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Sites and places present analytical problems to ethnographers who acknowledge the reality of global flows but doubt their liberatory potential. In this article, I suggest that ethnographers move beyond the rhetoric and organizing assumptions of globalism not simply by discarding the local–global distinction but also by interrogating the analytical tendency to disconnect culture from place. Such a tendency appears to contribute to the resilience of constructivism in ethnographic analysis. A perspective of emplacement builds on insights into global flows while providing a focus on embodied and situated presence. I develop this perspective with the aid of ethnography on conflicts between migrants and original inhabitants in an impoverished area of Malawi's capital. The occult powers of a secret society partly account for migrants' emplacement, challenging migrants' globalist imagination that draws on the liberal rhetoric of economic and political reform and on spiritual protection afforded by world religions. The perspective of emplacement reaches beyond globalism by showing how all phenomena in global circulations are at once both particular and capable of spreading widely as elements of the globalist imagination.

When the ritual paraphernalia of a secret society perished in flames in 1999, residents in Chinsapo township in Lilongwe, Malawi's capital, watched the bonfire and saw signs of more trouble to come. The secret society, known as gule wamkulu (the great dance), was the pride of the township's Chewa villagers who had settled in the area several decades before Lilongwe became the new capital in the 1970s. During the 1990s, its masked characters, zilombo (wild animals) grew increasingly aggressive toward migrants, who had rapidly outnumbered the local Chewa villagers. After cases of assault and rape, migrants began to demand the immediate banning of the secret society. When the police and other authorities seemed reluctant to impose such a ruling, a group of migrants invaded zilombo's hideaway, took the masks to the main road, and set them alight.

The perpetrators of this dramatic intervention were widely believed to have exposed themselves to sorcery. Most migrants, even those whose knowledge of the secret society was limited, saw a close association between zilombo and sorcerers. The perpetrators appeared fearless, not because they did not believe in sorcery, but because they were confident about superior protection. Islam was one source of their unflinching courage, invigorated, in this political context, by the role that Muslims could claim in Malawi's recent deliverance from dictatorship. The new state president—a Muslim and the perpetrators' ethnic compatriot—had promised freedom for
everyone to pursue prosperity, a promise that partly accounted for the rising tide of migrants from Malawi's countryside to its urban centers during the 1990s. According to the Muslim perpetrators I know, the burning of the masks removed one last obstacle to democracy in their lives. No longer would they and their families be terrorized by the arbitrary violence of zilombo; freedom (ufulu) would be won in the township.

The fact that a secret society and sorcerers, liberal democracy and a world religion, not to mention aspirations for economic advancement, can coexist in the same life-world has ceased to surprise ethnographers. The African city "appears as the postmodern social space par excellence" (van Binsbergen 1998:890; see also Simon 1999:24). It is an ethnographic site that apparently defies systematic description; efforts to attribute wholeness and integration to its range of meaningful orders are doomed from the start. Indeed, postmodernism posed problems to the ethnographers of urban Africa even before it was invented in academia. Epstein, writing about Zambia's Copperbelt towns during the colonial period, bemoaned the challenges to ethnographic representation in "a society inchoate and incoherent, where the haphazard is more conspicuous than the regular, and all is in a state of flux" (Epstein 1961:29). Over three decades later, Ferguson did fieldwork in the same towns and, despite their tangible economic decline, was overcome with a similar sense of a runaway society. "Certainly," he affirms, "(Epstein's) description resonates with my own field experience" (Ferguson 1999:18).

Despite the resonance between Epstein's and Ferguson's field experiences, it is not only three decades that separate them. Whereas Epstein's words convey a measure of despair before a perplexing diversity of practice and meaningful repertoires, Ferguson accepts diversity, on reflection, as an obvious characteristic of the Copperbelt social world. The three decades have made a community study an implausible proposition in ethnography, and Ferguson defines as his analytical object "a mode of conceptualizing, narrating, and experiencing socioeconomic change and its encounter with a confounding process of economic decline" (1999:21). Although much of his insight builds on the social anthropology of Epstein's generation in so-called British Central Africa, Ferguson's ethnography also draws on a more recent interest in global space. Flows and movement are essential to the making of the Copperbelt social world, through institutions and ideas that are in global circulation. The ethnographer is wary of taking for granted any boundaries, and even the most vigorous assertions of local lifestyles indicate the relational dynamic of the complex social field. Among the Zambians in Ferguson's study, however, not all is flow and transcendence. Ferguson shows how the economic decline of the Copperbelt is part of the global disconnect that marginalizes and yet does not isolate people such as impoverished Zambians. The images and ideas of a different kind of world continue to circulate in an unequal global space.

In this article based on ethnography on migration and township politics in Malawi, I consider a conundrum raised by Ferguson's study: the nature of sites and places in global circulations. My aim is to move beyond the current ethnographic unease with globalism, an unease that tacitly regards sites and places as analytical problems in the ethnography of global circulations. I take globalism, following Tsing's definition, to mean "endorsements of the importance of the global" (2000:330). Like Tsing, I discuss the challenges that contemporary ethnography can pose to such endorsements, particularly to the constructivism of the tired local–global dichotomy. Beyond dispute is the persuasiveness of the globalist imagination among the subjects of ethnography. More contentious is the imperative to devise an ethnographic approach to place making that retains the attention to planetary interconnections but
refuses to consider emplacement as a matter of localization. In this article, I suggest an approach to emplacement that discloses ethnographic subjects as situated in specific historical conditions that are as much embodied as they are discursively imagined. Ideas, practices, images, and institutions are, in this perspective, at once both particular and capable of spreading widely as elements of the globalist imagination (cf. Tsing 2000:352).

The predicament of migrants and their hosts in Chinsapo township presents an apposite case of emplacement and the limits of the globalist imagination. The Chewa headmen who struggle to rule in the township take the locality as a place for granted. They are challenged by migrants who continue to profess allegiance to their rural areas of origin and are stirred by various hopes in the globalist imagination, from greater prosperity in liberal democracy to a community of the saved in a world religion. The globalist imagination of migrants enables them to relativize their hosts' claims to authority by adumbrating a world beyond the township. In this article I show, however, that the ensuing conflicts do not indicate localization but embodied situatedness in a place, itself largely structured by a specific form of neoliberalism. The conflicts I describe in this article serve to demonstrate the ineluctable emplacement of globalism.

**constricted migration and imagined networks**

The distinct contribution of ethnography to debates on globalism lies in its capacity to show the actual limits of the fantasies that the globalist imagination produces and the reality of blockades amid global and transnational flows (cf. Geschiere and Meyer 1998). In Malawi, for instance, successive generations have had widely different experiences of migration, the constraints on their international and domestic mobility having varied greatly. The fact of spatial mobility underlies, nevertheless, the histories whereby the nation and its peoples have been made. From shifting cultivation and slave raiding in precolonial times to labor migration from the British protectorate, known as Nyasaland, spatial mobility was the rule rather than the exception. The migration of male labor to the mines and plantations elsewhere in southern Africa was integral to the regional political economy and, ultimately, to the making of British colonialism worldwide (cf. Crush et al. 1991). The fact that Malawi was never allowed to become a center of economic growth was borne out by the numbers of migrants abroad. In 1972, for example, the estimated proportion of Malawians abroad peaked at over ten percent of the total population, with considerably higher percentages recorded in certain areas of the country (Kydd and Christiansen 1982:358).

Now a source of nostalgia among many former migrants, life in the mines often involved absorbing new ideas and practices. Migrants who came from different colonies spread the nationalist cause by taking its message to their respective areas of origin. Malawians also were notably active on the scene of religious pluralism that the mines and colonial towns offered, often assuming leadership roles in new independent churches (Boeder 1974:105–116). The government of Malawi reduced international labor migration to a trickle in the mid-1970s, but, after decades of such political and religious influences, the government could not entirely envelop returning migrants in the confines of a postcolonial autocracy. Yet, since the 1970s, restrictions on the spatial mobility of Malawians have become increasingly severe. Destinations outside southern Africa have always been the prerogative of the privileged few, ever more so during the current consolidation of European borders against migrants from the south. But the real disappointment to Malawians has come from within the region. Struggling to deliver the promise of prosperity and security after apartheid, the government in South Africa has favored restrictive immigration policies, fuelling popular
mistrust, if not xenophobia, against those whom some South Africans consider to be “tropical” Africans.²

When the restrictions on international labor migration began to haunt Malawians in the 1970s, it was more than a coincidence that the Malawian plantation economy was itself in need of cheap labor (see Kydd and Christiansen 1982). Tobacco estates represented the backbone of the landlocked country’s economy and were controlled by a system of patronage in the one-party state (Mkandawire 1992). Returning migrants engaged in rural–rural migration rather than urbanization, either as smallholders or as laborers on agricultural estates (Christiansen and Kydd 1983). The colonial economy had kept the level of urbanization and industrialization modest in Malawi. At independence in 1964, five percent of the population lived in urban areas, and by 1987, this figure had grown to only 11 percent (Kalipeni 1999:61; Potts 1985:184). According to the preliminary results from the 1998 population census, still only 14 percent of the population live in urban areas (Malawi Government 1998:10).

These figures should not obscure the fact that although permanent urbanization may continue to be rare among the country’s poor majority, rural–urban migration may also be gaining more importance in Malawi. Rapid political and economic transformations in the 1990s account for promise urban centers have begun to appear to hold for some of the poor, with the population of the new capital Lilongwe increasing at a faster pace than that of the old commercial capital Blantyre.³ On coming to power in 1994, a new government embarked on a comparatively more comprehensive liberalization of the economy. The new government used its neoliberal platform to encourage small-scale entrepreneurship as a development strategy, with rhetoric that promised everyone the right to conduct business anywhere in the country and with microcredits for small-scale enterprises that benefited, in the main, those people who already had well-established businesses. As a consequence, urban centers have become bustling marketplaces, where vendors and various service providers are very visible.

Neoliberalism may have global purchase in the world after the Cold War, but its impact presupposes specific places.⁴ Residents in Lilongwe’s Chinsapo township, for example, are situated in an instance whereby neoliberalism is also emplaced. Enticed to move by the rhetoric on economic and political liberalization, migrants in the township endure restricted opportunities for mobility in one of the world’s poorest corners. The removal of subsidies on agricultural inputs by the neoliberal government has made life in rural areas increasingly difficult to sustain without supplementary income in towns. Yet as small-scale traders, unskilled or semiskilled laborers, and low-ranking civil servants, migrants in Chinsapo often notice how little mobility within the country improves their welfare. Businesses are precarious, their capital quickly depleted by crises such as illnesses and funerals. Employers seldom hesitate to use the neoliberal license to dismiss those who protest against poor salaries and conditions, confident that the large pool of the unemployed and underemployed will provide them with a workforce. In their attempts to keep the cost of urban living low, migrants in Chinsapo occupy an area that state and city authorities regard as a squatter settlement, unqualified for communal development. Although the World Bank and nongovernmental organizations have improved facilities for primary education and water supply, Chinsapo retains a rural character in its poor sanitation and dust paths.

Even if Chinsapo approximates the nethermost place of neoliberalism, the influx of migrants in the 1990s has benefited some people in the township. Established on the site of old Chewa villages the histories of which date back to the Turn of the Century, its convenient location—by a tarmac road about three miles from Old Town (the
location of Lilongwe’s main market) on a route that leads to a popular mission hospital—has contributed to the growth of neighborhoods into a township of some thirty thousand people. The headmen of the original villages continue to live in the township and consider migrants not as squatters but as newcomers in their villages. Headmen (mafumu) demand monetary compensation for the land that migrants occupy in the township, and the early years of the influx saw considerable sums of money being transferred to headmen’s households. The actors in the township’s land and housing market are now more diverse, including migrants themselves and outright speculators, but headmen continue to insist on a share of every new transaction. More symbolic than substantial, the dues in such transactions serve to remind residents of the headmen’s authority as the ultimate owners of the land.

As I describe in this article, the public recognition of headmen’s authority is by no means obvious. The difficulties partly derive from migrants’ convictions that they are “in town” (ku tawuni), beyond the reach of any headman’s authority. Most migrants also profess allegiance to the chiefs and headmen in their rural areas of origin, and according to my sample in 1997, 89 percent of migrants expected to return to their original villages. At least 79 percent of migrants either actively cultivated land in their areas of origin while living in Chinsapo or were confident that they had land in their original villages. The diversity of migrants’ areas of origin also accounts for headmen’s difficulties to exercise authority. The township has migrants from all the 25 districts of Malawi, with no district having more than 16 percent of all migrants in Chinsapo.5

Challenges to headmen’s authority do not, however, derive only from migrants’ close ties to their rural areas of origin or from their ideas of what town life should be. By insisting that migrants recognize their authority, headmen in Chinsapo draw on a distinction between those who have been born in the area (obadwa) and those who have arrived there (obwera). Crucial to headmen’s attempts to assert authority is their close association with the gule wamkulu. The violence and intimidation that its masked characters inflict on the obwera inadvertently contribute to some migrants’ emplacement in the township as contentious counterforces to the secret society. Despite the spatial confines of their migration, migrants are able to imagine networks far beyond Malawi, networks that make headmen’s authority seem both parochial and immoral. Islam and, among Christians, Pentecostalism seem to be the most effective forces to promote a sense of world religions among their adherents. Yet it is important to understand that imagined networks are made compelling by the embodied experiences of emplacement in which a neoliberal predicament combines with the particularities of the township as a place ostensibly ruled by gule wamkulu. In Chinsapo township, the general urban problems of violence and segregation assume a place-specific content (cf. Caldeira 1999; Sassen 1999). Here emplacement and the arguments it occasions drew my attention to the workings of the occult.

**globalism and ethnographic doubt**

The shifting predicaments of Malawian migrants prompt me to join those scholars who ask whether globalism has, as Louie puts it, “carried the liberatory potential of transnational flows too far” (2000:661). Reterritorialization has come to complement perspectives on deterritorialization. In contemporary migrations, the globalist emphasis on flows is undermined not only by the restrictive immigration policies of many governments but also by the continuing resilience of nation-states as organizing models for transnational migrants themselves (Ong 1999; Smith and Guarnizo 1998). In forced migration, on the other hand, some refugees reproduce their status as
displaced by swearing their commitment to particular homes and territorialized identities (Englund 2002; Malkki 1995). A somewhat similar observation applies to certain contemporary imaginings of networks as the loci of transcendence (Riles 2000). De-territorialization evoked in the rhetoric of corporate globalism, moreover, can be shown to mask the specific conditions of its existence, dependent as it is on the infrastructures found only in particular cities (Sassen 1991, 1998). Even on the most personal plane, sociological evidence on the effects of the new communication and information technologies does not support a view of profound transformations in intimacy and sociality (Boden and Molotch 1994).

The analytical choices presented by such observations are by no means inconsequential. Just as anthropologists who define modernity as their subject matter adopt its organizing assumptions even as they attempt to revise them (Englund and Leach 2000), so too does globalism offer its proponents and critics alike a persuasive framework within which to debate its apparent instances. Crucial to that framework is often an attempt to distinguish between the local and the global, an attempt that introduces, as Tsing comments, “a very seductive set of distinctions,” promising “both focused detail and the big picture” (2000:352). The appeal of the local–global distinction has partly derived from its capacity to deconstruct the apparent uniformity of globalization. The local, as “the stopping point of global circulations” (Tsing 2000:338), has been imagined as the source of the diversity (see, e.g., Robertson 1992). The observations above on networks and global cities suggest, however, that the local–global distinction can rapidly lose its analytical value once it is properly interrogated. Not only is the so-called local an emergent property of nonlocal processes, the so-called global also requires particular sites and terrains to operate.

Ethnographically informed attempts to move beyond globalism constitute a varied field of study, often united only by their considerable unease with local–global distinctions. The claim that “for the first time in human history, there is a global present” (Friedland and Boden 1994:15) typifies a recent scholarly and popular fascination with time–space compression (see Featherstone et al. 1995; Giddens 1990; Harvey 1989), increasingly tempered by ethnographic doubt. The uneven distribution of globalizing technologies—facsimile machines, mobile telephones, internet, electronic mail, and satellite technology—is an obvious source of this ethnographic doubt. Perhaps even greater challenges to globalist trappings are posed by those ethnographic studies that show the continuing significance of place in practices spurred by the globalist imagination. Van Binsbergen (1998), for example, chooses virtuality as his key analytical notion when probing the uses of ritual among urban Zambians. The physical absence of migrants from the rural area of origin provides an indispensable context for their ritual practice, supporting the familiar globalist axiom that “the socially local is no longer necessarily the geographically near” (van Binsbergen 1998:879). Yet van Binsbergen’s study suggests that urban Zambians’ place making bears little resemblance to time–space compression because ritual cannot dissipate the temporal and spatial separation between the rural and the urban. The two domains are organized along very different social, economic, and political lines, and girls’ initiation ceremonies, for example, indicate the “emulation of the village as a virtual image” (van Binsbergen 1998:882), a process of symbolic construction by which urban dwellers make a place with another place in mind. Despite the translocal flow of ideas and embodied practice, the result of this engagement with the virtual village is another place, a site with “urban patterns of signification” (van Binsbergen 1998:891).

Although it discloses the translocal underpinnings of the local, van Binsbergen’s notion of virtuality is less successful in dispensing with one central feature of much
globalist discourse—constructivism. Rather than being a place in which migrants come to be situated, the local appears as an achievement that they carve out of the cultural materials that the fact of their movement provides. Construction—a building metaphor of social life—enunciates the making of the local. Postglobalist ethnography hardly moves beyond the local–global distinction without confronting this organizing metaphor. The problem haunts all perspectives that regard signification as analytically and temporally prior to experience. According to Ingold's apt criticism, common to such perspectives is the absurd proposition that "worlds are made before they are lived in" (1995:66).

In point of fact, this proposition betrays the risks involved in analytically disconnecting culture from place. Constructivism inadvertently reproduces long-standing difficulties in the social sciences to appreciate spatial relations and place making, difficulties that stem from "landscape perspectives" (cf. Gray 1999:442). These perspectives uphold the assumption, usually tacit, that the subject has a capacity for disengaged perception and inscription. The origin is in landscape as an object in European art from the late 18th century onward, aesthetics that emerged concurrently with the processes of industrialization and urbanization (see Thomas 1984). Impressed by paintings that were like pictures of rural scenery, the emergent bourgeois class brought memories of rural pedigrees to urban homes. Crucial to the perception of environment as landscape was a certain autonomy and subjectivity associated with the spectator. In Lemaire's words, "the environment could only manifest itself as a landscape when the perceiving subject withdrew from his involvement in it and when he had the power and desire to know and to embrace the totality of his world by a distanced and disengaged look" (1997:6).

Emplacement refers to a perspective in which the subject is inextricably situated in a historically and existentially specific condition, defined, for brevity, as a "place." Casey observes, "We are never anywhere, anywhen, but in place" (1996:39). Emplacement draws attention to experiential and lived praxis, in line with the basic phenomenological insight that "the body is our general medium for having a world" (Merleau-Ponty 1962:146). In contrast to the cognitive connotations of the building metaphor, the situatedness of the emplaced subject discloses emotions and sensory experiences as central to the key notion of presence (Feld 1996:92-94). Yet, phenomenology commands such respect in contemporary anthropology and sociology that scholars are unlikely to find it a major source of disagreement between the perspective of emplacement and those perspectives that use the building metaphor. Admittedly, the antideterminist approach of constructivist sociology has long promised phenomenological understanding (see, e.g., Berger and Luckman 1966). A similar point of convergence may be the various praxis theories, especially as proposed by Bourdieu (1977) and de Certeau (1984). Although the extent of incompatibility between perspectives influenced by phenomenology and praxis theories remains to be established (cf. Farnell 1999, 2000), my usage of the perspective of emplacement, at least, draws on phenomenological insights into embodiment in my effort to reach beyond the building metaphor of social life.

By using the perspective of emplacement, I investigate how persons, through intentional motion between places, become involved in one another's life-projects, in the intersubjective making of subjectivity (cf. Jackson 1996:23-29). Migration, in this perspective, is a transition rather than a transportation (Casey 1996:23). In transition, embodied pasts, far from being passively transported, are emplaced anew as corollaries of migration. Purposeful activity, in other words, never encounters a world yet to be constructed or allows migration between identical places. "The ever-lengthening
shadow of our bodily past” (Casey 1987:194) casts itself over every move, every change of places, only to be further extended by the particularities of a place.¹¹

Location, material form, and meaningfulness contribute to the historical and existential definition of a place (Gieryn 2000; Sack 1997; Thrift 1996). Yet, the focus on place making as emplacement dissipates the local–global distinction not by returning to analytical models that presume cultural and spatial discreteness, but through enhanced sensitivity to situatedness and presence. The perspective is postglobalist because it both builds on earlier insights into flows and circulations in a global space, and it recognizes specific sites and terrains as the conditions of their existence and transformation. Even the apparently most global phenomenon is continuously emplaced as it reaches its new destinations. As such, localization is doubly disqualified to capture the contours of emplacement. Not only does it evoke globalization as its logical opposite, it also conveys a sense of closure in local appropriations. If persons, institutions, and capital are always emplaced, the challenge is to understand the variable capacities of places to act as springboards for traveling, whether by people, ideas, or institutions. Although “the local is the general” (Casey 1996:32; see also Casey 1993), emplacement as a phenomenological fact is molded by histories of boundary making and constraint. The case of migrants and locals in Chinsapo township shows how such global phenomena as Islam, neoliberalism, and democracy enter into further circulation after being emplaced by the embodied experience of the occult.

emplacement and the occult

The emplacement of migrants in Chinsapo township owes much to the fact that they share the township with a group of people who do not consider the place as ephemeral, lacking an identity beyond a haphazard collection of migrants in town. Obadwa, those who were born in Chinsapo, refer to the township as “our village” (mudzi wathu), a place founded by Chewa people before the arrival of whites. In fact, most obadwa are conversant enough with local history to point out that what many migrants consider as one township is actually a territory divided between several headmen. The divisions have occurred both as consequences of succession disputes and as results of relocations by the colonial and postcolonial governments. Headmen, supported by close aides (nyakwawa) selected from other obadwa families, oversee their respective areas of the township, while migrants usually remain unaware of the histories that underlie their division of authority.¹²

Many migrants also fail to see distinctions between the gule wamkulu societies in the township. Chinsapo’s headmen, on the other hand, subscribe to the common Chewa notion that every headmanship entails a mzinda, a territorial unit for initiating neophytes and conducting performances. Although most divisions of the township have both Christian and non-Christian headmen, the secret society evokes pride among virtually all obadwa. The different societies in Chinsapo perform in each other’s ceremonies and profess solidarity against critical outsiders. Rather than being a virtual enactment of the village in the city (cf. van Binsbergen 1998), gule wamkulu is a ritual for the here and now, an inescapable presence in the township for all who live there.

After the decreasing involvement of obadwa in controlling land acquisition in the township, gule wamkulu has assumed a more central role in constituting the difference between obadwa and obwera. In practice, migrants, even if ethnic strangers, are allowed to become initiated, and the most consequential distinction is, therefore, between the initiated (ometa) and the uninitiated (osameta).¹³ In obadwa families,
males continue to be initiated as young boys, often before they have reached puberty, and are abducted blindfolded to *dambwe*, the secret location of the society in the bush. The use of physical violence is absent when novices are more mature, such as when the obwera are initiated, but the worst provocations, whether verbal insults or trespasses on ritual sites, can still lead to forcible initiation. Every novice is introduced to the society's core values, which stress respect for elders, and to its code language that enables members to prove their initiation. Those who choose to continue with the process of initiation learn origin myths and songs, developing a nuanced understanding of what the different masks and animal structures stand for and how they are made. Few migrants are interested in reaching this stage. For them, initiation is a matter of "buying a path" (*kugula njira*), a practical concession to the authority of the obadwa that permits them to walk anywhere in the township without fear.

Among the uninitiated, the threat of physical violence is, however, only one aspect of the secret society. Another aspect is its association with the forces of magic and sorcery (*matsenga*). Zilombo (masked characters) are widely believed to embody occult forces, and initiation is thought to entail some knowledge of matsenga. Healers' (*asing'anga*) interests in masks and animal structures, parts of which they use as activating agents (*chizimba*) in medicine, are thought to confirm the association of this ritual paraphernalia with invisible forces. Moreover, the members of the society also are commonly believed to use the ashes of their burnt masks as medicine (*mankhwala*) in various morally dubious pursuits (see also Kaspin 1999). For the uninitiated, masks and the characters who wear them are often considered extremely dangerous, leading to the need to protect oneself with countermedicine, initiation, or by giving money to zilombo.

The feared occult side of gule wamkulu is actual only in relation to outsiders and when conflicts deepen among its members. In its positive mode, gule wamkulu establishes a symbolic link between the afterworld and fertility. Zilombo is a term that draws on a widespread notion in the region by which ancestral spirits are associated with, or are seen to take the form of, some animals (Morris 1998, 2000). Their appearance announces the death of a member of the secret society, and they lead the bereaved to the graveyard for the burial. Another set of masks and animal structures appears, performing to the beat of drums, at a larger ceremony to finish the funeral process. Such ceremonies, lasting several days and nights, are organized during the dry season between April and October. Through their vigorous dancing at the grave, zilombo "rub the footprints off" (*kufafaniza mapazi*), signaling that the funeral is over and that the deceased has safely entered the afterworld.

Among the obadwa in Chinsapo township, women are often as proud as men of gule wamkulu, take an active part in its performances by singing, clapping hands, cooking food, and brewing beer, and invite zilombo to appear in the initiation ceremonies of girls (*chinamwali*). Even if never formally initiated into gule wamkulu, therefore, women participate in some of the symbolic associations that the secret society generates between the afterworld, fertility, and the growth (*kukula*) of persons as moral beings (cf. Kaspin 1996). During gule wamkulu performances, explicitly sexual gestures between male performers and the female audience often enact these symbolic associations.

Gule wamkulu is also important in constituting the authority of chiefs and headmen. When a new headman is installed in Chinsapo township, he sleeps the night before the main ceremony with his aides in a house known as *tsimba*, a term also used for the seclusion where young girls spend a night during their initiation ceremony. Early on the following morning, the new headman is captured (*kugwira*) by zilombo,
like the novice who is abducted to dambwe for the first time. Zilombo escort the new headman to his own house. Later during the day, he inspects his predecessor's grave before arriving in bwalo (the headman's courtyard) where the ceremony takes place. Elderly headmen from neighboring villages first perform dances, followed by dances performed by elderly women. It is only after these dances that zilombo appear again, and the new headman gives them money before they begin their performance. How many and how impressive the masks are depend on the headman's seniority, but beer, food, and gule wamkulu ought to be part of the installation of all the headmen in Chinsapo township who wish to be associated with the secret society.

According to the uninitiated, the root of their conflict with the secret society lies in the fact that zilombo often violate the rules on which township dwellers have agreed. Certain areas of the township that are exclusively occupied by migrants have been declared by both headmen and migrants as off-limits to zilombo, and yet they sometimes appear in these areas, harassing passersby and even assaulting them. Despite the association of gule wamkulu with the occult, many of the uninitiated are outspoken in their criticism, arguing that the secret society should be banned everywhere in the township as it has been banned in the officially recognized residential areas of the capital. The uninitiated can confront the initiated in other, more direct ways, as well. Most Christian churches and Muslim communities excommunicate those who are known to be members of gule wamkulu. Two imposing mosques and dozens of church buildings demarcate sites where gule wamkulu itself is an outsider in the township (cf. Metcalf 1996). The most fearless of the uninitiated seek to provoke zilombo by deliberately trespassing on their ritual sites, ignoring their demands for money, or openly ridiculing their costumes and antics.

Such self-confidence is, as mentioned, usually an attribute of Muslims and Pentecostal Christians in Chinsapo township. Whereas other Christian congregations may contain men who covertly belong to gule wamkulu, born-again Pentecostalists make a point of denouncing the secret society as the devil's domain. A man makes his second birth appear more complete if he is able to tell the congregation about his despicable past as a gule wamkulu member. Among Muslims, an element of cultural alienation reinforces their condemnation of gule wamkulu. Most Muslims in the township are Yao by ethnic affiliation and from those areas in Mangochi, Machinga, and Salima districts where the secret society does not exist. For both Muslims and Pentecostal Christians, however, the real source of self-confidence is the superior protection that their beliefs seem to offer against sorcery. Muslims and Pentecostal Christians share the conviction that the power of prayer and worship ought to be enough to counter sorcery.¹⁸

Muslims and Pentecostal Christians criticize, and sometimes provoke, gule wamkulu with the self-confidence that their far-flung networks afford. At once both religious and economic, these networks are predisposed to make life in the township look secondary to the world of the righteous. Like other township dwellers, few of them are able to travel to foreign countries. Instead, visiting sheikhs and crusaders, together with resident imams and missionaries, embody the world beyond the confines of the township, supported by a transnational flow of religious tracts, videos, and audio tapes. The exact distribution of both religious and material products is sometimes a matter of intense competition, riddled with conflicts and exclusion, but there can be little doubt about the force of imagination that these networks promote (Englund 2001). Yet the occult processes of emplacement in Chinsapo township entail a predicament in which the globalist imagination faces strict limits to constructing new worlds.
Islam and democracy

The last few years of the 20th century witnessed intensifying conflicts between certain Muslims and the gule wamkulu in Chinsapo township. It is important to understand how these dramatic events gained momentum from the specific sources of Muslims’ globalist imagination. In their interventions, the spiritual and the secular were indistinguishable. The worldwide reach of Islam came to be associated with transformations in national politics, and multiparty democracy provided an argument against the occult.

The influx of migrants into Chinsapo during the 1990s coincided with a change of government in Malawi. Malawi Congress Party (MCP), the only party in the one-party state since independence in 1964, was ousted from power by the United Democratic Front (UDF) in the 1994 multiparty elections. The transition brought to the fore a politics of religious and ethnic identities in a predominantly Christian country. Bakili Muluzi, the leader of the UDF and the new state president, is a Muslim Yao whereas the first head of state after independence, Kamuzu Banda, was a Christian Chewa. Although the issue of religious competition has rarely appeared in the discourse of the political elite and Muluzi has made the point of attending Christian services, religious competition has assumed specific significance in particular places. In Chinsapo, the tension has been associated not so much with Muslims and Christians as with Muslims and the members of gule wamkulu.

Most Muslims in the township see their stay in town as a consequence of the enhanced opportunities for entrepreneurship that the political transition seemed to herald. Democracy (dimokalase) is, in this perspective, a condition that promises, if not guarantees, prosperity. Such an auspicious transition has been made even more inspiring by Muluzi’s identity as a Muslim and a Yao and by his image as a man of the people, a president without cruelty (pulezidenti wopanda nkhanza). For many Muslims in the country, he embodies not only democratic leadership but also the triumph of Islam in Malawi. Muslim communities in Malawi have long been supervised by leaders of Asian extraction, who have often kept their distance from their African subjects. The same distance has characterized the attitude of Asian employers, some of whom, despite belonging to families that came to Malawi from India and Pakistan well before independence, have never acquired Malawian citizenship. Muluzi, backed by considerable personal wealth, has appealed to Malawian Muslims as one of their own.

Far from being a source of parochial ethnic or nationalist sentiments, however, Muluzi’s economic and political success signifies, for Muslim migrants in Chinsapo township, the undeniable linkage between Malawian Muslims and the global Muslim community. Muslim migrants are frequently exposed to the stories and images of Muslims in other countries, especially once they start attending Islamic teachings in the capital. As in other cases of the globalizing Islamist discourse, whether Muslims are portrayed as the targets of violent persecution or, on the contrary, as the subjects of impressive spiritual and material advancement, a sense of a global space is created (see Ahmed and Donnan 1994; Beinin and Stork 1996). For some Muslim migrants in Chinsapo, Malawi’s difficult transition to multiparty democracy is an addition to the long list of struggles in which Muslims are embroiled all over the world. The fact that a black Muslim won the highest office in Malawi represents for many Malawian Muslims both the achievement of a virtuous political system and the capacity of Malawian Muslims to contribute to the appreciation of Islam in the world. After 1994, these sentiments have been made increasingly compelling by new arrivals from the global Muslim community, hailing from the Middle East and North Africa rather than Pakistan.
and India. They have engaged in business ventures in the country, allegedly with Muluzi and other UDF leaders. Among the critics of the new regime, their involvement in constructing several new mosques has prompted the fear that Muluzi is turning the country into an Islamic state.

Although political analysts often assume arguments about fundamentalism where Islam is involved (see, e.g., Huntington 1996), Muslim migrants and headmen in Chinsapo have not expressed their conflicts in such terms. In this case, rather than being the only active religious force, Islam is embedded in a field of social relations. Moreover, Muslim migrants have come to view their faith as a champion of liberal values, such as the freedom of worship and movement. For them, the era of democracy (nthawi ya dimokalase) has assumed moral content, to be safeguarded against reactionary forces. With their Chewa identity, the headmen in Chinsapo stand among the suspected enemies of democracy, further blemished by the former president’s remembered interest in gule wamkulu as one of Malawi’s treasured traditions. Most headmen are more pragmatic than these suspicions allow, delighted to accept recognition even from UDF officials, but few of them have ever donned the emblems of the new era. After second multiparty elections in 1999, headmen’s sympathies with the MCP were more obvious than during the period between the elections. The 1999 elections took place when gule wamkulu in the township was on the brink of being suppressed by the police. If voted back to power, the MCP, many headmen thought, would show gule wamkulu the respect it deserved.

Muslim migrants in Chinsapo often consider headmen’s conduct as inimical to achieving democracy in the township. Their rulings and monetary penalties belong, many Muslim migrants say, to the era of fear (nthawi ya mantha). To the extent that the occult powers of the secret society’s zilombo are summoned in headmen’s authoritarian approach, gule wamkulu itself is seen to represent the antithesis of dimokalase. In this vein, the ethnic prejudice and regionalism that have come to plague Malawi’s political pluralism do not simply derive from the machinations by the political elite. Emplaced in a poor township under neoliberal conditions, political pluralism may ignite unprecedented conflicts that politicians feel compelled to comment on and manipulate. Far from being the stopping point of the globalist imagination, place is where political pluralism has its effects and where, confronted by the specific conditions of its reproduction, it transforms itself. The conflict between Muslims and gule wamkulu in Chinsapo township is one example of such processes.

the emplacement of the globalist imagination

A group of some dozen Muslim men were at the core of the conflict that assumed increasingly violent forms in Chinsapo township in 1996–2000. Most of them were in their twenties and headed young households, whereas others were unmarried and shared housing with other unmarried men. A number of the men were connected through the bonds of kinship and marriage and originated from the same districts of Machinga and Mangochi. The group had expanded in the township to include other Muslims who prayed at the same mosque, shared ideas about business ventures, and conducted ceremonies, known as jando, that initiated Yao boys into manhood. An important aspect of their conviviality was their unflinching support for the democratic transition, regularly expressed in their praise for Muluzi and in their participation in the UDF meetings in the capital. Many of the men had decorated their houses with Muluzi’s portraits and wore the party’s yellow T-shirts even when they were not attending a party function. The house of a local UDF chairman, himself a Yao Muslim, became a focal point for informal gatherings, already an important site for the township’s
Muslims because one of its rooms was used for the seclusion of the boys who were undergoing jando. More senior than the men in the group, the chairman was not directly involved in the conflicts. His presence, together with the political and religious texts and audio tapes available at his house, was, however, essential to younger and poorer Muslim migrants’ abilities to imagine a world beyond the township, a world in which Islam, democracy, business, and being a Yao were closely entwined.

Although these young men had little personal contact with the township’s headmen, a common topic of their conversations was the headmen’s conduct. The conversations that I heard during my fieldwork often reached the conclusion that the headmen were not the legitimate rulers of the township. In particular, the group of Muslim men made no distinction between the misbehavior of the secret society’s zilombo and the headmen’s authoritarianism, viewing the UDF as the only acceptable authority in the township. They complained about these circumstances to the constituency’s member of parliament, a UDF politician, who urged the headmen to insure that zilombo did not use violence.

The situation deteriorated dramatically when a group of six masked men gang raped a woman in the township in 1996. The woman, a migrant though not a Yao, was seized by zilombo when she was found walking at night near the site of a gule wamkulu performance. One of the headmen was detained by the police for questioning, but he denied any knowledge of the case. As wild animals, he argued, zilombo were not subject to the same laws as human beings, and as the headman, he was responsible for the village (mudzi), not for the bush (itchile) from which the group came. I was later told by one of the headman’s aides that after more pressure from the police and UDF leaders in the city, the headman finally released the names of the rapists, on the condition that the reason for their detention would not be made public in Chinsapo.

The group of Muslim men found much ammunition for their criticism of the headmen in this and other similar incidents, and after the police and a member of parliament had become involved in the dispute, tension increased considerably. Zilombo were seen to make even more arrogant forays into the areas in the township where the secret society was banned while the group of Muslim men looked for opportunities to provoke them. Such an opportunity arose when a group of small zilombo, performed by young boys in the daytime, wandered into a neighborhood where some of the Muslim men lived. One of the men, known here as Saidi, quickly called on a few others in the Muslim group to chase the zilombo away. Brandishing sticks and bows, with onlookers laughing loudly, the men ran after the zilombo until they disappeared into a headman’s house in another part of the township. Saidi led the men back to their neighborhood in a triumphant mood, evidently thrilled that they had shown gule wamkulu the limits of its presence.

Their joy was to be short-lived, however. The following night saw the arrival of bigger zilombo in the neighborhood, yelling in high voices like animals. They attacked Saidi’s house, smashing its windows and door. The zilombo disappeared as suddenly as they had appeared, but Saidi’s tribulations were not over. The next day, he fell ill and died in the same afternoon. Many of the uninitiated in the township, Muslims included, were struck by awe after this incident, convinced that the zilombo had killed Saidi through sorcery (matsenga). His fellow Muslims were equally shaken but swore at his funeral to continue campaigning for the eradication of the secret society. They refused to believe that its occult powers could exceed the protection and strength that Islamic worship provided. The future of democracy, they went on to argue,
was at stake when zilombo were able to engage in such acts of evil without being challenged.

Undeterred, some of the young Muslim men appeared to seek deliberate confrontations with the secret society. One of them, conspicuously dressed as a Muslim in a white robe and cap, was beaten by zilombo after he had trespassed on the site of their performance, refused to give money, and insulted them for their nakedness. The beating gave the group of Muslim men license to contemplate a proper method of retaliation. A thought that had been expressed many times before in their conversations was now accepted: They should invade dambwe (the hideaway of gule wamkulu in the bush) and confiscate the zilombo’s masks. An argument ensued as to what the men should do with the masks. Some suggested that they should be delivered to the police for destruction, whereas others insisted that the masks should be destroyed by the men themselves. The latter view won, especially after it was observed that the police would take a long time to attend to the issue. The need was, the men agreed, to act immediately in order to prevent more violence from occurring, and the destruction should be made public to insure that the entire township would become aware of the act. The burning of the masks took place in full view of township dwellers, by the main road on a site directly opposite a bustling concentration of bars and shops.

For both the initiated and the uninitiated, it was difficult to imagine a more comprehensive assault on gule wamkulu. Not only had the men intruded into a site strictly forbidden for the uninitiated, they had also destroyed key ritual paraphernalia in an especially arrogant way. The headmen of Chinsapo made no secret of their profound dismay and immediately announced that the township’s graveyards would no longer be open to migrants’ burials. The act of burning masks had indicated, they argued, such insensitivity to Chewa culture (chichewa) that migrants could not expect any assistance from the headmen when they had funerals. The decision caused considerable uproar, and, given the virtually daily occurrence of burials in the township of some thirty thousand residents, soon proved to be impractical. The headmen changed their ruling to concern Muslim burials only. After much lobbying by UDF and Muslim leaders in the township, who also threatened to bring the issue to the attention of the police and city authorities, the headmen grudgingly refrained from pursuing their ruling.

The burnt masks did nothing to subvert the occult dimension of gule wamkulu in the township. No sooner was the bonfire extinguished than the headmen of Chinsapo arrived to inspect the damage and, significantly, to collect all the ashes they could find. They divided the ashes among themselves, again in full view of curious onlookers. Sorcerers are believed to use the ashes of burnt masks and other structures in gule wamkulu as “medicine” (mankhwala), and a widespread expectation in the township was that the culprits would soon be afflicted. For several months, nothing seemed to happen. The group of Muslim men enjoyed a sense of enhanced self-confidence, reinforced by the results of the presidential and parliamentary elections in 1999. Gradually, however, bouts of misfortune among the men began to lead the popular opinion toward the conclusion that they were under attack by sorcerers. Two of the men lost a child, both under five years old, while emotional disturbances and domestic violence haunted others. The worst was the fate of the man who was generally seen as the leader of the controversial operation. Notorious already before the controversy, his aggressive and erratic character assumed a more violent disposition. After beating his wife badly one night, he drank poison used for killing rats and died.

In a more visible attempt to regain their authority, the headmen of Chinsapo began to erect a memorial on the site where the masks had been burned. Local UDF
leaders agreed that the culprits were obliged to provide funds for the cement and other materials needed for the memorial, known as chiliza. The Muslim men accepted the deal, confident that they had humiliated the headmen. Chiliza, finished a year after the bonfire, was introduced to township dwellers as the grave (manda) of gule wamkulu where the spirits (mizimu) of the burnt masks sleep (kugona). Kasiya maliro, an antelopelike figure whose appearance marks the end of the funeral during gule wamkulu performances, was constructed on a podium made of cement. Its consecration witnessed a huge performance by several gule wamkulu societies, keenly observed by the uninitiated on the other side of the main road. It was simultaneously a performance in honor of a deceased headman in Chinsapo and a large gathering of Chewa dignitaries, including Maliri, the chief overseeing this part of Lilongwe district, and his peers from Kasungu and Mchinji districts, not to mention headmen from neighboring villages. The presence of Lilongwe’s district commissioner indicated the government’s wish to defuse the tension between its supporters and Chewa headmen. The memorial demarcated a site imbued with potentially dangerous forces, a fact that was underlined in the speeches. Those who wanted to die, Chief Maliri pronounced, were welcome to tamper with the memorial. Mizimu would insure, though, that their death would be slow and painful.

Through its provocations and counterattacks, the conflict between the Muslim migrants and the headmen was bound to remain unresolved, however much the parties would celebrate particular events as final victories. What the conflict shows unambiguously is the emplacement of the globalist imagination. This imagination stirred the group of Muslim migrants to pursue an alternative vision of the township. The sources of their imagination lay in the neoliberal rhetoric of free entrepreneurship, in the pursuit of liberal democracy, and in the spiritual protection afforded by Islam, all of which made it plausible for them to imagine the township as a gathering of mutually independent citizens. Headmen and other locals in the township, on the other hand, were no less affected by the globalist imagination. Their vision of Chewa culture as the ultimate authority in the township arose from processes, common in the contemporary world, by which awareness of global flows fed claims to specific authenticities and identities (cf. Strathern 1995:3). The obstacles that the occult powers of gule wamkulu put on achieving Muslim migrants’ vision revealed the extent to which migrants, when they settled in the township, did not enter a new world yet to be symbolically constructed. Chinsapo was a place, a social reality in which migrants came to be situated. Their place-specific experiences gave rise to ideas and modes of action that, as they travel with migrants or through other media, are likely to revise the globalist imagination.

**conclusion**

I have suggested ways in which ethnographers can study the expressions of the globalist imagination without being captured by its rhetoric and organizing assumptions. Ethnographers move beyond globalism by considering the specific conditions of global circulations that presuppose neither global forces nor local places. All phenomena in global circulations, including those that are conjured up in the globalist imagination, must be understood as situated in specific existential and historical circumstances. After the ethnography presented here, two conclusions stand out. First, globalism contains a variety of projects and aspirations; there is no one process of globalization encompassing a range of local appropriations. Muslims in Chinsapo township, for example, imagine a specific combination of spiritual and political realities according to the circumstances in which they are situated. Second, although such
circumstances have variable capacities to produce innovations for global circulation, it is reasonable to assume that each situated engagement with the globalist imagination also is simultaneously a widely ramifying revision. In order to be moments in continuous circulations, such engagements are new beginnings rather than ends and closings. Through involving migrants, the police, politicians, and other authorities, the conflicts between Muslims and headmen in Chinsapo township are enmeshed in a circulation of images and ideas.

I have introduced the perspective of emplacement to facilitate postglobalist ethnography. Rather than heralding a return to place-bound ethnography, emplacement provides a perspective in which current analytical insights into a global space are enhanced by the postglobalist realization that globalism itself hinges on specific circumstances. A key analytical consequence is the realization that the widespread ethnographic doubt about local–global distinctions may indicate the futility of disconnecting culture from place. Emplacement defines the human condition in which globalism has its permutations. The constraints imposed by emplacement are historically variable, indicating power relations in all boundary making, but the crucial lesson to ethnographic analysts concerns the limits of construction in social life. It is not simply a question of power differences, but of the ways in which sociocultural phenomena are constitutive rather than merely expressive (cf. Ferguson 1999:95–98). In order to disclose constraints on the apparently expanding possibilities for imagination and identification in globalism, I have stressed emplacement as an embodied condition.

The conflicts in the politics of Chinsapo township suggest that embodiment revolves around different kinds of experiences in different historical contexts. In Chinsapo, the occult appears central to the experiences of embodiment, especially in situations of crisis and conflict. Islam and Pentecostal Christianity are currently two of the most compelling forces to offer protection against the occult in the township. As this article has shown, however, such protection may be considered precarious, challenged by the powers of the gule wamkulu. The restrictions that its members place on township dwellers’ lives range from physical violence to sorcery, all involving the body as a medium for being emplaced in the township. The cases of rape have been particularly dramatic instances of embodied constraint. Lest they be seen as problems of the generic city, which is “primarily a place of danger, violence and male power” (Bech 1998:222), the specifics of these attacks must be understood. They have been directed against migrant women by spiritual beings that normally engage in playful enactment of sexuality with their female audiences. Whereas this normal pattern is part of the process of promoting fertility and reproductive relations, raping migrant women denies any such relatedness between migrants and gule wamkulu.

Emplacement affords some remedy for the representational problems prevalent in urban ethnography, not by taking urban localities for granted but by attending to the specific embodied conditions that underlie the experiences of a place. Just as the local–global distinction may give false priority to social construction, so too do urban ethnographers’ views of the haphazard, mentioned in the beginning of this article, arise from their disembodied gaze. If the haphazard appears amenable to social construction, it is because the disembodied gaze produces a landscape perspective. It stands back, surveys social life as if it were a landscape, and draws the conclusion that the apparent lack of pattern merely calls for intense social construction. An abstract environment, goes the tacit assumption, must first be symbolically ordered before it is experienced in praxis. The perspective of emplacement is likely to yield better ethnography, if only because it is attuned to the full range of sensory capacities in
ethnography after globalism

the urban experience. Ethnography after globalism maps out new frontiers for the study of the city, engaged as it is with subjects whose embodied presence is situated in history.

notes

1. The vernacular is Chichewa. This article draws on 13 months of fieldwork carried out in 1996–97, 1999, and 2000. Earlier fieldwork elsewhere in the region had made me fluent in Chichewa and had taken me through the initial stage of initiation into gule wamkulu. I was, therefore, able to attend its performances and interview its members in Chinsapo without hindrance. Gule wamkulu is also known as nyau. This term properly refers to a particular animal structure in the secret society's wide collection of masks and structures. It is used, in the main, by the uninitiated to refer to the secret society as a whole. For more general information on gule wamkulu, see, for example, Birch de Aguilar 1995; Kaspin 1993; Morris 1998; Schoffeleers 1968, 1976; and Yoshida 1992.

2. South Africa's changing political economy, and immigration and unemployment in it, has been discussed by Comaroff and Comaroff (1999) and Crush and McDonald (2000). For case studies, see, for example, Maharaj and Rajkumar 1997 and Dodson and Oelofse 2000.


4. On the critique of neoliberalism, particularly of the apparent omnipotence of the market, see, for example, Bourdieu 1998 and Chomsky 1998. An ethnographic approach to the neoliberal era is offered by Burawoy et al. (2000).

5. The sample included 300 households. Sixteen percent of migrants were from the southern district of Mangochi, followed by 15 percent from Dedza and 11 percent from Ntcheu in the Central Region. Lilongwe is in the Central Region, but the proportion of migrants from the district surrounding the city was only seven percent. This may be explained by the practice whereby villagers in the district commute between villages and the city, whereas migrants from other districts often have to find accommodation in the city.

6. Compare Yang's (2000) critique of the notion that capitalism is a cohesive economic system.

7. Ethnographic encounters with globalism and transnationalism have both widened the scope of ethnographic inquiry and brought diverse voices into debates dominated by metropolitan intellectuals and politicians (see, e.g., Appadurai 1996; Clifford 1997; Hannewitz 1996). Particularly scathing are those ethnographic interventions that expose xenophobic sentiments in the persistent popular and bureaucratic understanding that for every culture there is a distinct territory (Ong 1996; Stolcke 1995). The inspiration to be gained from this engagement with globalism is also evident in the many attempts to rethink and reinvent the practice of ethnographic fieldwork (see, e.g., Amit 2000; Fog Olfwig and Hastrup 1997, 1997b; Jaarsma and Rohatynskyj 2000; Lovel 1998; Marcus 1998; Robbins and Bamford 1997; Watson 1999). Much of this scholarship is, however, animated by major analytical differences among ethnographers themselves. One moot point is the novelty of global flows, with some arguing that the scale of those flows has witnessed radical changes in the past decades (see, e.g., Clifford 1997; Friedman 1994; Kearney 1995; Marcus 1998; Maurer 2000; Rodman 1992).

8. In a sense, van Binsbergen's interest in virtuality follows from his earlier research agenda that has consistently avoided a spurious distinction between urban and rural social worlds. His insight that town and country are linked within the same political economy remains compelling (see van Binsbergen 1981).

9. The metaphor of construction appears to have captured the imagination of many scholars who write about globalization and transnationalism. To cite only two examples, these scholars are interested in the "constructed nature of bounded units" (Basch et al. 1994:33, emphasis added) and in "the cultural construction of distinct places in a world of interconnectedness" (Hastrup and Fog Olfwig 1997:7, emphasis added). Such pronouncements indicate efforts to avoid objectifying cultures in ethnographic accounts (cf. Sahlin 1999). As Metcalf (2001:167)
has recently remarked, however, the current constructivism among ethnographers has parallels with earlier transactionalist misgivings about structural functionalism. The question is whether current constructivism, like transactionalism, only ends up objectifying economy and politics as the universal sources of abstract actors' motivations.

10. The notion of landscape has, however, inspired much illuminating anthropology and history (see, e.g., Hirsch and O'Hanlon 1996; Tilley 1994). For a pertinent historical study of the ways in which the same landscape has variously been the object of detached admiration and the very core of culture, see Ranger 1999.

11. This view on embodiment is at variance with the argument in Douglas's (1970) classic work, but already present in Durkheim (1961) and Mauss (1973), that the body is primarily a vehicle for representing culturally specific cosmological, social, and political dispositions (see also Comaroff 1985 and Boddy 1989; for a critique of these more recent studies, see Green 1996). Douglas tacitly subscribes to the distinction between signification and experience mentioned above (for further critique, see Csordas 1994; Lambek 1998; Lock 1993).

12. The term nyakwawa is sometimes translated as counselors.

Headmen also stand in a hierarchical relation to other headmen and chiefs outside the township. In the hierarchy recognized by the Malawian government, paramount chief is the highest traditional authority, followed by traditional authority, subtraditional authority, group village headman, and village headman. Depending on the status of the deceased or the gravity of a dispute, village headmen are expected to inform their superiors in the hierarchy about funerals and litigation as appropriate.

13. The idiom for initiation is kumeta (to shave). It is also used for the final funeral rite when women shave their heads to mark the end of the mourning period. At a naming ceremony, the infant's hair is likewise shaved. Although the hair of the novice is not shaven during his initiation into gule wamkulu, the use of the same idiom suggests that initiation is a part of life-cycle transformations. The obadwa–obwera distinction, on the other hand, is widely deployed by township dwellers. It has emerged in tandem with migration from the countryside to Lilongwe as the new capital. As such, even those first new migrants who arrived in the late 1970s are seen, and often see themselves, as obwera.

14. Historically, novices have been initiated after reaching their puberty. Gule wamkulu societies have lowered the age of the initiated usually in response to a perceived external threat, such as a conflict with Christian missions (see, e.g., Linden 1974:121). A proper history of gule wamkulu in the Chinsapo area, which is beyond the scope of this article, would include an account of conflicts between the secret society and Catholic missionaries who settled some two miles away in the early years of the 20th century. The leaders of gule wamkulu, as Linden (1974) has shown, believed themselves to be in competition with the mission schools for young men. Although it remains impossible, in principle, to belong to both the Catholic church and gule wamkulu, some men do so, and the tension between the two has eased considerably. This turbulent history may, however, partly underlie the aggression by gule wamkulu societies against outsiders in Chinsapo.

15. Like many other vernacular idioms that are translated as magic, sorcery, or witchcraft, matsenga corresponds uneasily to the largely negative connotations of these English concepts (cf. Geschiere 1997). The purposes and effects of matsenga can be either good or bad depending on its uses, but secrecy invariably surrounds it. In the classical, if now contested, anthropological distinction between sorcery and witchcraft (see Evans-Pritchard 1937), matsenga comes closer to the magical techniques conveyed by sorcery. The connotations of ufiti, on the other hand, resemble witchcraft, both as an innate rather than acquired quality and as a predominantly immoral activity. There is, however, no gainsaying the importance of careful contextualization when these idioms are studied. For more discussion of their uses among Chichewa-speaking peoples, see Marwick 1965 and Englund 1996.

16. Although popularly known as "wild animals," not all zilombo depict animals. Some characters also embody human beings, including in their most satirical mode well-known personalities, such as white missionaries and national politicians (see Kaspin 1993:48–49; Schoffeleers 1992:36).
17. On the constitutive role that audiences play in some performances in Africa, see Barber 1997. Some scholars have interpreted the gendered pattern of gule wamkulu performances as a means of fostering male solidarity in Chewa villages that are commonly structured matrilineally and uxorilocaly (see, e.g., Phiri 1983; Schoffeleers 1968:296–400). As Morris (1998, 2000) has more recently pointed out, however, women’s evident enjoyment of gule wamkulu performances must be allowed to qualify an exclusive sense of male solidarity. Initiation produces, rather, certain kinds of males—affines whose role in reproduction, through the emphasis on sexuality, is played out in ritual performances.

18. The gospel of security, rather than the gospel of prosperity, accounts for the success of Pentecostalism in Chinsapo township. The township had 15 Pentecostal congregations in 1999, steadily attracting Christians from mainstream denominations. Some Pentecostal Christians in the township also belong to churches that do not have active congregational life in the town-

19. For comparisons, see, for example, Hefner 2000 and Morier-Genoud 2000.

20. The presidential election was a close race between the candidates of the UDF and the MCP, both at the national level and in Chinsapo township. At a central polling station in the township, 3,656 votes were cast for Muluzi as the UDF candidate and 3,457 for Gwanda Chakuamba as the MCP candidate. Muluzi emerged as the winner of the presidential elections, and the UDF remained the ruling party.

21. After the democratic transition, each of the three main political parties—UDF, MCP, and Alliance for Democracy (Aford)—appeared to have a stronghold in one of the country’s three regions (see, e.g., Chirwa 1998; Kaspin 1995).

22. Chichewa is "the way of life of the Chewa people," such as their customs (miyambo). It is also the name of their language.

23. Most migrants prefer to bury their dead in their villages of origin, but difficulties in transporting the corpse and the bereaved sometimes make burials in Chinsapo inevitable. By denying migrants the right to bury their dead in the township, headmen made a statement about their belonging elsewhere.

24. See Note 9, above, on the way in which attempts to avoid objectifying culture may only end up objectifying economy and politics as the invariable sources of the globalist imagi-

25. On the importance of the senses for ethnographic inquiry, see, for example, Stoller 1989, 1997 and van Dijk and Pels 1996. On sensory capacities and the body in urbanization, see Sennett 1994.

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