

Prospects of Educating for Democracy in Struggling Third Wave Regimes: The Case of Malawi

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Democracy and culture will never be at peace with one another. In fact, they are at war. Democracy is winning right now, and we are seeing a breakdown of people's behavior. But we can never be happy without our culture. We cannot just destroy it for democracy. We must find a balance, times when democracy wins, times when culture wins¹ (Head teacher, Southern region of Malawi, 2000).

Malawi is a small country of about 10 million people that was considered one of the stars of democracy in Africa following its first multiparty elections in 1994. However, as in many other Third Wave² African democracies, the initial progress Malawi made towards democratization appears to have stalled or even lost ground³, even as the international "rules of the game" appear to have solidified in support of some form--however shallow--of democracy (Young, 1996). Why is this happening? We will focus on presenting a voice seldom heard in debates about why many democracies in Africa are struggling--the voices of "the masses," those whose everyday lives and actions are often only infrequently in direct contact with national governance structures and actors, but who are, nevertheless, expected to both directly and indirectly understand, control, and hold these structures accountable.

This article will describe how people in rural Malawi⁴ understand "democracy," and the types of changes that community members identified as being caused by democracy. A discussion of the types of "education for democracy" that have occurred in Malawi since 1994 will follow. We will argue that one of the primary weaknesses in present international and national support for democratic rule and education for democracy is the emphasis on (particularly national) democratic structures and institutions, as opposed to the "culture" of democracy--norms, values, and the local systems that support them. Lastly, we discuss what we think the role of "education for democracy" should be in Malawi, how current efforts could change to play this role, and how likely it is for such change to occur.

Malawi's Political Context

In 1994, Malawi transitioned from Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda's thirty-year one-party dictatorship to a multiparty democracy. In relatively free, fair, and bloodless elections, Banda was voted out of office in favor of Bakili Muluzi. For the first five years, Malawi's indices of political and civil liberties climbed to some of the highest in Africa (Freedom House, 1995-1999); international praise and donor aid flooded the country; and people rejoiced at the changes brought about by the power of their votes. Research conducted in 1997⁵ indicated that people generally felt the benefits of democratization outweighed the costs.

Muluzi won the second presidential elections in 1999 amidst claims of fraud (Chirambo, 1999). Similar, credible claims of corruption and intimidation were made following some parliamentary by-elections held after 1999. There were also worrying changes made to the Constitution once the ruling party controlled enough vote--the Senate, never convened, was stricken from the Constitution; the quorum needed for Parliamentary votes was lowered; Parliament tried to unconstitutionally dismiss four high court judges; and so forth. Malawi's civil and political indices began declining, as did donor praise and support⁶. And people began to worry--their daily lives were being more negatively affected by "democracy" with each year that passed, as corruption, crime, and inflation increased (Chirambo, 1999).

Methodology

The research cited in this paper was conducted between 1996 and 2001. In 1996, the authors observed and participated in action research on girls' education for a USAID-funded project in Malawi. Research methods included interviews, observations, focus group discussions, participatory theater for development performances, and workshops with government personnel. Kaunda has been involved in similar USAID-funded research on girls' education and educational quality from 1994 to the present; during this time he has conducted or overseen research in over 1,750 villages throughout Malawi; and has participated in over 150 workshops for government personnel. In 1999 and 2000, Kendall conducted 14 weeks of research on the effects of democracy on primary education in Malawi. She conducted interviews, participant observations, classroom observations, focus group discussions, and participatory rural appraisal exercises in two villages in the Southern region of Malawi; interviewed more than 30 NGO, donor, Ministry of Education, and other government personnel; and conducted document reviews. In 2001, the authors worked together on a six-week ethnographic study of the effects of democracy on primary education in three villages in Malawi⁷, collecting information through interviews, focus group discussions, participatory rural appraisals, classroom observations, and participant observations. The information gathered from 1999 to 2001 forms the core of the research presented below. This research is ongoing, and the conclusions drawn at this point will be further tested and elaborated over the coming year with survey data, additional national and district level interviews, and further ethnographic research.

Perceptions of Democracy in Malawi

The majority of interviewees felt there is a general, widespread misunderstanding of democracy that reaches from the top echelons of government to schoolchildren. Interviewees in the 2000 and 2001 studies from all regions, of both sexes, and of all ages, most frequently defined democracy as freedom to do whatever a person wants, regardless of the consequences of their actions to others. Interviewees frequently gave examples of general rudeness, changes in cultural practices, robberies, corruption, and even murder committed in the name of democracy. The following quote exemplifies the types of community-level changes people identified:

Democracy has destroyed our cultural values, and is making it more difficult for us to manage the young ones. These days, the boys can come to school, and just drink beer or smoke Indian hemp right at the school. When we try to counsel

them, they say 'this is a democratic world and we are allowed to behave as we like.' It is the same with boy-girl relationships...their parents are often the ones who set these examples. Their behavior has become immoral, you will find some men drinking in the morning or forming relationships at the market when they go to do some small business. (Teacher, Central region, 2001)

Almost two thirds of all interviewees believed that the definition of democracy as absolute freedom was a misunderstanding because it appeared to cause so much social dislocation, and appeared opposed to existing cultural and social norms; at the same time, support for the idea of a "true" democratic rule remained strong. As one Village Head commented:

Democracy is misunderstood these days. Here people say democracy means the freedom to do whatever you want; this is why people come with guns and trucks to steal our cattle...Some people, when they do these things, they will even point to [a minister involved in a large corruption scandal at the Ministry of Education]... and they will say 'you see, that is democracy, don't tell me I can't do what I want'. (Village head, Central region, 2001)

Interviewees also associated this "misunderstanding" of democracy with a shift in emphasis from communal to individual responsibilities and care. When asked about hunger in her village, a grandmother replied:

People's behavior is very much changed. In the past, everyone would eat together, men over there and women over there, all out of the same pot. Then that changed, so each family was eating together. But if the children of that house were hungry, they would come over and eat with us. No one went hungry. These days...we do not feel free to feed other people's children. Their parents must work for them...(Village elder, Central region, 2001).

Another woman commented:

In the past...anyone in my village could tell me when I was misbehaving. Now with democracy, if you try to caution a child about their behavior, they can even abuse you, and their parents may even come to shout at you. So these days, everyone keeps more to themselves. (Parent, Northern region, 2001)

When asked what was wrong with current understandings of democracy, most interviewees replied that personal freedoms have to be limited by their effects on the community. That is, the majority of interviewees provided a definition of "correct" democracy that is easily aligned with Western notions of citizen rights and responsibilities, but it was a definition they felt was not presently operating⁸. Interviewees attributed the general misunderstanding of democracy to two causes. First, democracy was widely perceived as an imported idea that is alien to people's history, culture, and daily lives. A parent expressed this perception as follows:

You know, democracy is a foreign thing to Malawi. It was brought here by foreigners and it will take us long to learn about it. No one understands it yet,

not even those at the top, so people are not behaving as they should. They will even curse each other in Parliament...This type of disrespect is not right, but we see it even in our children now. (Parent, Northern region, 2001)

Because of the perception that democracy is foreign, people generally felt there was only one 'correct' democracy, which had to be taught to them by outsiders. We were frequently asked to take up this role during our research:

We do not understand democracy here. Even we teachers have not been taught what it is, so we cannot teach the children properly. Because of this, people abuse it every which way...We need to be taught by outsiders like you about what this democracy is. (Teacher, Southern region, 2000)

At the same time that people felt reliant on outside sources of information, they reported receiving almost no guidance or information from the government or other sources about any aspect of democratization in Malawi. As one Village Head said:

You see, the problem is that we do not know about democracy. The government doesn't tell us much. I myself do not even know what to do most times. Someone can steal something. I heard I can no longer punish him, but instead he must be taken to the police. But the police these days are useless...[Have you ever heard from anyone (official) about the new laws of the country?] No, we do not know the new laws. (Village head, Central region, 2001)

Second, democracy was perceived primarily as a national-level political phenomenon. Due in part to Banda's extraordinarily repressive and paternalistic regime, anything perceived as being in the realm of the national government is still seldom openly challenged in villages. As one Village Head explained when asked why he did not begin a dialogue about democracy in his own area:

These days are not so different than the past. The MP [Minister of Parliament]...came to shout and threaten me because I was seen walking with an opposition member. He said he would burn my house down. I said 'Is this democracy...In a democracy can I not talk to anyone?' He had to leave then, but I know that if we discuss democracy...this will cause problems for me. (Village head, Southern region, 2001)

To openly protest local 'misunderstandings' of democracy, people must protest the government representative's misunderstandings of democracy. However, fear of speaking, or particularly taking actions against, the government is still prevalent at the community level.

Current efforts to educate for democracy

How have people in Malawi gotten the information they have about democracy? The vast majority of interviewees reported that the radio and political rallies were their primary sources of information on democracy. However, there have been four key efforts to provide information about democracy on a national scale: 1) party rallies before the 1994 elections; 2) a revised civics curriculum designed to provide information

to schoolchildren; 3) NGO efforts to provide civics education about democracy, human rights, and the constitution; and 4) mass education campaigns via the radio and posters⁹. Each of the four efforts had either serious shortcomings or constraints, and each appears to have provided little useful information or space for creating a lasting, localized 'culture' of democracy.

The party rallies suffered a number of impediments to providing basic information about democracy. First, the country's new democratic structures, and the roles the parties would play in them, were not fully determined until after the 1994 election and the party rallies that accompanied it. Second, each party was generally more interested in discrediting other parties and winning over voters with broad promises, than they were in educating people per se. The types and breadth of promises made during the campaigns--for example, freedom to do whatever one wanted, jobs for everyone, free shoes for everyone, immediate Universal Free Primary Education (UFPE), no more self-help development activities--severely weakened the government's ability to fulfill its campaign promises. This eroded public trust, and led many people to (often bitterly) associate democracy with the promises of absolute freedom and change that politicians so eagerly offered them in 1994.

A second key effort to educate about democracy took place in the education sector. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded a complete overhaul of the Banda-era civics curriculum in the mid-1990s. The curriculum was completed in 1998. Despite donor pressure, the government has yet to distribute it. In 1997, the government distributed revised curricula for all subjects; and introduced a new, single subject called social studies/general studies, which incorporated the Banda-era civics, geography, health, and other assorted topics. This is the only civics component in the present curriculum. It includes approximately two class periods a year from standards (grades) 5 to 8 on topics such as: multipartyism in Malawi, multipartyism in surrounding countries, central versus local government, the structure of local government, the structure of central government, and the six steps of passing a Bill in Parliament. No definition of democracy in the 21st century¹⁰ appears in the curriculum.

NGO efforts to provide information about democracy after the 1994 elections were quickly mired in politics, with the political parties almost consistently criticizing any NGO effort as being biased towards one party or another. The result, according to an NGO representative was that:

...we could only say the broadest things, and we almost stopped using the word democracy. We talked more about international human rights, but we could not link these to what was happening politically in Malawi. (Democracy NGO representative, personal communication, 1999)

Furthermore, Malawian NGOs were a relatively new phenomenon in Malawi--most were founded no earlier than 1993, and were based in Malawi's cities. Particularly during their first years, they suffered from numerous resource, management, and personnel constraints that severely limited their ability to have a widespread impact, especially in rural areas. No interviewee identified an NGO as a source of information

about democracy, although one interviewee had received a radio from a German-funded civic education project¹¹.

Radio continues to be both the most powerful media outlet in Malawi (Malawi Communications, 1998), and the most monopolized by the ruling party (Ott, Phiri, and Patel, 2000). The important role the radio could play in providing information about democracy is well understood by politicians and donors alike. However, because it has remained monopolized by the ruling party during the election campaigns, it has been used primarily as a platform for providing technical information on how to vote, and limited (and sometimes biased) information about the various political candidates. Before the 1999 elections, elaborate schemes to allow equal time to the various political parties and their candidates were drawn up and agreed to by the ruling party, but they were never enacted (Ott et al., 2000). Donors and NGOs continue to pressure the government to enact the liberalization reforms agreed to in 1999.

The Logic of Current Efforts to Educate for Democracy

Taken individually, the efforts to "educate for democracy" described above appear flawed in quite different ways. We argue that there is, in fact, a logic to their weaknesses. It is this underlying logic that must change to create a system of "educating for democracy" that can help shape a political culture supportive of democracy in Malawi. What are the shared weaknesses of all four efforts?

First, all of the efforts focus on generating information at the top and providing it to people at the bottom. Although this focus is sometimes warranted, the consistent use of a top-down approach helped foster the notion that democracy is a foreign idea, and placed access to information on democracy firmly under the control of the government. Given Malawi's history, this creates an immense roadblock to later participation and mobilization at the local level. It also helped create a structure with no established lines of communication from the bottom to the top.

Second, the methods used to provide information do not model, or allow for participation in, democratic processes. For example, NGOs could provide information in ways that create a democratic atmosphere of participation and open dialogue, but these methods are for the most part not used--both because of resource limitations and political fears. Likewise, the school in countries like Malawi is hardly a structure that embodies or incorporates many democratic principles¹². What little civics curriculum there is was presented to students in a top-down manner that provided no opportunity for discussion. Furthermore, almost all teachers we interviewed said they needed further training on both the topic of democracy, and the methods they should use to teach the topic, before they could feel comfortable teaching the social studies material. This sentiment is illustrated by one Head Teacher's comment:

The school should play a major role in educating our future leaders on democracy. But the curriculum has so little information, and we teachers ourselves do not understand democracy. Without information from the government, we cannot just teach about democracy any which way. (Head teacher, Southern region, 2000)

Similar constraints to modeling democratic, participatory processes exist in radio and political party efforts to educate for democracy.

Third, there is no opportunity for local dialogue or input into processes of democratization. None of the efforts facilitates people working together to blend basic information about national laws and democratic structures with aspects of their own histories and cultures. In a number of cases, these histories and cultures offer fascinating approaches to consensual and participatory democratic processes (P. Mwaipaya, personal communication, 1999) that are entirely ignored in the present education for democracy efforts. In short, local dialogue, and lines of communication between local and national actors and structures are not encouraged in the present efforts. In addition, none of the efforts provide space for people to question the values that are presently associated with democracy (absolute freedom, corruption, lack of care for others), but seem so undemocratic to most people.

We argue that these weaknesses are evident in all current efforts to educate for democracy because the globalized, mainstream donor and government definition of democracy in the 21st century, has generally narrowed, to emphasizing a minimalist or basic, as opposed to a broad or comprehensive, definition of democracy. It focuses on the processes (government by the people), as opposed to the outcomes (government for the people) of democracy (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997); tends to present an elitist stance (Stewart, 2001); and emphasizes the 'triumph' of liberal democratic models (Held, 1996). For example:

U.S. interests in Malawi are aimed first and foremost at supporting the dramatic political transition that brought Malawi...to democratic multi-party elections...Fundamental economic liberalization and structural reform have accompanied this political transformation. Attention now centers primarily on the consolidation of these gains, strengthening the policy and institutional framework across sectors...(USAID, 1999).

Even the growing literature on and funding for civil society, which in countries like Malawi includes many organizations with strong normative stances (for example, church groups), usually focuses on the institutional, as opposed to normative or cultural; and national, as opposed to local, aspects of civil society¹³. For example, the British Council's Web page on 'Civil Society' states:

British Council's focus on civil society is central to its work in Governance as we see the pressure exerted on state and local government institutions by citizens [sic] organizations as key to the development of accountability and democracy...when looking at the role played by civil society in accountability and governance we look at the role of political parties, academic bodies and the unions. (British Council, 1999)

An alternative model of democracy that attends less to the roles of institutions and elite actors, and more to the norms, values, and culture of democracy, would address many of the weaknesses of present national and international efforts to strengthen and educate for democracy in Africa. Fukuyama (1995) presents one framework for bridging these

alternative and mainstream definitions. He describes four levels upon which consolidation of democracy must occur: ideology, institutions, civil society, and culture. Culture is defined as the "...deepest level [which] includes phenomena such as family structure, religion, moral values, ethnic consciousness, 'civic-ness', and particularistic historical traditions" (p. 7). Ideology, institutions, and more lately civil society (defined primarily in institutional terms), have drawn the attention of academics, governments, and donors, and are central to the present globalized conception of democracy. Culture has not. Fukuyama believes that culture underlies civil society. Therefore, future work on democratic consolidation must focus on the interplay of culture and civil society, which will in turn lead to a better understanding of institutions, ideology, and democratic consolidation in different settings. Furthermore, Fukuyama argues that, "...while modern Western political thought tries to construct a just order from the top down...traditional Asian cultures start with levels 4 and 3 and work upward" (p. 10). This allows Asian cultures to specifically address the role of culture and values in institutional and ideological structures in a way that Western societies do not. This leads to democratic models that look quite different than Western models, but are both shaped by, and function smoothly within, existing cultural structures.

Robinson argues for the inclusion of a focus on 'the masses' and political culture [defined as "...political practice that is culturally legitimated and societally validated by local knowledge..." (Robinson in Lewis, Ed., 1998, p. 311)], in order to understand why African democracies are behaving as they are. She points out that models that focus on local cultural context in Africa have been largely ignored, and argues that:

Regime change theory is about elite competition. It brackets community norms, customs and symbols of power and considers such factors irrelevant to transition outcomes...[but] in light of the post-1989 African experience...Without minimizing the importance of elite values and behavior, my insistence is on the need to revisit the political relevance of non-elites and subordinate groups...(Robinson, 1998, p. 333).

We agree with the emphases that both Robinson and Fukuyama encourage, but argue that the simple addition of a focus on culture or non-elites to the existing mainstream framework for understanding democracy is not enough. This is true particularly in countries like Malawi, where there is a very small population of (primarily urban) elites, and a very large population of (primarily rural) non-elites, as well as a long historical tradition of communal leadership and organizational structures, coupled with a short historical tradition of state boundaries and structures. Instead, we argue that efforts to understand and support democracy in Malawi must originate from a 'cultural,' 'non-elite,' historical perspective, that refocuses attention on norms, values, and local interpretations of democracy and its alternatives.

This approach provides space for dialogue about the shapes democracy can take, privileging local understandings, histories and justifications over 'foreign' notions that are often supported primarily by national and international elites. The information arising from this approach should then shape our understanding of the roles that elites and institutions can play in supporting democracy. In the long run, we believe such an approach provides a model for understanding why democratic regimes in countries like

Malawi are failing, and what roles various actors and organizations can play to sustain democracy, in whatever new form it may take. This approach in turn provides new models for educating for democracy.

The Future of Education for Democracy in Malawi

A mainstream view of the role of education in supporting democracy is:

Even though many Africans interpret democracy in universal terms, and value it intrinsically as well as instrumentally, their understanding of democratic principles is extremely vague. Education can help to offset some of these shortcomings by closing gaps in political knowledge, but it does not always deepen commitment to democratic values. (Bratton and Mattes, 2001, p.120)

On the contrary, to be effective, education for democracy in Malawi will have to play a dual role of providing information about what systems of democracy have developed in other areas, and stepping back from the Western conflation of democratic principles (of, for example, basic individual rights and responsibilities), with Western processes, including present systems of representation and decision-making (Taylor, 1996). This would provide the space necessary for Malawians to determine how democratic principles are best carried out in their own communities and country--from the bottom up--and with space for the consideration of values and cultural norms that may reshape the institutions of democracy in Malawi. Taylor emphasizes that, without such space for accommodation to culturally different normative beliefs--which may sometimes lead to (particularly institutional) outcomes, viewed as fundamentally "undemocratic" by Westerners--the long-term ability of a country to create a stable democratic system in which issues of pragmatic power relations and notions of belonging are adequately addressed are slim.

The school¹⁴ should therefore serve as a site in which community and state work together in active dialogue to determine the shape of both the school and the democracy. However this process must have limits. Carr and Hartnett (1996) caution that:

...a democratic theory of education...must show how democratic participation in educational decision-making is to be circumscribed by conditions designed to preserve and protect the democratic values and educational aims that such a theory is intended to foster and promote...A democratic theory of education must, therefore, limit democratic decision-making in order to prevent educational decisions from being made which would prevent the next generation of citizens from acquiring the knowledge, virtues and dispositions that their participation in the process of conscious social reproduction requires. (pp. 189-190)

Education for democracy must therefore emphasize the notion and practice of democratic participation leading to conscious social reproduction, not a set-in-stone series of externally-constructed rules and regulations, or a locally-determined educative process that stifles the ability of students to achieve the same rights as those who determined that local process.

A college-educated urban man who was visiting his sister in one of the villages, explained the present role of formal education in understanding democracy as follows:

Education is necessary to understand democracy. Education teaches us what we do not have. It makes us feel we are underdeveloped. Once we have that feeling, then we look to the world and see how far behind we are. We can struggle to catch up. But these people here [in the village], they are uneducated. They cannot understand where we are in the world; they need more guidance to understand what this democracy is and what it can bring us. (Southern region, 2001)

Certainly, we should envision roles for the formal school other than to reemphasize the foreign nature of a model of democracy in which Malawi is simply 'underdeveloped,' but are there other models of education in Malawi that we can draw on to reimagine education for democracy?

In comparison to formal school settings, many non-formal educational settings in Malawi embody norms and practices more closely aligned with educating for a new model of democracy. They are engaged with many more people and often model culturally appropriate--and often much more participatory--ways of learning. For example, initiation camps¹⁵ in the Southern region of Malawi regularly incorporate community members, who often feel disempowered in the formal setting (children, parents, elders, local leaders), into both teaching and managerial roles. They use hands-on teaching and learning methods that often emphasize a give-and-take relationship between teachers and learners, and provide space for an explicit discussion of the norms and values that shape everyday life decisions. They sometimes draw on historical practices and beliefs that provide alternative models for democratic participation and decision-making¹⁶. They are also, tellingly, often in direct conflict with the formal school about what they teach, when they teach it, and how they teach it.

The formal schools greatest strengths for educating for democracy lie in their direct relationship to the state and its vast (in comparison to non-formal education institutions) human and material resources. Their weaknesses rest in their frequent conflicts with local ways of knowing, their historical roots, dependence on the state, and relative inability at this time to carry out their existing functions (Jere et al, 2001). The formal school could be vastly strengthened as a tool for educating for democracy, by turning to local non-formal structures and incorporating valuable lessons on modeling democracy, participatory methods, teaching and learning, and normative concerns. It could also be useful to incorporate some of the personnel from the non-formal sector (for example, having village leaders come in to talk about local history, local structures of leadership, local arts, etc.). Unless the school incorporates these lessons, its structures and ideology will remain suited only to transmitting and modeling state-driven information about foreign, locally inappropriate models of democracy.

However, incorporating non-formal ways of teaching and learning may not be feasible precisely because of the school's connection to the state. Israel (2001) says, "It takes a society that is committed to openness, change, cultural pluralism, and respect and tolerance for human differences to allow for the kind of classroom environment and pedagogy that nurtures responsible citizens of a...democracy" (p. 1). We would argue

that it calls for both society's and the state's commitment to create these environments. The school is intimately connected to the state, and change in the school is inherently political in nature--a dialogue to one degree or another between the state and society about what kinds of citizens should be nurtured (Carr and Hartnett, 1996). If the state is uninterested in creating an environment that truly fosters local participation and debate, then the school will be unlikely to serve as an effective institutional vessel for these ideals, regardless of the society's wishes.

Conclusion

State efforts to educate for democracy in Malawi should incorporate local, culturally-appropriate, non-formal educational practices into the formal school. At the same time, the relationship between the community, school, and state must shift to create a system of more open dialogue and debate. This vision of educating for democracy is an ideal built around our long-term involvement with both formal and non-formal education systems in Malawi, and our belief that the formal system provides the opportunity to work towards a vision of democracy shared between the state and local communities. But this model is an ideal, and there are more than the usual practical constraints to implementing it. Such a program of education for democracy must have political support--local, national, and international--in order to be implemented effectively.

Donors presently play a significant role in supporting both the education system and efforts to strengthen democracy and "good governance" in Malawi. These institutions would likely need to play some role--both financial and ideological--in fostering this new approach. However, that would mean they would have to radically alter some of their perceptions of the relationship between schooling and democracy, the importance of education for democracy, and the shape of democracy itself¹⁷. Donors are limited by their own cultures and internal structures, which seldom easily respond to or work in concert with local cultural systems¹⁸.

In a country like Malawi, with a history of severe government repression, the upper echelons of government must also be on board enough to guarantee they will not deliberately try to derail efforts to educate for democracy. This is, we believe, unlikely to occur in the current climate. Processes of democratization are not technical in nature--they are inherently political. People who understand the current laws, feel actively involved in the governance of their country, and feel that corruption and intimidation are not acceptable components of their democracy, would threaten the government's present ability to act without concern for, and often in conflict with, their constituents' needs and desires. In such a situation, knowledge really can be powerful, which leaves the school vulnerable to political pressure. School-based intimidation is already appearing in small pockets, even at a time when the school plays such a small role in educating for democracy¹⁹. Politicians are aware that education can prove a powerful weapon in supporting democracy. Their move away from supporting efforts to provide even basic information that might empower people to hold them accountable for their actions, much less efforts that might foster debate and open participation, cannot be ignored.

Furthermore, previous efforts in Malawi to mediate tensions between formal and non-formal education systems have generally met with limited success²⁰. Formal schooling,

especially in sections of the Southern and Central regions of Malawi, is still associated with norms and values considered contrary to local religious practices and traditions. The historical roots of the formal education system cannot be ignored in examining its ability to incorporate different ways of seeing and functioning into its structure. Without extensive restructuring, it may, in the end prove impossible for the school to serve as an effective mediator between the community and the state in educating for democracy. However, given the limited resources of the state, and the increasingly limited local support for existing democratic structures, it seems likely that if the government wishes to strengthen democratic support and legitimacy in Malawi, the school will have to adapt to fulfill the role of a true educating force for democracy.

Notes

1. Regional locations for quotes are provided for two reasons: first, to assure confidentiality to the interviewees by not providing village or district locations; and second, because Malawi's strongest lines of political division at this time are regional.
2. This is a term coined by Samuel Huntington; he defines a wave of democratization as "a group of [democratic] transitions...that occur within a specified period of time and that significantly outnumber transitions in the opposite direction during that period (quoted in Diamond, 1999, p. 2)." The Third Wave of democratization began in the 1970s with Portugal, then spread to Eastern Europe, and washed over Africa in the late 1980s and 1990s.
3. Generally, recent research on democratization in Africa has emphasized the cross-state similarities of transitions to democracy, and the widespread erosion of the gains made during this initial wave of democratization. For example, Bratton and van de Walle (1997) provide detailed information on the trends of democratization across Third Wave African democracies through 1994, emphasizing the expansion, in turn, of waves of political protest (peaking in 1991), liberalization reforms (peaking in 1992), competitive elections (peaking in 1993), and basic political rights (peaking in 1994). They then note that, by 1997, there is evidence that many of the democratic gains of 1990-1994 were eroding across the continent. Authors such as Harbeson detail the deficits of "...political organizational capacity...weaknesses of civil society, political parties, and democratically restructured legislatures to consolidate democracy in...contemporary sub-Saharan Africa" (p. 243, 1997), again emphasizing the continental nature of these trends.
4. Research will be conducted in urban areas in January, 2002 which may reveal important differences between rural and urban populations in Malawi. However, 85% of Malawians still live in rural areas, and it is these rural voices in particular that are so seldom heard in national and international policy and governance circles.
5. This information was gathered through action research focused not on democracy but on girls' education.

6. Within the last two weeks, "The Nation" and "The Daily Times" newspapers have reported that a Danish aid audit uncovered K10 million unaccounted for by the ruling party, leading to a freeze of some, and possibly all, Danish aid to Malawi. Some Japanese aid was also recently frozen following charges that the ruling party bought luxury boats with money intended for small-scale fishermen.
7. Research was conducted in one village in each region of the country. The villages were chosen in consultation with district level government personnel, who were asked to identify villages that were "average" in characteristics such as distance from an urban center, natural resources, school size and quality, political activity, and
8. NGO activity.
9. This supports the findings of Bratton and Mattes' (2001) study, which claims that 88% of Malawians could provide a definition of democracy, and 66% supported democracy. But the ethnographic detail of a qualitative study allows for a closer examination of how these general findings play out, and the division between what people perceive as the "correct" definition of democracy, versus the common "misunderstanding" of democracy that plays out on a daily basis, helps explain why only about half of all Malawians reject all democratic alternatives, only 57% are "satisfied" with the way democracy works in Malawi, and general lawlessness and social breakdown are increasing yearly.
10. We do not discuss the role of poster campaigns in this article; the radio and poster campaigns had many similar weaknesses, but the poster campaigns raised further issues of distribution, pictorial representations, and literacy.
11. Brief definitions of democracy in the historical past (for example, in ancient Greece and Rome) do appear in two of the history units in the Social Studies curriculum.
12. It should be noted that there are some newer NGO efforts that have been funded by donors to provide information directly to communities about democracy. However, they generally cover only a small geographic area, and most have not yet been evaluated. For the purposes of this paper, we have focused on the NGOs that were mandated to provide national coverage and began their projects by 1996. The later, more localized NGO efforts will be interesting to evaluate; they show promise of having more of an effect than these earlier efforts, at least in part because they attend to the specific needs of the communities in which they work.
13. Cf. Fuller, 1999.
14. Cf. Foley and Edwards, 1996; and Gyimah-Boadi, 1996.
15. We will focus primarily on the school when explaining the role we feel education must play in strengthening democracy in Malawi, although similar roles must be played by other non-formal and formal structures. For example, Levinger, Israel, and Schubert (1999) identify "The governmental units (national, state, and local) charged with administering the education system" and "The institutions within a society that set and implement public policies that influence education (e.g. the courts, the

legislature, the executive branch of government" (p. 1) as other settings in which processes of education for democracy should occur. We would add to this list non-formal educational settings such as initiation camps, religious schools or groups, and media outlets.

16. In the Southern region, particularly amongst the Yaos, both boys and girls undergo initiation ceremonies. These ceremonies originally took place at puberty, and taught boys and girls about caring for their changing bodies, how to be good wives and mothers and how to behave towards other community members. They also included, often quite graphic, information about, and demonstrations of, sex. The boys were usually circumcised. The ceremonies traditionally took place in the simba (bush), and boys and girls were initiated in separate camps under the watchful eyes of elder counselors. These days, children are being initiated at much younger ages (people claim this is at least in part because of poverty; both the initiation counselors and the child's parents receive money when a child is initiated); and the initiations are occurring in different environments, vary more in length (from a week to over a month), and vary more in the graphic nature of the material presented to children.
17. More detailed information on non-formal educational settings and their distinct characteristics in Malawi are available from the authors.
18. Generally, education for democracy for 'the masses' is given a relatively unimportant position in donor and government funding activities. For example, total expenses for Malawi's 1999 elections were K1,172,394,519. Of this total, the government provided about K800,000,000 and donors provided about K400,000,000. Less than K14,000,000 of the government funds were used for education activities. Donors provided a separate pot of about K90,000,000 directly to NGOs to carry out civic education campaigns, and GTZ provided a separate pot of unlisted quantity for the training of political leaders (Ott et al., 2000). All the rest of the funds were used to prepare for voter registration and polling, to buy voting supplies, to transport officials, and so forth. Obviously, such expenses are necessary, but the focus remains on the 'basic' technical exercise of voting, not on assuring that the people for whom the exercise is held are on board.
19. See Ferguson (1990) for a detailed account of the interaction of donor, national, and local cultures around the topic of 'development.' We argue that similar interactions occur around the topic of 'democracy,' and in fact, that the two notions are closely intertwined.
20. Interviews with community members, teachers, and local leaders; Central and Northern regions, 2001.
21. However, see CRECCOM's work with initiation counselors and local leaders to support girls' education for an example of a successful effort to open up a dialogue between actors in the formal and non-formal education sectors.

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