (Ibid.: 289). In this way, it was possible to maintain a rural lifestyle while no longer residing in a rural area. Some of these now urban people had 'less to eat than rural villagers'; but, despite poverty, for some, these new habitats created immense opportunities (Ibid.). I agree, however,

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51   See also, Meredith 2013 [2005] on how state formation on the African continent generally went hand in hand with a (violent) process of sedentarization.
52   In this sense, the current patterns of movement, both due to the aftermath of the floods and the endemic poverty, are nothing new.
53   There was also a large group of migrants who were named 'machona' or 'lost ones': they had 'severed their connections with their homeland and were unlikely to return' (McCracken 2013 [2012]: 184). They started new communities in, for example, present day Zimbabwe (Ibid.).

with Englund that urbanization is a term that 'long remained a misnomer for migration within Malawi' (2001: 92). At independence in 1964, more than '95 percent of Malawi's population lived in the countryside and the economy was almost entirely agricultural in character' (McCracken 2013 [2012]: 282). It is in these circumstances that Dr. Banda entered the scene.

But even Dr. Banda, a keen believer in 'the grand narrative about home', cannot deny that his life was mainly based on movement and an anything but rural lifestyle. He had initially left Malawi as a migrant worker to head to the mines in South Africa and he subsequently spent most of his life abroad. Upon his return, it became clear that much about his appearance and behaviour was no longer linked to the village life that he had lived when he was young. In fact, 'to some observers, the new leader, clothed in his three-piece suit, wearing a black homburg hat, delivering his speeches in English and refusing to eat nsima, was an unconvincing nationalist […] to all intents and purposes a white man' (McCracken 2013 [2012]: 346). Taking this into account, Banda's beloved 'traditional', African lifestyle narrative is present, yet for many, it does not reflect their lived reality.

Basically, 'the grand narrative about home' can never be an accurate reflection of the history, present or future, of the place we now call Malawi. Englund came to a similar conclusion: 'the fact of widespread migration in Malawi's past and present makes the tenacity of mudzi as a moral notion somewhat counterintuitive' (2002b: 138–139). This is when I realized that if I was going to try to understand my fieldwork experiences based on a grand narrative, people's everyday practices would remain incomprehensible. Even when trying to explain the past or the future through the lens of this narrative, I would get myself stuck in a story that just did not seem to fit the daily praxis of those who were telling me this story. This is why I chose to focus on what Lyotard calls 'micronarratives' or '"new moves": different stories, sometimes challenging, sometimes affirming but always co-existing with grand narratives' (Ibid.: 53).

The Plurality of Stories

Stories come into existence in many ways, shapes and forms and the art of storytelling can be traced back to the long history of oral tradition in Malawi, Africa and many other parts of the world (cf. Jackson 2006 [2002]); Jeppesen 2012; Strumpf 1999; Ochs & Capps 2001). Stories can be used to communicate information and valuable lessons to the next generations, but Jack-

son argues – based on Hannah Arendt's work – that storytelling can best be seen 'as a vital human strategy for sustaining a sense of agency in the face of disempowering circumstances' (Jackson 2006 [2002]: 15). Stories are thus a way to 'rework reality in order to make it bearable,' graspable and understandable (Ibid.: 16). Yet, 'no story is simply an imitation of events as they actually occurred'; there are thus as many (potential) stories as there are people and events (Ibid.). When thinking about different stories about home, the Chichewa proverb that started this chapter comes to mind. Kwanu ndi kwanu, mtengo mudalaka njoka means something like 'your home is your home, the tree houses a snake.' However, during my time in the field, I have come across at least four different stories that were told regarding its interpretation. Some of these link to 'the grand narrative about home,' whereas others boldly challenge it.

The first time I heard this proverb was while chatting with the girls in the hostel at Samaritan. We were sitting around on the khonde,[54] waiting for lunch to be cooked. Hope and Omega were discussing something about their families and the rest of us were just sitting, enjoying the sun. Memory was trying to cut up some of the extra vegetables that she had taken from the field close to the hostel, in anticipation of a lack of ndiwo.[55] When Hope and Omega started joking about their aunts, Memory interrupted: 'Your home is your home, basi.[56] If your mother has no teeth, then your mother has no teeth, basi.'[57] She was trying to stop the girls from joking about it, but achieved the opposite effect: everybody joined in to joke about each other's family members. Memory looked at me vexed. Clearly, to her, your home was not something to joke about: we all have a home and we cannot change the way that it is or looks. This clearly fits with the grand narrative: you are born somewhere and that is your home, no matter where you reside.

The second time I came across this proverb, it was mentioned to me by a good friend, a fifty-something Malawian in whose house I had often stayed. I had asked him about specific proverbs related to home and he came up with this same one. However, the meaning he conveyed was different from what I had heard before. According to him, the proverb meant something like 'no matter what your character is, your home will always be your home.'[58] The

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54   Chichewa for 'porch/veranda'.
55   The side dishes (usually soya, vegetables, meat or beans) eaten with nsima, a thick maize porridge, Malawi's staple food.
56   Chichewa for 'that's it' or 'it's just like that'. It can also be used to mean 'enough'.
57   'Kwanu ndi kwanu basi. Mayi ako alibe mano, ndi mayi ako basi'. (Field notes 08-03-2015)
58   Field notes 29-03-2015.

part about the character is probably linked to the fact that snakes are often taken to symbolize a bad or cunning person, but that this snake is sheltered by – at home in – the tree nonetheless. Somehow, this interpretation is comforting: even when you make mistakes or do bad things, your home will still be your home. This again links with the grand narrative where the home is unchangeable, solid and also a place that you can always return to.

The third time I heard this proverb being used, was when the former street boys were discussing how to find work. We were sitting together and I had been trying to talk about their vocational skills training, provided by Samaritan, which some of them had not finished. They ended up talking about work and how they could live anywhere, as long as there was work to be done and money to be made.[59] Then, just as I had started to focus more on the tomatoes that I was cutting for lunch, Blessings suddenly said: 'kwanu ndi kwanu, mtengo mudalaka njoka' (see photo 2 on the next page). I nearly cut off my finger while quickly asking the boys what they had been talking about exactly. Blessings explained that, basically, you can live anywhere, anything can be a home. Like the snake, he can even live in a tree! So it does not matter where you find your future job, you can live anywhere. Their interpretation of this proverb thus seems to be linked much more to their own lives, where they lived on the streets, than to the grand narrative of home.

After this third occasion, I sometimes tried to ask people about the proverb's meaning, but everybody translated it roughly as in the first two interpretations presented above. This was until I was talking with the girls at Samaritan again, towards the end of May. I had just started doing home visits with some of them and since everybody wanted me to come to their home, too, home had turned into our most 'spontaneously' discussed topic.[60] Then Jacquelina used the proverb again. I asked her what she meant by it and she stated, proudly, that everybody loves his or her home, even if it is a tree.[61] When I come to her home, I should not expect a mansion, but she loves it there anyway: it is her home. Elisa started to laugh uncontrollably after Jacquelina said this, which earned her a beating from Memory – no jokes about home. This interpretation, although similar to what the boys had said, was slightly different. Knowing Jacquelina's history, it surprised me that she emphasized her love for her rural home – a place that she had not visited for a long time. Her interpretation reminded me of the way that Lwanda translated this prov-

59   Field notes 13-04-2015.
60   I elaborate on these home visits in chapter 6.
61   Field notes 31-05-2015.

erb: 'East or West, home is best' (2009: 92). This, then, shows how the grand narrative is often referred to and used, also by people whose lived experience does not correspond to it.

Photo 2
Cooking lunch for and with the boys.

There might be many more interpretations that people ascribe to this proverb. Yet, by presenting these four here, I aim to show that although this proverb can be explained in line with 'the grand narrative about home', those whose lives do not fit this grand narrative tend to convey (slightly) different meanings. These different meanings reflect both their attachment to this grand narrative, but also their interpretive frame, which is based on their daily practices. In the next section, I elaborate on how narratives and practices can collide, creating disadvantageous consequences for (former) street youth.

Colliding Narratives and Practices

As the above makes clear, a grand narrative is by no means a grand Truth. Yet, this is beside the point. The grand narrative is a truth, among many others (cf. Jackson 2006 [2002]; Lyotard 1984 [1979]). More importantly, it is a story to which many Malawians refer and feel connected, regardless of their personal circumstances and practices. From this it follows that we should look at how this narrative, and others, influence people's actions. What does this narrative 'do' or inform people to do in their everyday lives? This is where I argue that collisions between 'the grand narrative about home' and certain peoples' practices, can create problems. The people for whom these problems arise are economically marginalized and urban based; more specifically, in the case of my research: (former) street youth (cf. Englund 2002b: 138). In the next paragraphs, I present two reasons for why they can suffer from a collision of the grand narrative and their lived reality. Firstly, 'the grand narrative about home' is used by well- or better-off people to contest their presence in urban space. Secondly, interventions by organizations – both (I)

NGOs and the Malawian government – are usually based on the grand narrative, which further disadvantages this already marginalized group.

One day, when I was on my way to Samaritan I was the last person to board a particular minibus. As I was trying to squeeze myself in, the conductor closed the door and got into a heated argument with the woitanira.[62] Apparently, they had agreed on a different amount of money but now that his bus was full, the conductor could not care less. While we were driving off, he threw 50 kwacha out of the window and started insulting the woitanira: 'go back to your village', 'go work the land, your children are hungry.'[63] He laughed sarcastically and we went on our way. This incident alludes to the widespread idea that those who fail to take care of themselves in a respected[64] way, in town, should leave the city. The grand narrative is used here to insinuate that their actual home is not in the city, which means that they should just go home and do their work there in order to provide for their families.

I have witnessed many similar events of (public) teasing in which the economically marginalized are framed as 'lost villagers': hanging around in town, but not able to achieve the success that would warrant their presence in this urban place. Among the (former street) youth, an often heard tease is to call someone a 'chimidzi', a villager. Whenever someone is being slow, window-shopping, or having difficulties with a piece of technology, looking as if s/he is poor or behaving as if s/he has no money (which is often the case) this insult can be used. Of course, this also plays on another grand narrative; namely, that those living in the village are poor, those living in town are rich. [65] I call this narrative 'the rich urbanite grand narrative'. Everybody I know is well aware that this grand narrative is as flawed in practice as the grand narrative about home is, but both remain widely used and accepted. This is thus an example of another grand narrative that not only co-exists with, but also consolidates 'the grand narrative about home' by (at least in narrative) closing off urban space to the economically poorer segments of the Malawian population. At the same time, this narrative is also used by the economically marginalized themselves to ridicule and denigrate village life, since even though they are not rich, in their eyes they are capable of surviv-

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62   The person who shouts where a particular minibus is going to.
63   'muzipita ku mudzi kwanu' 'ukalima, ana ali ndi njala'. Field notes 15-03-2015.
64   Being a woitanira is not a respected way of doing piecework, although one can make a (meager) living out of it.
65   See also this song 'Chimidzi Swagga' in which being a villager and being poor are constantly equated (accessible here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ecgYPaA4a_s). (last accessed 13-11-2015).

ing in town. The conductor who verbally abuses the woitanira is an example of this, because everybody knows that minibus conductors also struggle to achieve (financial) success in town. The same goes for when teases based on this narrative are used among (former) street youth.

'The grand narrative about home' thus clearly interlaces here with 'the rich urbanite grand narrative'. This grand narrative is also widely adhered to, as the opinion of a 17-year-old girl exemplifies: 'those who remain there [in the village] are the ones in my opinion who are not educated.'[66] Poverty in the rural parts of Malawi makes people flock to town in search of jobs; yet, many of them end up in similar or even worse economic situations, which further strengthens this narrative about people in the village being backwards and only capable of manual labour (cf. Englund 2002b). As David, a 22-year-old former street boy, put it: 'people leave villages to go look for money.'[67] This emphasizes the need to leave the village, even if one would not actually want to do so. Chisomo, David's 20-year-old friend, adds: 'there is no one who lives in a village who will refuse to go to town. Because they think that in town everything is there, you can't suffer.'[68] This idea is quickly overtaken by the harsh reality of town life, making the transition from rural to urban space challenging in itself – let alone when also having to deal with the constant challenges presented by fellow city inhabitants. Joining in this narrative and ridiculing village life is one way to cope with this difference between one's expectations or dreams and the harsh reality one deals with on a daily basis.

This interlacing of two grand narratives makes residing in urban space and claiming a 'home' there more difficult for the economically marginalized. Elite or better-off youth, for example, could equally be challenged about their (supposedly rare) visits to their 'rural homes'; yet, aside from the occasional argument with (grand)parents about their urban lifestyle, their presence in town is not contested. The grand narrative about home thus offers more challenges for the urban-based, economically marginalized, such as (former) street youth.

In their efforts to maintain and/or strengthen control of the city and to have the activities that take place within it run in an orderly fashion, the Malawian government, the city council and other organizations, such as (I)NGOs, tend to target the economically marginalized with their policies. These policies

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66 Focus group, Machinjiri, 02-04-2015.
67 Field notes 06-04-2015.
68 Field notes 06-04-2015.

and the subsequent interventions not only define the economically marginalized youth's presence as a problem or even danger, but also base their reforms and interventions on 'the grand narrative about home'. A narrative that, although often adhered to in stories, does not adequately reflect the everyday lives of this particular group. I argue that, despite good intentions, many of these interventions only add to the hardships that this group of people continuously attempts to overcome. This also makes clear that a grand narrative is thus more than just a story: like all other narratives, it constructs reality and informs and inspires actions (Lyotard 1984 [1979]; cf. Jackson 2006 [2002]). It thus has very real impacts on the everyday lives of people. The rest of this thesis is devoted to the ways in which (former) street youth deal with the impacts and effects of 'the grand narrative about home' as they struggle to construct a home for themselves in the city.

In this chapter, I have presented 'the grand narrative about home'. It portrays home as the rural village in which one was born. I then explained that this narrative does not necessarily relate to the everyday lives of people currently living in Malawi, nor does it reflect the country's history. Subsequently, I argued that for those who are urban based and economically marginalized, this grand narrative about home can pose great problems since it often forms the basis for public ridicule and governmental/organizational interventions for which they are targeted. In the rest of this thesis, I will delve into more of what Lyotard called 'micro narratives' in order to show how (former) street youth engage with the grand narrative of home, while attempting to make themselves at home in the city. In the next two chapters, I first explicate the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of my research.

3 Constructing a Theoretical Foundation

'home, like any word we use to cover a particular field of experience,
always begets its own negation'

(Jackson 1995: 122)

In this chapter, I provide an interpretative framework that guides the analysis on which this thesis is built. I start by discussing the intimate link that is often made between home and place and how this is connected to 'street youth'. Subsequently, I use the theories of Zygmunt Bauman to discuss mobility and come to a fluid conceptualization of home as an elusive, fluid field of tensions.

Building on Quick Sand: Towards A Fluid Conceptualization of Home

In the previous chapter, I presented what I call 'the grand narrative of home'. As I also mentioned, the notion of home that is created through this narrative shows only one aspect of the lived realities of the people I interacted with. Their social position, i.e. not always having had a house, has led to them being referred to as 'homeless', especially when coupled with the grand narrative I traced. To delve deeper into these politics of house- and homelessness, I use this chapter to build towards a fluid conceptualization of home. Some of the conceptualizations that I discuss come close to what the grand narrative propagates, while others diverge from it. Yet, what most of them have in common is that (the search for) home is seen as an integral part of the human condition; it is what makes us human (cf. Arendt 1998 [1958]; Jackson 1995; 2012; Mallet 2004; Woods 2015).[69] Our search for home thus seems universal, but that does not mean that we all search in the same way. The human condition is one of plurality; we are one, because we are part of many – both within ourselves and within the world (Arendt 1998 [1958]; Nancy 2000 [1996]; cf. Jackson 2012, 2013: 6). This means that each of us has our own way of experiencing and describing 'home', which might explain why

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69   Jackson calls this our 'existential project' and 'a universal human imperative' (1995: 123).

people, including academics and politicians, have fiercely disagreed on how to analyze, think about and use the concept.

Much of this controversy stems from the intimate link that can be (and often is explicitly) made between home and place; the assumption being that earth is home to humans and that humans are thus at home while being on earth, in a specific place (Arendt 1998 [1958]: 2; cf. Gauthier 2011; Ingold 2011 [2009]).[70] The grand narrative discussed in the previous chapter is based on this same rhetoric. However, as history shows us, ideologies and practices of in- and exclusion based on power, mobility and place have seen peoples claiming certain places while blocking others from having their homes located in that same place (cf. Geschiere 2009; Kalir 2015; Meredith 2013 [2005]; O'Mahoney & Sweeney 2010; Scott 1998). This dynamic is also clear in Dr. Banda's policies, when he attempted to construct and define who was or could be a Malawian citizen (McCracken 2013 [2012]: 457). The British, the former colonial power, attempted to include not only those born in Malawi, but also those who had resided there for more than seven years (Ibid.). This in order to safeguard and guarantee political influence for those of European or Asian descent residing in Malawi. Banda changed this as soon as he came to full power and made sure that 'only Africans or people born of an African mother could be Malawian citizens' (Ibid.: 457).[71] The politics of home and place are thus also intimately related to the nation state (cf. Anderson 2006 [1983]).

Interestingly, Banda did not stop there. He considered Malawi to be a unity 'as much in cultural as in territorial terms,' which meant that 'he went out of his way to offer citizenship rights to' Africans who had lived in Malawi for a prolonged period of time or those who had relatives in Malawi (Ibid.: 457).[72] By Banda's outright contestation of considering Malawi only as a nation in the territorial sense, he mixed his own ideas with the framework of thoughts that 'the Western powers'[73] were propagating at the time. This importance of territorial rootedness and thus the foregrounding of place can be found

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70   From a religious perspective, this statement is incorrect: home is in heaven. In Malawi this saying, also sung at funerals, is 'dziko la pansi si kwathu': the earth (literally, the country below) is not our home. Unfortunately, delving into the religious conceptions and politics of home goes far beyond the scope of this thesis since (former) street youth hardly appealed to this narrative.
71   He allowed the possibility for Europeans and Asians to apply for citizenship, but it was up to the government to decide whether their application would be granted (McCracken 2013 [2012]: 457).
72   This privilege mainly related to Mozambicans in the border areas (Ibid.).
73   I have put this term in inverted commas to indicate that I use it as a figure of speech, for the sake of brevity.

in many, if not most, 'Western' ideas about home. 'The Western' sedentary lifestyles and strong notions of building seem to be the cause of this (Jackson 1995: 86).[74] Heidegger, for example, stated that our being is defined by dwelling: 'The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans are on the earth, is Buan dwelling' (1971: 2). He was, however, fiercely criticized for his ideas, by, among others, Emmanuel Levinas, who reacted against his emphasis on autochthony and the violent politics that can ensue from this kind of reasoning.[75] For Levinas, a home was almost the opposite of what Heidegger propagated; namely: 'the ethical necessity of welcoming strangers' in a 'place where wanderers find refuge' (Gauthier 2011: 11). Levinas' conceptualization thus symbolizes a notion of home that is much more open and less rooted in place, albeit a notion that seems almost unattainable in practice.

The clash in this philosophical debate between Heidegger and Levinas prompted Gauthier to search for 'a politics of space that is ontological and ethical' and that will help us to 'successfully navigate between the twin extremes of tribalism and rootless cosmopolitanism' (Ibid.: 16–17). This tension between 'tribalism', Heidegger's thoughts taken to the extreme, and 'cosmopolitanism', Levinas' ideas taken to the extreme, is visible in most thinking about home. It might also explain why Banda had such trouble in coming up with a satisfying definition of 'Malawian citizens'. On the one hand, one wants to be inclusive; on the other hand, nation states (and (imagined) communities in general) are per definition exclusionary (cf. Anderson 2006 [1983]). No matter which kind of community is imagined, this always means that some are not – or are not completely – part of it. In fact, 'the imagined communities called "nations" require constant, often violent, maintenance' (1997: 9). Barak Kalir thus argues that 'in its territorial dimension, "home" is in fact an inherently exclusionary notion' (2015: 24). This is or has been experienced, for example by white settlers who remained in Malawi after independence, but also by contemporary 'illegalized migrants' (2015).[76]

Peter Geschiere also describes this dynamic in his book The Perils of Belonging: Autochthony, Citizenship, and Exclusion in Africa & Europe (2009). In

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74   Jackson traces this line of thought back to Marx, Jung and Freud as well, since they all use (albeit in different ways) metaphors of houses and/or building in their influential thinking (Ibid.).

75   Heidegger's thinking is also controversial because of its intimate connections to Nazi politics.

76   During my stay in Malawi, the newspapers often reported on 'illegal migrants' that were residing in Malawi without having the right to do so. This often referred to Ethiopian, Somalian,

it, he compares the debates in the Netherlands, Ivory Coast and Cameroon on the notion of autochtony, or belonging to the soil. He emphasizes that, in tracing one's origin and roots, the 'true' starting point always seems to be ungraspable (Geschiere 2009; cf. Clifford 1997). It constantly moves, depending on how one looks at it. This means that one's identity, citizenship and/or home-claims of 'belonging' to a certain place, can become challenged at all times, on every different level (Geschiere 2009; cf. Blunt & Dowling 2006). For those whose home has always been a self-evident and uncontested aspect of their lives, it might be difficult to imagine that, for others, home can be a process of everyday negotiations (cf. Dumbleton 2005; see also Yuval-Davis, who argues the same for 'belonging' (2006)). These politics of belonging, of making one's home claim and having it recognized and respected, thus implicate us all, but for some they are more prominently present and consequential than for others (cf. Yuval-Davis 2006). This holds for the macro level of nation states, but also for the micro level of interpersonal interactions. Both of these are constituted and played out in the seemingly 'small' interactions of the everyday. And this is where the politics of home and belonging, bring us to street youth.

Street Youth and Home

Although I have been using the terms 'street youth' and 'street children' in the previous pages without hinting at their difficulties, these terms are highly problematic. Firstly, because they appear to indicate a social group when they are more a figure of speech (Nieuwenhuys 2001: 540). There is no such thing as the street child or the street youth and those who are supposed to fall into this category rarely describe themselves as such – this also holds for the 'street youth' that I have interacted with. Although referred to as street children/youth by the Malawian government, The Samaritan Trust and their surroundings, they only identified themselves with this label jokingly, mockingly or pragmatically – the latter, for example, in order to get access to resources. The term also appears to obfuscate more than it elucidates: children can be on the streets for many reasons, also just to play. The actual amount of time they spend on the streets varies widely and it stigmatizes those who are deemed to fall within the denoted category (Nieuwenhuys 2001: 551–552). UNICEF has, at some point, attempted to differentiate between children 'on' ('visible and working there, but still living with their families') and children

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Congolese and Burundian refugees (cf. The Daily Times 24-06-2015, The Nation 26-04-2015, 20-08-2015, Weekend Nation 01-08-2015).

'of' the streets ('for whom the street has become the major point of reference'); yet, these kind of typologies suffer from the same problem as the more generic categorization, which is why I will not use them (Ennew 2003; cf. Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003; Kaime-Atterhög & Ahlberg 2008). Instead, due to a lack of viable alternatives, I have chosen to stick to the more generic terms for the sake of clarity and readability (cf. Aptekar & Stoecklin 2014: 8–11).[77] For the same reasons, I do not use inverted commas when using the terms street children or street youth.

The second part of the figure of speech 'street children' is equally problematic, because when is someone a street child and when are they a street youth? This question is difficult to answer especially since age is not necessarily a useful way of classifying human beings. Childhood is now widely regarded as a social construct, which means that what it means and to whom, has changed (and still is changing) over time (cf. Boyden 2003a; Buckingham 2012 [2000]: introduction; Punch 2003).[78] Besides, there are aspects of maturity that age does not capture, such as psychological maturity, and even our bodies develop in different ways meaning that not everybody reaches physical maturity (however one defines this) at the same age. Most of the street youth that I interacted with intensively are between 14 and 22 years of age. I could refer to most of them as children because international law defines every human being below the age of 18 as a child.[79] However, I feel that UNESCO's definition of youth is more fitting, because it reflects their social position. According to UNESCO, '"youth" is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community.'[80] In addition, UNESCO holds that 'youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age-group' and, because in the African Youth Charter 'youth' are people between 15 and 35 years of age, I have chosen to stick to youth.[81] Despite my focus

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77   Aptekar and Stoecklin attempt, over the course of four pages, to categorize street children and youth based on their activities on the streets – their endeavour is not particularly elucidating.

78   Boyden emphasizes that some of the policies based on childhood ideologies have tended to exacerbate the marginalization of 'the children of the poor' (2003a). Nieuwenhuys argues, in a similar fashion, that 'majority world children' are usually judged according to the norm based on 'minority world children' (2004, 2013).

79   As established in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990). Accessible at: http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx (last accessed 26-11-2015).

80   http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/youth/youth-definition/ (last accessed 26-11-2015).

81   http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/youth/youth-definition/ (last accessed 26-11-2015). The African Youth Charter is available at: http://www.au.int/

on the older girls and boys, I also frequently interacted with younger street children – who I refer to as such – simply because the girls of all age groups resided in the Samaritan's hostel together.

Over the past decades, academic research on street children and youth has increased steadily. Perhaps not surprisingly, the underlying assumption in most scholarly work has been that street children and youth are homeless, because they reside(d) on the streets and thus not at home (cf. Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003; Van Blerk 2005; Young 2003). Home is usually treated as the place where they were before they ended up on the streets (cf. Beazley 2000). The idea that the streets could be their home has also been mooted, yet this has often been the researcher's interpretation and not necessarily something that was discussed with the children and youth themselves (cf. Magazine 2000; Young 2003: 611). Others have focused on street children's mobility and the ways in which they negotiate their spatial identities while adhering to the hegemonic image of street children and youth as homeless: they can only be 'home' when they decide to leave the streets (Van Blerk 2005; cf. Evans 2004). The idea that they might have created a new home, have started to feel at home elsewhere (as well) or that it could be of importance to discuss issues of home with them, is increasingly being picked up on, although more research is needed (cf. Beazley 2000). The influential grand narrative that children are supposed to reside in the domestic sphere is thus making its effects widely felt (cf. Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003; Ursin 2011; Van Blerk 2005: 9).

According to Aptekar and Stoecklin, the label 'street child' is already a statement about home in itself – or rather, the lack of it (2014: 25).[82] They continue by stating that there is 'very little documented research on what being homeless means to children in street situations,' clearly assuming that these children/youth are homeless (Ibid.). However, as scholars researching so-called homelessness in 'the West' aptly demonstrate in their writings, this label should not be taken at face value (cf. Fitzpatrick 2005; Sommervile 1992, 2013: 407). After all, it is the 'power of society to define what is and is not home' that means that we must not forget the power disparities from which this label ensues (Veness 1993; cf. Blunt & Dowling 2006: 126–132; Sommervile 1992, 2013). So-called homelessness is usually also a temporary and episodic condition – a lived reality that this label obfuscates (Sommervile 1992, 2013: 396). This is why I agree with Woods that the label 'homeless' can

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en/sites/default/files/treaties/7789-file-african_youth_charter.pdf (last accessed 26-11-2015).
82   One could argue that the streets are the ultimate fluid home – brought to my attention by Dr. Wels.

only make sense when home is taken to be static and immoveable (2015: 38). Leaving a home, for whatever reason, does not necessarily make one homeless, and since people have both roots and routes, their movements through the world can lead them to construct their home or feel at home in many different places – even simultaneously (cf. Clifford 1997). To explore how this works in practice, I propose to leave room for the complex meanings of ideological constructs such as home and homelessness by conceptualizing them in fluid ways, in the context of our fluid modern times (cf. Sommervile 1992).

Liquid Modernity

According to Bauman, 'it would be imprudent to deny, or even to play down, the profound change which the advent of 'fluid modernity' has brought to the human condition' (2012 [2000]: 8). In his book(s), he discusses the impacts of the capitalist system of production on our everyday lives, which are shaped by the movements of capital and (our) labour: we have to be constantly ready to move, whenever capital requires this of us (2012 [2000], 2015 [2004]). He thus uses the metaphors of liquidity and fluidity to describe the volatile circumstances within which people in the present attempt to construct their lives under continuous pressure.[83] This pressure can make customs, arrangements and relationships that once seemed solid, become liquid and it subjects everything, including who and where we are, to change (2012 [2000], cf. 2015 [2003]). This change holds eternal promises for improvement but, in practice, often exacerbates existing economic inequalities. This, in turn, creates the need to follow money and (potential) jobs, triggering more movement and thus liquefying life and the conditions under which it is lived once again (Bauman 2015 [2004]). The growing slums around Blantyre testify to the rapid speed of this process (Bauman 2015 [2004]; cf. Van Blerk & Ansell 2006).

I find this metaphor a fitting one to describe the everyday context in Malawi, where, due to these intrusive and destructive long-term effects of capitalism, the majority of the population lives in (extreme) poverty.[84] According to World Bank indicators, approximately 84 per cent of Malawi's inhabitants

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83   In his book, Bauman uses 'liquid(ity)' and 'fluid(ity)' almost interchangeably, but always in opposition to 'solid(ity)': 'these are reasons to consider 'fluidity' or 'liquidity' as fitting metaphors when we wish to grasp the nature of the present' (2012 [2000]: 2). When referring explicitly to Bauman's theories I use 'liquid(ity)', otherwise I use 'fluid(ity)'.
84   Available at: http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/country/statistics/tags/malawi (last accessed 22-12-2015). This calculation is based on data from 2010.

reside in rural areas, where they rely (almost solely) on subsistence farming.[85] Taking into account the horrendous effects of climate change that Malawi has had to deal with in recent years, it comes as no surprise that half of the population lives in poverty.[86] This poverty creates the pressure that liquefies the existing patterns of living, breeding willingness and eagerness for change and leading to an increasing number of people moving to town in search of jobs – better economic deals to survive. This process is expected to continue, because, according to predictions from the IMF, the (near) future holds little for Malawi. As stated in their newest 'country report', 'the economic outlook remains difficult reflecting the negative impact of weather-related shocks, the ongoing suspensions of budget support, persistently high inflation and weaker global demand which could hurt Malawi's exports' (IMF, 15 December 2015). The harvest of March 2016 will be approximately 30 per cent smaller due to the floods and 'as a result, an estimated 2.8 million persons […] at risk of food insecurity' (Ibid.). In the Southern areas just below Blantyre, people are currently surviving on boiled green mangoes, water lilies and corn waste.[87]

And yet, I argue that it would be a mistake to think that 'liquid modernity' is a recent phenomenon in Malawi. World Vision, for example, revealed that 47.8 per cent of all children in Malawi 'are stunted in their growth' due to undernourishment.[88] This was not caused by the recent floods or the last two harsh seasons. Malawi, currently among the poorest countries in the world, according to the World Bank, has never been an economically rich country.[89] This can partly be ascribed to previous leaders, among whom Dr. Banda figures prominently, but also to widespread corruption scandals, such as the most recent Cash Gate, which still prevents donors from providing money to the Malawian government to address the current food crisis (IMF 2015). However, although Bauman's theories on 'the liquid' help us to reflect on this

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85   Available at: http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/country/statistics/tags/malawi (last accessed 22-12-2015). This calculation is based on data from 2014.

86   Available at: http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/country/statistics/tags/malawi (last accessed 22-12-2015). This calculation is based on data from 2014.

87   http://www.nyasatimes.com/2015/06/13/dpp-mp-says-malawi-hunger-no-longer-looming-but-a-reality-people-eating-water-lilies/ (last accessed 27-12-2015), http://now.worldvision.org/story/malawi-family-faces-hunger-season-few-mangoes-fewer-hopes (last accessed 27-12-2015).

88   http://now.worldvision.org/story/malawi-family-faces-hunger-season-few-mangoes-fewer-hopes (last accessed 27-12-2015).

89   https://www.gfmag.com/global-data/economic-data/the-poorest-countries-in-the-world?page=12 (last accessed 27-12-2015) http://allafrica.com/stories/201502200164.html (last accessed 27-12-2015).

context of utter destitution, it would be a mistake to argue that his ideas explain it all. Bauman's theories were developed in Europe and throughout his texts he mainly provides examples from or about Europe. Therefore, I want to highlight several aspects that need to be taken into account when using Bauman's theories to make sense of the current situation in Blantyre, Malawi – which it elucidates nonetheless.

Bauman starts his analysis with the statement that 'the era of unconditional superiority of sedentarism over nomadism and the domination of the settled over the mobile is on the whole grinding fast to a halt' (2012 [2000]: 13). An extremely mobile elite is now governing the settled masses. Bauman then contends that 'while the elite are likely intoxicated by their mobility opportunities, the rest are more likely to feel imprisoned in their home territories, from which they have little prospect of moving' (in Ritzer 2008: 578; cf. Bauman 2015 [2004]). Looking at (former) street youth's options of, for example, moving to England or the US, I can agree with this broad statement. Despite ever increasing mobility, there are those who have less opportunities to be mobile due to their economic positions. At the same time, mobility in Malawi is also a survival tactic of precisely the group of people that Bauman seems to exempt from being mobile. Malawi's long history of labour migration to neighbouring territories and countries testifies to this, but there are also more recent examples. Englund concluded, for instance, that 'for many migrants in one of the poorest areas of the capital city [Lilongwe], mobility is best seen as a lifestyle in which improvements in the village are pursued through a stay in town' (2002b: 139). Their mobility, shaped by the capitalist mode of production, thus consisted of moving between town and village. Also, research by Potts indicates that migrants or urban-based people do not necessarily spend the rest of their lives in town (1995). She argues that return (urban to rural) and circular migration between rural and urban areas occurs more often than research has so far shown (Potts 1995).

The above points to mobility being used – and having been used for centuries – as a survival tactic, by precisely those who Bauman considers to be the 'homeless and shifty "underclass"' (2012 [2000]: 13, cf. 2015 [2004]). In some instances, he recognizes their mobility; yet, pages later, he exempts them from the liquid modern condition. To me, this analytical separation between the mobile and the immobile makes little sense. We all find ourselves in constant flux and all people are mobile – we all move and have been doing so for centuries (Clifford 1997: 2). Also, as mentioned in chapter 1, I would argue that those who are now described either as the underclass and previously as the mobile that needed to be sedentarized, seem to have entered liquid mo-

dernity long before the 'exterritorial elite' that Bauman refers to. Especially in Malawi, the 'underclass' has been forced to be mobile due to the combined forces of colonialism, imperialism and capitalist market expansion, which together exacerbated their marginalized economic position far before the onset of 'liquid modernity' as such. This is still reflected in the sheer number of Malawians that live and work in South Africa, without having the legal permission to do so (cf. Bauman 2015 [2004]).[90]

Towards the end of his book, Bauman, quoting Maffesoli, states that 'the world we all inhabit nowadays is a "floating territory" in which "fragile individuals" meet "porous reality"' (2012 [2000]: 209, emphasis in original). We thus all find ourselves in this fluid state. Bauman continues to argue that 'in this territory only such things or persons may fit as are fluid, ambiguous, in a state of perpetual becoming, in a constant state of self-transgression' (Ibid.). In our liquid modern times, 'rootedness' is fluid, yet we attempt to solidify it, to pinpoint it on a map. Bauman's idea of liquid modernity also points at the tension inherent in the concept of home that I discussed earlier. Home, as rooted in place versus home, as the ethical necessity of welcoming strangers and, as such, facilitating movement. This ancient debate between Heidegger and Levinas also finds expression in the case of (former) street youth in Malawi. Seen as 'homeless', their claims of being at home in the city are contested. It is not their national identity that is challenged, but rather their presence in town is deemed undesirable and illegal (cf. Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003; Veness 1993). The grand narrative about home can be used to reinforce this view because it frames their lives in such a way that their 'real' home is elsewhere, outside of the city, in a village. This is where they will be safe, with their families, and where they should go back to: it is an attempt to curb their movements and solidify their lives.

When thinking about 'home', Bauman's theories thus offer perennial possibilities and perhaps even a need for new conceptualizations in which home is less rooted in place: in liquid modernity this link between home and place is constantly challenged, negotiated and, consequently, (re)constituted. In Malawi, this is partly done by the reiteration of 'the grand narrative about home', because telling a story is also an action (cf. Jackson 2006 [2002]; Ochs & Capps 1996, 2001). But it also includes other practices, among which non-discursive ones. These practices concerning home in our fluid modern times all relate to

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90   This was widely known, but became extremely politicized during the 'outbreaks' of xenophobia in South Africa in April and May 2015 (cf. The Daily Times 14-04-2015, 19-04-2015, 20-04-2015, The Nation 14-04-2015, 19-04-2015, 20-04-2015 Weekend Nation 18-04-2015, Sunday Times 19-04-2015).

the tension with which I started this section. I argue that in narrative, home is conceptualized as rooted in place, very much in line with Heidegger's ideas. In lived reality and in practice, however, our senses and practices of 'home' are imbued with movement and thus seemingly correspond more to Levinas' ideas. In order to capture this tension and to couch my conceptualization of home in Bauman's sketch of our liquid modern times, I propose to work with a fluid conceptualization of home, which I outline below (cf. Bauman 2012[2000]; Blunt & Varley 2004; Blunt 2005 Blunt & Dowling 2006).

Home: A Fluid Field of Tensions

Too often, home has been analysed using dichotomies. I agree with Blunt & Dowling that in terms of attempts to understand people's daily practices, this is not very useful (2006). Dichotomies like private/public, feminine/masculine space, do not seem to grasp the intricate and complex nature of home and feelings of being at home as experienced, enacted or narrated in daily life in our fluid modern times. Because it is my aim to look into exactly this, I conceptualize home as lived, 'as a relationship, a tension', constructed in daily practice (Jackson 1995: 122). The concept is thus riddled with tensions, but these tensions are not dichotomies, scales or lines along which people can be 'placed' according to their behaviours. Rather, they are flows that are constantly in flux and converge or diverge in ever different ways. 'This emphasis on fluidity opens up the present – the places and the spaces in which our everyday lives are formed – to flux, which means nothing is foundational' and that change is a quintessential part of our lives (Tucker 2010: 530). By conceptualizing home as a fluid field of tensions, it also becomes possible to zoom in on multiple and sometimes contradictory experiences – as the quote at the beginning of this chapter stated: 'home, like any word we use to cover a particular field of experience, always begets its own negation' (Jackson 1995: 122). In a fluid conceptualization, this negation is equally part of home constructions.

This broadness and elusiveness of home might be precisely the aspects that make it such a powerful concept. Geschiere made this type of argument for witchcraft in his latest book on witchcraft, intimacy and trust, in which he links his analysis of these three phenomena to a preoccupation with mobility and modernity (2013). His discussion of modernity focuses on the effects of the capitalist mode of production and the changes that this brought and brings about in societies, similar to Bauman's theorizing on liquid modernity. Geschiere suggests that instead of attempting to come up with a com-

prehensive analytical definition and running the risk of becoming involved in 'a quixotic struggle to control a notion that is so powerful because of its slipperiness,' it might be more useful to focus on what people have been doing with these notions over time (Geschiere 2013: 3, my emphasis, 10). It is exactly this 'fluidity and ambiguity' that I want to capture, and in this process Geschiere emphasizes the importance of recognizing the inherent danger in generalizing all-encompassing notions: they can be used to victimize already marginalized groups in society (Ibid.: 2, 9). The way in which 'home' is conceptualized in the grand narrative of home and how this narrative is subsequently used in interventions relating to street youth, is an example of this.

In part, this can be ascribed to the power of positive conceptualizations of home. However, seeing 'home' as an inherently good, safe or positive space would be a big mistake (cf. Argenti & Schramm 2012 [2010]; Blunt & Dowling 2006: 125; Bøås & Hatløy 2008; Das 2008: 292; Geschiere 2013; Kalir 2015; Øverlien 2012). In fact, for many (former) street youth, home is a source of pain, abuse, shortage, shame and profound unhappiness. Thinking about home only in the positive sense thus easily disguises the 'competing experience of those for whom "home" is a place they intentionally left' (Kalir 2015: 24).[91] This, however, does not mean that home signifies only negative things to them; most have very fond memories of the place(s) they call home. In order to understand conceptualizations of home, both the positive and the negative associations and experiences are equally important.[92] Home, as a word, is thus, at best, a very unstable index, both in narrative and in practice.[93]

Given that the concept of home, much like the concept of witchcraft, 'defies all classification and distinction,' Geschiere urges researchers to focus on the intertwining of past, present and future ideas to foster understanding of what a notion means to a certain group of people, in certain settings, at specific moments in time (2013). Home, then, like witchcraft, is not easy to 'catch' in words and this means that, with the onset of liquid modernity, home narratives were able to graft themselves onto newly emerging 'modern' ones (cf.

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91   See also the booklet Making it Home: Real-life stories from children forced to flee, written by the International Rescue Committee (2004).
92   This has mainly been remarked by several feminist theorists, who argued that the home is a place where abuse and power relations repress women (cf. Bowlby, Gregory & McKie 1997; Gurney 1997; Kalir 2015; Malos & Hague 1997; Ribbens & Edwards 1995; VanEvery 1997; Waurdhaugh 1999).
93   The latter was, for example, showcased by the floods.

Geschiere 2013: xxvi).[94] In that sense, I would argue that home is not just elusive, but can also become an 'illusive concept'; its content can be illusory, for example when the dark sides are omitted or when one has not been home for a long time.[95] It is often thought of as a harmonious safe haven whereas lived reality shows us something else. And yet, we cannot seem to escape this romantic idea. In this combination of elusive and illusive, the notion of home thus appears to be linked to another tension on which to graft itself, which explains part of its unremitting power and emotional appeal.

To come to a better understanding of this, I follow Blunt and Dowling in their conceptualization of home as 'lived; what home means and how it is materially manifest are continually created and re-created through everyday practices' (Blunt & Dowling 2006: 23; cf. Nowicka 2007). Blunt and Dowling call these 'home-making practices.' They can range from claiming one's autonomy (Ursin 2011) to attempting to feel safe (Øverlien 2012), maintaining one's routines (Nowicka 2007), cooking for one's husband or re-arranging furniture. Home-making practices differ per person, but there are also patterns that can be discerned. In 'home', different flows converge and although these can be separated academically, in daily life they are intricately entangled and exist in each other and in relation to each other.

An example of one of these flows is the material or the materiality of home. Considering a house, a shelter or a dwelling as home means looking at house designs and objects and decorations in the home (Blunt & Dowling 2006; cf. Cieraad 2006 [1999]; 2010; Mallet 2004). These are shaped by both cultural and individual preferences, but also conditioned by the environment and financial possibilities. The amount of artifacts in a house, but also the quality of the goods, all relate to the broader socio-economic status of the inhabitants of the house, which makes it very common for people to come up with elaborate value judgements based on the looks of a certain house – relating its material aspects to the 'worth' of its inhabitants (Blunt & Dowling 2006:

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94 Interestingly, Geschiere's analysis of the tension inherent in the concept of 'witchcraft' is similar to my analysis of the tension present in the notion of home. Geschiere argues that the witchcraft discourse survives because it has the 'surprising capacity [...] to combine an obsession with secret mobility – witches' ability to fly off to unknown places – with a firm rootedness in familiar realities of village and kin' (Ibid.: xxvi). I propose to analyse home in a similar way, by pointing at its rootedness as well as its potential – ever increasing number of – routes.
95 I elaborate on this in chapter 6.

108). During a focus group, a 17-year-old girl responded to the question 'does the look of a house give you an impression of who the occupants are?':

> There are certain houses which are big and give you a picture that its occupants are somehow educated, or the smaller ones that these people have just relocated from the village to this place but they didn't proceed with their education properly. Those houses, self-contained, big, electrified with a fence, just shows that these people are exceptional while for some houses without piped water, electricity and using public or communal water points, just illustrates that its occupants didn't have enough school.[96]

Interestingly, this girl's account of the materiality of a home follows the widespread capitalist ideology of the self-made man, thus disregarding the enormous amount of pressure that the less-privileged have to endure in their attempts to fashion their existence. Not having a big or fancy house is linked to being uneducated, also very much in line with the 'rich urbanite grand narrative' that I described in chapter 1. This explains the importance of understanding conspicuous consumption when looking at the interior of the houses of the economically marginalized: some have bought a TV, even though their house is not connected to the electricity network or they would borrow the neighbour's television set when I came for a visit.[97] The richer the house looks, the richer you look.

This emphasis on materiality is interesting, especially since the connection between house and home and a house as a home appears to be much less strong in Malawi than it is in 'the West'. Migration, for example, is conceptualized as 'moving house' – instead of 'moving home' – and research by Van Blerk and Ansell showed that Malawian children connected moving very much to going to a better house or leaving the house they were in because their family was failing to pay the rent (2006). This shows how conceptualizations of movement and place tie in with people's socio-economic position in society at large, but also with conceptions of home. Hope, currently residing at Samaritan, and Felix, who used to stay there but now rents in a slum with his friends, explained to me that although they refer to their home with the name of an area, the house they resided in inside this area continuously changed.[98] Felix: 'we changed houses all the time, after all [they are] is rent-

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96   Focus group, Machinjiri 02-04-2015.
97   Hope admitted this to me shortly after our visit (Field notes 11-04-2015).
98   Interview with Hope on 25-04-2015 and Felix 28-05-2015.

[ed].'[99] So even the materiality of houses and homes is less 'solid' than it seems at first glance.

In 'the West', home is also strongly associated with the nuclear family, but in many African contexts the family structures are much more fluid: 'children are particularly migratory within these fluid structures, moving to assist relatives, for education or to undertake chores' (Van Blerk & Ansell 2006: 259). This makes it both important and interesting to ask people about their conceptions of home and family, because they can differ greatly. Verheijen also came to this conclusion after doing research on marriage and sexuality in a village in Malawi; what is understood to be a 'marriage' or a 'household' needs to be asked (2014: 16). I thus always asked youth who they were living with and with whom they usually interact while residing in a place or in their home. Answers to these questions varied widely, as will become clear in the subsequent chapters. However, something that seems to differ little on a global scale is that 'most of the work carried out in the home is done by women' (Blunt & Dowling 2006: 95, 110). This makes home a severely gendered space (Ibid.; cf. Barker, Knaul, Cassaniga & Schrader 2000; Nowicka 2007: 78; VanEverey 1997).

Women are, in general, less likely to consider the home as a place for relaxation: for them it is the workplace. Both the boys and the girls that I engaged with agreed to this. The boys stated that basically everything that needs to be done in the house is for the women.[100] 'If the man would also be busy with the household chores, then he would be late for work.' And: 'the work for men is to find money, that's it.'[101] Girls even mentioned the amount of chores as a reason to run away from home: 'sometimes parents would give you an errand to do, say fetching water, but before you are done with that, you will hear them assigning you another chore like cooking nsima, then they would say and you also wash the clothes etcetera.'[102] The girls residing at Samaritan also frequently mentioned their frustration when they were called to clean the staff offices or assist in cleaning up after lunch. According to them, boys were never asked to do this. Unfortunately, 'these gender differences in home-based work become the basis for further inequalities,' for example, because girls have no time to go to school anymore or women will not be able

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99 'Timasinthasintha manyumba nanga si renti' (interview 28-05-2015).
100 Chisomo: zonse za pakhomo (Field notes 08-04-2015).
101 Ntchito ya amuna ndi kungoyangana ndalama basi. (Field notes 08-04-2015).
102 Focus group, Chilaweni 17-04-2015.

to work (fulltime) because they also have to do the household chores (Blunt & Dowling 2006: 95).

(Gender) relations in the home also relate to violence that can take place in the domestic sphere (cf. Barker, Knaul, Cassaniga & Schrader 2000). In a home, both love and hate, peace and violence have a place (cf. Jackson 1995). 'Despite this the significance of love, happiness, anger, depression, and loss have remained largely unacknowledged in contemporary writing on home' (Gurney 1997: 383). In chapter 7, I delve into the topics of love and home-making in more depth, but for now let us note that (gender based) violence and maltreatment are often reasons that contributed to (former) street youth's decision[103] to leave home (cf. Evans 2004; Korbin 2003; Scheper-Hughes 2008). Bridget often mentioned that she was missing her siblings now that she did not live at home.[104] Some of the other girls had brothers who also resided at Samaritan[105] – whereas others hardly knew their siblings because they had left home so young.[106] Some of their parents were still alive and used to visit them while they resided at Samaritan, whereas others had never met their mother or father.[107] The importance of family was, however, clear in the girls stories and also from the numerous occasions that they left Samaritan (without permission) to go and visit relatives in town. Boys appeared to do this less often, but did it all the same. Many of the youth also had family members or (boy)friends residing in South Africa, which brings us to consider the importance of belonging and identity as important dimensions of home (cf. Van Blerk & Ansell 2006).

Belonging and identity are important aspects of home-making since they contribute both to 'feeling at home' and to having one's home-claims acknowledged or challenged (cf. Geschiere 2009). Identities are fluid, always in flux, 'producing itself through the combined processes of being and becoming, belonging and longing to belong' (Yuval-Davis 2006: 202; cf. Guadeloupe 2009). Many of the youth that I interacted with emphasized that they are Malawians, belonging to Malawi, basing this on them having their home

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103 Acknowledging the choices they made, despite the fact that they did not make these under circumstances of their own choosing, helps us to see children and youth as social actors instead of passive victims 'wholly dependent on others for their survival and development' (Boyden & Cooper 2007: 4; cf. Boyden 2003; Boyden & Mann 2005; Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003; Ennew 2003; Magazine 2000: 985; Seccombe 2002).
104 Interview with Bridget, 26-04-2015.
105 For example, Ruth.
106 Interview with Jacquelina, 24-05-2015.
107 Example for the first, Peter, example for the second, Kumbukani.

in a rural village. This was of immense importance for them, from which it follows that it does not just matter what a person says or does, but also when and where one says or does things. Identity, belonging and place are thus interlinked (Willemse 2012). Belonging also brings with it a certain entitlement: because you belong somewhere, you have a right to certain services, resources or assistance.

Most of the youth that I spoke to proudly mentioned that, later on, after finishing school, they wanted to work hard to help the nation of Malawi, their homeland. Hope, for example, wants to become a soldier, 'because I want to protect my country. I love Malawi.'[108] The same goes for Omega and Memory.[109] Home is thus also used to signify entire nations: one's homeland (Blunt & Dowling 2006: 143, 159). A Malawian paramilitary soldier that I happened to speak to one day also told me about his pride for his country and he coupled this with his contempt for those who were 'stealing' Malawi's riches; Indians and white business owners.[110] 'They say: the country is yours, but the money is ours.'[111] This was part of his explanation for why Malawi is a poor country. But his comments point to much more.

The focus on identity and belonging to a certain 'home' easily leads to exclusion when it is coupled with security and protection of this home (Ibid.: 167; cf. Geschiere 2009; Kalir 2015; O'Mahoney & Sweeney 2010). This is where the conceptualizations of Indians and white business owners comes in; they are portrayed as 'foreign elements' (Blunt & Dowling 2006: 188). Street children and youth are often imagined as an enemy to public order or as a danger to the homes of others because of their corrupting influences and/or criminal activities (cf. Magazine 2000: 985; Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003). Decisions to remove them from the streets have been taken by the government on numerous occasions and, although these exercises were usually rather unsuccessful, it does complicate life for those residing on the streets.[112] These decisions, however, seem not to have weakened the nationalism and patriotism that is portrayed by (former) street youth. Their belonging on a micro-scale might be affected, but on a macro-level they construct Malawi as their ultimate

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108 Interview 25-04-2015.
109 Field notes 08-03-2015.
110 Field notes 27-02-2015.
111 Amanena: dziko ndi lanu, koma ndalama ndi zathu.
112 An example is this news article from 2012: http://www.nyasatimes.com/2012/12/30/street-begging-remains-banned-malawi-government-to-flush-out-street-beggars-official/ (last accessed 18-11-2015).

home. This faith in an imagined community brings us to consider another important 'flow' for home-making: the imaginary (cf. Anderson 2006 [1983]).

When thinking and talking about home, especially with an economically and socially marginalized group such as (former) street youth, the imagination quickly comes to the fore. Not only do many (former) street youth initially appear ashamed to discuss the places they consider home, they also often fantasize about what home should have been or ought to become. Some of the girls in the shelter contended that, if the money would be there, they would go back home. If they would not be hungry and if they would be allowed to go to school, they would love to be able to stay at home.[113] Others spoke about their homes in strongly idealized versions: especially the girls that came down from Lilongwe to partake in Samaritan's vocational skills training programme seemed intent on making everyone believe that their sole purpose for being in the shelter was to use it as a boarding school. However, on certain occasions, during private talks, most of them revealed that their home situations were not that great – they simply loved to imagine them as 'better', especially since they knew that they would have to return after completing their training.[114] This is where home derives its illusive content from. According to Bauman, many people today walk around trying to live these fantasies, but in these fairy tales the negative experiences of home – such as 'enforced belonging and non-negotiable obligations' – are actively downplayed (2012 [2000]: 172). I therefore agree with Jackson that 'in the end, home is not a place that is given, but an experience born of what one makes of what is given' (1995: 155). Although this is only possible within certain parameters, which one does not set for oneself or alone, a lot of the (former) street youth survive their daily struggles while (or even because of) working towards their 'ideal' of home.

This process, consisting of converging flows of (among others) materiality, (extended) relationships, identity and belonging and the imaginary is what Jackson calls the process of 'being at home in the world' (1995). He argues that home does not necessarily have to 'be sought in the substantive, though it may find expression in substantive things like land, house, and family' (1995: 154). In fact, 'experientially,' home seems to be much more 'a matter of being-at-home-in-the-world' (Ibid.). Home thus connotes a 'sense of existential control and connectedness – the way we feel when what we say or do seems to matter, and there is a balanced reciprocity between the world be-

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113 Maggie, Diana and Ruth (11, 10 and 12 years old).
114 Informal talks with Shawntelle, Praise and Sharon (all 18 years or older).

yond us and the world within which we move' (Ibid.). By looking at (former) street youth becoming at home in the world, I thus leave space for different experiences of home, but also homelessness as society sees it. While doing this, I was guided by the following research questions, of which the first one has already been dealt with in chapter 1:

- What is 'the grand narrative about home' prevalent in Malawi?
- How is this narrative translated into policies and practices of organizations working with street youth in Blantyre?
- In what ways do (former) street youth's home-making practices correspond to and challenge 'the grand narrative about home'?
- How do (former) street youth want to 'become at home' in the city?

The answers to these questions help me to formulate an answer to my main research question, as stated in the introduction: How do (former) street youth in Blantyre, Malawi, engage with 'the grand narrative about home' in trying to imagine their 'becoming at home' in the city?

In this chapter, I have discussed and reflected on the theoretical 'foundations' on which my story is 'built'. I discussed the link between home and place, which reveals a tension in the concept, and I dwelled on the notion of 'street youth' in connection to home(lessness). Subsequently, I set out to conceptualize home as a fluid field of tensions in an attempt not to obscure important parts of lived reality. In the next chapter, I devote attention to my own home-making while in the field by discussing my methodology.

4 **Methodological Construction Work**

*'Ethnography shines a light, sometimes a very strange light, on what people
are up to, and such doings are rarely if ever predictable or in line with what
"current theory" or "the experts," "the elders," "the state," "the law," or what
sometimes even "the natives" themselves might say'*

(Van Maanen 2011[1988]: 173)

In this chapter, I discuss the methodologies that I used to create the stories
on which this thesis is based. I describe how I used focus groups, open and
semi-structured interviews and participant observation to engage with re-
search participants, and I emphasize the importance of language when doing
ethnographic fieldwork. In the final sections, I reflect on my activities and I
also explain how I analysed my findings.

Methodological Considerations

Lyotard, quoting Medawar, argues that 'a scientist is before anything else a
person who "tells stories". The only difference is that he is duty bound to ver-
ify them' (1984 [1979]: 60). In this section, I thus elaborate on how I have
constructed the stories that I tell in this thesis by discussing my method-
ological choices and reflecting on their effects and implications (Alvesson
& Sköldberg 2000). This reflection is of importance since, over all, despite
careful planning, 'my research is the product of circumstance, of serendipity
and coincidence, of contingency, of interpretations and being interpreted'
(Wilkinsons in Thomson, Ansoms & Murison 2013: 5; cf. Yanow & Swartz-
Shea 2006). And what also must not be forgotten is that 'stories are like
searchlights and spotlights; they brighten up parts of the stage while leaving
the rest in darkness' (Bauman 2015 [2004]: 17). What I discuss thus shows
parts of lived reality, but I do not claim to (re)present The Truth or a com-
plete oversight of Reality; 'without selection there would be no story' (Ibid.).
In what follows, I provide detailed accounts of how my plans worked out in

practice. During these endeavours, my 'fluent' knowledge of Chichewa, Malawi's national language, was invaluable.

Language

Without speaking the language, I would never have been able to do this research in the way that I have done (cf. Undie, Chrichton & Zulu 2002). Throughout this thesis, I draw conclusions based on things that were said in the public space or conversations that were held within my earshot, but in which I was not an active participant. My ability to understand what people are saying, both when they explicitly speak to me, but also when they speak to others, has greatly enhanced my understandings of everyday interactions and the research context in general. This also increased the amount of people that I was able to engage with and the contexts within which this was possible: I was not dependent on a translator or on people's command of English. As a white person, people usually did not expect me to speak Chichewa and they were often surprised by the extent of my vocabulary, which includes a lot of 'street language', most of which I learned from street youth (see photo 3).[115] This is a great advantage when talking to youth, but can be quite embarrassing when talking to older people. Passersby also often made remarks if they heard me speak: one day, a man started yelling 'she is stealing our language!' When I greeted him politely he insisted on shaking my hand, saying he was so proud of a mzungu[116] having taken the time and effort to learn the Malawian 'way of being'.[117] His remark points to the importance of language for one's identity and belonging. When a friend of mine once complimented me on my Chichewa, he added: 'it's like you don't belong, but yet you do!'[118] Apparently, my ability to speak and understand Chichewa made me a bit Malawian. My occasional mispronunciations and grammatical errors often helped to 'break

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115 Youth that had not met me before often enjoyed testing my abilities. This in contrast to adults and older people who often felt proud of my linguistic competence and started by speaking very slowly to make sure that I would catch everything.

116 'white person'.

117 In Chichewa: akutibera chiyankhulo chathu! He linked this to 'chikhalidwe chathu', our Malawian behaviors. (Field notes 18-05-2015).

118 Thirty-something, upper-class Zimbabwean business man, long-term resident in Malawi (Field notes 17-05-2015).

the ice' and made people feel relaxed: rather than being an all-knowing mzungu, I was the strange girl who had tons of time to talk, in Chichewa.

Photo 3
Learning Chichewa while the girls paint their nails.

Although my linguistic errors might have helped me in terms of my position in the field, this also points to the important fact that Chichewa is not my first language.[119] (Nor is English, for that matter.) This brings us to the problem of translation, which I have briefly mentioned in chapter 1 (cf. Duranti 1997; Dutton 2002; Leavitt 2014). Even though this problem can never be completely overcome, I hope that through ethnography and my involvement with Chichewa, I can convey my fieldwork experiences as accurately as possible. I made sure to regularly cross-check interpretations and translations with research participants, my landlady and other Chichewa-speaking friends.[120] In essence, my fieldwork and this thesis are translations and interpretations of interpreted translations, which were themselves also interpretations and translations of others (cf. Duranti 1997; Yanow & Swartz-Shea 2006).

Finally, I want to stress that although this section is meant to underline the importance of language, I do not take 'words' to 'mirror the world' (Jackson 1995: 160). To me, language is performative and through it, human beings continuously fashion the worlds they experience in multiple and often contradictory ways; I thus contend that there are no 'external realities that they have no role in fashioning' (Bryman 2008[2001]: 19; cf. Besnier 2009; Jackson 1995, 2005, 2006, 2013). Therefore, 'one must resist thinking that words can capture the nature of what is' (Jackson 1995: 125). Many narratives co-exists and they 'help shape and order social life,' but there is 'no requirement' that these narratives should then be 'universal or even consistent with one anoth-

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119 I am in the possession of a B1 certificate for Chichewa (from Talencentrum Lowani), but my (knowledge of) spoken Chichewa is at a higher level. (Reference: Tirza Schipper, director of Talencentrum Lowani).
120 See Annex B on page 178.

er' (Van Maanen 2011 [1988]: 157). Thus, what I present here are 'words, not worlds […] representations, not realities' (Ibid.: 158).

Participant Observation

Often 'human beings forget that the world is not simply given; it is also made and made over in everything they do' – also in telling stories (Jackson 1995: 148; cf. Bauman 2012 [2000]: 28). Because of my research question, which concerns processes of meaning making, and my emphasis on lived reality, participant observation was the main research method I used. Bauman stated that 'the way human beings understand the world tends to be at all times praxeomorphic: it is always shaped by the know-how of the day, by what people can do and how they usually go about doing it' (2012 [2000]: 56). Van Maanen adds to this that ethnographic research 'presupposes historical knowledge, linguistic competence, and deep personal experience' (2011 [1988]: xvii). Embedding myself in the lives of those who I am interested in was thus of the utmost importance, but by no means an easy task.

Considering that my research centres on something as personal as home, participant observation at someone's home is both a logical, but also a difficult choice. Not everyone will allow a (relative) stranger around while they go about their business, certainly not in the most intimate part of their life world. Although I had already spent substantial amounts of time in Malawi and with most of the research participants, I was prepared for the difficulties that might ensue from this. With the group of former street boys this turned out to be less intricate than with the girls residing at the Samaritan Trust shelter. I have been in touch with the boys since 2008, when we resided at Samaritan together.[121] I also met with them frequently during my stay in Malawi in 2012–2013. None of them has found stable employment (yet), which meant that they had the time and energy to hang out with me and, probably because of our long history, they allowed me to be present in their homes during their everyday activities. Since they have been my main Chichewa teachers, they were already used to me recording or writing things down in

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121 Since my contact with them has been episodic, I believe that Gurney would see parts of this research as being based on 'episodic ethnography' (1997). Something he highly recommends to be able to see the differences and similarities in home-making practices over time. Unfortunately, focusing on this extensively goes beyond the scope of this thesis.

their presence – in fact, sometimes they would make me record or write certain things down so I would not forget or ask them again.

I explained that they were free to stop participating at any moment or could ask me not to use certain stories, but none of them asked me to censor anything. On average, I spent about one or two full days a week in their presence, from the morning until nightfall. Usually, we would hang around in town, visit friends and relatives or we would go to one of the houses they were renting in a nearby semi-urban area. When the boys had things to do, such as fetching something for a relative or doing some piecework, I was also present, including during the recurring domestic chores, digging toilets, preparing lunch, handing out money to relatives and (girl)friends and the never-ending search for piecework. I focused my attention on stories about home and, in particular, on home-making practices: routines of making oneself at home, such as carefully putting away one's belongings, but also the relationships with neighbours, family members, whether they appeared at ease and relaxed while at their residence. I asked questions about this as well, but usually tried to do this later and in private to avoid embarrassing someone.

Things went very differently with the girls, since they had much less freedom of movement and, although I knew some of them from my earlier visits, our contact had not been so intensive. Most of the girls that resided at the shelter where I volunteered in 2008–2009 are now either in boarding school or married and living with their husbands.[122] At Samaritan, I first had to ask permission for my endeavours, but while the staff deliberated this, I had already spent time with the girls to introduce myself and get to know them. After having been permitted to do my research by Christina, the director, I explained my research topic and intentions to the girls and asked them when I would be able to spend time with them on a regular basis. They decided that I was welcome during the weekends only: during the week they would be too busy with school, household chores and vocational skills training. The fact that there is usually no staff in the weekend, even though there should be, probably also contributed to their decision but, because 'anthropology should never forget that its project unfolds within the universal constraints

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122 Some are also back on the streets. I have managed to find some of these girls again, but their experiences go beyond the scope of this thesis.

of hospitality,' I did not try to change their minds and simply agreed to spend Saturdays and Sundays with them (Jackson 1995: 119).

At the weekends, I would arrive in the morning around 8.00 and leave in the afternoon around 16.00, so as to make it back home before dark. Sometimes, I would bring things to do (paper and pencils, a magazine or newspaper to read together), but a lot of the time the girls seemed tired from their chores and weekly routine and we would simply sit on the veranda, do each other's hair, listen to the radio and gossip (see photo 4). Several times, the girls were visited by donors over the weekend and on Sunday morning's some of them would go to a nearby church, returning only around lunch time. Sunday afternoons were often spent on the sports pitch close by, playing netball or supporting the Samaritan Trust soccer team. Because the girls' mainly enjoyed free time during the weekends it was interesting to see how they chose to spend this. At the same time, it meant that I was not able to observe a great many of the home-making routines that probably play important roles throughout the week. I remained focused on home-making routines, however, including habits such as bathing three times a day, gossiping, rearranging one's belongings in the cupboard or on the bed and interaction with the boys at Samaritan. These were all important indications for how the girls were feeling at home. Whenever one of them was very quiet I would go over for a chat, usually cheering her up in the process.

In the beginning, almost all the girls were present during the weekends, but towards the end of my stay, they had got used to my presence and, as a result, I would sometimes find myself with only a few girls. Others went (despite the fact that this is not allowed) to the market or to visit relatives or friends. Although this was inconvenient when I had planned a group discussion, I also feel that it was a sign of having successfully integrated in the group. Towards the end, I also witnessed increasingly intense fights among them and I was also confided in or asked for advice concerning their boyfriends (whom they are not allowed to have). Since I had made clear from the beginning that, although I had worked at Samaritan as a volunteer before, this time I was not there to deal with them on behalf of the organization, they soon stopped their efforts to hide 'forbidden' practices. I took this as a sign of trust.

With trust comes great responsibility, which leads me to consider the issue of privacy and anonymity. Most of the former street boys had recently resided at Samaritan and the girls knew them (well). I was often asked to pass messages back and forth and occasionally I would let them use my phone to communicate. There were quite a few romantic relationships between

these boys and girls, two of which were ongoing while I was in the field. Being confided in, by both sides, greatly enhanced my understandings of both the boys' and the girls' expectations and explanations of what took place in these relationships. Because this is a deeply personal and intimate topic, I have decided to use pseudonyms.[123] I thus asked all the boys and girls to pick a different name for themselves, instead of randomly assigning them one, in order to signal that it matters to me who they are (Young & Barrett 2001: 132; cf. Despret 2008: 130; 131). The girls greatly enjoyed this and started arguing who would get to be 'Rihanna' and 'Beyonce' before deciding, after some encouragement from my side, that they use other names. Despite the fact that both the boys and the girls often used my camera and organized elaborate photo shoots of themselves (see photo 5 on the next page), their house, their activities and their friends until the battery would die, I have chosen not to use pictures in which they can be easily identified (cf. Kearns 2012; Mizen & Ofosu-Kusi 2007).[124]

Photo 4
Sitting on the khonde at Samaritan.

During the second part of my fieldwork, I asked some youth whether it was possible to visit the places they kept referring to as their homes – participant observation on the move, to see how their stories played out in practice. They responded enthusiastically to this, since, for them, it was a nice opportunity to visit these places again without having to spend money on transport and

123 During the writing process, I decided to use pseudonyms when referring to Samaritan's staff members to safeguard their privacy as well.

124 This is because I want to protect their privacy, in order to make sure that they will not get into trouble in the future because of what they told or showed me. This is also why I do not mention which research participant is depicted in a picture. Most of the pictures were taken by the (former) street youth themselves, but because I cannot trace who took which picture, I do not mention specific names for this either.

gifts. They also knew that they would not be forced to stay at home, because my presence assured their return to town.[125] Samaritan initially responded hesitantly, especially concerning the older girls whose villages were far away. Eventually, they allowed me to take six of them for home visits in nearby urban areas. With the boys, I carried out visits to both rural and urban areas, some of which I had been to already during previous stays in Malawi. We used to travel in a group of approximately eight youth, while with the girls it was me and one, two or three girls, depending on the place we were going to. I had left it completely up to them, which home they wanted to take me to. All I did was make sure that we bought some sugar, soap and salt as a gift for their relatives – something to show that their sons and daughters were doing alright.

Photo 5
Posing pictures.

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125 For those who had been maltreated at home my presence was considered a 'safety net'.

During my time in the field, I also engaged in small talk with everyone who was willing to listen and/or talk to me (cf. Driessen & Jansen 2013). In particular, the countless minibus rides that took me all over the city and beyond were great opportunities to talk to fellow passengers. Throughout my thesis, I refer to anecdotes or people that I spoke to and for this I use the reference 'field notes (date)'. All these notes were written down either during or shortly after the event that it relates to took place. Before discussing how I went about doing focus groups, I want to emphasize that, although I attempt to couch my research findings in a broader context, I do not claim my research to be generalizable or as describing 'what it is really like out there' (cf. Jackson 1995: 160; Gurney 1997). What I present in this thesis is based on the way I interpret what I experienced, which is linked both to whom I met and engaged with – a by no means representative group of people – and to the interpretations of those with whom I interacted (Yanow & Swartz-Shea 2006; cf. Bryman 2008[2001]: 183; Sumner & Tribe 2012 [2008]: 118). This should not, however, be taken to mean that my story is just that; stories shape the world in which we live by informing our actions and thoughts (Jackson 2005, 2006 [2002], 2008, 2013). I am aware that my story is just one story and that it co-exists with many (un)told others that can equally be used to describe our shared world (cf. Bauman 2015 [2004]: 17–19; Jackson 2006 [2002]; Lyotard 1984 [1979]).

Focus Groups

Initially, I had intended to do focus groups to see which patterns and themes concerning conceptions of home would emerge when talking to youth in a group (cf. Bryman 2008[2001]: 475; Cronin 2001). Based on these findings, I would then approach individual participants to interview later on, since it would help me see who was willing to talk about 'home' and which concepts and questions they deemed relevant. Even though I attempted to organize quite a few sessions, I only managed to do two focus groups as I had planned. One of these was with the (former) street boys in which we discussed pre-conceived statements; the other was with the girls at Samaritan, with whom I did an activity regarding the gendered division of activities in the household, family structures and what a house looks like (see photo 6 on the next page). Interestingly, a number of the interviews that I attempted to do turned into informal focus groups, or group discussions. This is because street youth usually move around in groups and it thus turned out to be difficult to speak to one of them alone. At Samaritan, this is also linked to the presence of many people in the same space, which makes privacy difficult to

establish (cf. Beitin 2008; Evans 2011; Kaime-Atterhög & Ahlberg 2008). A number of the interviews that I attempted to do thus turned into informal group discussions or simply chatting together and would spontaneously become an informal group discussion when youth insisted on joining, switching on the recorder to explain something to me that I should not forget.[126]

Focus group with the girls at Samaritan.

In total, I participated in seven of these informal group discussions; five of them with former street boys and two of them with the girls at Samaritan. Although I posed questions and influenced the conversation, these talks were mainly guided by the participants. I also conducted five focus groups with girls in two different urban areas, to see whether their ideas of home differed remarkably from (former) street youth's ideas. Their statements have mainly been used in chapter 1, constructing the grand narrative.[127]

Open and Semi-Structured Interviews

From the start of my fieldwork, I visited several organizations to interview their staff members. Most of them, such as the staff at Habitat for Humanity, CCODE an affiliate of Slum dwellers International and the Federation of the Rural and Urban poor (previously the Malawi Homeless People Federation), worked on housing issues. My aim was to hear from them which themes were important in urban home-making practices. I also conducted several

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126 I suspect that some of this happened when they were getting frustrated with questions that I would ask them in between doing other things (sometimes they would refuse to answer and tell me that they needed to explain this to me properly – not while cooking or cleaning) or when they felt that I kept asking the same questions, or different questions relating to the same topic, which they felt they had answered already. This happened, for instance, on 08-03 (when the girls wanted to talk about their future professions) and on 08-04 (when the boys wanted to discuss gender relations, their love lives and sex).

127 See also Annex B and C for more information on these focus groups (starting from page 178).

interviews with staff members of the Samaritan Trust to find out which conception of home they were promoting in the shelter. These interviews were semi-structured, since I had questions in mind that I wanted to ask them, but, at the same time, I also remained open to any issues that they raised (Bryman 2008[2001]: 438). Most of my interviews, however, were done with (former) street youth. Because they had indicated that they wanted to talk to me more in-depth, I decided to be more rigorous in arranging one-on-one interviews towards the end of my stay in Malawi, also since 'home is framed by biographies and personal experiences' (Woods 2015: 146).

To guarantee their privacy and to increase the likelihood of having an uninterrupted talk, I decided to invite the boys to Afro Lounge, a high-class restaurant mainly frequented by azungu and Malawian elite, owned by my landlady.[128] We made a 'schedule' together and, over the course of four days, I interviewed two boys a day: one in the morning, one in the afternoon. They thoroughly enjoyed coming to Afro and took great pride in being seen there, explaining things to me while feasting on the menu. Although we could be seen by others, Afro's garden offered enough privacy for our conversations and, due to our long history, the boys were very open. Usually, these interviews lasted for at least three hours. I always started by reminiscing about how we had met and by asking them how they had ended up at the Samaritan Trust. From there, I simply listened to their (life) stories and asked questions whenever I did not understand something or wanted them to elaborate (cf. Bryman 2008[2001]: 556–567). I intentionally left these interviews open to allow them space to share with me whatever they felt like sharing.

The girls had also indicated wanting to talk to me alone, but they had already started to create these moments themselves. Usually, we would sit in a bedroom and the others would be told not to come in since we would be having a 'serious talk'. I usually brought sweets, which would be shared by all, for eating during the interview, although some days I also financed extra ndiwo (relish) for lunch or some buns. These talks lasted approximately 45 minutes. This probably has to do with the fact that the girls knew me less well than the boys did. Also, the shared bedrooms proved to be less private than the Afro Lounge and some of the girls were younger than the boys, which could explain a shorter attention span (cf. Duranti 1997: 150; Günther 2001). Furthermore, these talks were more directed by my questions, since the girls talked less of their own accord. By carrying out the interviews towards the

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128 The story of Kumbukani, with which I started this thesis, is based on one of these interviews. https://www.facebook.com/afroloungemw/ (last accessed on 27-11-2015).

end of my fieldwork, I hope to have created a situation in which they felt safe and free with me, and thus were in a position to 'object' to what I asked or to refuse to answer if they did not want to (Kvale 2006; cf. Blommaert, Bock & McCormick 2006; Nunkoosing 2005). Occasionally this did happen, which strengthens my belief that I succeeded in doing this.

Reflections

When it comes to ethnographic research, reflection is key: 'meaning resides in the journeying, not in the destination, and the authenticity of ethnographic knowledge depends on the ethnographer recounting in detail the events and encounters that are the grounds on which the very possibility of this knowledge rests' (Jackson 1995: 163). This is why I use this section to reflect on my fieldwork period. I first discuss my ethical stance on doing research with youth, especially youth in – what is often termed – 'vulnerable positions' (cf. Aptekar & Stoecklin 2014). Thereafter, I reflect on my own presence and time in the field, in as much as I have not already done this explicitly in the above. I also want to mention that, although this section is termed 'reflections', this does not meant that this is the only place in this thesis where I am reflexive. Throughout my stories, I refer to the context within which narratives were elicited or presented to me and my presence and actions in these situations are not omitted. Moreover, I acknowledge the pivotal role that my interpretations play in this thesis, which I hope 'furnishes opportunities for understanding, rather than' establishing truths (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000: 9).

 With regard to the Samaritan Trust, I had already attempted to furnish opportunities for mutual understanding since I first came to Malawi in 2008. My previous experiences had made wary about much of what the staff claims to do and they were well aware of this. Most of them remember my protests when they wanted to merge two centres and I have also fiercely criticized past corruption, at times challenging how the funds from Dutch donors were used. The children and youth were also aware of my tense relationship with some of the staff members and they also know that I disagree with many of the (disciplinary) practices that take place. On some occasions, this led them to exaggerate certain punishments in the hope that I would stop them from happening. I never did this, but I always participated in the work punish-

ments when these were given during the weekend. I did confront the director with some of these issues and she noted my concerns.

Samaritan is also aware that I am dubious about the success of their reintegration programme. Throughout the research, I have remained open towards hearing their ambitions and intentions and I understand that they have little choice, but I do not think that they implement the programme to the best of their abilities. At the same time, I also realize that the circumstances are harsh, there is hardly any money and street youth are not an easy group to work with. Moreover, the staff is underpaid and overburdened. And, although there are flaws, I dare say that residing at Samaritan, for most of the children and youth, means that they are better off than they were on the streets. That said, I do not believe that this should be used as a defence or excuse for the poor state that Samaritan is currently in.

Doing research with children and youth is different from doing research with adults, because children tend to occupy marginal positions in societies (Punch 2002). This marginality is even clearer in the case of (former) street youth (cf. Aptekar & Stoecklin 2014; Young & Barret 2001c). This also has to do with childhoods of children in the West being taken as 'the norm', leading to negative perceptions of childhoods in the rest of the world (Punch 2003; cf. Bøås & Hatløy 2008; Mead 2001 [1930]). This is why Nieuwenhuys reminds us of the importance of 'postcolonial perspectives' on childhoods, which challenge the basis of many ideologically biased notions of childhood as a protected stage in life during which children are inherently vulnerable and need to be protected (2004, 2013; cf. Kilbride 2012). The tension that this conceptualization creates in the case of street youth is described by Scheper-Hughes as 'the street kids paradox': 'they are both "at risk" and "the risk"; dangerous and endangered; vulnerable and resourceful, needy and bold, naïve and street smart, miniature adults and child-like adults' (2008: 35; cf. Korbin 2003).

Youth thus occupy an ambiguous position in which not all kinds of agency are 'deemed appropriate' (Bordonaro 2012: 423). I argue that this makes it all the more important to deal more elaborately with their 'own understandings of their experience' (Boyden & Mann 2005: 4; cf. Gigengack in Christensen & James 2008 [2000]; Ungar 2004: 359). I have therefore approached all research participants 'as competent storytellers and experts on their own lives' (Øverlien 2011: 482). Although I consider these youth competent social actors in their own right, I first approached Samaritan Trust for permission to do my research. This is important because the institution acts as the

temporary guardian of its residents. After two extensive talks, during which we discussed my research ideas and methodology, Christina, the director, granted permission. I then asked the girls for their consent too, by explaining what the research was about and emphasizing that, at any point, they would be able to stop participating or request that stories, anecdotes or photos not be used. All of them agreed to participate and none have asked me to censor anything. For the (former) street boys, who live by themselves, I requested permission only from themselves and not from their parents/guardians. In fact, considering their family relations, such a request would have been considered inappropriate by many (cf. Clacherty & Donald 2007: 151; Morrow & Richards 1996). Whenever I went on a home visit, I did, however, inform the family why I was there and ask their permission to include my experiences in my thesis. Nobody voiced objections; on the contrary, people seemed amused and flattered by my interest in their lives and homes.

In all my interactions with the youth I created space for them to ask me questions as well, in order to diminish the 'adult-child power disparity' (Clacherty & Donald 2007: 148; cf. Despret 2008). This frequently happened during our time together. I tried to make activities that I organized participatory and fun by telling jokes and stories, but also by bringing materials such as pencils or colourful memo notes that also made the activities a creative expression (cf. Young & Barrett 2001a, 2001b: 388). The amount of time they usually took to decide in animated discussions 'how things should look', indicates to me that they enjoyed this. My own limited developed ability to do nice drawings or think creatively, seemed to inspire them even more: they took pride in what they presented to me and often told me to 'practice' drawing in my free time, or they decided of their own accord to assist me in doing a 'proper' drawing.

Apart from being a lousy artist, there are other aspects of me that have influenced my fieldwork. For example, the fact that I am a white woman, in the position to study at a university and travel to Malawi for the purpose of doing research. Although my ability to speak and understand Chichewa makes it tempting to argue that I could easily connect with and understand (former) street youth with whom I spent most of my time, this would be a pretentious assumption. Being able to hear and understand a word does not mean that I always understood why people shared with me or what they shared in the way, wording and situation they did. In fact, I also sometimes misunderstood comments because of my own 'prestructured understandings', which have not necessarily been shaped by the Malawian context and cultural circumstances (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000: 250). On numerous occasions, also when listening back to my recordings, I realized that I had misunderstood

what someone was conveying to me. Memory, one of the older girls at Samaritan, was quick to realize this and even told me during our interview that I would never be able to understand how hard life on the streets really is – no matter how long I listened to her.[129] This did not keep her from trying to tell me what it was like; but, whenever I tried to summarize what she had just said, she would rephrase it and tell me that I had not fully understood.

I can only concur with Memory's opinion. I will never be able to know what life is like on the streets of Blantyre, as much as I will never be able to know what it is like to lose your parents at a young age, head a family by the age of ten or grow up in a Malawian village. However, this impossibility of knowing and understanding the world in exactly the same way as another person, does not exclude the possibility of creating and furnishing understandings through interaction. On the contrary, by exchanging stories and attempting to make the other understand, we can try to create common ground (Jackson 2006: 238). From this common ground, we can subsequently continue our conversations, based on empathy and allowing space for diverse interpretations. Although one could cynically say that because I am a white adult, youth simply felt obliged to answer my questions. I would argue that they felt that, regardless of knowing that I would never fully understand them, it still seemed worthwhile to try and help me understand a fraction of what their lives are and have been like. Memory and the other research participants continued to tell me stories, often of their own accord, and they continued to convey how they felt about or experienced certain situations. The longer I was in the field, the more these situations arose when I was also present, allowing me to move between different levels of interpretation by different people: comparing my own experience, my field notes, stories during the event and stories after (cf. Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000: 254). Judging by the amount of time they allowed me to spend with them, I can assume that they enjoyed trying to explain to me how they experience their lives. I also think that they hoped to get something out of this in terms of a sweet while doing the interview, having someone to talk to, or maybe future contributions to school fees.

These kind of interpretative exercises never stop, because not only am I interpreting what is going on when I am observing something, I am also interpreting when I write it down in my field notes and when I decide not to. The way in which I write things down is then also important, since this forms the basis

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129 'Ma street ndi ovuta, ndi ovuta kwambiri, sungatheso kumamvetsetsa ayi'. The streets are rough, very difficult, you won't be able to understand that, no'. Interview 15-03-2015.

for my re-interpretation, when I read back what I have been experiencing. Yet another interpretive turn is made when I build stories based on anecdotes out of those field notes. Constantly moving between what I remember having experienced, what I wrote down about my experiences and what others told me we experienced, was a very tiring, yet rewarding reflexive exercise. And one that seems to be never-ending. This is why, while writing this thesis, I became acutely aware of how doing ethnographic research is 'highly particular and hauntingly personal' (Van Maanen 2011 [1988]: xiii). My interpretation of what I experienced while doing fieldwork is thus profoundly influenced by who I am and who I am becoming. My becoming is shaped by doing fieldwork and vice versa.

'Fieldwork is a technique of gathering research material by subjecting the self – body, belief, personality, emotions, cognitions – to a set of contingencies that play on others such that over time – usually a long time – one can more or less see, hear, feel, and come to understand the kinds of responses others display (and withhold) in particular social situations' (Van Maanen 2011 [1988]: 151). Hence, if I had had more time, my understandings would probably have deepened. I also would have had more chances to follow up, more in-depth, on the youth's stories. This element of 'time' is also very important when I think back on the institutional constraints that I had to navigate in working with the girls at Samaritan.[130] The longer my fieldwork continued, the more the girls came to see me as a friend, since I kept all their secrets and did not enforce Samaritan's rules when I saw them being broken. We also had things in common: we were all going to school and convinced of the importance of education, we had to dress in similar ways, covering knees, preferably wearing long skirts. Our[131] freedom of movement is more constrained than that of the men, for example when it comes to moving around at dusk or travelling long distances by ourselves. Yet, my skin colour does enable me to diverge from these standards without severe repercussions.

When interacting with the boys, I could not draw on these kind of commonalities, but I could (and often did) refer to our long history together. The fact that I am a woman was very important to them, as evidenced in their attempts to strictly enforce gender rules – yet always keeping in mind that I was 'still learning' how to be a Malawian. I was supposed to do the cutting

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130 This does not concern one specific person in the institution, and I do not mean to insinuate that they were trying to delay my activities. Things just take time.

131 Although I do not mean to imply that I am a street girl, I use the word 'our' to stress that I had things in common with the girls because of being a girl. I was not 'outside' these societal rules and hierarchies.

of the vegetables and help with the cooking, although I did not have to fetch water, make the fire and cook the nsima. They were also more vigorous and rigorous in commenting on my clothes and behaviours than the girls. More than once, when they came to pick me up, they sent me back to change my skirt for a longer one. Due to our 'solid' relationship over time, they felt free to give me these kinds of comments and I trusted them enough to follow them through. However, because of our long relationship, the boys were also expecting certain contributions from me, in terms of gifts for their relatives and friends whenever we visited, but also help while looking for employment. They framed these as my responsibilities as 'their sister'. I have tried my best to live up to their expectations, but I also know that this can never be enough. Despite our shared history and despite the amounts of time we spent together, there are several fundamental differences between us that we will never be able to overcome completely.

These fundamental differences relate to the broader economic and political structures that shape our existence. The fact that I am in a position to (regularly)travel to Malawi and do research among fellow youth already points in this direction. And although one could argue that Samaritan's girls are also still in school, my level of schooling and the opportunities that this holds for me are on a whole different level – closely related to my economic position. My background is also very different from the youth's whose lives I try to understand. I have never had to survive on my own, let alone on the streets, and I have always had the support of my family – both financially and emotionally – to assist and encourage me. This is very different from most of the youth that I spoke to. Also, the girls were used to doing a lot more hard work and were far more aware of being a girl or woman than I was, simply because it presented them with many additional challenges throughout their lives. This gaping inequality between the well-off and the 'less privileged' and my interpretation of it are of immense importance to understanding how I situated myself in the field, my research and the analysis I present in this thesis.

I agree with Bauman that in the (liquid) capitalist system the riches of the few are based on the exploitation of many (2015 [2004], 2015 [2003], 2012 [2000]). In the case of Malawi, this process of exploitation has a long history, which started before the onset of liquid modernity with the unspeakable horrors of the slave trade – the ultimate commodification of labour – colonialism and imperialism (McCracken 2013 [2012]). These deeply intrusive processes created Malawi's weak position in not just the economic, but also the political system. In capitalism, money and power are deeply intertwined, which means that the majority of Malawians suffer the consequences of dep-

rivation and destitution every day. In his book Wasted Lives, Bauman argues that this creation of 'human waste', consisting of poor, unemployed people, is inherent to the modern system (2015 [2004]). Although at first glance the term 'human waste' sounds derogatory, because it ignores the intrinsic value of human lives, at second glance it clearly portrays the irony and pivotal point of Bauman's analysis of our current (economic) system (2015 [2004]; cf. Arendt 1998 [1958]). I agree with Bauman that this continuous creation of inequality on a worldwide scale obligates social scientists to communicate about the system's effects and thus hopefully assist in improving and changing it (2015 [2004], 2015 [2003]).

Bauman is not the only postmodernist thinker who thought along these lines. The human condition of plurality in which fashioning understandings, instead of violently fighting each other to convey the ultimate Truth, is central in the philosophical tradition within which I situate my thesis (cf. Bauman 2015 [2004]: 1). Both firmly and fluidly in what Das, Jackson, Kleinman and Singh call 'the ground between' anthropology and philosophy (2014). Utterances, narratives and stories construct the world in which we live and are thus performative (Jackson 2005, 2006 [2002], 2012, 2013; Das, Jackson, Kleinman & Singh 2014; cf. Ochs & Capps 2001). But performativity and politics go hand in hand: people have reasons for telling me what they told me when and how they did. It is then up to me, as a researcher, to interpret and cross-check my interpretations, presenting a story substantiated by encounters: where words, meanings, disciplines, politics and ideologies meet, facilitating our shared becoming (cf. Das, Jackson, Kleinman & Singht 2014). I thus hope to have done what Czarniawska urges us to do: 'fieldworkers can try to come up with their own view, neither surrendering it to the views received, nor asserting its supremacy, but simply adding it to the views from the field' (2007: 39).

Data Analysis

My 'data' consists of several different types. I have recorded data consisting of interviews, informal talks, focus groups and informal group discussions. Parts of these have been transcribed using Express Scribe. The data that I gathered during participant observation consisted of notebooks filled with quotes, remarks, stories and anecdotes that I wrote down during or shortly after the described events took place. I typed the anecdotes out digitally as well – in case I lost the notebooks – and highlighted the ones that made a strong impression on me. If I did not understand something I talked it through with the people involved, but also (if necessary in anonymized ways)

with others, to receive as many interpretations as possible. I also collected newspaper articles regarding urbanization, street children/youth and the floods and its aftermaths.[132] I ordered these thematically by using a colour coding system (yellow for urbanization, blue for floods, etc.) and stored them chronologically. The articles that dealt with two topics were double coded and I also wrote down in key words what they were about.

All of this created a lot of 'text'. I coded these texts thematically, using an open code system to tease out patterns (Bryman: 2008 [2001]: 550–552). I focused on finding similarities on the topics of house and home in all stories – but if I found differences, I would try and find out which groups of research partic-ipants shared these differences. Because I was doing part of this while I was still in the field, I was able to go back to people and ask them again how they felt about certain topics or questions. I analysed the data from the interviews and (focus) group discussions in the same way (Ibid.: 553–555). I used the data from participant observation in order to contextualize the information I received during interviews and (focus) group discussions, to illustrate or to contrast specific events with these patterns, but it also gave me new ideas to ask different questions.

In this chapter, I discussed the methodological underpinnings of this thesis. I presented the qualitative research methods that I used and I placed myself in the field in order to reflect on the kind of stories that I engaged with and how I interpreted and analysed these. In the next chapters, I narrate my fieldwork experiences, which are geared towards coming to an understanding of (for-mer) street youth's home-making practices and their process to create their 'being at home in the world'. We start with a visit to the Samaritan Trust.

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132 Every day, I read the two biggest national newspapers: The Daily Times and The Nation. During the weekend these were called Weekend Nation and Weekend Times.

5 **On the Way Home**
The Samaritan Trust's policies

'You know what I've heard?!' Surprisingly, Elisa's heatedly-asked question
falls on deaf ears.

This might have had something to do with the weather because it was a
relatively sunny Sunday late April and we were all sitting outside on the
khonde[133] of the girls' hostel, enjoying the warmth before the cold season
would properly start. We are braiding Shawntelle's hair. My fingers have
started to cramp and the skin is turning red because of the tough wool we
are using. We have been at it for hours and her head is still only half finished.
What seems like hundreds of tiny little braids encircle her head like a crown,
but the top part still consists of a frizzy afro. 'Well, what is it then?' Shawn-
telle asks. She tries not to move her head while she says this, but Jacque-
lina yanks her hair anyway: 'sit still'! Elisa smiles and she gloatingly looks
up at us while making her big announcement: 'Justin Bieber doesn't have
a house! He rents!'[134] She looks around triumphantly, seemingly proud of
her discovery. Her words have the desired effect: Jacquelina drops the braid
she was working on and Hope, Omega, Praise, Sharon and me do the same.
'Really?!'

Chaos erupts. The girls push each other in order to crowd around Elisa, who
is still looking at her phone while repeating the statement at the top of her
lungs in order to overpower the other girls' screams and giggles. Even Kate,
Eve, Maggie, Diana and Ruth, the younger ones who are normally less in-
terested in the older girls' conversations, stop playing their ball game and

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133 Chichewa for 'porch'.
134 *'Justin Bieber alibe nyumba! Amapanga renti!' (Field notes, 26-04-2015).*

come running onto the khonde. From inside the hostel I hear the sounds of someone hastily climbing out of her iron bunk and seconds later Aliyah arrives as well, out of breath because, on her way out, she was calling Memory, who is preparing extra ndiwo[135] in the kitchen. Hope starts laughing, grabs her smart phone and switches off the Malawian gospel song that we were listening to. Seconds later, she has managed to find Justin Bieber's famous song 'Baby' and plays this as loud as her phone's speakers permit. The girls are all talking and screaming at once, while half of them sing along to the catchy chorus, so I can hardly hear what they are saying. When Memory, the oldest girl in the hostel, joins them, they all fall silent.

'Cha?'[136] Memory asks, pretending not to be interested. 'Elisa says Justin Bieber doesn't have a house,' Jacquelina hastily explains. 'How do you know and why is that'? Memory asks in one breath. 'It's because of drugs, I read it somewhere' Elisa responds, while trying to look confident. Everyone is staring at Memory and Elisa. Jacquelina sees an opportunity here and snaps: 'can you even read Elisa?' The others laugh. Everybody knows Elisa has eye problems and that she is not always in her right mind; she's very naïve and a bit slower than the other girls. She came to Samaritan not long ago and she has consistently been trying to use the fact that she came down from Lilongwe, Malawi's capital, to claim authority over the other girls who mostly come from Malawi's Southern (and widely regarded as 'backward') parts. Yet, this time, Jacquelina's attempt to start an argument doesn't work. Memory, and the other girls as well, seem much more interested in the Justin Bieber case than in bullying Elisa. For a few seconds, we find ourselves sitting in silence because Hope's phone has switched off: it ran out of battery.

Suddenly Elisa says: 'Tanja, tell them! Am I lying?' The girls all turn to me. Apparently I should have been well aware of Justin Bieber's love life and housing arrangements, but unfortunately I am not. I smile and say that I'm not sure, but that I could check for them if they would really want to know. Jacquelina smells blood and starts mocking me. Obviously I would know about this! I always ask questions about houses and homes and now I wouldn't know that one of the most famous and attractive young man in the whole wide world turns out to be not just broke but also homeless?! No wonder his girlfriend Selena[137] had left him!! They all laugh for a few minutes but soon

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135 The Chichewa word for 'side dishes' eaten with nsima, a thick maize porridge: staple food in Malawi and many other parts of Africa.
136 Short for chiyani, 'what'.
137 Selena Gomez, a young popular singer who dated Justin Bieber on and off for a couple of years.

we are back to braiding Shawntelle's hair. Except for Hope. She is looking for a charger to charge her phone.

Not long after the above episode took place, it was lunch hour. Shawntelle and I remained on the khonde and Memory kept on cooking in the kitchen, but all the other girls quickly ran inside the hostel to look for their plates and containers and one of the boys came over to tell us that the nsima was cooked. I remember feeling relieved, since it meant a break from braiding hair, but also because I felt like having some lunch. The girls had been complaining about it all morning; it was the boys' turn to cook, so we all knew what was coming. Firstly, the nsima would either be burnt at the bottom or full of lumps, 'because the boys don't cook seriously.' Secondly, the food would probably be late because the boys 'always' started cooking late. Moreover, they would probably only call us when they had already served themselves, leaving us only the leftovers. Whenever it was the girls' turn to cook, they failed to play these tricks, because the kitchen is inside the walls of the Samaritan Trust grounds, next to the boys' hostels: they always knew immediately when food was ready. But the girls' hostel is situated outside of Samaritan's walls, next to the staff houses. During the week, a cook prepares the food, but in the weekends, they are on their own. Occasionally, a staff member would come in, but you could not count on that.

When the girls came back from fetching lunch that day, we had each received a surprisingly big portion. Usually, they go to get food in pairs: one fills her plate with nsima, the other one with the side dish. Because most of their plastic plates have no separate compartments, putting the nsima and the side dish on the same plate makes eating very messy. Three times a week, they get nsima and beans, twice a week, nsima and soya pieces and twice a week nsima and bonya, little fish. A few years ago they would get rice on Fridays and vegetables every day, but this has become too expensive. This is why Memory has spent half of her morning looking for pumpkin leaves in the neighbouring fields as well as sticks for firewood. One of her 'friends at school' had given her some money, so she had also managed to buy two tomatoes, some salt and a tiny plastic bag of cooking oil.[138] Once cooked, the vegetables were shared between the older girls and myself, the younger one's received nothing – a clear indication of the strict hierarchy that is usually adhered to. In the beginning, I had protested, saying that I was already fat enough, but they shared with me anyway. When I had tried to share it with the younger girls,

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138 In chapter 7, I return to the entanglement of the themes of scarcity, girls, boys and (romantic) relationships.

Jacquelina had 'amicably' pushed my hand, which made the ndiwo fall on the sandy concrete floor. Later, I heard from Kate, the girl I was trying to share with, that she had been yelled at because of my action, so from then on I just ate what I was given.

Bridget, who had arrived at Samaritan in the afternoon on the day of our Justin Bieber discussion, would sometimes entertain us during lunch by mentioning the kind of food she would get at home and how her mother would cook this. Her stories involved lots of vegetables and salt, but hardly any beans. We would all laugh about it and sometimes the girls would insist on cooking a certain dish for me, which we occasionally did. Yet, even when we followed Bridget's mother's recipe exactly the way Bridget remembered it, it never tasted quite the way she said it was supposed to taste. One day, when she seemed particularly disappointed at our vegetable stew, I tried to explain to her how my parents had sometimes taken wine home from their holiday in France because it tasted so good. But when they would drink it at home, they would always be disappointed and complain that it never tasted the way it had when they were sitting in their folding chairs in front of their tent. Maybe she was just missing her mother? Or the place where her mother was now? Home? Bridget quickly agreed, but then changed the subject by making me promise to tell my parents that wine is bad for you and that staying in a tent when you have money is silly. Kate, who was known for her insatiable appetite, swiftly added that we should try to cook some more vegetables, so we could check if we made a mistake with the recipe.

Apart from really missing her mother and her family in general, Bridget also just enjoyed cooking. And since I was the one paying for the ingredients, we were never short of someone who remembered a 'traditional' dish, like banana cake (chigumu), chocolate or muffins, from when their mother used to make or give this to them. While chatting like this, the girls who had already been staying at Samaritan for years, would not usually say much. I guess that for Memory and Jacquelina, these kind of memories had long since faded. Each of them had stayed at Samaritan for more than five years, sometimes claiming that they had 'lost count'. In the interviews I had with them, they would initially say they 'just arrived', but later it would become evident that they had already spent a long time in the shelter.[139] To the newly arrived girls from Lilongwe, Elisa, Shawntelle, Praise and Sharon, this presented an opportunity to tease and challenge their position in the hierarchy. Those who had been longest at Samaritan, usually ranked high. They knew the drill and

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139 Interview Memory, 15-03-2015. Interview Jacquelina, 24-05-2015.

used this against the others, especially older newcomers that would qualify for a high position based on their age. However, to the girls from Lilongwe, Samaritan was a boarding school. So why would one spend so much time here? Obviously, this meant you were failing your tailoring classes? Or you were an improper girl who had brought shame on your family and friends and therefore they did not want you back. Situations like this could lead to fierce arguments. One of the girls, usually Jacquelina, would yell at the ones from Lilongwe and then walk away. Five minutes later, all the older girls would go to the football pitch together to play netball, or they would continue braiding hair. Things, then, were not as bad as they might seem based on one story.

As the above underlines, the girls' hostel at the Samaritan Trust is an interesting place to spend time. But before I delve deeper into the girls' daily lives, it is necessary to know more about the Samaritan Trust's policies that inform their practices. In the first section of this chapter, I elaborate on Samaritan's three-step programme towards reintegrating the children to their homes. I focus on the changes that the institution has made since 2010, when the government adopted the Child Care, Protection and Justice Act, in line with the new UN guidelines on alternative care. These developments are intricately linked to the 'fluidity of funding', which impacts on Samaritan's practices. In the final section, I then elaborate on the conception of home that Samaritan propagates, evidently geared towards and rooted in 'the grand narrative about home'.

The Samaritan Trust

The Samaritan Trust was established in 1993 by Jervase Chakumodzi, who was concerned with the future of the street children and youth that he saw in Blantyre.[140] His first priority was to take them off the streets, so that they would be cared for and at least have a safe place to stay. It was his intention that, in this 'safe haven', the children would be able to start thinking about their future, aided by the staff, and change their lives for the better. When I arrived at head office on 19 March for my meeting with Christina, Samaritan's director, she was quick to acknowledge that what this 'change for the better' is, has changed significantly over the years, although the programme has remained largely the same.[141] Before discussing these changes, she quickly summarized Samaritan's programme for me once more. Samaritan is the

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140 http://www.samaritantrust.org/about-us/ (last accessed 03-12-2015).
141 Interview, Christina, director, 19-03-2015.

oldest institution in Malawi that focuses exclusively on working with street children and youth and also the only organization that offers residential facilities. Chisomo Children's Club (CCC), the only other organization in Blantyre that specifically works with the same target group, runs a drop-in centre.[142] Both CCC and Samaritan draw inspiration and funding from religious groups and refer to God in their everyday activities. They can thus be considered FBOs – faith-based organizations – although this does not mean that Samaritan's staff or the children residing there are not religiously diverse.[143]

Roughly, Samaritan's approach rests on three important phases that bear a strong resemblance to what Van Gennep called rites de passage (1960; cf. Turner 1982, 2008 [1969]). These are rituals that change the social status of an individual by firstly separating him or her from his 'old' social role or position in the group. In the case of street children and youth, this separation takes place when they leave their homes and head to the streets. When they are taken in by Samaritan, they have reached the second phase of the ritual: transition. In this phase, the children and youth are what Victor Turner described as 'betwixt and between': they are no longer street children, but they also have not yet been reincorporated into society (Turner 2008 [1969]: 95). Samaritan shapes the scene where their induced liminal phase plays out: they are separated from their old lives on the streets and preparing for their new position in society. During their stay at the shelter they are 'transformed', 're-educated' and 'rehabilitated'; but, after their stay, they do not actually return to a new societal position: in fact, they go back to the position they were in before the whole ritual began, before they went to the streets (cf. Bordonaro 2012). Throughout their stay, the youngsters are taught to forget their 'street habits', such as begging or stealing, and they are sent to public schools to study, but also to adjust to a 'normal life' again and learn discipline and respect. If they have never been to school, Samaritan teaches them a 'basic education programme' on the premises. Those who are considered too old for school and those with learning difficulties take these basic education classes as well.

In addition, Samaritan offers a vocational skills training programme in which youth can study bricklaying, electricity, carpentry and tailoring. Previously,

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142 Although children can stay here for some time if necessary, it is not geared towards long-term stays like at Samaritan http://chisomochildrensclub.org/what-we-do/ Instead, 'CCC helps support a number of Community Based Childcare Centers' where the children can be taken to if there is a need for long-term alternative care (last accessed 13-12-2015).
143 A thorough and in-depth analysis of the importance of religion goes beyond the scope of this thesis.

bicycle repair classes and were available and efforts are now being made to start with cosmetology in order to make the skills training programmes 'gender responsive'.[144] (Interestingly, gender responsiveness seems to be translated in practice as 'gender appropriate', thereby affirming persistent gender stereotypes.) Christina tells me that this is mainly done because she is fed up with the girls not choosing to partake in the bricklaying or carpentry course: instead 'they go to the hostels and say "we've got nothing to do".[145] This is why she recently hired a female bricklaying instructor, surely the girls will be willing to take the course then? I confide in her that I think this is doubtful and my assumption is confirmed during a later chat with Omega (16) who said: 'I can't do bricklaying, because the boys in my village already studied that. I have to learn something different so I can find money.[146] Her remark points both to the persistent gender stereotypes that are present in societies, but also to her awareness of only residing at Samaritan temporarily and thus having to make the most of it (cf. Van Blerk 2005). She wants to learn skills that she can use after her time at Samaritan is over, so that she will be able to (financially) take care of herself.

Regardless of whether the girls and boys are interested in the skills that are offered, the skills training programme is mandatory for those who take part in the basic education programme. It is also mandatory for the older girls, even though they also go to public schools. The idea behind this is that the girls will probably not be able to finish their secondary education. By making them study vocational skills they will at least have this certificate when they leave Samaritan. At the same time, because the mandatory skills classes start right after public school finishes, it leaves the girls no time to linger at school. This reduces the chances of them finding boyfriends and getting pregnant or getting into trouble in other ways, or so Samaritan argues. During the school holidays, Samaritan sometimes organizes other activities during the daytime in order to keep the children busy, but ideally, the children and youth are sent home to maintain and strengthen the connections with their families.[147]

During this second phase of the rite de passage, Samaritan is also preparing children for the third and final phase: reintegration into the family, community and society (cf. Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003; Van Blerk 2005; Young 2003). Upon their arrival, social workers ask the child where his or her home is and why s/he went to the streets. They subsequently visit this home and

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144 Interview Harold, monitoring and evaluation officer and social worker, 29-05-2015.
145 Interview Christina 30-03-2015.
146 Interview 19-04-2015.
147 Interview Evance, head of social work, 26-02-2015.

discuss with the parents or guardians why the child left. These two stories are then compared and, if they differ, the social workers decide who is telling the truth: the child or the parents. According to Harold, a social worker, more than half of the time the child's story is incorrect: 'kids, what they say, at times it's just as survival tactic on the reason why they left home. Most of them are not genuine reasons […] they will just try to tell us those reasons to seek refuge.'[148] The reasons that are most often mentioned are poverty and (sexual) abuse,[149] although sometimes it also turns out that the child him or herself has been the problem, behaving violently or stealing from people in the community.

Once social workers determine which scenario is unfolding, they focus their attention on the child and engage in the above-mentioned re-education and rehabilitation exercises. When these are deemed complete, a second home visit takes place: the social workers go back to the child's home and take the child with them. The key question during this visit is 'to what extent is the family ready to take back the child?'[150] If families are struggling financially, they will often request more assistance from Samaritan before agreeing to take the child back. If the child's behaviour was the problem, Samaritan will emphasize that the child has been re-educated. In cases of (sexual) abuse, social workers analyse whether the abuser is still present in the home and if so, whether this person has changed.[151]

On returning to Samaritan, the second home visit is discussed and the social workers decide whether the child can be safely reintegrated. If not, s/he will remain at Samaritan until either the home situation has changed or until a different home can be located – for example, with another family member in a different area. If reintegration is deemed safe, the third phase officially begins. The third home visit that is undertaken is then to reintegrate the child back into his or her home. A social worker agrees on a date with the family and accompanies the child back home. There, the family is counselled on the need to take care of the child and financial assistance in terms of school fees is promised. Then, the social worker leaves. Occasionally, they will contact the family again after a few weeks, to ask how the child is doing and whether they have encountered problems. Yet officially, that child will then be 'successfully reintegrated'. Case closed? Not really. Because although the case file

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148 Interview, Harold, monitoring and evaluation officer, social worker, 29-05-2015.
149 This is how the (former) street youth spoke about it, which is why I mention it like this here. What exactly took place in these homes in the past is not the focus of this thesis.
150 Interview 29-05-2015.
151 Ibid.

might be closed, many of the children and youth that have been reintegrated, end up back on the streets.

Bauman, who focuses on the more generic socio-economic structures of modern societies, would not be surprised by this. In fact, he argues that 'the production of "human waste", or more correctly wasted humans (the "excessive" and "redundant", that is the population of those who either could not or were not wished to be recognized or allowed to stay), is an inevitable outcome of modernization and an inseparable accompaniment of modernity' (2015 [2004]: 5).[152] Street children and youth are a striking example of this. When I ask Christina, Samaritan's director, about it, she sighs and says: 'I'm watering the sand' – which means something akin to carrying water to the sea.[153] She acknowledges the programme's lack of success and links this to Samaritan's dire financial situation, which hampers implementation. This 'fluidity of practice' comes to the fore in the next two chapters, but now I want to pay attention to what I call the 'fluidity of funding', because this profoundly shapes those practices.

The Fluidity of Funding

Financial flows direct the policies and practices of the institutions they finance, which reduces their ability to adapt their policies to the fluidity of practice. Yet, financial flows do not exist in a vacuum. In our fluid modern times with interconnected financial and bureaucratic systems, Samaritan's funding situation is intimately linked to changes in Malawi's national rules and regulations, but also to buzzwords and fashions in the NGO sector (cf. Katz & Anheier 2006).[154] The latter two made an important shift around 2010, when the UN released the new 'Guidelines for the Alternative Care for Children'.[155] These guidelines propagated the importance of the de-institutionalization of children whenever possible and focused on the possibilities of home-based care and interventions: 'all decisions concerning alternative

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152 See also this blog published in The Nation newspaper, where Christina argues a similar point: street children are part of cities since they exist everywhere in the world. http://mwnation.com/a-choice-for-street-children/ (last accessed 29-12-2015).
153 'Ndikutira madzi pa mchenga', interview 30-03-2015.
154 This 'rescaling' of power and spaces of influence can be seen in transnational NGOs policies and the ways in which buzzwords quickly change and become embedded in ever larger numbers of organizations. See Brenner, who wrote about this rescaling of power for states in relation to urban spaces (2004).
155 Available here: http://www.unicef.org/protection/alternative_care_Guidelines-English.pdf (last accessed 03-12-2015).

care should take full account of the desirability, in principle, of maintaining the child as close as possible to his/her habitual place of residence, in order to facilitate contact and potential reintegration with his/her family and to minimize disruption of his/her educational, cultural and social life.'[156] Big international organizations such as UNICEF, Save the Children and SOS Children's Village were quick to respond to these new guidelines and wrote a report on how to put them into practice titled Moving Forward.[157]

In response, the Malawian government adopted a new law called the Child Care, Protection and Justice Act (2010).[158] This legislation echoes the UN guidelines and likewise emphasizes that home-based care is to be preferred over institutionalization.[159] A friend of mine, who then worked as the director of an orphanage that worked closely with the Department of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare (Ministry of GCDSW),[160] told me that, in Malawi, home-based care had come to be considered as a great way of combining extensive budget cuts with more 'traditional ways' of solving problems regarding children and youth.[161] By pointing out the responsibility of families and communities, the government was able to put the blame for the ever increasing presence of street children and youth with either the children themselves, for being lazy and wanting to get rich quickly and easily, or with their parents and communities, instead of looking deeper into the root causes of why people turn to the streets (cf. Bauman 2015 [2004]).

An example of one of these reasons could be the above-mentioned endemic poverty, especially in Malawi's southern region, but also, for instance, abusive relationships in the community. These reasons are currently not taken into account by the government. Since the 2010 law seemed to yield little effect (which probably has to do with the fact that poverty levels kept rising), the

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156 UN Guidelines, p.4, B.11.
157 The report is available at: http://www.unicef.org/protection/files/Moving_Forward_Implementing_the_Guidelines_English.pdf (last accessed 03-12-2015).
158 Available at: http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/90369/104130/F179063148/MWI90369.pdf (last accessed 03-12-2015).
159 This also emerged in interviews with Samaritan Trust staff members (Christina on 19-03-2015 and 30-03-2015, Harold on 29-05-2015 and Evance 26-02-2015). It was also the reason why the girls' home from Stichting Afrika Zending no longer exists; the girls have been reintegrated into their homes to abide by the rules of home-based care system (numerous informal conversation with foundation members).
160 Ministry website: http://www.gender.gov.mw/ (last accessed 03-12-2015) Notice also the interesting title of this ministry, lumping 'gender' and 'disability' ironically close together.
161 Field notes 09-03-2015.

government announced in 2012 that street begging would be made illegal, as of 16 June; the international day of the African Child.[162] Both the giving and receiving of alms would be outlawed. The government also mentioned that this outlawing was related to the 'home for every child campaign' that had started in July 2012 in an effort to implement the 2010 child protection law.[163] Children needed to be at home, not on the streets, but also not in an institution – preferably (cf. Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003; Ursin 2011; Van Blerk 2005: 9).[164]

In practice, however, children and youth kept coming to the streets. This prompted the government to repeatedly engage in 'street sweeping' exercises to get rid of 'all street children and perpetual beggars'.[165] Samaritan, as an organization now suddenly working with a proscribed group and the only institution where street children and youth can actually reside, was enlisted to assist in these activities. Evance, the head of the social work department, speaks about it indignantly.[166] He tells how more than 40 street children were arrested and handcuffed by a large police force and then made to wait in front of the police station. He was then asked to take all of them to Samaritan, but no funds were made available to make sure that they could be housed and fed, so Evance refused. The children spent the rest of the day waiting and managed to escape that same day. Most of them stayed away from town for a while, which prompted politicians to announce the success of the street-sweeping campaign. However, it did not take long before all of them had returned to town – often with siblings or friends in their wake.

A blind mother, begging with her young children, told the journalist who enquired about their 'return' to the streets: 'how can they ban begging without giving us an alternative means of supporting our children? That's kill-

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162 http://www.nyasatimes.com/2012/06/13/malawi-plans-to-outlaw-street-begging-official/ (last accessed 03-12-2015).

163 http://www.nyasatimes.com/2012/12/30/street-begging-remains-banned-malawi-government-to-flush-out-street-beggars-official/ (last accessed 03-12-2015). http://www.africareview.com/News/Malawi+to+outlaw+street+begging/-/979180/1426990/-/format/xhtml/-/90pv81/-/index.html (last accessed 03-12-2015).

164 See also Onyiko & Pechacova, who argue that institutionalization alone will not 'curb street children' – measures to address the root causes of why they go to the streets are needed (2015).

165 http://www.nyasatimes.com/2012/12/30/street-begging-remains-banned-malawi-government-to-flush-out-street-beggars-official/ (last accessed 03-12-2015) I also want to note that, in my view, the terminology of 'street sweeping' appears particularly, since it de-humanizes the street children and beggars.

166 He told me this during our talk on 26-02-2015.

ing us!'[167] Yet, politicians simply reiterated the importance of having 'clean' streets and people's responsibility in providing for themselves and their children. Dr. Shaba, the Principal Secretary of the Ministry of GCDSW, stated that 'most of people who are in the streets begging are capable of making a living through legitimate means.'[168] Based on this attitude, another 'street sweeping' exercise was carried out after 21 December 2012, the date on which the law came into official effect – but again to no avail.[169] The less fortunate kept and keep returning to the streets, as is evidenced by the frequently announced 'street sweeping exercises' that continue up until today (cf. Bauman 2015 [2004]).[170] The current minister of GCDSW, Patricia Kaliati, stated on 30 November 2015 that 'government will not bow down to street kids and beggars who are returning to city streets after they were removed.'[171] 'We will not get tired, these people must be removed so that there is sanity in our cities.' Evidently, street children and youth are seen as a threat to safety in urban places (cf. Scheper-Hughes 2008).

Together, the 2010 UN guidelines, the 2010 Malawian child protection law and the prohibition of begging in 2012, created a powerful push for Samaritan to change its policies; not least because the reality of funding is intimately linked to how well an institution 'fits' into the national and international notions on how to deal with street children and youth (cf. Katz & Anheier 2006). Without wanting to be involved in this way, Samaritan was charged with assisting the government during, but especially after these street-sweeping exercises, in an attempt to keep children from the streets and successfully reintegrate them to their communities.[172] When realizing the impact of the current laws, Samaritan started devoting more attention to lobbying and discussing with politicians, the police and social welfare how to deal with street children and youth. The downside of this is that Samaritan's staff has less time

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167 http://www.streetnewsservice.org/news/2012/december/feed-360/born-begging-children-of-blind-malawians-condemned-at-birth.aspx (last accessed 03-12-2015).

168 http://www.streetnewsservice.org/news/2012/december/feed-360/born-begging-children-of-blind-malawians-condemned-at-birth.aspx (last accessed 06-12-2015).

169 http://www.nyasatimes.com/2013/01/11/malawi-street-children-beggars-defy-governments-order-to-move/ (last accessed 03-12-2015).

170 http://timesmediamw.com/malawi-government-to-sweep-out-street-children/ (last accessed 07-12-2015) This news article concerns a 'street sweeping exercise' carried out on the 6 September 2014.

171 http://mwnation.com/minister-talks-tough-on-street-kids/ (last accessed 07-12-2015).

172 This 'collaboration' was not satisfactory for Samaritan, as Christina (director) argues in this newspaper article, where she urges the government to rethink their strategies and how they implement them: Samaritan would be willing to help them to do so in exchange for a say in the process. http://mwnation.com/a-choice-for-street-children/ (last accessed 29-12-2015).

to actually counsel and interact with the children. The lobbying was however deemed necessary, not least because Samaritan's reputation was at stake: if an institution that is supposed to reintegrate street children fails to do so and children return to town, then how can the government's policies work? Following this line of argument, Christina (the director) and Evance (the head of social work) joined several working groups at the ministry of GDCSW, among which the Social Welfare Technical Working Group.[173]

Samaritan was also struggling financially. At one point they were housing more than 200 children and youth in two different locations. This was financially unfeasible and therefore, in 2011, they decided to merge the two centres to reduce maintenance costs. This is how the girls ended up with a hostel that was actually a staff house, outside the walls of Samaritan. The boys were divided over three big hostels.[174] The girls' hostel is forbidden territory for the boys and anyone who is seen within the straw walls risks immediate 'reintegration'[175] – which is not to say that boys do not go there. Although sometimes presented as an improvement, I would argue that the merging of the two locations was nothing more than an economic measure and not one that necessarily increases the safety of the girls and boys residing at Samaritan.

The newly chosen lobbying strategy started paying off in 2012, when Samaritan's lack of funding was relieved because they were awarded a three-year grant by the Tilitonse Fund.[176] This grant was geared towards Samaritan's vocational skills training to make street children and youth financially independent.[177] Yet, in order to receive it, Samaritan was also obliged to take on more responsibilities. They had to hire a monitoring and evaluation officer (Harold) to manage the funds that would come in. Secondly, they had to focus their activities on both Blantyre and Lilongwe – the latter being Malawi's capital, but also a town where Samaritan was not active. This put a lot of pressure on Samaritan's staff, some of whom are now forced to divide their time between Blantyre and Lilongwe. When I asked Harold about this, he said: 'Tilitonse, they are just donors, they find things there, but they are also work-

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173 Interview Evance 26-02-2015.
174 Boys are separated into age groups to prevent abuse, but it is unlikely that this strategy works 100 per cent.
175 I return to 'reintegration' being used or perceived as a punishment in the next chapter.
176 Samaritan Trust Newsletter 16, Spring 2013. Available here: http://www.stichtingaquavivenda.com/nieuwsbrieven/samaritan%20trust%20newsletter%20spring2013.pdf (last accessed 07-12-2015).
177 http://tilitonsefund.org/about/ (last accessed 06-12-2015). http://tilitonsefund.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/TILITONSE-NEWSLETTER-EDITION-1-20141.pdf (last accessed 07-12-2015).

ing within the legal framework of the land.'[178] When following the financial flows, Samaritan had no choice but to change its policies.

Apart from these changes on an operational scale, Samaritan's policies at the Blantyre institution also had to change. In the past, a child could reside at Samaritan for up to eight years or even longer: either the child or family was not ready for reintegration, there was no money for a home visit or the home situation simply did not warrant a reintegration. But, in order to align their policies with the Malawian government's and Tilitonse's wishes (or demands), the time that children can spend at Samaritan was shortened significantly. Whereas before it used to be the case that a 'rehabilitation' took at least two years and maybe longer, now the whole cycle needs to be completed within three months to attain the efficiency rates that were stated when the fund was made available.[179] Although in the past I had heard Christina say on numerous occasions that changing a child's behaviour takes time, she now adhered to the 'national action plan to de-institutionalize and promote home-based care and home-based interventions' seemingly without difficulty.[180] In fact, she admired the government for realizing that 'some of the institutions are actually to the detriment of the child.' Evance also agreed that 'institutionalization is the last resort.'[181] As did Harold: 'we use the government thinking to say: home is best.'[182] The buzzwords that are part of the new government's strategy and the NGO sector have thus clearly been incorporated in the narratives of Samaritan's staff – even when doubts about their applicability exist.[183]

Home and an Institution

So, if Samaritan follows the UN, international NGOs and the Malawian government in saying that 'home is best', which notion of home does Samaritan propagate? Whenever I asked staff members about this, they would talk about the problems of institutionalization. Harold emphasized that if children stay in an institution for too long, they become 'like a kid who belongs

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178 Interview 29-05-2015.
179 Interview Christina (director), 19-03-2015.
180 Interview 19-03-2015.
181 Interview 26-02-2015.
182 Interview 29-05-2015.
183 See Katz & Anheier, who focus their analysis of transnational NGO networks on the lack of inclusivity and minimal space that is created for participatory partaking of (local) less powerful partners (2006).

to an institution.'[184] And 'an institution doesn't have any culture, doesn't have any values, but the community where a child comes from, it has culture, it has values, you know.' This overly romantic image of the community is linked to the Malawian government's concern that 'children from the orphanage, who have been brought up there […] are failing to fit into society.'[185] Evance: 'They are failing to follow the norms of the community.'[186] Christina argues that 'Malawian society is one big village,' where communities have to know and learn that they are responsible to care for the children that are born in their midst.[187] Although, in the short run, institutionalizing the children might seem to be good for them, in the long run, it will harm them because they will become 'Malawians who can't be Malawian.'[188] Evance agrees and adds: 'looking at the whole picture, you realize that when they are home with their relatives, with their parents, with their guardians, that's where they grow up as an adult, as a responsible adult because that's where our culture originates.'[189]

This evocation of 'culture' is echoed in the proverb that Evance uses to explain to me why children cannot grow up properly away from their 'real' home: 'mtengo sungakule opanda midzu' – a tree cannot grow without roots.[190] 'The children cannot grow without knowing where they are from, without knowing their relatives, without interacting with them; telling them their grandparents, their history, that kind of hierarchy. If they do not know about it, then we believe that, I mean there is no future in that child.'[191] Christina also comes to this when she explains to me that institutions make children into their own by taking away their tribal identity:

> we have got Asena, Amatumbuka and then you are taking that Tumbukaness away from them and making them Samaritan Trust children who wake up all at the same time, who eat the same food, which is, which doesn't happen in the village. In the village sometimes you wake up at four am, sometimes you wake up at eight am. Sometimes you have to go and sleep in the field to guard from baboons […] But then they are here, they lose all that. […] They lose touch with who they are. And then they can't adapt now. When you try

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184 Interview 29-05-2015.
185 Ibid.
186 Interview 26-02-2015.
187 Interview 19-03-2015.
188 Ibid.
189 Interview 26-02-2015.
190 Ibid.
191 Interview 26-02-2015.

to reintegrate them, try to find them jobs, they can't adapt. Because they are no longer Malawians.[192]

Apparently, being born in the village, growing up there and living life in 'village style' is of crucial importance to be and become a Malawian and to be and become a good person. This strongly resonates with the grand narrative in which this same conception of home is upheld. Home is in the village, where the 'real' Malawian resides in a harmonious community, practicing Malawian culture – whatever this may be. In an institution, this is not possible, which is why an institution is not an actual home. Christina: 'to him who has a hammer, everything looks like a nail. So if you have an institution, you think every child needs to be institutionalized.' But this is not the case: 'I believe children are better kept in homes than in care centers, which we also call homes but are actually not homes.'[193] These real homes, where the children are supposed to reside and grow up, are in line with the grand narrative: located in the rural areas, where their family comes from and their culture originates.[194]

This overly positive image of both community and the children's (rural) points of origin disguises the fact that home is never solely positive – the mere presence of street youth shows us this. Many of the children and youth that reside at Samaritan ran away because of maltreatment or because they were being neglected. Endemic poverty also plays an important role in their choices to leave home (cf. Retrak 2015). This poverty can be linked to Malawi's rapid urbanization, which makes it very hard for Samaritan to implement its reintegration policy and actually see results. Sending children back to poor areas where they came from and refuse to stay will not keep them from returning to town. Interestingly, Evance told me that most children at Samaritan come from economically poor urban areas, such as Mbayani, Bangwe and

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192 Interview 19-03-2015. (Sena and Tumbuka are some of the tribes that reside in Malawi, as discussed in chapter 1).

193 Interview 19-03-2015. Interestingly, Christina also remarked that she is very much aware of the fact that the children at Samaritan pay for her and her staff's children at home: 'if they all decide to leave, we'd close' (field notes 19-03-2015, 30-03-2015). Her home and its maintenance are thus closely linked to the existence of a group of people that can be termed 'street children' in need of a home (cf. Bauman 2015 [2004]).

194 Christina also mentions at some point that the children's home to which they are to be reintegrated might be in town. 'Maybe it's in Mbayani, maybe it's not even a village.' From this comment, it is tempting to conclude that clearly, most of the time, home is in a village. And for those who have their home in Mbayani, this is clearly less good, than having your home in a village.

Ndirande – notorious slums.[195] This means that this is also where they will be reintegrated to, if they used to reside there before coming to the streets. Rurality and the harmonious community, as suggested by the grand narrative and Samaritan's policies, do not always apply in lived reality.

Christina is well aware of this. And she is also aware of the fact that if poverty is the cause of children coming to the streets, Samaritan's reintegration policy will not change what is happening. Christina: 'if funds allow, we try to strengthen the family. Unfortunately we don't have enough funds to strengthen the family, it's always difficult.'[196] Evance also sees that poverty is the underlying reason why most of the children run away from home. 'Malawi is one of the poorest countries. […] And poverty is broad: talking they don't have food, they don't have all the basic needs: food, clothing, shelter eh they don't have access to good health care. So looking at all those angles, they see that at the institution is the right place to be.'[197] He terms this the 'dependency syndrome', which makes his job to reintegrate children to their 'real' home very challenging. Yet, despite the poverty in their homes, many children are reintegrated: 'we said deliberately, all those that can be reintegrated, whether they are poor or not, because we are not fighting poverty, they should go.'[198] Christina adds that Samaritan is not able to care for more than 60 children at the same time.

And yet, most of the staff's explanation for the difficulties they experience when reintegrating children is not simply 'poverty'. They link this to a change in attitude that they see in the children who have resided in an institution like Samaritan for a prolonged period of time. Harold: 'when they are in the institution there is free food, everything coming to you. But when you are out there, you have to face.'[199] This is why the food at Samaritan is kept very simple, Christina explains. 'We even keep the food very cheap, so that […] they're not incentivized to stay.'[200] She also feels strongly about teaching the children that they need to work in order to eat, because more than 80 per cent of all Malawians rely on their own produce to survive.[201] The children are prepared for this by Samaritan's staff, before they go to spend their hol-

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195 The other areas are more rural: Chikwawa district, Mulanje and Thyolo. All located in Southern Malawi.
196 Interview 19-03-2015.
197 Interview 26-02-2015.
198 Interview 30-03-2015.
199 Interview 29-05-2015.
200 Interview 19-03-2015.
201 Ibid.

iday period with their families. 'You are going to be expected to work, if it's maybe going to fetch water or whatever it is that children do in the villages.'[202] And the children know this, Christina says. 'They know that if they go home, there's nothing to eat. But they still miss their relations. So they want to go home, suffer for just a little bit, have lack of food security for just a little bit but have the pleasure of seeing their relations and then come back.'[203]

Evance concludes that, although an institution cannot offer a child 'roots', it can assist in meeting their 'basic needs'. He recognizes that this puts street children in a difficult position: 'they cannot stay home where there is hunger, then to come to a place where there is food but maybe no love and affection.'[204] This is why 'recently we have started integrating that kind of thinking saying "no, this is not your home," "come a certain day, you need to go back home"'. Although this seems promising for the children that have been arriving over the last few months, for the older ones who have sometimes resided at Samaritan 'from eight to 18', this is a lot harder to swallow. They feel 'this is their home. You cannot change their mindset, you cannot tell them that no, institutionalization is the last resort.'[205] But then, 'if you have to force them to be reintegrated, they won't end up home.' It is likely that they will return to the streets. The fluidity of practice is, therefore, what we need to look at next. In this chapter, I have discussed the policies of the Samaritan Trust. Its programme can be seen as consisting of three phases – separation, transition and reintegration – aimed at returning the child/youth back home. Samaritan's policies are profoundly shaped by legal and financial constraints, because funding flows tend to follow UN guidelines, the practices of (international) NGOs and national laws. In the final section, I showed how Samaritan's policies adhere to the grand narrative about home, and thus locate home in a village as a point of origin. Constructing it as the place where children grow up to become real Malawians and responsible adults. In the next chapter, I focus on the fluidity of practice by discussing how the girls and (former) street boys experience(d) their stay at Samaritan and think about their reintegration.

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202 Interview 30-03-2015.
203 Ibid.
204 Interview 26-02-2015.
205 Ibid.

6 Home at an Institution

'A place to escape from and to escape to.'

(Blunt & Dowling 2006: 130)

In this chapter, living at Samaritan, home-making practices in a temporary residence and (former) street youths' thoughts about reintegration are central. In the first part, I describe the girls' hostel and the girls' home-making practices while residing there. In the second part, I highlight the difficulties of residing at Samaritan and relate these to the 'dark sides' of home. This is because, although residing at Samaritan can be difficult, the girls appear reluctant to be reintegrated. In the final part, I show how the convergence of the grand narrative and the dark sides of home in the reintegration process create tensions that lead to a solidification of home.

Home at an Institution

Arriving at Samaritan, it is just a short walk from the minibus stage towards the sand trail that leads to the girl's hostel. Usually, before I reach the first poles of the straw wall, the younger girls will have spotted me. Kate, Maggie, Eve, Diana and Ruth – all between nine and 12 years old – enjoy playing outside: sitting in the sand in the shade on the right side of the hostel, they use a football, little rocks, a piece of string or unripe guavas, always able to enjoy complex games that I, much to their satisfaction, never manage to win. They would only stop playing their games if they were given a chore by one of the older girls, if they did not feel well or if it was lunch time. And if they spotted a visitor – a guaranteed success on Saturdays and Sundays, when I used to arrive in the mornings. They would compete over who could reach me the quickest, grab my hands, take my bag, and pull me onto the khonde to welcome me. Then they would wait for me to open my bag and see what I had brought for activities for the day. I often took pencils and paper, but occasionally I would bring nail polish or wool (see photo 9 on page 87). The latter could be used both for braiding hair and for knitting. Leaving the younger girls with my bag, I would walk around the hostel to greet the older girls.

They would be busy cleaning their rooms, washing their clothes, fetching water from the pump further down the field, bathing and getting dressed.

Photo 7
Samaritan

Me entering the girls' hostel.

Outdoor kitchen viewed from the inside kitchen.

The youngest girls' bedroom.

You enter the hostel through the kitchen (see photo 7 on the next page). It contains a (never used) stove and some cupboards. The shed in the backyard is the one that is used as a kitchen, in case the girls have extra food to cook. In the kitchen's right corner a door leads into the hallway. On the right side, is

a toilet, a shower and a store room used by the matron (who I saw only twice over a weekend during my entire fieldwork),[206] while the doors on the left side lead to three bedrooms.

The first one on the right is for the youngest girls. Coming in, you can immediately smell that not all of them dare to leave their beds at night when they need to use the bathroom. The number of girls that share this room fluctuates, depending on the intakes, but the iron bunk beds easily accommodate nine girls. The beds were hardly ever made and only few of them were covered by mosquito nets – all of which were hanging on by a thread. In the middle of the room stood a pile of broken bed parts and an old closet to keep their clothes in. The walls clearly showed signs of being used as support whenever they climb into their bunks; smudges of nsima, oil and dirt are visible on the top half of the understated beige paintwork. I never spent much time in this room, mainly because the younger girls enjoyed spending their time outside – understandably so, considering the state of their room. This was different for most of the older girls, who greatly enjoyed having me in their bedroom while chatting, clearing out their closets, folding their clothes or simply lying in bed while playing with their phone.

Photo 8
Girls at Samaritan. The two bedrooms for the older girls.

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206 Field notes 04-07-2015.

The older girls were divided over two smaller bedrooms; one housing four, one housing five girls (see photo 8). Apart from the four single beds, some wooden, some iron, the smallest room always felt 'full' because of the wall facing the hallway that was covered by a cupboard, stuffed mainly with clothes, but also little bottles of perfume, body lotion, mirrors, combs, fake hair, shoes, pictures and all the other things that the girls in this room wanted to keep to themselves. Sometimes this included leftover food, which can lead to enormous amounts of laundry when concealed plates of beans are accidentally tipped over.[207] The walls, dyed in the same pale beige paint, were much cleaner than in the other bedroom; these girls did not have bunk beds, but they also cared much more about how their room looked. They cleaned it without being told to do so. If they had just done laundry, the burglar bars on the inside of the window would be covered in freshly washed underwear – something that 'proper women' don't hang outside to dry. Many of the drawings we made during my stay ended up above the girls' beds, marking their personal space (cf. Cieraad 2010). The second bedroom for the older girls was very similar to this one, except for the fact that it had one more bed and a bigger closet.

When arriving in the morning, I would visit all three of these bedrooms to greet everyone. Some of them would invite me onto their beds for a quick talk, others would simply say hi and go about their business of cleaning, making their beds, rearranging their clothes or putting on their body lotion. Occasionally, I was asked to help decide which outfit to wear, but since the girls consider my style to be 'old fashioned' this did not happen very often. (Most of their clothes had come in through donations from expats or middle-class Malawians, which meant that they tended to show much more skin than I allowed myself to).[208] If Hope was in her bedroom, she would usually insist on changing my hairdo before I would be allowed to leave the room. Most of our time together, however, was spent outside on the khonde, in the shade or on

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207 Field notes 15-03-2015.
208 More than once, I received compliments for my clothing style from passersby or people that I greeted in the streets: 'you dress so modest. Not like our girls these days. Westernization is bad and so strong' (field notes 27-02-2015). Dressing provocatively by either wearing tight clothes (such as jeans) or short skirts (showing knees) was associated with 'the West' and sometimes referred to as 'azungu style' (white people's style). The hot pants worn by tourists probably contribute to this.

the football pitch next to the girls' hostel where youth from the entire neighborhood would play football (the boys) and netball (the girls) every weekend.

Photo 9
Painting nails.

There were several activities that the girls always engaged in before they would come and sit down to chat. Washing themselves, their school uniforms and clothes was very important. Everyone did this individually, although they would often fetch water together or 'share' a bucket. Since there were only few of these, not everybody could do laundry or bathe at the same time, so coordination was required. Together, they would also make sure that one person would mop the floors and sweep the outside of the hostel. The younger girls needed to be encouraged to do so, but the older ones seemed to take pride in these tasks and emphasized the need to be considered clean (cf. Gadd 2015).[209] This is also why the girls bathe three times a day: morning, afternoon and in the evening before going to bed. When I inquired, they told me that 'us girls' have to do this because we are different from boys.[210]

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209 This focus on cleanliness also came to the fore in the advice of the successful business women who came to 'mentor' the girls on International Women's Day (field notes 08-03-2015).
210 Field notes 05-04-2015.

We smell bad because we work hard in the house and when we suffer from our monthly 'problem' we have to bathe often anyway. It is therefore better to bathe three times a day, because then nobody can know when you are having your period.[211] After each shower, the girls would put on different clothes and, if my camera still had battery, a new photo shoot would start. This ritual structured their day and the older girls would refuse to go outside of the straw walls if they had not had their shower yet.[212]

For the older girls, another important ritual was making their beds. These beds are private spaces in the sense that you would have to ask before you sit down or take something from someone's bed. The materiality of these beds, although occasionally girls would switch beds if the other bed seemed more comfortable to them, marks an organization of space. Douglas argued that home 'need not be a large space, but space there must be, for home starts by bringing space under control' (1991: 289). Their bed was the space they could most easily control, as long as they made them look proper and clean. So even though this space was not solid in the sense that it never changed, it provided a place for the girls to order and maintain: 'for a home neither the space nor its appurtenances have to be fixed, but there has to be something regular about the appearance and reappearance of its furnishings (Ibid.).

Apart from keeping themselves and the inside of the hostel clean, the girls were also occasionally ordered to clean the hostel's surroundings – including the maize gardens. This happened whenever a donor visit was anticipated, but it was also used as a punishment.[213] Especially the girls who were born in town would complain about these activities and claim that they lacked the experience to join in. But, overall, under the threat of (even more) punishment, everybody would participate. The outside sweeping would also be a lot of work and, if we were unlucky, we had to weed the grass and remove the plants in between the tiles too. The girls' bin was located in a corner of the little maize garden, so, depending on the amount of waste, we had to set it on fire once every so many weeks. The garbage comprised a mixture of plastics, fake hair, ripped clothes and rotten leftover foods and the stench from the smoke produced by this fire was truly awful. After these cleaning exercises, the girls usually seemed relieved; both that the punishment was over, but also that their residence was clean again. Living together with different people meant that some felt the need to clean more often than others and

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211 The Chichewa word for having your period is the same as the word for bathing: kusamba. (Paas 2009: 300).
212 This happened every day, so I have not noted down a specific date for this observation.
213 For example, on 30-05-2015 (field notes).

these punishments were experienced as a way to correct this imbalance (cf. Douglas 1991: 295–296).[214]

One day, we were all sitting outside on the khonde after having cleaned the inside of the hostel. We were tired and nobody was in a good mood. While waiting for lunch, I told the girls that I was really tired from all the household chores that we performed. Ruth (12) giggled and told me that her mother loves her very much because she is the only girl in the household and therefore she helps with all the chores: mopping the floor, cleaning plates, fetching water at the river, washing, cooking, etc.[215] Boys cannot do those things, Ruth says. Jacquelina makes a gesture that indicates her disagreement and Ruth quickly adds that her brothers do not help because they are much younger than she is. Elisa, who is sitting on the edge of the khonde starts to laugh and says defiantly: 'I don't do that kind of work.'[216] Even during this punishment she has been slacking and the others are annoyed by this. We all laugh, but the older girls quickly stop to signal their disapproval. I reply that she has nice brothers, but Ruth is having none of it. 'My mother always told me, you have to know how to do these things so you won't suffer.' Everybody falls silent, waiting for Elisa to respond. But it is Diana (10) who joins the conversation. She is sitting next to me and fumbles with my hair when she suddenly says to me 'she [Elisa] is like you!' She smiles and crawls on my lap but the other girls burst into laughter. Clearly, although I thought I worked hard, my way of executing household chores is far below what one would expect of a woman of marriageable age. And she probably also refers to my complaining while performing them and my insistence that boys would be able to do this as well.

I frequently thought back to this event. Not just because it was funny, but also because it points towards the gendered nature of household chores and the importance that is placed on personal hygiene (cf. Barker, Knaul, Cassaniga, & Schrader 2000; Gadd 2015; Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003). The girls, no matter which area or family they came from, were all used to doing the majority of the work in the home every single day. Although the amount of work annoyed them at times, many also emphasized that this was part of what made them feel appreciated by their family members (cf. Barker, Knaul, Cassaniga & Schrader 2000: 57). This is also clear from the numerous stories about their homes that were usually shared after cleaning activities. I gather from this that doing household chores forms an important part of what re-

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214 Field notes 23-05-2015, 30-05-2015.
215 Field notes 23-05-2015.
216 Ibid.

minds them of their homes and the things they used to do there. Girls have 'been trained to stay at home and learn from their mothers how to become women' (Ibid.). While living on the streets, there is no residence to take care of or clean and it is very difficult to keep oneself clean.[217] The focus that (former) street youth – both boys and girls – place on looking and being clean thus seems to be an important aspect of coming to feel at home both with oneself and the surroundings.[218]

I remember how Bridget (17) told me several times that staying at Samaritan sometimes left her feeling bored, precisely because there are hardly any household chores for her to do: 'we just mop and we wash the plates that we used ourselves. So it's only little.'[219] Being the oldest, she was used to having to do a lot more, much like Ruth mentioned earlier. Yet, although the amount of chores at Samaritan is less than at home, it is still more than the boys, because the girls are also expected to clean the plates or help cook lunch for the staff (cf. Blunt & Dowling 2006: 99; VanEverey 1997). I do not mean to imply that the girls would like to have more chores assigned to them: I think the crucial point is that, during their stay at Samaritan, the girls experience having more time for themselves, but they do not have as much freedom as they would have at home to decide how and with whom they want to spend this time. Bridget: at home 'we can walk around, we can go and chat with our friends. But here, no: we can't move.'[220] She refers to the golden rule that no girl is allowed to leave the hostel without permission. This permission is given for school and vocational skills training, but during the weekend they are not supposed to leave the grounds except for going to church.

Hope (19) is also annoyed by this. Since she was part of a child-headed household, her sense of freedom might be even more pronounced than that of the other girls. She emphasizes that she was used to choosing whatever she wanted to do after completing her chores, but now her options are limited.[221] She is, however, quick to acknowledge the positive side of this: she is better able to concentrate on school because she does not have to worry about finding money to feed her siblings. 'Here I just eat.'[222] But that does not mean

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217 This was mentioned to me (often jokingly) almost every week and whenever I would comment on their showering habits.
218 This 'cleanliness' can also be likened to the 'sweeping the streets clean' campaigns, in which street children and youth are explicitly conceptualized as 'polluting'.
219 Interview 26-04-2015.
220 Ibid.
221 Interview 25-04-2015.
222 Ibid.

she always enjoys staying at Samaritan. Arguments often erupt over clothes that have gone missing, soap that was stolen or body lotion that is suddenly finished. Safeguarding your belongings is not easy – especially considering that everybody receives the same and the same amount of everything, which makes it easy to mix things up, both on purpose and by accident. Whenever arguments escalated and turned into proper fights, Samaritan's staff would discipline and punish those involved, which leads us on to a discussion of the darker sides of home.[223]

The Dark Sides of Home

The dark sides of home refers to actions, events and processes that le(a)d children and youth (formerly) residing at Samaritan to come to see their home as a place to escape from (cf. Blunt & Dowling 2006: 130). These dark sides include instances of direct violence, such as being beaten by one's parents, but also structural violence, such as endemic poverty (Galtung 1990). Cultural violence, the attitudes and actions that legitimize the (re)production of inequities, often takes shape in relation to gender, which is what the girls residing at Samaritan have experienced firsthand (Ibid.). Not being allowed to go to school, being overburdened by household chores or being forced into marriage at a young age are examples of this. The three types of violence (structural, cultural and direct) can reinforce each other, which means that structural and cultural violence tend to find their ultimate expression in direct violence as well (Ibid.: 295). Unfortunately, this has also been the experience of most of the children and youth that reside at Samaritan. Witchcraft, which Geschiere referred to as 'the dark side of kinship,' is also part of these dark sides of home and points towards what Bauman calls 'the frailty of human bonds' (1997 in 2013: xvi; Bauman 2015 [2003]; cf. Turnaturi 2007). As I stated in the introduction, I do not wish to dwell on these dark sides extensively, but I pay attention to them here to show that these do not disappear when one leaves home: residing at Samaritan comes with its own dark sides.[224] This can then turn home into a place to escape to – as the quote at the start of this chapter indicates (Blunt & Dowling 2006: 130).

One of these dark sides is the ways in which the children and youth are disciplined and punished. Punishments tend to be given to groups of girls and

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223 Pun intended; see Foucault who wrote extensively on disciplinary power (cf. 1980, 1991 [1977], 2004 [1997]).
224 Focusing extensively or exclusively on the dark side of home also goes beyond the scope of my current research question, which is directed towards the present and the future – not the

not individuals. This is also because a lot of the activities are done in groups. Memory: 'here we do things all together. But at home, you can't do all things together with the whole village.'[225] The strong group hierarchy plays into this collectivity because, although the girls are forced to do a lot of things in groups, they are certainly not all friends. Many arguments and fights take place every day. Sometimes these erupt between the older and the younger ones, or between the ones that came from Lilongwe and the rest, but there did not seem to be a clear pattern. Jacquelina and Elisa thoroughly disliked each other and they argued more than the rest, but other than that arguments were a perennial possibility for everyone to become involved in. Omega told me that it was best to just accept the situation and 'take it as it comes.'[226] Some days were just better than others.

Although the potential existed for everyone to argue with everyone, there was a big power difference between the older and the younger girls. Frequently, the older girls would order the younger ones to perform certain tasks or fetch things for them. They would, of course, also be able to do this at home, but, at Samaritan, it often led to arguments – probably because the 'natural' authority of older siblings over their younger ones is not present here. Memory: 'it is difficult. Sometimes they can even refuse or just be lazy. We have to make sure that we talk to them with love, because we don't know how they came here. So we talk to them nicely, if we ask mean, they won't do the work.'[227] If they will not do the work, it is one of the older girls who gets into trouble, because Samaritan uses a head girl structure in order to encourage the children to discipline each other.[228] Christina had explained to me that she uses this structure 'to keep them in line and also to give them responsibility,' something they would also have in their homes.[229] It also saves time for the staff: 'if I want to say something to the girls, I can't look for all of them. I'd rather just look for the head girl and tell her.'[230] The older girls rotate the 'honor' of occupying this position, but doing so brings both power and peril. You are able to command who needs to do what, but, if they refuse, this becomes your problem. Memory voiced this by saying that she did not feel safe at Samaritan anymore because she would always be blamed for whatev-

(violent) past.
225 Interview 15-03-2015.
226 Interview 19-04-2015.
227 Interview 15-03-2015.
228 Interview Christina (director) 30-03-2015.
229 Ibid.
230 Ibid.

er was going wrong.[231] Being a head girl thus makes you both powerful and vulnerable, since the other girls know that if they refuse to do what they are supposed to do, you will be punished (too).

These punishments differed in intensity and duration and, according to the girls, the punishment one received depended more on the staff member who was in charge of punishing you than on what it is that you had or had not done. Being grounded, but also cleaning the hostel and its surroundings could be given as punishments. Whenever the group was being punished for something only a few girls had done, the atmosphere would be ruined for several days and the 'offenders' would be bullied and reminded of their mistakes. At other times, only one girl could be punished, for example, by being grounded for a period of time or not being allowed to take part in group activities. Whenever discussing punishments with them, the girls stated that they also often received beatings from staff members.[232] They would be beaten on their bottoms and backs and they would receive long sermons about all their mistakes and their misbehaviour. No matter how they tried to explain themselves, the girls feel that staff members would never listen to them.[233] Omega: 'they are not able to listen to children.'[234] Hope agreed with this: 'I am not a child, no. But they see me like one.'[235] This greatly annoyed her and it made her feel as if she was not taken seriously by Samaritan. This points at a big weakness in Samaritan's programme, because it shows that the way in which the youth are disciplined limits their participation in the behavioural changes that Samaritan is trying to achieve (cf. Barker, Knaul, Cassaniga & Schrader 2000: 52).[236]

Yet, despite these punishments, the rules were being broken all the time. This could most easily be done during the weekend, because then there were hardly any staff present. On several occasions, I arrived at the hostel and found hardly anyone there. On Sundays this meant that the girls had gone to church, while others were in Samaritan's kitchen cooking lunch. Some, however, would use this opportunity to go and visit their families. This was

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231 Interview 15-03-2015.

232 This took place for example on 29-05-2015. Field notes 30-05-2015.

233 Interview Omega 19-04-2015, interview Hope 25-04-2015, interview Memory 15-03-2015, interview Jacquelina 24-05-2015.

234 Interview 19-04-2015.

235 Interview 25-04-2015.

236 Boys also emphasized that they did not feel taken seriously. Field notes 24-05-2015. Interviews with Kumbukani (27-05-2015), Blessings (28-05-2015), Richard (27-05-2015), Memory (15-03-2015), Bridget (26-04-2015).

mainly done by the younger girls, whose families lived in slums close by. Samaritan's director had already told me that homesickness can be a problem. She observed that this was mainly the case for girls under 13, who had not been at Samaritan for long.[237] My own observations confirm this: the younger girls were likely to go home during weekends, either for a day or even spending the night there. They know they will have to work hard and will not get a lot of food when they do this, but they miss their family and friends and are therefore willing to endure these discomforts.

Ruth frequently walked home during the weekend and so did Eve and Diana.[238] Bridget and Hope would often tell me about missing home, but they would not attempt to go there without permission. Their homes were not within walking distance, but I suspect that they were also more aware of the consequences that could ensue from a quick trip home: the (severe) punishments upon return. Asking permission to leave the hostel grounds to visit your family or a friend was not necessarily difficult – for example, for a funeral or sick relative – but rather something that the girls avoided in order not to give staff the impression that they were anxious to leave Samaritan.[239] Kate, a quiet, distant girl, would regularly walk to her home in Mbayani after school, supposedly to fetch soap.[240] I knew that she would sometimes sell the soap that Samaritan provides her with in order to buy more food, but I had not expected her family to be in a position to provide this for her. Her parents are deceased, so she used to stay with her grandmother who runs a local kachasu[241] bar from her living room. This means that the house is usually filled with drunk men sitting together, smoking and drinking, utterly delighted with any female attention – also from young girls like Kate.[242] (Weeks later, Kate and I went to visit her home but I ended up cutting our time short due to the illicit behaviour of these men).[243] However, she rarely brought anything back. No soap, no money, no extra food. The soap, although wanted, thus seemed to figure more as an excuse to visit home. This makes home, due to

237 Interview 30-03-2015.
238 Field notes 19-04-2015, 10-05-2015, 23-05-2015.
239 Field notes 19-04-2015, 30-05-2015. This was similar for the boys (Field notes 24-05-2015).
240 Field notes 15-03-2015.
241 Locally brewed liquor made from the distillation of fermented maize.
242 See also Van Stapele, who described similar places in Nairobi, Kenya (2015).
243 Field notes 25-04-2015.

its dark sides, a place to escape from, but, at the same time, it can sometimes be a place to escape to.

The anxiety surrounding punishments becomes even more clear when focusing on the biggest punishment that can be given: suspension. Suspensions could last for quite extended periods – three months is not unheard of – and were given as a consequence of a serious mistake or several mistakes in a row. The girls repeatedly stated that staff members that had come to dislike you could easily have you suspended. The volatility of suspension thus added to the already existing anxiety about this punishment. This also put pressure on the group, because you would not want to be the one who gets someone else suspended. Because of this, certain wrong-doings were kept hidden. One day, when Elisa was molested, by a boy named Clinton, who touched her breasts in Samaritan's kitchen, she did not tell the staff what had happened out of fear of getting him suspended.[244] The other girls also pressured her not to speak up, because they did not want to make the other boys mad at the girls. Besides, or so they reasoned, this was Elisa's own fault for having been alone in a room with him. The youth's fear of suspension thus led to concealing sexual violence in the institution (cf. Barker, Knaul, Cassaniga & Schrader: 2000).[245] Elisa, although having left her home because she was at risk of ending up in prostitution, experienced the same dark side in the place she escaped to. This made her say that she wanted to go home – clearly showing how home can be a place to escape from and escape to at the same time.

This same dynamic is central in Esther's story about witchcraft, another dark side of home (cf. Geschiere 2013). One day, the girls and I were sitting outside on the khonde when the matron came by.[246] She told us about Esther, who, while she resided at Samaritan, was always sick. It did not take long for witchcraft rumours to spread; either she was a witch herself, trying to make other people sick, or she was under attack from another witch – which is equally dangerous. After some time, Esther got tired of these accusations and went to have an HIV test. She turned out to be positive and received medicine. Now, she no longer felt sick, but the girls teased her about her HIV status. This made her decide to return home. By coincidence, the matron had been in town and met Esther close to Queens Central Hospital in Blantyre. She had had a car accident. The girls clicked their tongues as a sign of com-

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244 Field notes 09-05-2015. This posed a moral dilemma for me, since I felt responsible, being the only adult present. I spoke to all involved and made the boy apologize for what he did.
245 Field notes 19-06-2015.
246 This was the second time I met the 'full time' matron over the course of eight months of fieldwork (Field notes 04-07-2015).

passion while the matron continued her story. It seems there was witchcraft at play, because Esther had been hit by a car in the middle of the night![247] Apparently, she had been flying around. Re-reading Geschiere, who emphasizes witchcraft's connection to hidden or unexpected forms of mobility, some of the girls' teases like 'she flies at night' also started to make more sense to me (2013: 210). Coincidentally, I met Esther the next day while on my way to Chikwawa. I had pulled over at a market along the roadside when she suddenly walked up to me. I hugged her and asked her how she had been. She had a scar on her head (probably from the car accident) and she looked skinnier than I remembered, but she smiled and said she was OK. How could she not be: 'here is my home' she added matter-of-factly.[248]

Although Esther meant what she said, her home was a place where she decided to stay only after she started feeling that the pleasures of staying at Samaritan no longer outweighed the troubles. Samaritan posits that reintegration 'is the process of a separated child making what is anticipated to be a permanent transition back to his or her immediate or extended family and the community (usually of origin) in order to receive protection and care and to find a sense of belonging and purpose in all spheres of life.'[249] Ideally, children and youth will at some point want to return home of their own accord, like Esther eventually did. Christina: 'what you want is for the children to go home voluntarily. For us it's a good thing, I wish all of them would do that.'[250] But, for the youth I spoke to, their attitude towards reintegration was much more ambivalent – something that Esther's story also shows. Most of Samaritan's residents view it as the worst punishment: a kind of indefinite suspension. The fact that staff members often threaten youth who misbehave with reintegration, only reinforces this perception.[251]

Harold, one of Samaritan's social workers, told me: 'two or three girls have been very unruly lately, they have been found with boyfriends and a like, counseling has been ongoing.' To him, these counselling sessions do not seem to pay off: 'the more you tell them, it seems like the more they do it.'[252] From

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247 'khala ngati ufiti'. 'Anamgunda mu usiku'. (Field notes 04-07-2015)..
248 'Mesa ndi kwathu'. Field notes 05-07-2014.
249 Malawian Reintegration Study – Family for Every Child, 2014 Draft. Commissioned by the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare, with the support of UNICEF. This definition can be found on p.3 and they quote the article by Krumholz & Jones (2013) for their definition. It is available at: https://www.crin.org/en/library/publications/reaching-home-global-learning-family-reintegration-low-and-lower-middle-income.
250 Interview 30-03-2015.
251 Field notes 08-04-2015.
252 Interview 29-05-2015.

the girls, I hear nothing but jokes and irritations about these sessions.[253] They try not to listen to the staff's advice concerning sexuality and (love) relationships because they feel that the staff does not (try to) understand them and merely uses these occasions to ridicule them.[254] Because of their (assumed) immoral behaviour in the past, while they resided on the streets or lived in circumstances that put them 'at risk': 'they always think that we have done all these bad things, even if we haven't, or only a little bit for a little while,' Memory explains.[255] Whenever someone does try to give them serious advice during one of these sessions, the girls do not feel like responding, either because they think that whatever they confide in the social workers might be used against them at a later date, or because they do not feel comfortable discussing it in a group.[256]

When the staff feel that the counselling sessions are a waste of their time and resources for certain youth, they make the decision to reintegrate. Harold: 'we know that these kids have behavioral problems, but others are beyond. They are too much.'[257] Even though they sometimes see no other solution, Evance told me that reintegrating children is the hardest part of his job. 'The children are so dependent […] on the institution because that's where they felt like all the needs are met.'[258] When reintegrating them, they often take this personally and think it happens because of a personal grudge: 'Kho you hate me, why are you doing this?' It remains difficult to explain to them that they can safely stay at home again, Evance says. If, for example, they have seen that a child was doing well at home during the holidays, then social workers will attempt to reintegrate them afterwards. Sometimes, this is when parents become difficult, because they do not want to have another mouth to feed. Evance attributes this to the 'dependency syndrome. Feeling that the institution owns these kids.'[259] After counselling, most parents, however, do take their responsibility and allow the child to come back, he says. I highly

253 Their generally bad experiences with these forms of counselling were confirmed to me by three trauma psychologists who undertook a trauma-training with Samaritan's staff in September 2015. (see also the website of the organization that sent them, Umwana: http://www.umwana.net/ (last accessed 12-12-2015).
254 Field notes 12-04-2015.
255 Ibid.
256 Field notes 12-04-2015.
257 Interview 29-05-2015.
258 Interview 26-02-2015.
259 Ibid.

doubt whether this negotiated 'coming home' can be a pleasant experience for a child.[260]

Christina emphasizes that, these days, Samaritan involves the entire community in this process. 'In knowing that Malawian society is one big village, so we talk to the group village headman, we talk to the teachers in that community. So that when the child is reintegrated, everyone in that community knows and has accepted that this child needs some help it needs to be, what do you call it, taken in and given more attention.'[261] But reintegration does not always go to plan. Harold: 'for the other reasons I've described, to say, a child might be reintegrated at any time, looking at other maybe conditions.'[262] When I tell him that, to me, this makes it sound as if the girls are right in perceiving reintegration as a punishment, Harold laughs. 'No, we don't do that, otherwise most of them would have gone. For sure, if that was the punishment.'[263] Apparently, there is a thin line between being reintegrated because they can no longer maintain you at the institution and being reintegrated because your parents are willing and able to maintain you (again).

At the same time, although most girls talk about reintegration as a very negative thing, and something that they are afraid of, they also find it shameful and immoral to refuse to be reintegrated.[264] Part of this has to do with the idea that, no matter what you say, the reintegration will happen anyway. Hope: 'if they want to reintegrate you, they reintegrate, basi. If I would say no kwathu this this this, they'll just say ieh, kwanu ndi kwanu basi.'[265] Hope uses the emotionally appealing proverb that I discussed in chapter 1 to underline the 'solidity' of home and one's inability to change where it is located. Because you were born there, this is where your home is, even if you do not want to reside there. If you do protest, Hope tells me that Samaritan will blame you for being selfish: 'they say you have to go because they want to help your friends.'[266] More importantly, you do not want to deny your home! No matter how poor it might be or how much you do not want to live there, your home is your home. The girls also told me that staff members would sometimes

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260 Interview 29-05-2015.
261 Interview 19-03-2015.
262 Interview 29-05-2015.
263 Ibid.
264 Informal talks, but this was also extensively discussed during interviews with Omega (19-04-2015), Memory (15-03-2015), Hope (25-04-2015), Bridget (26-04-2015), Kumbukani (27-05-2015), Blessings (28-05-2015), Richard (27-05-2015) and Chisomo (22-05-2015).
265 'Your home is your home'. Interview 25-04-2015.
266 Ibid.

tease them about their homes, deeply insulting them, for instance, by saying, 'at your home there is no maize,' referencing extreme poverty.[267] When asking them directly, most of the girls would say they could not and would not want to oppose their reintegration. This was in order to honour and respect their homes, the place where they came from and where relatives reside. Omega, who has told me on numerous occasions about her fear of being reintegrated to 'her' village in the North where she escaped witchcraft and poverty, made it seem as if only others would refuse reintegration, but not her: 'I understand that for others, but me, I am not afraid.'[268] Bridget and Hope told me the same, even though they would all express their worries during informal talks.

This ambivalence was also present in Memory's story. First, she had told me that she ran away from her home in the south because her twin sister just got married and she feared that she would be next.[269] This fear is understandable, when considering that girls in Malawi have a big chance of getting married before they turn 18.[270] Memory was only 14 years old at the time and really wanted to finish school.[271] In addition to her refusal to marry, she then also became a victim of witchcraft attacks. This is why she decided to go to town to find money for school fees. During her first years at Samaritan she felt much safer there than at home. But towards the end of our talk, her story changed and she told me that she no longer feels safe at Samaritan. She is afraid to be reintegrated without having finished her secondary school and she feels that Samaritan's staff is working towards this by blaming her for strange things that have been happening lately. Although Memory does not put it like that in her own words, I sense that she was talking about witchcraft here. A month after our interview, Memory wanted to talk to me in private and she told me that she will be reintegrated in June, after having taken her examinations for form 2.[272] She is very unhappy about this, but, at the same time, she refuses to express this to the staff. She does not want them to think that she is afraid to go home, because her home is good and her family loves

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267 'Kwanu kulibe chimanga.' (Field notes 12-04-2015).

268 Interview 19-04-2015.

269 Interview 15-03-2015.

270 http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/malawi/ (last accessed 29-12-2015) http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/9/malawi-chief-annuls-330-child-marriages (last accessed 29-12-2015) https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/17/malawi-new-marriage-law-can-change-lives (last accessed 29-12-2015). Statistics show a 50 per cent chance of girls marrying before they turn 18, but we must not forget the questionable nature of statistics (cf. Jerven 2013).

271 From numerous informal conversations, I also deduce that Memory is not sexually attracted to men - but this goes beyond the scope of this thesis.

272 Field notes 19-04-2015.

her.[273] This ambivalence about home as a place to escape from and escape to thus seems to be further exacerbated by Samaritan's reintegration practices.

Fluid Tensions, Solid Homes?

The ways in which the girls live together at Samaritan refers to the tension that is inherent in home, as discussed in the second chapter of this thesis. On the one hand, the girls are expected to be open and to welcome new arrivals; girls like themselves who have been 'rescued from the streets.'[274] On the other hand, they are also trying to protect their place in the institution, their bed, their clothes and their possessions. At the same time, they also endorse Levinas' viewpoint of home as 'the ethical necessity of welcoming strangers' in a 'place where wanderers find refuge' (Gauthier 2011: 11). Sometimes, the latter is more pronounced in narrative than in practice, but I also saw three girls arriving at Samaritan during the period of my fieldwork and all of them managed to settle in rather quickly. Omega once told me: 'I was helped, I want for my friends to be helped too.'[275] Although living together with different girls coming and going, never knowing how long you will stay together, can be stressful, they all accepted that this is the way life at Samaritan is. At the same time, during arguments and fights, the more Heidegerrian idea of home would emerge: some girls believed they had more right to reside at Samaritan than others. This also became clear in Omega's talk, because she also stated that at Samaritan 'they are used to the fact that the children come, but the girls will not stay long because they are used to other things. So me, I want to show them that I'm not going to shame them. I want to do well.'

With this remark, she points at the difference between the girls who have resided on the streets for a prolonged period and those who have not. Girls that resided on the streets are more prone to running away, either to return to the streets, to the home situation they fled from or to marry and start living with a boyfriend or husband (cf. Barker, Knaul, Cassaniga & Schrader 2000). Samaritan's staff is also convinced of this, which is why they are so strict about not having boyfriends and about remaining within the hostel's ground. But this does not make creating a home for oneself on these hostel grounds any easier: everything is directed towards not feeling at home there, so that voluntary reintegration will be easier. And although the girls engage

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273 Interview 15-03-2015.
274 Interview Evance (26-02-2015), Christina (19-03-2015).
275 Interview 19-04-2015.

in home-making practices – as discussed in the first section of this chapter – none of them mentioned Samaritan as their home; even if they had lived there already for more than five years.[276] Home, in that sense, seemed rather 'solid' and unchangeable.

Knowing that their stay at Samaritan is temporary and feeling that they do not want to deny or renounce their roots, the youth at Samaritan thus find themselves in a difficult position. On the one hand, they have left the place they call home because they do not want to reside there; on the other hand, they know that residing at Samaritan provides only temporary relief. And it is not relief that comes easily: it comes with its own hurdles and challenges. Some of the dark sides of home that they escaped from can be found in their temporary residence as well. The latter explains why not all street children and youth who can be found on the streets of Blantyre wish to reside at Samaritan – regardless of whether Samaritan has the capacity to host them (cf. Van Blerk 2005). The relations with staff members are tense, but this also holds true for the relations among the youth. The relations with their family tend to be experienced as less tense during their stay at Samaritan, but, before long holidays, this tension easily returns.

When it comes to their identity and belonging, the girls thus find themselves in an uncomfortable limbo. At Samaritan, they are perceived as children, even though they might be well into their twenties and have headed families before, and they are seen as exhibiting or having exhibited immoral behaviour. They do not belong at the institution and do not feel like they want to spend a lot of time there. At the same time, they do not have another place to go to. They do belong to their homes, of which they are very proud, but they also left these intentionally to escape maltreatment, poverty or witchcraft accusations. Making themselves at home thus seems very much connected to movement: they left their 'roots' intentionally and are 'en route', looking for a better life (cf. Clifford 1997). But, whenever these roots are questioned or become more fluid, for example because of their long absence from this place, the girls attempt to solidify them by talking about home with pride and joy; (temporarily) ignoring the dark sides. Apparently, the ultimate dark side of home means to have no home to claim at all; to be (seen as) homeless (cf. Bauman 2015 [2004]; Blunt & Dowling 2006: 126–130; Geschiere 2009: 38). While having 'escaped' home, it remains of the utmost importance to still 'have' that home. Even if one does not want to reside there (now). Home

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276 This also emerged during my interviews with the boys who formerly resided at Samaritan. The idea of someone mentioning Samaritan as their home seemed laughable to them.

figures thus both as a place to escape from, but also as a potential place to escape to. What it is that needs escaping from or to changes continuously, which explains why solidifying home is problematic and at the same time beneficial. In the next chapter, I elaborate on how these 'liquid collisions' create both problems and possibilities for (former) street youth.

In this chapter, I have explained the home-making practices of the girls' at the Samaritan Trust – how they try to make themselves at home in an institution that is geared towards taking them home: reintegration. I then discussed the dark sides of both the homes they left and of the institution in which they temporarily reside. The strong group hierarchy and the constant threat of being sent home appear to create the need to solidify home as a place that one can always escape to, even though one attempts to escape from it at the same time as well. These attempts to solidify home assist in coping with life in liquid modernity while simultaneously creating problems. It is to these 'liquid collisions' that I devote the next chapter.

Photo 10
House drawing by Eve (10). When she grows up, she wants to live in a house of plenty.

7 **Liquid Collisions**

'You can't go home again.'

(Wolfe in Jackson 1995: 4)

In this chapter, I elaborate on 'liquid collisions': the problems that arise when solidifying home in an attempt to cope with life in liquid modernity. I describe several home visits that I went on with (former) street youth, to demonstrate how their stories about home collide with lived reality, especially when coming (back) to this home. In the first part, I discuss how, paradoxically, when under pressure, (former) street youth attempt to solidify home, sometimes in line with but sometimes also challenging the grand narrative. In the second section, I show how, in practice, home remains fluid, which situates these 'liquid collisions' between ever-changing stories, practices and home places. In the final section, I underline the dangers of solidifying home in policies designed to assist (former) street youth.

Solidifying Home

In practice, things often turn out differently than they were envisioned or meant to be and the reintegration process is no exception. The fluidity of practice, like the fluidity of funding that I described in chapter 4, plays an important role here. Despite good intentions, it often happens that a child is reintegrated by an unqualified staff member. Christina, the director, told me: 'they may not have the, because of education, they may not know actually why we ask those things.'[277] With 'those things' she refers to the questions one asks when doing a home visit in an attempt to analyse whether the situation is safe enough for the child to be reintegrated. Having unqualified staff do this is, of course, extremely problematic and potentially puts children and youth at risk. The risk of wrongly assessing a home situation is always present, but it can be reduced by working with qualified staff. Christina acknowledges this, but sees no other option due to financial constraints. These constraints are severe and often also the cause for doing less than the intended three home visits: there is hardly any money for fuel or transport.[278] The same ar-

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277 Interview Christina, director, 19-03-2015.
278 Interviews 19-03-2015, 30-03-2015.

gument goes for not sending children home during the holidays: 'if you look at the cost benefit, sometimes we are forced to keep children, who want to go home, because of the cost associated with them going home for two, three weeks.'[279] When it comes to rekindling relationships with their relatives, the effects of these money shortages for the children and youth are detrimental. In most cases, deviations from the 'standard' reintegration procedure are thus caused or exacerbated by money problems, which underlines the intimate connection between the fluidity of practice and the fluidity of funding.

An example of a reintegration that did not happen the way it was supposed to, in this case due to money issues, is the first time Kumbukani was reintegrated. Kumbukani's history is riddled with maltreatment and hunger, but also with movement and resourcefulness.[280] His first reintegration took place in April 2008, when the children and youth at Samaritan, accompanied by me, were taken to Liwonde National Park. On the way back, we passed the turn-off close to Kumbukani's home area. Social worker Bande,[281] who realized that this meant a 'free ride' for a reintegration, had instructed the staff members where to drop Kumbukani and, so it happened that, after a day of fun and looking for elephants, all of us went on our way back to the shelter but Kumbukani was dropped by the side of the road to go home. He vividly remembers this day:

> I went by myself. I reached [the village]. I just walked. It's close. I stayed there [in the village] and studied in standard five. But then people started to be not nice to me again. They said Samaritan had told them that they would help them to take care of me, but Samaritan never came back again. They had left a phone number that we called but they kept telling us "ah, we will come, we will come"- but they never came. So I ran away again. But I didn't want to be in the streets again like before. So I went straight to Samaritan. I was going to tell them that it didn't work out and that I wanted to go to school. […] I met with Bande, but then he told me face to face 'iweyo, ti-nathana nawe'[282]. You see, they were already finished with me.[283]

Being dropped with a bag of clothes and left to find your way home. This is not how a reintegration is supposed to take place and if it does happen like

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279 Interview Christina, director, 30-03-2015.
280 As described in the introduction and chapter 5, I will not dwell on the dark sides of home here.
281 Bande was fired several years ago.
282 'you, with you we are finished.'
283 Interview 27-05-2015.

this, the chances are slim that children will actually remain in the place they were reintegrated to. As Kumbukani describes, he ran into problems, partly because of his sudden arrival back in the village. Had he come with a staff member, things might have turned out differently. It should be noted that Kumbukani was not always easy. Chisomo Children's Club had already reintegrated him once: 'they do an interview about your home, they record [it]. So I told them about Chikwawa. [The village where his aunt took him, as described in the introduction]. So they took me and they brought me to Chikwawa.'[284] But after a few weeks he ran away, again because of maltreatment. He spent some time in town, but then an employee from CCC found him. 'I didn't want to them to take me again, because they would maybe take me home again,' Kumbukani explains. At this point in his life, the streets seemed a better place to reside than his place of origin or any of the other places where he had been previously. He continued to make himself at home in town, but, at some point, he got tired of street life again.

'I was thinking where they could take me. I thought maybe they could drop me at my older brother's place, the one who had bought land in Zobwe. He came sometimes to Chikwawa to see me, but he never took me. But at that time he wasn't married yet.' Hoping for the best, Kumbukani decided to tell CCC that he had lied before and that his home was actually in Zobwe. CCC subsequently took him there, but they ended up simply driving around; 'I didn't know where his house was. I was just asking for Martin but people didn't know.' So CCC had to take him back to Blantyre. 'Then they asked me again where my home was. Ku mudzi kwanu ndi kuti? [specifically implying the rural link] So now I was thinking to tell them Zomba. But then again, it's not good there.'[285] Paradoxically, when put under pressure, Kumbukani appears to experience his home in Zomba as 'solid': he cannot refuse or deny that this is where his 'real' home is, despite the fact that he does not want to reside there. In the end, Kumbukani decided not to tell them, but they kept asking. 'They asked me again because they wanted to know where my real village was.'[286] 'I told them kwa Pahlua, Balaka. So they took me there.' This village near Balaka was the place where his aunt nursed him back to life after his mother had died while giving birth to him.

What becomes clear from the above is that Kumbukani, having lived and grown up in different places, was attempting to use each of these as a home

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284 Interview 27-05-2015.
285 Ibid. See also the interview with Evance, social worker, 26-02-2015.
286 'Ku mudzi kwanu kwenikweni ndi kuti'? The word 'real' is stressed here. Interview 27-05-2015.

in order not to have to return to his point of origin: the village in Zomba. When asked, he kept changing where his home was in an attempt to settle in the place where life would be best, or at least better, for him. He stayed with his aunt for a while, but then her marriage ended and she was no longer able to take care of him. When he no longer received food he started begging; not long after, he decided to go back to the streets of Blantyre, since begging would be more lucrative there. After having lived on the streets for some months, Bande, the social worker who would later reintegrate him, took him to Samaritan. This was in 2002. Again, he took his time before telling them where his home was. Initially, he had refused to say anything out of fear that he would be sent back there and he ran away from Samaritan several times.[287] Subsequently, he directed Samaritan to different places in different provinces, either to long-forgotten or non-existent family members, before eventually telling them that his 'real' home was in Zomba. So, despite the fluidity of 'home' in his past and present lived reality, he ultimately locates his 'real' home in Zomba. It thus seems that, paradoxically, the grand narrative about home becomes solid, not liquid, under pressure.

Solidifying the Grand Narrative

When social workers ask street children and youth about their home, they do so in a specific way, because they expect a specific answer. They ask 'kwanu ndi kuti', which refers to home by implying a rural link, sometimes, but not always, followed by 'mumakhala kuti': where do you stay? Needless to say, the answers to these questions might differ. This is also exemplified by Christina's comment, when she realized that not all children locate their homes in villages: 'maybe it's in Mbayani, maybe it's not even in a village' (my emphasis).[288] The number of children at Samaritan that actually came from villages and did not move to the streets from an urban base in the slums is relatively low.[289] For them, the above described solidification of the grand narrative about home also takes place when put under pressure, but the fluidity of their everyday experiences remains prominent throughout this process. They ac-

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287 Interview 27-05-2015.
288 Mbayani is one of the big townships close to Blantyre's city center. Interview 19-03-2015.
289 Interview Evance 26-02-2015.

knowledge the narrative and adhere to it, but, in practice, they choose to live in town.

In town, the fluidity of the material reality of home plays a big role, as I mentioned in chapter 2, since the (former) street youth then mention an urban area as their home, notwithstanding that they regularly change houses within it. Fluidity thus plays a very prominent role in their home-making practices (cf. Van Blerk & Ansell 2006). This is easier when they have relatives residing in town, which warrants reintegrating them in an urban area, instead of in their 'real' home. But despite this desire to live in town, they often reiterate the grand narrative in stating that their 'real' home is in a rural area. These constant yet continuously changing attempts to solidify home are what I call 'liquid collisions'. Collisions, because irreconcilable stories and/or practices meet; liquid because these collisions are not 'the end': what collided is liquid and therefore flows on, also after the collision.[290] It can collide again.

Take Felix, now 22 years old. His mother used to stay in Mbayani, but she hails from a village in Chikwawa. Although born in town, he later lived in this village until he was 12. Then, he fell ill and the traditional medicine in the village could not cure him, which is why his mother came to the village and took him to town.[291] He had been asking her to do so for a long time, because, after his grandmother had died, 'my grandfather found a new wife, but this new one was a witch.'[292] She made life hard for him and escaping to town, where his mother resided, had seemed like a good idea to him for quite some time. After he recovered from his sickness, he remained in Mbayani with his mother. But it did not take long before he started going to town to find money for food. Felix: 'when I went to town to beg, I was just small. Then Samaritan took me.'[293] He stayed for a while, but it was hard for him, 'because I used to love money too much.' When Samaritan wanted to reintegrate him, he told them that his mother lived in Mbayani – he did not want to go back to his home village because of the witchcraft. Felix thus refused to adhere to the grand narrative by not solidifying his home in the village, but rather fixing it in Mbayani – an urban area. Samaritan reintegrated him in Mbayani, where his mother agreed to take him in. But it was not long before he went back to the streets, but this time he was too old to beg, so instead he did piece-

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290 A 'solid collision' would mark an end, with extremely radical or far-reaching consequences, which is not how (former) street youth experience these collisions.
291 Field notes 08-04-2015.
292 Ibid.
293 Ibid.

work.[294] He also found Kumbukani there and they started working together. Up until today, he has never been back to the village, but, when asked, he still does sometimes refer to it as home. Home is thus fluid in practice and can be located somewhere along a person's route through life, but the roots, as constructed in the grand narrative about home, remain important (cf. Clifford 1997; Englund 2002a, b).

When I ask Felix if he would go to his rural home if he had the money for travel costs and presents for his relatives, he refuses. 'I will not go to the village because my grandfather died now, the one who loved us. There are some aunts but they are bad. I won't live there anymore.' His refusal to go back appears connected to the dark sides of home; a fear of witchcraft, which is commonly associated with home villages (cf. Geschiere 2013). 'The village and it's emotional intimacy may, at least in some respects, become an almost virtual reality to many Cameroonians in the city, but it is still deeply engraved in witchcraft visions' (Geschiere 2013: 22). The same appears to be the case in Malawi. Felix refers to the village as his home and remembers the relations he has there. He identifies as someone from Chikwawa, but he refuses to live there. Life in town is better, he tells me.[295] The grand narrative and his home are thus thought of as solid, even though his lifestyle and choices exemplify fluidity; constant movement in search of money and the best deal. At times, the grand narrative collides with what he does in lived reality, creating a liquid collision.

Felix's nephew, Richard, also resided in Mbayani with his mother. In fact, Felix's mother had called her sister to come and join her in town (cf. Potts 1995). He says he was a difficult child.[296] He wanted to go to school, but there was not much food in the house. He would only eat once a day, which is why he decided to start going to town and find money there. Samaritan found him one day when he was waiting for Felix. Bande, the same social worker that had taken Kumbukani, asked Richard (eight years old at the time) what he was doing in town. 'So I said my mother beats me, she is mean to me, that's why I went to town. They thought I was saying the truth, but I knew that I was the one who was being difficult, I was lying.'[297] His mother did beat him regularly, but this was because he refused to go to school and went to town instead, Richard explains. He was not an easy child and enjoyed going his own way – something that goes for more of the (former) street youth (cf. Apt-

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294 Ibid.
295 Ibid.; interview 28-05-2015.
296 Interview 27-05-2015.
297 Ibid.

ekar & Stoecklin 2014). Unfortunately, while Richard was at Samaritan, his mother passed away due to an unknown illness. This is why, when Samaritan asked him where he is from, he decided to say that he is from Mbayani: he does not want to go to the village his mother left to escape poverty and give him a better life (cf. Englund 2002a; Potts 1995).[298] Focusing on his mother's routes more than his mother's roots, he thus chooses not to adhere to the grand narrative about home.

In 2011, when Samaritan's two centres merged, Richard was reintegrated and taken to Felix's mother. 'They hadn't seen the place. But they just told me that now they had to reintegrate me. So I just said, ok, that's possible. I agreed. If I would have said that it wasn't possible, they still would have reintegrated me.'[299] He was accompanied to Mbayani where the social worker explained to Felix's mother that Richard had spent long enough at Samaritan and that it was time for him to return home. She agreed to take him in, but after a short period of time she refused to let him go to school. She needed his help with her business. Felix, having been reintegrated before Richard, had already moved back to the streets because of this and the lack of food in the house. Not long after his reintegration, Richard decided to do the same. But having spent some time on the streets again, he realized that this was not the life he wanted. He wanted to go to school and, because his grandfather was a teacher, he thought that by going to the village and residing there, he would be able to do so.[300] He received the money for transport from Felix's mother after helping her at the market for a day. So, when things were not working out for him in town, Richard was happy to have the village to return to and claim as his home (cf. Englund 2001, 2002a, b; McCracken 2013 [2012]: 233; Potts 1995).

While averting his eyes, Richard tells me that he got lost on his way home because it had been such a long time since he had been there. He felt very bad about this, because one is supposed to never forget how to reach home. But Richard 'only knew the name of the village' that he was going to.[301] Pragmatically, he had made use of the grand narrative to locate his home in the rural village where his mother was born, but now he was in trouble for not knowing exactly where it was. He eventually reached it because two women passing on foot recognized him, because he looks like his mother, while he was standing at the stage where the minibus had dropped him. When

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298 Ibid.
299 Ibid.
300 Ibid.
301 Interview 27-05-2015.

he reached his grandfather's house safely he was welcomed and able to stay there. But he was not used to the behaviour in his home village. He struggled speaking Chisena,[302] which is the language that is spoken there. He also did not know that when passing somewhere, 'you are supposed to greet people. You give them respect. But I would just walk past.'[303] Then, the other people in the village started telling his grandfather: 'his grandchild, me, the one who came from town, teach him our behavior, he is not giving us respect.'[304] So despite having reached what he had chosen, following the grand narrative, to call his home, Richard did not manage to become at home there (cf. Clifford 1997; Yuval-Davis 2006). He was experiencing a liquid collision: his stories and practices collided and when he attempted to solidify them, by saying that, after all, his 'real' home was in the village, it turned out not to be so. Despite changing his habits, the two years he spent there were tough, he tells me.[305]

When his step-grandmother started insisting that he work the land, he pretended that he did not know how to: 'I can't work the land, I come from town, right.'[306] But she did not believe him. Over time, his conflicts with his grandfather's new wife became too much and he decided to go back to town because he did not want to be responsible for their divorce. He would try his luck in town because he wanted money and also, he knew that his nephew Felix and his old friends from Samaritan were still around there. And he knew that if things did not work out for him in town, he could always return to the village (cf. Englund 2002b; Potts 1995).[307] Having the 'certainty' that your home is in one fixed spot, paradoxically seems to enable the movements of these (former) street youth when they (rather fearlessly) search for opportunities to improve their lives (cf. Clifford 1997). And they all believe that staying in town will enable them to live this better life, even if this means (temporarily) living on the streets. Some attempt to solidify their home in town, but this does not mean that, at other times, they do not also adhere to the grand narrative arguing that their 'real' home is in a village. This fluidity and the simultaneous paradoxical effect of solidification under pressure is what makes home such an intriguing concept (cf. Geschiere 2013; Jackson 1995). In the next section, I describe what happened when I visited the homes that (former) street youth had narrated to me. Home's elusive and illusive dimension

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302 A bantu language spoken by Sena people.
303 Interview 27-05-2015.
304 Ibid.
305 Ibid.
306 Ibid.
307 Ibid.

and the liquid collisions that the solidification of home create, emerge (cf. Geschiere 2013).

Visiting Storied Homes

So, when put under pressure, the grand narrative of home solidifies not just in policy – as discussed in chapter 4 – but also in practice and in the views (former) street youth. Their stories about their 'real' home intrigued me, so I decided to ask if we could go to visit these homes. Some of their stories were so idyllic that one wondered why some of them had ever left these places: home as illusive, more than elusive. That said, I would argue that it had probably become illusive because of its being elusive: after the hardships they had to endure on the streets and in town, home might have started to seem more appealing. However, upon arrival, it often quickly became clear why living at home was not really an option for these youth (anymore) in reality.[308] The first visit I went on was to Kumbukani's home. He was anxious to go because he did not know how great the damage was that recent floods had caused and whether his (distant) relatives where alright. Last time I went to his home (in 2012, 2013), we went with the entire group of former street boys that he is now staying with, and we did the same on this occasion.[309] The following story is a (rather long) excerpt of our experiences that day, based on my field notes.[310]

Do you remember the turn-off?' Kumbukani asks me. I'm afraid I have to disappoint him. Although I have visited his home before, I wouldn't be able to find it without him giving us directions. And this time it turns out to be even more difficult because the floods have swept away most of the smaller dirt roads that we would normally have used to reach the place. We pass groups of little huts while we zigzag through the fields. The maize looks bad. We all see it. 'Stunted growth', David says – a term they learn in school. Then suddenly the road ends. We can't move forward because ahead lies a huge swamp and on either side of the road we see little streams of water gently flowing into the bush. We reverse and Kumbukani struggles to remember which way to go. The other boys immediately react: 'he forgot his home, he forgot his home!' It takes only seconds for Kumbukani to become very angry.

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308 This happens often in migration and has been explored extensively in, for example, literature on diasporas (cf. Adichie 2014; Anyidoho 2011; Clifford 1997; Geschiere 2009; Jackson 2000, 2008; Mallet 2004; Nowicka 2007; Sinatti 2009; Woods 2015).
309 In total, we were nine people, excluding the minibus driver and conductor.
310 Field notes 06-04-2015.

He swears at the others while he hits the loudest, David, with his fist. He refuses to talk to any of them until we have parked our minibus and decide to walk the last few meters. People have started to come out of their houses, because they heard the noise of a car. When they see me, they come running to shake my hand but they seem at a loss as to why I am here. Some mumble that I might be part of the people who come to bring relief aid after the floods, but unfortunately for them, I am not.[311] Kumbukani walks in front, but people don't seem to recognize him. He doesn't pay much attention to them either, because he is trying to find the shortest route to his relatives' houses. Then a woman standing in the curve of a dirt road says 'Kumbukani, is that you?' She looks as if she is seeing a ghost. She hesitates, but when he smiles and nods, she runs towards him for a hug. 'We wondered whether he was still alive', she later tells me. We sit down on the mphasa[312] that they spread out under a tree and we chat with the family and the people that come to see us for the next three hours. Kumbukani has disappeared almost immediately after I sat down but not before he could whisper in my ear 'I'm quickly going to Jamaica'. A euphemism for smoking weed. He is nervous and we don't see him for at least an hour. We are left sitting under a tree, answering questions posed by his family: did he pass the form 4 exam? What kind of job does he have? Is he working with computers? Will he buy a car soon? I had promised Kumbukani to say as little as possible, but I can't help but feel bad when thinking about him searching for cartons and cardboard boxes on the streets of Blantyre. His life is nothing like his relatives are imagining. In the meantime, Chisomo is complaining that Kumbukani is not behaving as if we are in his home, leaving us all by ourselves. He is supposed to introduce us to people and show us around! Out of sheer boredom, some of the other boys leave to go to Jamaica as well – either to find Kumbukani or to smoke some themselves. When Kumbukani finally returns, looking calmer, he is leading the way for a very old lady; his grandmother, the only immediate family he still has. They shake hands, she greets me and then the other boys, receives some soap and sugar from Kumbukani and then makes her way back to her hut, a little further down the dirt road. The people sitting next to me are talking, but I don't understand what they say. Here they speak Chiyao – Kumbukani understands it, but he has lost most of his ability to speak. The other inhabitants from the village that come to greet us all emphasize how proud they are that one of them has made it in town. Kumbukani walks around and can't sit still, he clearly feels more uncomfortable

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311 We did bring relief items for Kumbukani's family who promised to share these with the other families.
312 A thatched mat.

by the minute and starts signaling that he wants to leave. But we have to wait patiently for the nsima (which we brought) to be cooked. I have never seen Kumbukani more exuberant than in the 1,5 hour we spent together in the minibus on our way back to town. He seems extremely relieved and I can't help but wonder whether he is feeling disappointed. It must hurt to be hardly recognized in the place you call home…

After this home visit, I felt bad. As if I had put Kumbukani in a position that he did not want to be in. It must have been difficult to realize that, although in his mind his rural home is a place he can always return to, in reality, his relatives thought him dead and hardly recognized him. But when I asked him about it, he said he was very happy that we went. Now he would not have to go again anytime soon. They have seen him, they know he is still alive, they have received their gifts and they think he is doing well – that is all he want-ed out of this visit.[313] Kumbukani: 'what I see in my life, it is better to stay in town. But in the village is my home. We can say mthengo mudalaka njoka, kwanu ndi kwanu. So I'll go there. I'll build there. It's my home' (cf. Sinatti 2009).[314] He used the proverb that I elaborated on in chapter 1 to explain his feelings of home to me. Although they had mistreated him in the past and although he has not spent much time there, it is his home. It is where he originated, where he was born, where he started his route through life (cf. Clifford 1997). His wish to build there and show people that he is doing well, is strongly linked to his sense of pride: 'they are bad people. But, at home people will come to know that I am a good person. Because I don't do bad things for people.'[315] He wants them to know that, although when he was born nobody wanted to take care of him, he will honour his roots and prove them wrong. He will be successful in town and that will make him successful in his village, his home (cf. Englund 2002b).[316]

I admire what he told me; at the same time, I want to check with the other boys whether maybe my interpretation of the estrangement he seemed to feel on reaching his home was too strong. I ask David about the incident in the minibus where Kumbukani hit him because he accused him of having for-gotten his home. Before David can answer, Felix tells me 'we just teased him, he didn't forget where he is from'. David agrees: 'you can't forget your home

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313 Field notes 08-04-2015.
314 Interview 27-05-2015.
315 Ibid.
316 According to Geschiere, the 'unjust redistribution' of wealth has led to the creation of 'un-precedented forms of inequality,' which helps to explain the ever salient power of witchcraft in the present day (2013: xxiii, 212).

my friend, you always remember.'[317] They also did not agree with Chisomo's comment that Kumbukani did not act as if he was home. Felix: 'he just wanted people to know he was there.' David: 'that's important. They have to know. People in the village, they believe in witchcraft. So if you go to the village without letting your grandmother know, she can't see you and that will be very bad. So he did very well. She needs to know he is alive' (cf. Geschiere 2009, 2013).[318] I still wonder whether Kumbukani's idea of having a home in the village is a rather illusive one. If people do not remember or know him, how is it possible to have his claim of belonging – his home – recognized? How would he be able to claim land? Despite his attempts to pinpoint it on a map and solidify it, in practice it turns out that home is much more elusive and fluid: a field of tensions that have to be engaged with, which at times results in liquid collisions.

Kumbukani is a special character. And his history is certainly more troublesome than the history of most of the other (former) street youth that I spent time with. Considering that his reintegration took place years ago by people that no longer work at Samaritan Trust, I want to narrate another home-visit that I went on. On 22 June 2015, I received a phone call from an unknown number. When I answered the call it turned out to be from Memory; she was in town. She told me that she has been reintegrated last week, but that she was not going to stay in the village. We spoke briefly and she told me that she was staying at a friend's place in town until she figured out what to do. We agreed to meet soon, but then her battery died. Over the next few days I kept trying to call the number, but she never answered. I went to Samaritan and asked Christina whether Memory had been reintegrated and, if so, by whom. She said she would check and minutes later she told me that no reintegration report had been made.[319] It was also unclear who had gone with her, if anyone had gone with her at all. She added that Memory was 23 and therefore already too old to reside at Samaritan.[320] Clearly, to her, the case was closed.

Over the phone, Memory had already told me that she had simply received the money for transport and had been sent on her way. Apparently, reintegration practices have not changed that much in seven years. A few days later, I met up with her at Afro Lounge; she was cheerful as ever, but worried too. She had been staying in town with a friend, but was now going to return to the village because her friend, a woman who hailed from the same village,

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317 Field notes 08-04-2015.
318 Field notes 08-04-2015.
319 Field notes 25-06-2015.
320 Ibid.

had four children so she could not stay there long.[321] I agreed to come to her village the week after and we stayed in touch over the phone. The results of her Form 2 exam had not come in yet, so it was still unclear whether she passed. If she passed, Samaritan might be able to find a sponsor for her so she would be able to go to boarding school to finish the remaining two years.[322] 'Don't worry,' she told me over the phone. 'As long as there is a chance for me to finish secondary school, my mother won't make me marry someone here.' I could only hope that she was right.

When I saw her a few days later she looked very different from the girl I had got to know at Samaritan. She always used to wear caps, hoodies and trousers, but now she was wearing a skirt and a chitenji, the cloth that women wear over their skirts. She looks tanned. 'I look like a villager now right?' she said, smiling, while I tried to jump elegantly off the bicycle taxi that had taken me the last few kilometres to her home.[323] I met her mother and twin sister, who looks exactly like her. Except for the fact that she is more tanned, skinnier, married and also mother of a three year old. During the visit, Memory was busy in the kitchen cooking lunch (for which I brought items). I chatted with her mother about the importance of school and she said she is proud of her daughter for having overcome so many challenges while trying to pursue her education; at home this was simply impossible.[324] It was not clear to me whether her mother knew where Memory had been residing and how she ended up at Samaritan, but I did not want to ask anything about it, because so many other people from the village had also come to listen to our conversation. We were sitting outside on a mphasa under a nice tree and in full view of one of the houses on the family's plot, which had collapsed during recent floods. Chickens were playing with the thatched roof, eating the insects crawling on it. When we had finished our nsima, Memory took me to their garden. We walked through the village until we reached a field full of beans and cassava. She filled a plastic bag for me with freshly harvested cassava and then walked me back to the hut where she was staying. She shares a bedroom with her mother and a younger sister. She was doing OK, but she

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321 Field notes 01-07-2015.
322 Field notes 25-06-2015.
323 Field notes 09-07-2015.
324 Ibid.

did not want to stay: 'I want to move forward in life, improve,' she says. But for now she feels stuck.

At Home

In Memory's narrative, much the same as in Kumbukani's story, home becomes solidified under pressure. Although they have both resided in many different places, including the streets, having left their home to escape maltreatment, witchcraft or early marriage, their story and sense of belonging centres around their village home (cf. Geschiere 2009). It appears to be a spindle – the pivot point, from, to and in relation to which they coordinate their movements while striving to make their dreams come true (cf. Clifford 1997; Geschiere 2013). In practice, for Memory, her immediate family is still living there and she knows that she will have a warm place to stay – even though, if she stays too long, she might be forced to marry. For Kumbukani, this is different, since he hardly has any immediate family left and he never lived at his home for a prolonged period of time. Both of them, however, maintain the grand narrative and solidify it in their stories. Felix and Richard, who have the possibility of claiming a home in town, in Mbayani, also solidified home in the village, but their home claims were more fluid. All of them also maintain that they see a future for themselves in town. Kumbukani wants to find a lot of money, for example by becoming a driver.[325] Then he will marry and live a happy life in town. Memory wants to become a nurse and bring children from her relatives who are growing up in the village to town, so they can go to good schools and she can take care of them.[326]

In our fluid modern times, home, in all its elusiveness – coupled with illusiveness – seems to constantly demand dealing with tensions, such as the tension between Heidegger's focus on place and Levinas' ethical imperative of open dwelling and welcoming strangers (cf. Gauthier 2011; Jackson 1995). These tendencies are both part of the notion of home and emerge, in particular, when home claims are constantly challenged, as in the case of (former) street youth. Using them as a binary opposition would obscure the pragmatic ways of dealing with their intricate entanglement, which is where home in our fluid modern times appears to derive its appeal from. Instead of trying to define what 'home' is or is not, I have attempted to show how (former) street youth use this notion in their stories and daily lives (cf. Geschiere 2013). Although

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325 Interview 27-05-2015.
326 Interview 15-03-2015. Field notes 08-03-2015.

their use becomes solidified under pressure from rules and regulations and dealings with NGOs, in daily practices thinking and doing home is much more fluid. This creates liquid collisions where different flows collide, and then continue flowing. Coming to an understanding of this process and these liquid collisions, could then lead to improvements in home-based care guided policies and practices, which is what I delve into below.

Liquid Collisions

I started this chapter with a quote by Thomas Wolfe stating 'you can't go home again.' This is the title of his novel that was published (posthumously) in 1940. It captures what I remember thinking after I had visited the places where (former) street youth locate their homes. Kumbukani no longer fits in his home, he does not feel at ease there and he would never be able to or – more importantly – want to live there. In a less extreme way, the same goes for Memory. She left her home to escape marriage, witchcraft and poverty, and it seems unlikely that she will be able to reside there if she remains unmarried. Wolfe's statement becomes even more convincing when looking at it from a more philosophical point of view. In the denouement of the story in the book, Wolfe wrote: 'You can't go back home to your family, back home to your childhood… back home to a young man's dreams of glory and fame… back home to places in the country, back home to the old forms and systems of things which once seemed everlasting but which are changing all the time – back home to the escapes of Time and Memory.'[327] In my opinion, this quote captures what Zygmunt Bauman meant to express when he coined the term 'liquid modernity' and some of the consequences that this has for the homes and life worlds of (former) street youth (cf. 2012 [2000], 2015 [2003], 2015 [2004]). Everything is constantly changing, including ourselves, which means that – as an even older wise man said – 'you could not step twice into the same river.'[328] Both you and the river would have changed.

(Former) street youth do go back to the place they call home; at the same time, they do not. In their absence, their home has changed and so have they. If they 'return', they become emplaced anew, which creates, and in some cases even demands, new ways of thinking and acting while at home (cf. Englund 2002a). Going back to the same geographical place is still possible, but

327 https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Thomas_Wolfe (last accessed 13-12-2015) and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/You_Can%27t_Go_Home_Again (last accessed 13-12-2015).
328 https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Heraclitus Heraclitus (last accessed 13-12-2015).

the place itself is entangled in your own emplacement in it and thus it has changed (Englund 2002a). Emplacement is a term coined by Harri Englund who explains it as an approach 'that discloses ethnographic subjects as situated in specific historical conditions that are as much embodied as they are discursively imagined' (Englund 2002a: 263). The link between this embodiment and discursive imagination shapes both place and home-making practices; a continuous process and often a struggle. In liquid modernity, everything and everyone is constantly changing and on the move, which makes the 'emplacement' of flows and our fluid selves an important everyday exercise (Bauman 2015 [2003], 2015 [2004]). In that sense, Wolfe's statement 'you can't go home again' could also be read as a statement towards institutions that attempt to regulate and define the notion of home in a narrow way, which allows them to use it as the basis for home-based care policies and practices.[329]

For many, youth Samaritan's policies do not work: many of them return to the streets. The reintegration programme, inspired on the home-based care ideology and legitimated by the grand narrative about home, is based on a narrow conceptualization of home, which I argue creates liquid collisions that potentially exacerbate existing inequalities, ultimately rendering access to urban space increasingly difficult for economically marginalized people such as (former) street youth. They are sent back to their 'real' homes, which are located in rural areas, effectively banning them from urban places. And while it seems that (former) street youth, albeit under pressure, often adhere to the grand narrative about home by solidifying this home in a rural area, they only do so in order to gather the courage to keep moving (cf. Clifford 1997). This is problematic for all involved.

For the government, adhering to the current programmes means that the 'problem' that they have with street children and youth will not be solved. The reintegration process might be implemented, it will not assist to 'remove' all street children and youth from the streets – in fact, most of them appear to decide to return, because the home they are reintegrated to is not a home where they want to or are able to reside (cf. Bauman 2015 [2004]). The funds that are used both for the 'street sweeping exercises' and for the reintegration programmes are thus spent to little avail. The same goes for the Samaritan Trust. They find themselves in a difficult situation where the high return rate of children and youth to the streets means that their programmes do not assist (enough) in achieving their goals; yet, their only chance to receive (more) funding is to adhere even more strictly to the home-based care discourse that

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329 Nation states do so in much the same way (Bauman 2015 [2004], cf. Kalir 2015).

is currently prevailing. The UN and international donors who now adhere to the buzzword of home-based care will, in time, probably also come to realize that, in contexts of extreme destitution, home-based care is not a particularly effective way of safeguarding children and youth's rights and lives.

I argue that in Blantyre, Malawi, the entanglement of the home-based care discourse with the grand narrative guiding home's conceptualization, has detrimental effects for the intended beneficiaries and exacerbates the existing inequalities. Youth who escape their homes to get away from the dark sides are forced to return to places they had good reasons to escape (cf. Blunt & Dowling 2006: 130). For those who escaped extreme destitution by turning to the streets, the reintegration process means a return to this same situation, because hardly any material support is provided to the home environment. Although most of the youth locate their home in rural villages, adhering to the grand narrative also means that those who have resided in town or peri-urban areas are returned to villages where they hardly spent any time. Like Kumbukani they might not even have immediate family left to care for them. By emphasizing that those who grow up in the city lose their roots and culture, access to urban space for the underprivileged is barred (cf. Bauman 2015 [2004]). Town is the place where they want to be in order to secure a viable livelihood, but their presence there is challenged by narrowly conceptualizing home as the rural village where one was born and should therefore return to in times of trouble. In an attempt to safeguard their place in this world, it seems that youth then join in the solidification of home, to at least have a starting point from where their routes through life can start (again) (cf. Clifford 1997).

In this chapter, I have described how the grand narrative of home tends, paradoxically, to be solidified under pressure. In practice, it remains a fluid and elusive field of tensions, but in stories it can become solid and fixed. These attempts to solidify home are part of the liquid collisions that take place, because people attempt to become at home in liquid modernity. In the last section, I explained why the articulation of the grand narrative of home with the home-based care discourse renders urban spaces less accessible for economically marginalized people. In the last chapter, I narrate how (former) street youth conceptualize and (discursively) imagine their future homes in an attempt to create a home for themselves in town.

8 Home is Where the Heart Goes

'In the sea of uncertainty,
one seeks salvation on little islands of safety'.

(Bauman 2015 [2003]: 28)

This chapter is about an alternative storyline that (former) street youth refer to when it comes to both their current and future home-making practices. In this story, finding a romantic partner, being in a love relationship and having a stable job are vital for their dream to create a home in town and not (re) turn to their rural homes. By telling this story, I aim to show that, although the grand narrative is very powerful, alternatives exist and articulate with it in complex ways. In the first section, I describe how the search for a romantic partner can be understood in terms of what Bauman calls 'liquid love'. By elaborating on the link between love and money, I show that for (former) street youth, becoming at home in the world appears to be intimately linked to finding a romantic partner to co-construct this urban home with.

Liquid Love

Whenever I asked the (former) street youth about their futures, all of them dwelled on the importance of finding a suitable partner to marry, build a house for and have children with – in town. To be able to search for this suitable partner, however, one also needs to have money.[330] This is an important, but also difficult hurdle to overcome. On the one hand, (former) street boys often have more money than their peers because they do not go to school and already work. On the other hand, this is often piecework and thus does not provide a steady flow of income or a respectable status (cf. Bauman 2015 [2004]: 10). For (former) street girls, finding someone who can financially support them is of the utmost importance if they want to remain in town and not return to their rural homes. At the same time, they have the reputation of needing a lot of money and being 'easy' to catch for (other) men, because

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330 See also this thought-provoking article by Kaler (2006) on how the elders she spoke to in rural Malawi see money and the monetarization of society as the reason for deteriorating gender relations, especially 'in the realms of marriage and sexuality'.

of their suspected past working as prostitutes.[331] These issues complicate the 'relationship market' for (former) street youth.

When talking about a relationship market, one already sees how capitalist terminology has seeped into the most intimate spheres of our personal relationships (Bauman 2015[2003]; cf. Hunter 2005).[332] In liquid modernity, where capital and its movements coupled with its need for labour shape and dictate our everyday lives in profound ways, it would be foolish to assume that these logics do not play a role in our love lives, or so Bauman argues in his book Liquid Love (2015 [2003], cf. 2012 [2000]). In his foreword, he sketches the dynamics that he attempts to address:

> This book's central characters are men and women, our contemporaries, despairing at being abandoned to their own wits and feeling easily disposable, yearning for the security of togetherness and for a helping hand to count on in a moment of trouble, and so desperate to 'relate'; yet wary of the state of 'being related' and particularly of being related 'for good', not to mention forever – since they fear that such a state may bring burdens and cause strains they neither feel able nor are willing to bear, and so may severely limit the freedom they need – yes, your guess is right – to relate […] (Ibid.: viii).

The tension Bauman addresses is that being in a relationship with one person and 'investing' (another metaphorical term) in it means that other, potentially better opportunities, cannot be seized. Choosing one person, means not choosing all the others. And in a time of fluidity and continuous change, making such a commitment becomes a difficult choice (2015 [2003]: 10). These deliberations play a role for both people in the relationship, hence Bauman's book's subtitle On the Frailty of Human Bonds. 'Being in a relationship means a lot of headaches, but above all perpetual uncertainty' (Ibid.: 14). What if the other person chooses a different partner? Or finds a better 'deal'? Then you could lose it all. This points at 'an unprecedented fluidity, fragility and in-built transience (the famed 'flexibility')[that has come to] mark all sorts of social bonds in our modern day and age' (Bauman 2015 [2003]: 91, cf. 2012 [2000]). The frailty of these human bonds means that creating and maintaining a relationship is, much like 'constructing a home', as discussed

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331 Which is certainly not true for all of them.
332 This is also common practice in the Netherlands, where people who have just broken up can be heard to say 'I'm back on the market' ('Ik ben weer op de markt'), meaning 'I am available again'.

in the introduction, as fragile as everything else in our liquid modern times – yet, we keep doing it.

Girls ready to meet up with friends during the weekend.

Looking at the lives of (former) street youth in Malawi, I find that their social position can best be explained when bringing Bauman's sketch of our current neoliberal system and the ways in which this impacts on our intimate lives, together with Alcinda Honwana's analysis of 'waithood' (2008).[333] According to her, waithood is 'a prolonged period of suspension between childhood and adulthood.'[334] This suspension has to do with the high costs of getting married, whether in bride price or in having to provide for two or more people besides yourself.[335] The problem then becomes that these youth, although old enough to get married, can simply not afford to become husbands or 'to form families and households.'[336] She argues that this also makes them 'unable to become fully independent and partake in the privileges and responsibilities of social adulthood,' which would give them social status in society.[337] The term 'waithood' thus implies a certain socio-economic position that many youth (not just in Malawi) currently find themselves in (cf. Bauman 2015 [2004]: 13). However, I agree with Hashemi that this does not mean that their lives simply consist of 'waiting'; we need to pay attention to 'the productive micro quests that youth engage in to resolve this uncertainty' (2015: 261). And, as the quote that I started this chapter with states: 'in the sea of uncertainty, one seeks salvation on little islands of safety' (Bauman 2015 [2003]: 28). A (temporary) stay at Samaritan can be seen as an island of safety, but (former) street youth also construct having a partner and being in a romantic rela-

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333 Article available at: http://www.iss.nl/fileadmin/ASSETS/iss/Documents/Academic_publications/2_honwana.pdf (last accessed 14-12-2015).

334 Text of the Lugard Lecture at the International African Institute, which Honwana gave in 2013. Available at: http://africanarguments.org/2013/08/12/youth-waithood-and-protest-movements-in-africa-by-alcinda-honwana/ (last accessed 14-12-2015).

335 Interview Felix 28-05-2015.

336 See footnote 332.

337 Ibid.

tionship as one of these islands – although one that is complicated by their socio-economic position.

Love and Money: Intimate and Intricate Entanglements

Love and the search for a romantic partner are hot items during everyday conversations with (former) street youth. I cannot count the number of chats I had about boyfriends, girlfriends and romantic futures together filled with joy, happiness, a house and many children around. But because I knew that the girls at Samaritan are not allowed to have boyfriends, this sometimes created interesting contrasts between their stories and actions. One day, when the girls were complaining about not being allowed to go to the market, walk around or meet with friends, I asked them why Samaritan does not allow them to do this (see photo 11 on the previous page). To my surprise, they were all quick to explain this to me. Bridget: 'if we are free and we are just walking around, we'll meet with boys on the road. Then those things will not be good.'[338] She looked at me intently, hoping that I would realize the seriousness of what she had just said. Hope: 'if I go home for two weeks holiday, I can meet up with men there. Maybe those men can make me pregnant.'[339] This anxiety concerning pregnancy and the 'quick step' made between being seen with a boy and 'being pregnant' also emerges in the story of Chikondi, one of the older girls who used to reside at Samaritan. After the holidays were over, she did not return to the hostel. Halfway through April, I inquired where she was, but none of the girls knew.[340] In May, they told me that Chikondi eventually came back, but had been sent away: the staff had found out that she had not spent her holidays at home, so there was no place for her at Samaritan. I thought this was rather harsh, but the girls told me that it was justified because Chikondi 'went her own way.'[341] She had been seen with men as well, so she might even be pregnant! How would Samaritan be able to take her back? There are two things about this story that I want to highlight. Firstly, it remains unclear whether the home that Chikondi was told to spend her holiday at, was a place where she herself also felt safe to reside. The girls could not agree whether Chikondi had spent her time with family in a nearby slum area or whether, following the grand narrative, she had been sent back to a village she had left when she was still a child. The latter she supposedly refused. This then means that not having been 'at home' in Samaritan's conceptualization

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338 Interview 26-04-2015.
339 Interview 25-04-2015.
340 Field notes 19-04-2015.
341 'Anayenda njira zake'. Field notes 23-05-2015.

of home, does not necessarily mean 'back on the streets' or finding oneself in unsafe places and spaces. In fact, Chikondi could have been at home, but one that Samaritan does not consider to be her home. Secondly, having been seen with men does not necessarily mean that one is sleeping with these men either. But people quickly draw this conclusion. This quick connection of boys/men and getting pregnant is also evident in Hope and Bridget's comments. Both of them present this as something that can take place suddenly without really being aware of it, let alone being able to prevent it. And although this thinking about girls and women as passive victims of male sexuality has long been trending in academia as well, research increasingly shows women's tactics and choices when it comes to (sexual) engagements (cf. Hunter 2005; Tamale 2011; Verheijen 2014). The entanglement of love and money, for economically marginalized populations such as (former) street youth, then only adds to the necessity of dealing with these romantic relationships in strategic ways.

When I asked them about love relationships directly, the girls would always convey that although a relationship just for love would be possible, it is common knowledge that your boyfriend shows you his love by buying you things (cf. Poulin 2007). This gift giving or receiving money is thus more than an economic transaction; it is deeply embedded in the courtship process and a sign of emotional commitment (Cole & Thomas 2009: 24; cf. Bhana 2015; Hunter 2005; Poulin 2007; Verheijen 2014: 9). In that sense, 'emotional attachments as well as economic relations shape intimacy in Africa, as elsewhere in the world' (Cole & Thomas 2009: 24; cf. Hunter 2005: 272). It would now be easy to assume, based on the Malawian context of deprivation and destitution, that girls and women are the victim in this entanglement of love and money, because they end up engaging in so-called transactional sex to meet their basic needs. But this, as Verheijen concluded based on her research in a Malawian village, is not necessarily the case in practice (2014; cf. Hunter 2005). In fact, women are often skillfully capitalizing on the man's 'normative role as provider' (Ibid.: 83, 251–252). Receiving gifts, such as soap or lotion, but also food items are then not perceived as a 'gift', but rather as a man's duty to give and a woman's right to receive, demand and claim (Ibid.: 129; cf. Hunter 2005: 152).

Hence, in order to be in a relationship, one needs money. This also explains the girls' sympathetic attitude towards Selena Gomez for having left Justin Bieber, when it turns out he rents a house instead of owning one (see page 79,

chapter 5).[342] A Western Union billboard that occupied a prominent place in Blantyre near Shoprite made me realize this even more. It said: 'can love be transferred? Yes' (see photo 12 on the next page).[343] It overtly appeals to this emotional connection that can, or even should, be expressed through money (cf. Hunter 2005: 272).[344] In the context of liquid love, waithood and the search for a reliable partner – love comes with a price tag.

Over the course of my fieldwork, I soon figured out that the (potential re)distribution of materials was a hot topic among the girls at Samaritan. They all receive the same amount of soap and body lotion, in the same packaging every month. Fights during which they would accuse each other of using the other's items were very common and occurred at least once every weekend. When it came to receiving clothes, underwear or school items, Samaritan's handouts differed, depending on what they received from donors, but also on the specific needs or body sizes of the girls. But, sometimes, girls would be seen with items that had not been handed out publicly. Everybody – the girls, the boys and staff members – would then reiterate the idea that these items must have been given by a boyfriend. This strong association between boys/men and possessing certain goods is problematic for the girls because at Samaritan, both having a boyfriend and receiving goods from people without the staff's knowledge, are not allowed.

Omega once told me how receiving soap, body lotion and money from her brother had made her very unhappy. After receiving these gifts, she thought: 'where will people think that I got these things? They will think I have a boyfriend.'[345] So she went straight to Evance, the social worker, and explained to him who had given her the items. Evance verified her story by calling her brother and she was allowed to keep the gifts. Jealousy plays a big role here, since if you do not share whatever you have received, the other girls might raise the alarm and tell staff members that you have a boyfriend. Usually, the girls try and enlist accomplices who will receive part of the spoils in exchange for assistance in concealing the gifts. Shawntelle, Praise and Sharon,

342 According to internet sources, this is not what took place between Bieber and Gomez, but for the girls to interpret it like this shows the entanglement of love and money, which is what I am conveying here.

343 Field notes 09-05-2015.

344 I saw the billboard while sitting in a minibus, so I did not take a picture. Online, however, I managed to find it. I then also saw that on its website, Western Union uses the hashtag #ShareTheLove to encourage people to send money to their loved ones for the holiday. https://www.westernunion.com/au/en/home.html?method=load&countryCode=AU&languageCode=en&pagename=HomePage (last accessed 14-12-2015).

345 Interview 19-04-2015.

three girls from Lilongwe, often worked together like this because they were reluctant to share with the others. But, using pressure, Hope managed more than once to get Shawntelle to share some of her weave[346] under the threat of telling Evance that she had been seen with money or a boy – regardless of whether this was the case.
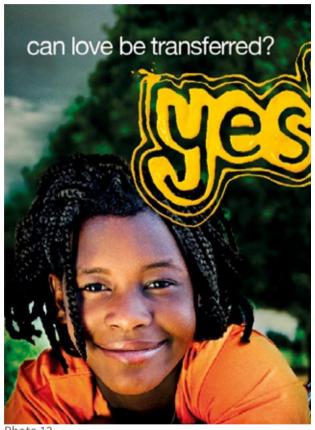

Photo 12
ShareTheLove.
(source: http://theinspirationroom.com/daily/print/2009/2/
western_union_yes.jpg)

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346 Fake hair.

No Money, No Love?

The boys would simply laugh at me whenever I suggested that you could 'just' be in love, without focusing on money. Something that the girls deemed possible, but to the boys this seemed too good to be true. Among themselves, boys and men tend to publicly ridicule and shame those who think that they would be able to ask a woman out without showing that they have the financial means to do so. For instance, one day when the boys and I were coming back from a home visit in an urban area, the driver of our minibus started hitting on me when he found out that I understand Chichewa.[347] The boys let him sweet talk me for a little while, but then made their move. After I received another invite to remain in the minibus and come to his house, Chisomo stood up, demanded that the driver reduced the volume of the radio and shouted: 'we'll come to your house. So do you have chairs?'[348] All the passengers started laughing, one woman until tears rolled down her cheeks. The driver was furious and did not talk to us for the rest of the trip. At first, I did not get the joke, but when I got home and told my landlady, she responded shocked: 'did they really say that to him?' Apparently, calling someone out on not having expensive things like chairs in his house, equals utter humiliation, especially when that person is hitting on a woman.

For men without money, this relationship market poses problems. The previously mentioned price tag might be one they cannot afford. In that case, when women 'capitalize' on their rights to receive gifts, this puts men in a difficult position if they are unable to provide whatever their (prospective) partner is requesting. And despite their efforts to not be in this group, very often, the (former) street boys are the ones without money. Richard: 'if you don't have money, the girls run away.' 'You have to wear good things, look good and then also have money in your pocket.'[349] As an example he tells me about David's relationship that just ended. David found out that his girlfriend was seeing another boy as well. When he confronted her, she explained that 'the problem was that David didn't have a lot of money. […] So she went to look elsewhere.'[350] It is a social fact (in Malawi) that the man is supposed to bring in the money, while the woman takes care of the house (cf. Das 2008). This quest for money, increasingly difficult in the current economic situation, can take men far from their homes – as Malawi's long labour migration history also reflects (cf. McCracken 2013 [2012]). Academics have come up with

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347 Field notes 25-05-2015.
348 'Tibwera kwanu. Kodi, kuli mipando?' Field notes 25-05-2015.
349 Interview 27-05-2015.
350 Ibid.

the term 'crisis of masculinity' to denote the situation in which men struggle to fulfill their socio-cultural roles, which are tied to certain economic responsibilities (cf. Izugbara 2015; Matlak 2014; Van Stapele 2015). Because men's masculinity is tied to how they fulfill their duties as (financially) caring husbands and fathers, economic deprivation can make it hard for them to feel appreciated – something the boys talk about a lot (cf. Van Stapele 2015).

Having said this, the entanglement of love and money does not mean that those who do not have (much) money in practice also do not have girlfriends (cf. Poulin 2007; Verheijen 2014). Buying items for one's girlfriend is seen as a sign of love and masculinity, but the requested items are not necessarily expensive; the (former) street boys who do piecework in town are able to afford these at times. Items for daily use, such as soap, toothpaste, shoes and clothes, are popular to ask boyfriends for, but so are things that can be used to enhance one's appearance, such as make-up or perfume.[351] In case one wants to impress a girlfriend's parents, one can also buy something as mundane as charcoal – which I realized when Felix decided to spend almost a quarter of what he had earned in a month on charcoal for his girlfriend's family.[352] The other boys told him off for doing so, especially because he did not bring anything for his older girlfriend, who is pregnant with his child. But, as we all know, resources are limited and thus so are investments…

Despite these limited capabilities to 'invest', most of the (former) street boys are involved in multiple relationships and so are some of the girls at Samaritan. 'Actual fulfillment of the male role has become increasingly difficult in recent times' (Verheijen 2014: 51). For the (former) street boys, however, this only seems to intensify their search for a romantic partner – sometimes specifically targeting girls that might 'settle for less'. The girls at Samaritan occupy an ambiguous position in this respect. On the one hand, they are often portrayed and treated as 'easy' girls, who can fulfill your wishes in exchange for small gifts; on the other hand, their supposed experience and marginalized economic position makes boys think that they will require a lot of 'maintenance'. Despite this ambiguity, over the years I have known of many relationships between boys and girls both of whom reside(d) at Samaritan. Richard, for example, is together with Jacquelina and Blessings was in an on-off relationship with Omega during the time of my fieldwork.[353] The latter had started while they both resided at the Samaritan Trust, so Omega knew

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351 Field notes 08-04-2015. Interview Blessings (28-05-2015), Interview Richard (27-05-2015), Interview Kumbukani (27-05-2015).
352 Field notes 05-07-2015.
353 Both couples have split since I returned from the field.

full well that Blessings had no money.[354] He explained to me that, as a head boy, he was able to give her more food whenever he was dishing out breakfast, lunch or dinner and he could also bring her extra soap or lotion as little gifts.[355] But some relationships started without the prospect of finding money or receiving gifts. Richard, for example, met one of his girlfriends at a point in his life when he was carrying cartons in Blantyre town.

This means that, despite the harsh economic conditions and their 'waithood', the (former) street youth I spoke to are actively looking for their future partners. In the times of Liquid Modernity and Liquid Love, this means that these romantic endeavours have become a trail of trial and error (Bauman 2015 [2003]). Felix, for example, already has a child with one of his girlfriends, but still adamantly searches for a better girl to marry.[356] This has to do with both the fact that she no longer wants to marry him, but also with him wanting to look for a better option. In the meantime they stay together.[357] And Felix is not the only one looking for 'the best bet'. Although I mainly heard the boys talk explicitly about it, the girls also mentioned it implicitly. Having been punished for being seen with boys, the girls started using a new tease, which they said was inspired by what the staff had told them during the sermon on their bad behaviour. They were told to stop hanging out with boys, especially with more than one boy at a time, which prompted the older girls to start calling each other 'aamuna ten', which means 'the one who has ten men.'[358] To them, this was hilarious, but they were playing with fire, because it confirmed what the staff – and most of the boys at the shelter – already thought: that they are prostitutes, going from one man to the other in search for the one who can give them the most. Whenever they are called prostitutes, the girls become very upset and understandably so. To be called a prostitute, 'uhule' in Chichewa, is a deeply degrading experience and most girls and women will try to avoid putting themselves in situations where they could invite these kind of comments (Verheijen 2014: 160).

Richard, juggling three girlfriends to see who would be most loyal to him if he did not have much money, explained to me that he tried not to give his girlfriends money, but rather, material things.[359] 'Most of the time I[360] don't

354 Interview 27-05-2015, Field notes 08-04-2015.
355 Field notes 08-04-2015.
356 Field notes 17-03-2015.
357 Ibid.
358 Field notes 31-05-2015.
359 Interview 27-05-2015.
360 I'm not sure to which one of the three he is referring to here.

like to give her money. Because if they get used to money, then they might turn into prostitutes. If I keep giving her money and then I go to Chilaweni,[361] she'll be missing money so she'll look for another man.'[362] In fact, he says, when you are in a relationships or looking to be in one, you know that 'you lose a lot of money. It's like that, in Malawi.'[363] Girls who you hardly speak to can even come up to you and ask for money, he explains. This is like an invite and it means that you might be able to sleep with them. 'She can ask you to buy her chips. Then you say 'bwanji, iweso zikutheka'; so then with you it will also be possible?[364] Then, if you buy her the chips, she is your girlfriend. A few days later 'you can give her money and then you sleep with her' (cf. Hunter 2002). When I ask him if he believes that a girl can be with a boy simply because she loves him, he answers: 'I don't believe in love.'[365] Love by itself is not enough: love and money are intertwined. In fact, according to Richard, love 'is more like sharing.' 'If you look good, she should also look good. […] She has to also wear good things. So people can see that you have changed the girl' and improved her life.[366] This not only makes you a good man, it also shows the community that you are ready and able to take care of someone. It shows a way out of 'waithood'.

Fluid Futures, Played out Pasts

Towards the end of my fieldwork period I started asking these (former) street youth more about their hopes and dreams for their future. Interestingly, the places they were going to or had been reintegrated to, did not figure as their envisioned place of residence. All of them mentioned that they wanted to live in town, finish their (secondary) education, get a job, get married and then have children. Preferably two: a boy and a girl. And then live happily ever after. Bridget, for example, resolutely told me that her children would grow up in town: 'I don't know where. Maybe in Lilongwe or so, but definitely in town.' When I asked her why, she said 'maybe my husband will have work somewhere there. But in the village, no, I can't allow that.'[367] She contended that life in the village, where things are always lacking, is harder than life in town – this despite the fact that her family is struggling to feed the children

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361 An area relatively far from where his girlfriend resides.
362 Interview 27-05-2015.
363 'Umalusa ndalama zambirimbiri'. Interview 27-05-2015.
364 Interview 27-05-2015.
365 Sindimakhulupilira a chikondi. Interview 27-05-2015.
366 Ibid.
367 Interview 26-04-2015.

and send them to school, which is why she resides at Samaritan. Omega told me a similar future home vision. She wants to live 'somewhere in Blantyre or Lilongwe, in one of the townships. I want to be in town. In the village it will be hard to find a job.'[368] Her children should be born in town too but 's/he will also go to the village during the holidays. S/he should learn about the village, village life.' When I asked her why, she said it was important because people's behaviours in the village are much better than in town – and who knows, 'maybe s/he will find a marriage in the village, then they have to know how to behave' there. And, she adds, 'our village should grow because of my help, but me, here, I want to stay in a good place. With my own good family.'[369] The home she wishes to create will therefore be in town, although she confirms the grand narrative in emphasizing the importance of remaining connected to the rural place where she was born (cf. Englund 2002b).

Memory is the only one who said that after finishing her education – she wants to become a nurse – she wants to live in the village for some time. 'I want to stay, at first, in our village. So people from there can see me work there. Also a lot of my friends, I haven't seen them for a while. I want them to see that if you keep going to school, that's where you can end up. I want to be an example for the people there.'[370] But 'after two years or so' she wants to move to town, to live a good life. So she, as well as Omega, affirms the grand narrative, yet also holds that her home is not the place where she can have a good life – this she will create for herself, somewhere in town. Memory, like Bridget and Omega, also mentioned building a house for herself. Blessings wants this as well. He tells me that although it is possible to build a house for yourself, it is better not to do so alone: he certainly would not want to build his house 'lonely.'[371] But he definitely will not be able to stay in the village: 'no. I won't be able to. Because I don't really want to farm. I like staying in town, the work in town is different.'

Richard had the most detailed future dreams: 'for me, my dream, I want that when I reach 30, I have a baby boy, Shawn. That's what I want. I also want to have a good job and a good house.'[372] When I ask him where he will build this house he says 'when I find a lot of money, I'll buy land maybe in Nyambadwe or in Namiyango or in Ndirande, doesn't matter where, wherever.' So not in or close to your village, I ask him. 'No, not in the village. I'll buy a nice plot

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368 Interview 19-04-2015.
369 Ibid.
370 Interview 15-03-2015.
371 Interview 28-05-2015.
372 Interview 27-05-2015.

and stay there with my wife.' He did not yet know who his wife would be, but he would certainly try and find a good one. One that would not be afraid to do work, but she would be willing to stay at home and work from there, maybe sell things like charcoal and make a small profit like that. So money figures here as well: they all want their children to have a better start in life than they have had themselves. Blessings: 'we'll do what we can so they will not live a life of suffering. So their children will also not suffer in life.'[373] They tell me about the poverty chain, which they learn about in school. Chisomo: 'if you are poor, your children are also poor. If you are rich, everybody in your family will be rich.'

We sit in silence for a while and I wonder whether they realize that they are now basically saying that they will remain 'poor' for the rest of their lives – and so will their children. But then Blessings starts talking again: 'but also, that chain, you can break it. If you work hard and become rich, you can make the next one also rich. You can break it. Or change it a bit.'[374] I feel relieved that they have not given up hope of achieving their dreams. And apparently, their future homes are located in town. They are attempting to move forward and consolidate their presence in town by finding a romantic partner to imagine that future with. And although one could argue that looking for a romantic partner typifies something that occupies youths, adolescents and adults, the (former) street youth in Malawi trace this home-making story back to their younger years: to the game of 'playing house'.

Children all over the world play this game and in Chichewa it is called za ana; things from/for children. Together, children imitate a family; one person plays the father, another the mother, they use a younger child, a doll or a pet to play the baby and then the adventure starts. The mother cooks and worries about the decorations in the imaginary home, which can be under a cloth, but also in a tree or simply open-air. Chisomo remembers that during harvest season 'they can even build a house from maize stacks or left overs.'[375] Kumbukani adds that they even play 'with time': during the day, the father leaves the house every morning to go and earn money.[376] When the woman falls pregnant she puts clothes under her shirt until the baby is born and weddings are celebrated in much the same way as adults' weddings are. One day, while visiting Peter's (19) home to admire his newborn son, the neighbour's children were playing this game and the mothers joined in to sing the

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373 Field notes 08-04-2015.
374 Ibid.
375 Field notes 18-05-2015.
376 Field notes 08-04-2015, 18-05-2015.

traditional weddings songs and comment on how the children were dancing (see photo 13). They even encouraged the bride and groom to kiss each other on the lips.[377]

Photo 13
A 'za ana' wedding.

According to the boys, this popular children's game is one of the reasons why Malawian's are often young when they start having a family: 'in Malawi they start young when they are playing za ana, mother and father, they make a small house, then they do those things that men and women do,' Chisomo explains.[378] 'They sleep together, but not really.' According to Felix, it is a nice game because it is something that boys and girls can play together – most of the other games are played separately. Peter recounts how he heard parents correcting children for pretending to sleep with each other because they had seen that that is what parents do. Chisomo remembers this as well: 'if they find you doing that, they will tell you to stop doing that, 'don't do those stupid things' they will say.[379] Peter: 'some children, not knowing what the parents mean, they can even say 'come, let's do those stupid things' without even

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377 Field notes 16-08-2015.
378 Field notes 08-04-2015.
379 'Musamapanga zopusa'.

knowing exactly what it means.'[380] According to them, this is the fun part of the game. Kumbukani: 'even how to have sex, you learn that while playing these children games.'[381] Not really of course, Blessings adds, but the idea and the fact that you do it together, that is what you learn.

This is why some of the girls who still enjoy playing it when they get older, are severely reprimanded for this: they pretend to play a children's game, but, in reality, 'they just want men.' They are getting ready for marriage. 'For those who are not yet married, first there is za ana. Those things they do at za ana, it's what happens in marriage,' Kumbukani contends.[382] Playing this children's game of 'playing house' is intimately linked with the exploration and creation of love and sexual relationships.

Co-constructing Home

The grand narrative of home is a very powerful narrative, because it appeals to people's emotional emplacement as well as their sense of belonging and origin in this world (cf. Englund 2002a). Kwathu is about your roots, the place where you started your journey through life (cf. Clifford 1997). Therefore, whether you grew up there or not, whether you enjoyed the time you spent there or not, whether you still have immediate family there or not and whether you visit the place often or not, does not matter that much. The appeal of roots, of being able to pinpoint a place on this earth where you belong, means that this place will always play a role in your life, regardless how you shape this role and how this shapes you. And although this can be problematic when the place you call home is suddenly solidified in directives, laws and policies as the place where you have to reside, it does not have to be the case. In fact, it seems as if having this place and solidifying it, at times, allows (former) street youth to keep moving in search of what they deem to be a better life. It somehow operates as a springboard, which youth (can) use for their jump into 'the sea of uncertainty': life in town (Bauman 2015 [2003]: 28). The majority of them, but not all, have spent most of their lives in town. And all of them envision continuing to reside in town, together with the wo/man of their dreams. Where they will construct – both in the literal and in the philosophical sense of the word – their own homes, for the most part depends on where and how they will find their partner and employment, but they are

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380 'Bwerani, tipange zopusa'. Fields notes 18-05-2015.
381 Field notes 18-05-2015.
382 Ibid.

all sure that it will be in town. They are open to emplacing themselves anew, whichever opportunity may present itself. But their aim is for their children to be emplaced in their home village as much as they themselves have (been) (cf. Englund 2002a, 2002b). They seem to hold that 'firm' roots are needed to deal with the fluidity of everyday life in our liquid modern times, in order to be able to construct one's routes through life. These routes, although currently unknown, are imagined, shaped and directed by their roots and the search for money. And the latter plays an important role for the construction of their future home in more ways than one: they also need money to find a romantic partner to co-construct this home with.

I would argue that where Michael Jackson speaks of 'being at home in the world,' 'becoming at home in the world' seems more appropriate (1995). These youth have not 'settled' (yet) and every day they construct and build towards becoming at home in the city; their dream, but also a necessity considering the situations that they find themselves in. They constantly build and look for ways to solidify what they construct, while at the same time painfully aware of the 'frailty of human bonds' and the perennial possibility that even those who are closest to you, can let you down (Bauman 2015 [2003]; cf. Geschiere 2003; Turnaturi 2007). In all this turmoil, (former) street boys and girls attempt to find a partner to build their future home with. In this way, they can at least feel like they have reached 'the little islands of safety' in the great fluid unknown (Bauman 2015 [2003]: 28).

In this chapter, I have traced an alternative storyline concerning (former) street youth's current and future home-making practices. This story about love, money and their entanglement relates to the grand narrative in seeing the rural home as the place where their route through life began, but it does not conceptualize this as the place where they want to reside. Their efforts to maintain their presence in town hinge on finding money and a romantic partner to co-construct this home with.

9 Summary & Conclusions
(Be)Coming Home

'And whatever is man-made, men can unmake'.

(Bauman 2012 [2000]: 28)

In this final chapter, I end my story, but I also suggest several starting points for new stories. I first present a brief summary that reiterates the most important elements of my arguments. Thereafter, I elaborate on the importance of recognizing the entanglement and co-existence of different narratives that can all be used to inspire actions. Focusing solely on 'the grand narrative about home' disadvantages economically marginalized, urban-based people because it can be used by others to challenge their presence in urban places. Using this narrative to come up with interventions and reform programmes can be considered counterproductive since it only adds to the hardships that (former) street youth have to overcome. Lastly, I make some suggestions for further inquiries and future research.

ReConstructions: A Summary

In this thesis, I have argued that focusing solely on the grand narrative of home as a basis for action, when it comes to interventions and reform programmes directed towards (former) street youth, the intended beneficiaries are further disadvantaged because their presence in urban space becomes (even more) contested by locating their home firmly in a rural area. In the following paragraphs, I use my sub-questions to retrace how I arrived at this conclusion, driving my points home.

My first sub-question was what is 'the grand narrative about home' prevalent in Malawi? In chapter 1, I discussed a grand narrative that has come into being, in part because of Dr. Banda's cultural policies. This narrative holds that home is in the rural village where one was born. For those who reside in the city, this means that they have to be successful because, due to the interlacement with other narratives, people hold that those in town are rich and educated whereas those in the village are backwards and poor. Although people know that in reality things are not this simple, these narratives remain widely used and adhered to. For (former) street youth, this means that 'the

grand narrative', interlinked with other narratives, can be used to challenge their presence in urban places. Sometimes thereby confining them to rural space. The question how this narrative translated into policies and practices of organizations working with street youth in Blantyre then becomes relevant. As I demonstrated in chapter 4, the government and (I)NGOs such as the Samaritan Trust base their programmes and interventions on the grand narrative of home, which leads to attempts to send street children and youth (back) to their rural regions of origin. This, despite the fact that many of them were born in the city, hardly visited this rural home and – most importantly – do not wish to go back and/or reside there. I concluded that this effectively means that the interventions, although meant well, tend to do more harm than good, since they only further challenge the street youth's presence in the urban sphere, contesting their home-making practices.

These home-making practices of (former) street youth are the focus of most of the other chapters. Chapter 2 was devoted to an analytical discussion of the importance of paying attention to home-making practices in the first place and the tensions that are engaged with through them. Chapter 3 concerned the methodology to discuss how I put what I highlighted in chapter 2 into practice while on fieldwork. Subsequently, I asked myself the question: In what ways do (former) street youth's home-making practices correspond to and challenge 'the grand narrative about home'? In chapter 5, I discussed how the policies that were described in chapter 4 tend to work out in practice and how they are experienced by the (former) street youth. Their home-making practices while residing at Samaritan are shaped by the knowledge that their stay is only temporary and they struggle with the negative conception, use and implications of reintegration.[383] Home emerges as a place to escape from when it comes to its dark sides, but also a place that one wants to consider as a place to escape to; if not in practice, then at least in narrative. This because the dark sides of home are also present in the institution where they temporarily reside.

In chapter 6, I demonstrated how (former) street youth sometimes appeal to the grand narrative, while sometimes also challenging it. This became clear by going on home visits with (former) street youth and experiencing the effects of what I have called 'liquid collisions': the problems that ensue from attempts to solidify home in our liquid modern times. It appears that when

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383 In chapters 4 and 5, the experiences of the girls come to the fore, whereas in chapters 6 and 7 I base my argument more on the experiences of the boys. This, as I explained in the introduction, is because the girls have not yet been reintegrated.

put under pressure, home is experienced and constructed as solid, adhering to the grand narrative and this mainly to have a starting point from which to venture onwards in life.

After describing this, I argued that it is important to look at other narratives that co-exist with the grand narrative and equally influence daily home-making practices. By asking (former) street youth about their future, I aimed to answer the last sub question: how do (former) street youth want to 'become at home' in the city?

In chapter 7, I shared these stories about (former) street youth's future homes, hopes and dreams. Within these, love, money and their entanglement strongly came to the fore. To create their future home, all of them mentioned the desire and the need to have money so they could get married. And vice versa: the desire and the need to get married, to have a partner to co-construct their home with. Although, when asked, most of the (former) street youth reiterate the grand narrative about their home being somewhere in a rural village, their future ideas and home-making practices are all geared towards firmly establishing themselves in town. They thus pragmatically adhere to the grand narrative by at times solidifying home in their rural village to have a starting point, roots, to create their routes from, and at other times using the fluidity of home to make a home-claim in an urban area. Liquid collisions often take place, yet are not always experienced as problematic by (former) street youth. The grand narrative is by no means rendered obsolete, it is just that they base their practices on many other narratives too. Accommodating and acknowledging this complexity makes their behaviours understandable as attempts to construct a home for themselves in liquid modern times of insecurity and economic destitution. It also shows that although NGOs may attempt to do good, their approaches can also complicate and obstruct street youth's attempts to construct a home for themselves.

Becoming at Home in the World

Having answered my sub-questions, this leaves us with the main research question: *How do (former) street youth in Blantyre, Malawi, engage with 'the grand narrative about home' in trying to imagine their 'becoming at home' in the city?*

The tension between the (former) street youth's stories and their home-making practices refers to their adherence to the grand narrative when asked explicitly about home, yet their daily practices often challenge this narrative.

However, it would be too easy to simply say that their practices oppose the grand narrative. In fact, I argue that although their attempts to settle and create a life for themselves in town directly contest the grand narrative in that they are not living 'at home' – these practices are in part rendered possible by the grand narrative itself. Knowing or narrating that one still has one's rural home, a place where one can always return no matter how far or how long one moves away from it, allows for their movements. You cannot really lose your home, it is always there. This knowledge might be part of the backbone of (former) street youth's movement: they are able to try to settle in town because even if everything goes wrong, they believe they always have a place to return to. It makes the movements less scary.

Home thus figures as a material and also social connection to your roots and as such, the starting point for your routes (cf. Clifford 1997). The (former) street youth's home-making practices, then, seem much more 'a matter of becoming-at-home-in-the-world' in which home signifies 'a sense of existential control and connectedness – the way we feel when what we say or do seems to matter, and there is a balanced reciprocity between the world beyond us and the world within which we move' (Jackson 1995: 154). This is what (former) street youth attempt to create for themselves in town, despite continuously being contested and having their home-making claims challenged. Bauman also refers to this effort when quoting Linhart in describing that those who are continuously marginalized by the current economic system 'lose not only their jobs, their projects, their orientation points, the confidence of being in control of their lives; they also find themselves stripped of their dignity as workers, of self-esteem, of the feeling of being useful and having a social place of their own' (2015 [2004]: 13). This need to feel as if you have some control over your life and what happens in it, is the need to feel and become at home in the world (Jackson 1995).

Based on this conclusion, I draw several related conclusions. Firstly, I want to emphasize that the way in which I conceptualized home seems to be beneficial when attempting to understand processes of meaning making and the ways in which notions of home can inspire action. Seeing home as complex, diverse and fluid helps us to understand difficult and at times contradicting dynamics that have very real effects in our everyday lived reality. Analysing home based on dichotomies or binary oppositions obscures these dynamics and obscures especially the power structures that underlie dominant conceptualizations. This more theoretical point has severe practical implications for both the Malawian government and (international) organizations with

regard to their policies and practices in working with (former) street youth or those who are conceptualized as 'homeless' or 'urban dwellers'.

As I discussed in chapter 4, the Malawi government has made its laws regarding the handling of street children and youth based on the (I)NGO discourse that children should not become institutionalized. In their law, the Child Care, Protection and Justice Act, emphasis is placed on the importance of children growing up in their home. Since this home, following the grand narrative, is always located in a rural area this is where these children should go (back) to. The Samaritan Trust bases their policies on the above-mentioned law and thus emphasizes that the shelter is not the children's home. Basing themselves on the grand narrative, they label those who are unwilling to return to their rural homes as 'difficult'. The idea being that they want to reside in town because they do not want to work the land or take part in the household chores. For those who were born in town and whose families reside in town as well, these teachings do not seem to work. The situation that they ran away from cannot be understood properly when this understanding is based on the grand narrative alone.

This also because they do not want to leave urban space. In fact, they are attempting to survive in town, constructing their being at home there. Jackson: 'in the end, home is not a place that is given, but an experience born of what one makes of what is given, and the work is always before us all of becoming "bosses for ourselves"' (1995: 155). I conclude that this is exactly what (former) street youth are attempting to do. They are trying to be bosses for themselves, without being sent back to the place where they started this life, often in a marginalized and disadvantaged position. They are trying to move forward, construct their being at home in this world as they move: following opportunities, following money, looking for love. The home that they construct for themselves, however, remains fluid and difficult to capture in categorizations or definitions. Moreover, it remains fragile, since it can fall apart or be taken away in the blink of an eye, or in the wave of a flood… The home they attempt to construct is thus as delicate and fragile as love. At the same time, it is sometimes also astonishingly strong and resilient. It can feel solid, yet it is fluid like everything else.

Hence the title of my thesis. 'Home is always home,' Memory told me. [384] 'But if you want to go forward in life, you have to keep moving,' she added. This statement captures (former) street youth's engagements with 'the grand

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384 Field notes 01-07-2015.

narrative about home' while trying to become at home in town. On the one hand, home can be constructed and experienced as solid, adhering to the grand narrative; home is in the rural village where your life began. At the same time, home is constructed, created and imagined in every day talks and practices. This is done pragmatically, at times allowing for fluidity and the altogether uncertain and volatile nature that characterizes the human condition in these liquid modern times (Bauman 2012 [2000], 2015 [2004], 2015 [2003]). The wish to move forward in life, the wish and necessity to keep moving in order to be able to do this, make 'becoming at home' a very intricate process filled with liquid collisions; solidity and certainty continuously alternate with liquidity and uncertainty.

At this point, I want to return to the quote with which I started my introduction: nyumba yoteteza mtima wanga unamanga, kuyambila foundation mpakana malata (Young Kay & Maskal 2014). It is an excerpt from a pop song: Wekha by Young Kay and Maskal, two very popular Malawian artists.[385] In the song, Young Kay sweet talks a girl by saying that she has built a fort around his heart, from the foundation all the way to the iron sheets at the top. Besides the obvious metaphor and the fact that both the (former) street youth and myself really like this song, this line epitomizes what my research in Malawi turned out to be about: the metaphor that Young Kay and Maskal use appears to work both ways. As much as (the construction of) a good relationship can be compared to (the construction of) a good house, creating a home in the world appears, for (former) street youth in Blantyre, to be intricately linked to finding a significant other to co-construct that (being at) home with.

The Holes in the Wall

My research can best be taken to have been exploratory. The topic of home is very broad and this leaves me with many more ideas for future inquiries into this domain. Taking into account that urbanization is likely to continue and that Malawi will bear the consequences of the floods for years to come, only adds to the urgency of the need for these inquiries. It would be interesting to do similar research in different places in Malawi – for example, in Lilongwe where Samaritan recently started a similar shelter, or Mzuzu, where no such

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385 See also Paul Gilroy's book Darker than Blue: on the moral economies of black Atlantic culture for interesting examples on how popular music (such as Bob Marley or 50 Cent) can be used in academic reflections on social life (2010).

shelter exists – to build towards a more comparative perspective of life for street youth attempting to establish themselves in the city. Research on the same topic with different foci that were now beyond the scope of my research question, could also prove interesting. In the following paragraphs, I highlight a few of these lines of inquiry.

Firstly, I think it would be useful to do similar research to the one that I have conducted, but with an explicit focus on gender differences. Even though gender came to the fore in my stories, I was unable to compare whether the differences in responses and engagements of (former) street youth are based on differences in gender. I expect that this might be the case, but I have not found any explicit confirmations for this hunch. Considering the fact that many NGOs, Samaritan included, are currently struggling to come up with a more gender-sensitive approach, delving into this topic could be useful. A second suggestion would be that it could prove useful to turn my research into a longitudinal project: episodically going back to Blantyre and discussing the same topic with the same (former) street youth in order to see how and if their stories and daily practices change(d). I expect, for instance, that the boys' connections with their rural homes will diminish over time, while they attempt to firmly settle in town. This could lead to trouble concerning land rights if they choose to return to places they consider as their home or land, when others no longer recognize those claims. Longitudinal research could also teach us more about challenges in negotiating access to urban places and it would provide us with interesting insights in to where former street youth end up: do they manage to obtain a stronger socio-economic position? Conclusions drawn based on this kind of research could then feed back into interventions and reform programmes in order to make these more compatible with the intended beneficiaries experiences and dreams.

Thirdly, it would prove interesting to look at home from a more materially based perspective. My focus has been on narrative and (the performativity of) stories and not so much on the more material aspects of life which, especially in the Malawian context of destitution and deficits, doesn't capture all aspects of life as experienced in lived reality. Due to my narrative approach the material side of home has remained somewhat underexposed. Future research using this perspective would be able to highlight more of the everyday struggles that (former) street youth experience, whereas my narrative approach focused more on their ideas, hopes, dreams and reflections on these. A fourth line of inquiry would be to zoom in further on the element of social class. I have now looked at economically marginalized, urban-based people, but how does the grand narrative work for elite? Even though they seem to be

less frequently confronted with it, this does not necessarily mean that they do not experience 'liquid collisions' or similar problems. It would be interesting to look into their handling of the difference between their daily urban experience and their (sometimes fiercely claimed) rural heritage.

The fifth and final line of inquiry that I want to highlight here is to delve further into the connection between love and witchcraft. During my fieldwork, I frequently ran into comparisons between the two, probably since both of them can transmit diseases and contain 'irrational elements' that make them potentially dangerous. Boundaries can be crossed when stating that you are 'in love', which makes it dangerous in much the same way that witchcraft is often considered to be dangerous. Also, a lot of the effects of 'being in love' are explained in witchcraft idiom: surely, when you cross a gender boundary by doing the dishes because you love your wife and want to help her she must have put a spell on you or fed you specific herbs.[386] Considering that for (former) street youth (but probably youth in general) searching for, finding and keeping love is an important aspect of their daily lives, looking further into this topic in connection with witchcraft might reveal interesting dynamics concerning processes of in- and exclusion in Malawian society.

Bringing it Home

We are still sitting in the garden at Afro Lounge. Kumbukani is finishing his fizzy drink while staring into the distance. I am starting to think that maybe my questions have affected him too much. Just when I am about to ask whether he's OK, he smiles at me and reiterates what he told me minutes before: his dreams for the future. When we talked about his future, Kumbukani's eyes lit up. He has many dreams. I had asked him where I would find him if I would come back to Malawi in 2025. He took a while to think before he answered. It will not be hard to find a place in town to start a business, he reckoned. 'That's what I want to do.' Start a business, have money and get married. 'So, you'll be living in town then?' I asked. It is better for me to live in town, Kumbukani responded. 'Ku mudzi koma ndi kwathu.'[387] He looks me in the eye, almost as if he is looking for a sign that I have (finally) understood the seriousness of what he has just said. He is not convinced and so he continues: 'even if I don't go back there until the day I die, it's kwathu. They can't refuse me there.' He conveys his wish to build a house there and, when

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386 Malawians would say mankhwala, 'medicine'.
387 'But my home is in the village.' (in interview on 27-05-2015).

he finally has money, to assist his family and relatives that reside there. I listen to him and feel a strange sense of admiration emerging. Despite all that he has been through, he appears driven to do good for the place that he calls his home, even though it has never been a hospitable and nurturing environment for him.

'And, of course, I'll also get married,' Kumbukani continues. But 'I don't want to get married by mistake. You know, people can't live alone. God gave man a friend to stay with.' He smiles when he sees me smile. He grabs his soft drink bottle and takes the last sip. Then he leans in, winks at me and says in a confidential manner; 'you know, if I would go kwathu and I would say that I want a woman to get married, loads of them would come.' He claps his hands to add significance to the word 'loads'. 'I would just choose: bwera ndikukwatira.'[388] He seems pleased with himself and confidently leans back in his chair. 'So why don't you just do that then?' I ask him. When I think about all the issues with all his girlfriends that I have been informed about over the past few years, this would certainly seem like an easier way to find a wife. 'I don't want to get married at home. It's better to get married here,' in town.[389] 'Why?' He has no answer to that. Maybe he is not too sure that it would actually work the way he thinks it would or maybe finding a woman in town would further solidify his home claim in urban space.

'The problem is money.' If you want to get married, you need money! Even now, Kumbukani has to laugh when he is explaining this to me. He has done so on several occasions and my stubborn conviction that you can also marry just because you love someone, even if s/he doesn't have a lot of money, amuses him as much as it annoys him. This time, he seems intent on making me understand that it is simply impossible. Not just because the girl will certainly leave you for a richer man, but also because it would make him a bad man: 'it is possible to stay together because of just love but if a girl would come to me that she loves me and she wants to stay with me, what do I feed her? Do I feed her love? What is she going to wear? Should she wear love? Love, you can't wear.'[390] So he needs to find a good job, maybe get a driving licence. Then he will make his current girlfriend, Thokozani, really happy. He could marry her. But he needs money. What if Thoko would want him to

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388 'Come here, I marry you.'
389 'Sindimafuna kukwatira kwathu. Bola kukwatira kunoko' (interview 27-05-2015).
390 'Ndizotheka kukhala limodzi chifukwa cha chikondi chokhachokha komano if a girl would come to me that she loves me and wants to stay with me, ndimudyetsa chiyani? Ndizimudyetsa chikondi? Avala chiyani? Azivala chikondi. Chikondi, sungachivala.'

help her family and he has only love, not money, what is she going to give to her family?

Photo 14
Looking forward to the future. In the background: A house that was damaged by the floods.

Maybe they would live in Namiyango, a slum area close to Blantyre on the outskirts of Limbe. Or maybe somewhere else. It does not really matter since he knows Blantyre and the areas around it. They could live anywhere, even

far away from Blantyre. As long as he would be making money. For now, he will just remain with the other boys in the house they rent in Namiyango. It is a good place, close to town so there are many opportunities to find ganyu.[391] But he will not live in the village, he wants to live in town. Although the story that he tells me now diverges from the grand narrative, as do his daily practices of home-making in the city, the grand narrative does seem to console him somehow. It gives him the strength to keep moving, while trying to create a home for himself in town, knowing that there is a place to which he can always return. Kumbukani: 'I have my place in Zomba to work the land, but I also have my place in the graveyard there. For my spirit. That place is mine. Nobody else can sleep there.' This is how the fluidity of home in everyday practice is coupled with the solidity of home in the grand narrative that most Malawians reiterate. Although this does not necessarily work in practice, in the storied world, it helps highly mobile economically marginalized (former) street youth to cope with life in liquid modernity. Although they intentionally left this place, knowing or thinking that it will always be there, helps. After all, it is where they started out their journey through life. Home.

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Annex A: Lyrics Wekha

Wekha, by Young Kay ft. Maskal (2014)

Chorus

Ndakuuza ndiwe wekha baby
Bwanji sukhulupilira baby
Ona kumene tachokela baby
Nanga kumene tilowela baby
Bwanji sukhulupilira

Sizachilendo kwa ine anthu kunditalka
Ndimangolimbikabe sindifooka
Akazi ambili amabodza, amabwela ndichikoka
Chithunzithunzi cha iwe maine[392] sichichoka
Olo chilakolako, choyang'ana kwina
Ukapanda kukhalapo, nango ziposo apo
Mkazi ine ndi wako, zachikondi chathu
Zisamalamulidwe ndi zokamba za anzako
Azitikamba, bola ife tikudziwa
Zomwe tikupanga, tsono mwali tafatsa
Nyumba yoteteza mtima wanga unamanga
Kuyambila foundation mpakana malata
Koma, zomwe umaona ndi zoipa zaine
Zomwe umamvela sizichoka kwa ine
Ndazipeleka panopa zili kwa iwe
Kuti utha kumvetsa za mumtima mwa ine

Chorus

Akazi omwe umati ndi anzako
Akufuna kutenga malo ako
I know, akukamba zoipa zaine mbali yako
Saying we don't match as a couple, zawo izo[393]
You know me I don't do too much talking

---

392 Maine is an exclamation that can be used in many different circumstances. In this case I have translated it as 'wow'.

393 Zake zimenezo (plural zawo zimenezo) is a way of saying 'that's their problem/thing'. It's an often used colloquial expression.

You already know this crazy world that I'm lost in
I'm tryna make that your heart is the place that I'm locked in
And you can keep me there till I'm laid up in a coffin
Often, ambiliwa imakhala nsanje
Seeing we got that real love, osati masanje[394]
Ma hope angofreeza, za ife sizobisa
I'm tryna be forever your Mr. Listen
Komwe tachokela iwowo kunalibeko
Komwe tikupita nawo akufuna akafikeko
Osapanga ngati nawe sunandinamizeko
Koma zokusiya iweyo sindinaganizeko
Chorus

Alone[395]
My translation[396]

Chorus

I'm telling you, you're the only one baby
Why don't you believe me baby
Look where we are coming from baby
And where we are heading baby
Why don't you believe me

It's not unusual to me that people talk about me
But I still persevere, I don't give in
Lots of women gossip, they come with deception
But your picture, wow, doesn't fade away
And there is no desire to look elsewhere
If you are not there, it gets worse for me
Woman I am all yours for our love
Must not be influenced by the talks of your friends
Let them talk, better that we know about it
What we are doing, so my queen[397] hold on

---

394 Chiyao for 'play during which children learn to cook' or 'childishness' (Paas 2009: 185). This
can be linked to 'za ana' the children's game I discuss in chapter 7, regarding the exploration of
(sexual) relationships.
395 Wekha means alone, but 'ndiwe wekha' means 'you are the only one' in this context.
396 I was helped by Deogracias Benjamin Kalima.
397 Mwali can be translated as 'virgin' or 'any single woman who hasn't had a child yet'. But in
colloquial speech it often means 'queen'.

You have built a fort in my heart
Starting with the foundation up to the roof[398]
But, that which you see as my dark sides,
Those things you listen to don't come from me
I have given myself now it's up to you
Whether you can understand what's in my heart

Chorus

Those women you say are your friends
They want to take your place
I know, they are telling you bad things
Saying we don't match as a couple, that's their problem
You know me I don't do too much talking
You already know this crazy world that I'm lost in
I'm tryna make that your heart is the place that I'm locked in
And you can keep me there till I'm laid up in a coffin
Often, those people are jealous
Seeing we got that real love, not a childish version
The other pursuers just freeze, what we have we don't hide
I'm tryna be forever your Mr. Listen
They were not there where we are coming from
They also want to reach where we are going
Don't pretend like you haven't lied to me
But I haven't thought of leaving you

Chorus

The song can be listened to here:
http://www.malawi-music.com/component/muscol/Y/2-young-kay/601-
wekha/2116-wekha-ft-maskal

---

398 Malata are the iron sheets that roofs can be constructed of if one has the money to buy
these. Otherwise roofs are grass thatched.

Annex B: Deogracias B. Kalima

Next to the focus groups and group discussions that I organized for (former) street youth, I also co-organized five focus group discussions with two different groups of ten girls each. These girls resided in areas close to Blantyre and had never lived on the streets or in an institution. I was interested in knowing whether their talks about 'home' would differ significantly from what those who are considered to not live at home told me. I also used these to cross-check my interpretations of 'home-issues' (cf. Young & Barrett 2001a: 147, 150). The girls for these focus groups were selected by people whom I knew from my volunteering activities on the Friday's. In both areas people knew me because I had been coming, helping and translating in the medical clinics every other week. The headmaster of the secondary school had asked ten girls for a focus group with me in the one place, in the other it was a friend of mine who runs a nursery school who spread the message in the community. The focus groups were held during the first hours of clinic, in a separate classroom or (when it was too hot) in the open air.

Before starting these focus groups, I had asked Deogracias Benjamin Kalima to be my translator and assistant.[399] I feared that my Chichewa might not be good enough to understand nuances and guide group discussions with ten girls, especially since I had never met them before and wasn't used to their way of talking. Deogracias is a married thirty-something year old man, who resides in a rural area approximately 2 hours (in travel time) away from Blantyre. Considering his background in journalism and previous work experience as a fieldworker at World Vision, he was familiar with doing interviews and having group conversations. He also has a natural talent to strike a conversation with even the shyest person and keep the talk flowing nicely. Although in practice he didn't usually have to translate the answers back to me, I felt at ease having someone there who could help to articulate things in Chichewa and who was aware of the topics that I was interested in. He was like an extra pair of eyes and ears and I made sure to always discuss whatever I had planned to do with him in advance, to see whether the activities I had thought out would work and whether I had worded my questions correctly. After finishing, we would always sit down and discuss how it went, which taught me a lot about which questions and answers Deo deemed to be 'true'

---

399 See annex C for the transcription manual that I made for him.

but also 'useful', 'misunderstood' or 'difficult'. He also transcribed the recordings of these six focus groups.[400]

Although important for my own background information and a valuable way to cross-check what (former) street youth told me, this thesis doesn't rely much on the 'data' that I gathered during these focus groups although they were used to construct the grand narrative I narrate in chapter 1. This is why I have chosen to describe this process in an annex and not in the actual text.

---

400 Deogracias also arranged my first visit to a displacement camp in the South and later on accompanied me on my visits to the urban displacement camp and assisted in the informal group discussion we had there. I paid him a salary per day/activity for his work and also reimbursed his air time, food and drinks during our work days and his travel costs.

Annex C: Transcription Manual

Given to Deogracias on 15-05-2015

Transcription Manual

A transcript is a written representation of the information that can be gained from an audio file. The audio file contains the voices (and sounds of the surroundings) of the interviewer and the interviewee(s).

In the audio recordings, the interviewer was Tanja [T] and the translator Deogracias [D]. The children that are being interviewed can be signified by [C], adults that were interviewed can be signified by [I]. If we know the interviewee's name you can put [I + first letter of their name]. A transcription can then look like this:

Example

D: Welcome eh everyone, thank you for coming here. I would like to introduce myself to you, my name is Deogracias Benjamin Kalima and I am here here today together with my friend from Holland: Tanja Hendriks.

T: Hello everyone! Bo!

D: Tanja is doing a research and if you want, you can be a part of it. If at any time you want to stop with this exercise you can and if you don't want to answer or if you don't have an answer to a question, you can always say so. There is no problem whatsoever. Have you understood?

C: Yes!

Mind you that you only have to add a translation of what you said if you say something else than just a translation of whatever I said before. (If it is just a translation, you would get everything double, which is not necessary). On some occasions you added questions on your own accord in order to probe further. These will all have to be translated but then you can leave out the

translation that you gave me (since that is probably a spoken summary of whatever you have already written down).

Example

T: Can you ask them to describe a typical Malawian house to me?

C: Well, what does she mean now, a typical Malawian house?

D: Just describe traditional housing, that is what she wants to hear about.

C: Ok, well you can build a round or a square house. You can use mud or cement.

The transcripts will be done in English, so you will have to translate what both of us and the interviewees said in Chichewa to English – because my supervisors don't speak Chichewa. It is very important for the translation to be as literal as possible. If you struggle translating something, you can keep the original phrasing in Chichewa (because I will understand and it might make up for great quotes!). In this case, just make sure to type the Chichewa words in Italics. If people use proverbs, you can provide me with the literal translation and then add [between these kind of brackets] the symbolic/deeper meaning, since these are not always obvious.

Example

T: So can they tell us eh how they eh how they ended up here in this camp?

I: Well, we had a severe drought first and then we were just praying for rain. So, I guess, walira mvula, walira matope [crying for rain means crying for mud, meaning there's negative consequences to the things you wish for].

T: Ah, I see. What are some of the things you are wishing for now?

Here are some guidelines:

- Every time another person says something (different voice), you 'enter' and start on a new line.
- If there is a long silence in the recording, please indicate this with [*]. This way I can understand by reading the transcript that some questions maybe took a little longer to answer to.
- If many children are talking at once or if there is a lot of background noise and you cannot understand properly what they are saying, you can put [-----]. Then it is clear that we cannot know what was said there.
- If many children give the same answer, so for example if a group of children replies with 'yes' or 'no' to a question, please indicate this with [^^]

Example
>   **T**: Can they tell me about some of the things they are missing in the camp?
>   **C**: Yes, [-----] sometimes we are lacking food.
>   **C**: Yes, and also sometimes we don't have toys to play with.
>   **D**: Really? What else can you tell me. Come on, don't be shy [*]
>   **C**: Well, it's mainly the issue of food. [^^] And we just want to go home.

The audio files are on the USB stick. You need windows media player or VLC media player to listen to it. Please put headphones and don't share any of the information relayed in the interviews with others, since it is confidential. This work can be done fastest by opening a Word file on your computer to type in and then open windows media player in a small window, so you can see both files at the same time. Listen to the recording and then hit the pause button every time someone finishes a sentence. You then type the sentence and press play again.

It is estimated that for every 10 minutes of audio recording, you will need about 1 hour to transcribe. (But the more you do it, the quicker you will be!). I have added 3 files: 2 focus groups in Chilaweni (one from 10-04 and one from 17-04) and the audio version of our conversation after the camp visit on 11-05. In total, this means there is approximately 26 hours of transcribing work to be done. [1]

----

1   In the 'original' transcription manual that I gave to Deogracias, this paragraph ended with a detailed explanation on the financial compensation that he would receive for doing this work. We mutually agreed on a certain amount per hour (which I raised after one week because I was so impressed with the quality of his work). For the sake of his privacy I have left this particular amount out of this thesis.

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This book is based on Tanja D. Hendriks' Master's thesis ''Home is Always Home':
(Former) Street Youth in Blantyre, Malawi, and the Fluidity of Constructing Home', winner of the African Studies Centre, Leiden's 2016 Africa Thesis Award. This annual award for Master's students encourages student research and writing on Africa and promotes the study of African cultures and societies.

For many Malawians, the concept of home is strongly associated with rural areas and one's (supposedly rural) place of birth. Many former street youth adhere to this 'grand narrative about home', despite the fact that this generally depicts them as 'homeless', because they reside(d) on the streets – in town. So, how do (former) street youth in Blantyre, Malawi, engage with 'the grand narrative about home' in trying to imagine their 'becoming at home' in the city?
This book departs from the idea that (the search for) home is an integral part of the human condition. During eight months of ethnographic fieldwork in Blantyre, the author tried to come to an understanding of the meaning of home for (former) street youth. Their home-making practices in relation to a marginalized socio-economic position in a generally challenging economic context point towards more fluid and diverse constructions of home, which exist alongside the aforementioned grand narrative, without rendering it obsolete. Hence, home can best be seen as a fluid field of tensions (re)created in the everyday. As such, it leaves space for both (former) street youths' roots and routes in life, while they are becoming at home in the world.

Tanja Dorothé Hendriks (1990) holds a bachelor's degree in anthropology and a master's degree in International Development Studies (University of Amsterdam). She also completed the research master in African Studies at the African Studies Centre (Leiden University), for which she conducted fieldwork in Malawi, focusing on (former) street youth and 'home'.

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