TWO

LIVING PROJECT TO PROJECT

Brokering Local Knowledge in the Field

In the living room of a guesthouse in Blantyre—Malawi's commercial capital—members of a research team gather around Dr. Cook, an American researcher affiliated with Religion and Malawi (RAM), who is leading a project investigating the medicinal practices and HIV-related knowledge of traditional healers. The guesthouse serves as RAM's temporary headquarters for the next several weeks, a base from which fieldwork teams will set off each day to collect questionnaires and interview data in surrounding areas, and the office where interviews will be transcribed and data entered into databases. In addition to the young college-educated Malawians who will administer the questionnaire to traditional healers in the field, John and Victor, Malawian fieldwork supervisors who have worked on many such research projects in the past, are present. After introducing the survey to her audience, Dr. Cook looks expectantly at Victor, asking, "Traditional healers are of different sorts, right? I've heard that there are different categories of healers—herbalists, witchcraft-related . . ." He answers this question concisely, one among many he fields on a daily basis about Malawi and Malawian culture from the foreign

(*azungu*) researchers he works for. Later, John and Victor lead a training session to familiarize the new fieldworkers with the questionnaire. In addition to going over technical details pertinent to conducting a good interview, they provide the fieldworkers with some advice that might make their work go more smoothly. Victor explains:

> We aren't there to correct their [traditional healers'] misconceptions, just to collect them. Even if we know what they are telling us is wrong, about AIDS or whatever, don't be judgmental. . . . Know how the healers are. They want respect and can be hard to deal with, as they expect to be treated like big men even if they are no big deal at all: "Take off your shoes when you enter my house, or bow down to greet me." If they want you to take off your shoes and bangles so you don't disturb the spirits or whatnot, just do it! [Chuckles from audience.] It's the same thing with the pastors we've met [on past projects], where we pray with them before we start [the research] to connect with them.[1]

Victor brokers local knowledge to different audiences. First, he clarifies the fuzzy picture Dr. Cook holds of traditional healers in Malawi. Second, his advice to novice fieldworkers bridges a potential gap between urban-dwelling and college-educated fieldworkers and the traditional healers they will soon encounter. This scene captures some of the expectations of individuals hired as knowledge workers on survey research projects. I use the term "knowledge worker" deliberately here for two reasons. First, the term is often associated with elites who "think for a living," and falls on the "skilled" side of a modernist dichotomy between "labor of the head" and "labor of the hands" (Arendt 1958, 90). In using it to refer to fieldworkers, I trouble the assumption that fieldworkers are unskilled laborers or minor actors in survey research; in fact, knowledge production depends on their innovative work in the field. Second, the term is capacious enough to capture what I deem to be two important dimensions of fieldwork: (1) the process of producing data, tangible material units (e.g., survey responses recorded on a page) that fieldworkers help along a life course, rather than abstract statistics; and (2) the ways in which fieldworkers work to produce and claim ownership over the kinds of local knowledge researchers value (in the process, working knowledge to their benefit to protect their economic niche in a larger global health apparatus).

As middlemen, knowledge workers skillfully mediate between disparate spaces and groups of people on a daily basis. In addition to filling in gaps in the course of survey design and fieldwork, they also police boundaries between kinds of knowers and produce the forms of difference that data col-

lection relies on. Traditional healers—often framed as repositories of medical knowledge—are, in Victor's view, saddled with misconceptions about AIDS that will soon be collected in the space of an interview encounter. In foregrounding the cultural obstacles fieldworkers might face (superstitions, traditional beliefs and customs, and inflated big-man egos), he marks the healers as Other and emphasizes the status differential between interviewers and their interviewees. Meanwhile, the fieldworkers chuckle at the thought of disturbing spirits during routine administration of a survey, making known their own disregard for such backward beliefs.

. . .

Chapter 1 illustrates how the tangible pages of a questionnaire—yet to be administered—are material manifestations of researchers' dreams and designs, a template for proper collection of data. Whereas the foreign and Malawian researchers we encountered in survey design sessions are the familiar and recognizable experts of global health in Africa, the value of survey data is constituted by the largely invisible labor performed by the hundreds of fieldworkers and supervisors—such as the one pictured in figure 2.1—in the field who are the focus of the next three chapters. Field research, even as it appears to be simply the systematic collection of information from respondents, necessitates a complex and flexible assembly line of people, equipment, technical and logistical know-how, and appropriate social and environmental conditions. The field is not just a place from which data are collected; rather, it is a constructed and negotiated space in which knowledge, value, and new kinds of relations take form (Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Schumaker 2001). The transformation of raw information into statistics that become evidence for policy or interventions is facilitated by many individuals who shape data as they travel in their life course, the large majority of whom—unskilled data collectors—have until recently been overlooked by ethnographers of global health (Kamuya et al. 2013; Kingori 2013; Molyneux et al. 2013; Engel et al. 2014; Prince and Otieno 2014; Kingori and Gerrets 2016).

Since the earliest surveys and research endeavors enacted in sub-Saharan Africa, fieldworkers have appeared in accounts as individuals whose menial labor is necessary to field research, but without any particular kind of expertise. In the Nyasaland Survey (1938–1943), for example, "native assistants" appear as an undifferentiated mass of individuals whose work entailed, for example, collecting stool and urine specimens in chip boxes and test tubes or measuring gardens by stepping out their circumference with the aid of a compass (Berry and Petty 1992, 290, 29). This chapter aims to challenge such

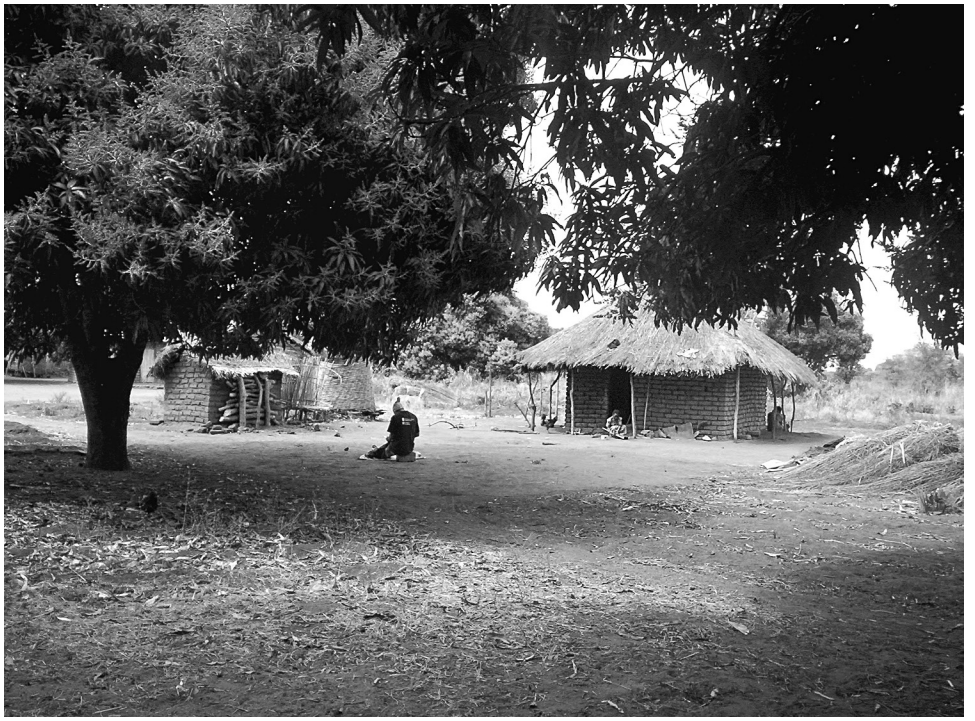

FIGURE 2.1. An LSAM fieldworker checks a survey questionnaire near the household where it was administered. Photo by the author.

depictions. The increasing expansion of markets for knowledge work amid proliferating global health projects affords Malawian fieldworkers new opportunities for social and economic mobility, however precarious or short lived those opportunities may be (Prince 2014). As this chapter illustrates, while foreign researchers tend to view local knowledge as a stable entity that streamlines everyday fieldwork, fieldworkers capitalize on the fact that their expertise is not stable or inherent but rather malleable and performative. Inspired by Lambek's (1993) classic study of knowledge in Mayotte, I consider how local knowledge is produced, distributed, and consumed, paying close attention to how the forms and techniques of knowledge in research worlds emerge from a crowded social field of diverse actors.

Reflecting on the place of local knowledge in data collection, longtime fieldwork supervisor Andrews suggested, "Researchers don't just want a tour guide; they want a Renaissance man!" Rather than a tour guide who might provide mere geographic direction in an unfamiliar place, a Renaissance man

possesses diversified knowledge of a local context that is crucial to the smooth running of data collection.[2] Presuming local expertise to be embodied, relational, and improvised, this chapter argues that the local knowledge and professional identities of Malawian fieldworkers are cooked and commodified in the practices of data collection in the field. In what follows, I provide an ethnographic glimpse at some of the everyday interactions between fieldworkers, supervisors, and researchers, each of whom is differentially invested in a shared knowledge-making project.

First, I describe fieldworkers' interests in maintaining ownership over the local knowledge foreign researchers expect them to possess. I examine prefieldwork training sessions as an important site where fieldworkers are initiated into new professional identities and where the social boundaries (between knower and known) and spatiotemporal boundaries (between office and field, urban and rural, and modern and backward) that undergird data collection are performed and practiced. Following fieldworkers into the field, I then show how such tactical boundary work informs research encounters and revalues and redefines the local expertise at the core of data collection. Throughout, the chapter takes an interest in how the governing structures of research work as temporary, underpaid, and difficult—glossed by fieldworkers as living project to project—nonetheless enable them potential access to social, cultural, and economic capital and facilitate the imagining of new futures.

Recruiting Knowledge Workers

Survey research projects afford some measure of economic and social mobility to a cohort of young Malawian secondary graduates and college graduates who find temporary, contractual employment in the world of AIDS research. These individuals are hired as fieldwork supervisors, interviewers, or data entry clerks. The uncoupling of authorship of data from a singular sovereign researcher entails both possibilities and pitfalls for the kinds of knowledge produced. Table 2.1 summarizes the major daily duties of these individuals. While the table overlooks the contributions of other members of fieldwork teams (such as drivers, cleaners, and cooks), it reflects the focus of this chapter on knowledge workers, or individuals who have sustained contact with data in some form. The duties summarized here are elaborated in the course of the chapter.

Many of the college graduates employed at the time of this research were contract workers with the Centre for Social Research (an arm of the

TABLE 2.1 Fieldwork Team Members' Roles

Job Title	*Summary of Duties*
Fieldwork supervisor	Supervise a team of 5–10 interviewers in the field, check and monitor the progress of data collection in real time, make decisions and set agenda for daily data collection, interface between foreign researchers and fieldwork teams, attend daily meetings with foreign researchers, fieldwork trouble shooting, hiring and firing of interviewers (sometimes), provide input and feedback on the content of surveys and other data collection instruments, introduce fieldwork teams to traditional authorities and district officials
Interviewer/data collector	Work as a member of a fieldwork team, visit individual households to collect survey, HIV test, or anthropometric data, check surveys or other data before submitting to supervisors, provide input on daily logistics and fieldwork schedule
Data entry clerk	Enter survey and other data into a growing digital database as it is submitted in hard copy by fieldwork supervisors, help with organizational and office tasks as needed

University of Malawi whose history is elaborated in chapter 1) or a consulting firm. These organizations hire out ready-made teams of experienced fieldworkers and field vehicles (minibuses or SUVs), displacing much of the responsibility for survey research logistics from foreign researchers to local firms or centers.[3] Whereas MAYP, RAM, and GSIP sourced college-educated fieldworkers in this way, LSAM preferred to pick and choose its own fieldwork teams, recruiting fieldworkers locally by posting printed advertisements on trees, walls, or at the district offices some days ahead of its arrival at a field site. On interview day, hundreds of secondary school graduates from the project's sample areas turned up with their school certificates in hand. For aspiring fieldworkers, securing a temporary but stable job was a welcome and unusual opportunity. In some cases, after LSAM finished data collection in one region of Malawi, interviewers would migrate with LSAM to its next field site in a different district with the hope of securing the same position there. College graduates, too, sometimes traveled from the city to rural recruitment sites to apply for these jobs, in a reversal of the more familiar Malawian countryside-to-city labor migration path.

The relatively small number of LSAM fieldwork jobs available often engendered accusations from locals that persons selected to administer surveys in

their district or village were outsiders taking their jobs. Hiring practices expressed and reified underlying stereotypes or caricatures of ethnic groups. Supervisors who interviewed potential employees lamented the paucity of educated Yao speakers (making timely administration of surveys in Yao-speaking areas difficult), and also considered Yao interviewers to be "dull[er] and slow[er]" than interviewers of other ethnic backgrounds.[4] Likewise, fieldwork teams considered Balaka District in southern Malawi their least preferred fieldwork site, complaining, "Yaos [a large, primarily Muslim ethnic group in the district] have so many spouses and so many children" (making filling in a household register on a survey an onerous task) and that Yaos are uneducated, making them more likely to accuse research teams of bloodsucking or to refuse to participate in surveys. They claimed that Yao men were difficult to find for interviews, as they were always out "doing business."[5] The construction of both Yao interviewers and respondents in research cultures enlist popular notions of Yao-ness as they play out in the Malawian national imagination and showcase the ways in which survey projects become sites where social boundaries and difference are (re)invented and performed.[6]

Swidler and Watkins (2009) term secondary school graduates in Malawi such as those who work intermittently for research projects "interstitial elites"; in a country where only a small minority achieves the status of either secondary school or college graduate, they aspire to a bright future.[7] However, because they are not sufficiently educated, for example, to be competitive for NGO jobs in the cities, these young people—like others of their generation across sub-Saharan Africa—often also find work as volunteers in donor-implemented programs or AIDS interventions (McKay 2012; van de Ruit 2012; Madiega et al. 2013; Swartz 2013; Prince 2014; Maes 2017). These positions come with benefits such as small stipends and the possibility of being hired as a paid employee in the future. Similarly, research jobs provide a temporary paid break from farming and petty trading. Many fieldworkers suggested that after a project left town, they would return home to do farming and "wait for [more] jobs from projects," and most articulated ambitions to return to school for degrees in practical fields such as computing or accounting if they saved enough money in the future. In 2008, I administered a short survey ($n=117$, response rate 98/117, 84 percent) to a cohort of fieldworkers (supervisors, data collectors, data entry clerks, and HIV test counselors) working for LSAM, MAYP, RAM, GSIP, and other survey-type projects in 2007–2008. The survey revealed that the average age of fieldworkers was 25.41 years old; 30 percent were secondary school graduates; 60 percent had also attained a postsecondary school certificate (in fields such as accounting,

VCT, or secretarial skills); and 10 percent were college graduates (percentages rounded to whole numbers).

Brokering Local Knowledge in the Field

> As a fieldworker, the [HIV] counselor should . . . know that culture has been there for ages and your plan is new to them [the villagers who are participating in research] and it might also take another generation to change the culture.[8]

This excerpt from a training manual distributed to fieldwork teams by LSAM—authored by veteran Malawian fieldworkers—implicitly solidifies boundaries even as it attempts to make them permeable, much like the supervisor's words during the training session at the start of this chapter. First, it rhetorically places a boundary between the VCT counselors and their subjects, rural Malawians, by confining culture to the villages and associating the power to change culture with counselors. Likewise, in its objective to train or teach the counselors to be good fieldworkers, it draws a boundary between the project and its employees. Solidifying and emphasizing boundaries between themselves and their employers and between themselves and rural research participants enables fieldwork supervisors and interviewers to preserve ownership over local knowledge and to ensure it remains valuable. As we will see, within a survey project, it is not just data that are produced, but identities, dreams, and social boundaries as well.

TRAINING FOR THE FIELD: BOUNDARY WORK AND THE PRODUCTION OF DIFFERENCE

During the first week or two of a fieldwork season, LSAM, GSIP, MAYP, and RAM all held extensive training sessions for their fieldworkers. These trainings took place in rented facilities (such as a teacher's college or a hotel conference room) or at the guesthouse where fieldwork teams stayed for the duration of data collection. Their purpose was to encourage bonding among the field teams, to determine before fieldwork began which fieldworkers should be let go, to familiarize fieldworkers with the survey or other instruments to be implemented, and to standardize and harmonize data collection procedures as much as possible. Becoming a competent fieldworker necessitates training as a mode of professionalization into the world of survey research. Fieldworkers are trained to transform villages into "the field," snippets of conversation into data, and rural dwellers into interviewees. Instead of initiating fieldworkers

into local culture, these trainings initiate them into research culture and, in the process, facilitate new imaginings of self and other. Whereas chapter 4 shows how the epistemic virtues held by demographers come to be embodied—if imperfectly—during the administration of surveys to rural Malawians, this chapter focuses on how data collection produces new kinds of social boundaries and forms of difference and revalues local knowledge. In fact, it is in their interactions with data and standards for their collection that fieldworkers gain the local expertise they offer to foreign researchers.

Participants in the training sessions coconstructed an archetypal villager or research subject to facilitate their work in the field. Engagement with this ideal villager necessitated preparations and forethought as to proper comportment, behavior, and dress code on the part of the fieldwork teams. On day two of a joint training session for LSAM interviewers and HIV counselors in May 2008, Francis, the Malawian VCT team supervisor, provided a rapid-fire set of guidelines to his trainees: "How do we dress for the field? We put on *chitenje* [cloth wrap worn by most rural women]. We can't wear what we wear in the city. You have to suit the environment. Strong perfume can make the respondent uncomfortable. Manners affect everything. Chewing gum is rude. Don't whisper or appear to be gossiping in front of villagers."[9] The supervisor closed this session with a performance of a commonly known piece of village culture in Malawi: he clasped his hands together and thanked the trainees for their attention: "Zikomo! [Thank you!]" The gesture—Zikomo—was explained for the benefit of those who may have been unfamiliar: "Always do this if you pass someone in the village or if you wish to enter someone's compound." Instructions such as these belied an assumption on the part of LSAM's Malawian supervisors that fieldworkers must be familiarized with or acclimated to the field. As they are trained to embody a new occupational role, they are also taught that they are fundamentally different—more urbane, more familiar with international branding, more sophisticated, more open-minded—than the villagers they will be interviewing (Pigg 1996).[10] However, Francis's instructions also point to the supervisors' interest in maintaining a boundary between themselves and their trainees: they are the experts imparting accumulated fieldwork wisdom to a group of initiates (see Englund [2006] on the production of such boundaries in professionalized human rights advocacy spaces in Malawi).

Project guidelines for dress and comportment were meticulously observed by fieldworkers and monitored by fieldwork supervisors, and clothing and comportment became embodied symbols of fieldworkers' professionalism, status, and difference from rural villagers (Justice 1986, 143; Nading 2013, 98).

In June 2008, I attended training sessions for LSAM interviewers who would be administering a long survey to villagers in the coming weeks. As they prepared to enter the field for the first time to pilot the survey, a supervisor singled out a fashionably dressed male interviewer who was sporting a Kangol brand cap to drive home a lesson: "We can't be putting on hats like this one *ku mudzi* [in the village]!" A few months later, another male interviewer was sent home to change his trousers before work. His supervisor asked him, "What were you thinking coming to work with those jeans with 50 CENT [the American hip-hop artist] written on them in big letters?" Interviewers, too, commented on their colleagues' attire, often in gendered fashion, as when one woman was consistently singled out for choosing to wear "shoes meant for clubbing" in the field. Critiques of field attire such as these produce the city and the village as incommensurable places: "Blantyre is Blantyre, but Mchinji [a rural fieldwork site] . . . *ndi ena!* [The city is one thing, but the rural areas are another thing altogether!]," as Francis put it.[11]

In their effort to blend in with villagers, fieldworkers employed costumes, props, and accessories. During our daily minibus journeys to the field, I witnessed a ritualized collapse and maintenance of boundaries between the categories of field and office, and researched and researcher. At about the halfway point between the field office and the field in the mornings, the women in the van tied headscarves or bandanas around their heads and knotted colorful chitenje fabric around their waists (usually over trousers or a skirt). At the end of the day, they sighed with relief, unwrapped their heads, and removed the now dusty chitenje. Men, too, adopted certain ritualized codes of dress and mannerisms; they often referred to their older or less fashionable sneakers as fieldwork shoes and replaced them with their regular, cleaner, and more stylish shoes at the end of the day before heading into town for dinner. During downtime in the field, supervisors often shopped at weekly markets in trading centers near sample villages for low-priced field clothes. The symbolic distance between the fieldworkers and the villagers was reestablished as the minivan hurried back to the office in the evenings.

In July 2008, rituals of fieldwork dress were at the center of a discussion between Dr. Smith, an American public health researcher who was in Malawi with RAM for two weeks, and John, the supervisor for the project's data collection that summer. Dr. Smith inquired why female fieldworkers wore headscarves while in the field but not in the office. John explained that it was to foster closeness to their respondents by hiding things like expensive extensions or elaborate hairstyles village women do not have access to. "To not wear the scarf would be saying, 'I have a lot of money and I'm not from

around here and I care too much about my hair.'" In practice, however, wearing scarves and *zitenje* worked to accentuate the social distance between interviewers and research subjects. Villagers could tell if a fieldworker wore her hair in extensions even if she covered them with a headscarf and knew she was dressing down. However, attempting to blend in allowed the interviewer to maintain a foothold in both the local and research worlds that she straddled. Interviewers gradually became skilled at using cultural diacritics to competently blend into the field and embody a certain cultural style by "deploying signs in a way that position[ed them] in relation to social categories" (Ferguson 1999, 96). Even if they are not fooling anyone, dressing and undressing indicates their interest in knowing and mastering the local, an endeavor at the center of their professionalization into fieldwork. Clothes and accessories may seem insignificant props in the drama of fieldwork, but they are symbolic markers of the shared investments of members of fieldwork cultures in policing the boundary between the field and the office, and the knowers and the known (Gieryn 1999). In fact, it is the shared agenda of the actors who make up the survey research project—producing clean data—that gives birth to new social hierarchies and status regimes mirrored by the spatialized narration and performance of difference.

The field was also produced as a place of difference in fieldworkers' narrations of fieldwork as an adventure, as out of the ordinary, and as a kind of roughing it. In the open-ended survey questionnaire I distributed to over one hundred interviewers and supervisors (working on survey projects including my case study projects, mentioned above), I asked respondents what they most enjoyed about fieldwork. The responses complemented conversations I had with project staff members: the field was imagined as an almost magical place that was unfamiliar and new. Most respondents mentioned that they enjoyed fieldwork because it afforded them the opportunity to travel and learn more about Malawi (77/98, or 79 percent of respondents to the survey mentioned these as the main benefits of fieldwork jobs).[12]

Fieldworkers viewed fieldwork as an opportunity to get out of familiar settings and explore new ones. They described fieldwork as "a chance to discover the world" and liked that it provided opportunities to make business or other connections, to see family in other parts of Malawi, or to eat new and different foods. While teaching at the University of Malawi from September to December 2008, I frequently socialized with research supervisors, many of whom were tired of the downtime between projects, since most data collection happens during the American or European summer (Malawi's winter). They "longed to be on the move again." Some projects took fieldworkers on

short leisure trips to places like South Luangwa National Park in neighboring Zambia, to wildlife reserves near research sites, or on other special outings. All projects organized parties, often with a *braii* (barbeque), a DJ, and dancing, for employees at the end of data collection at one site. Finally, fieldworkers appreciated the intimate fictive kinship that developed in research cultures, often referring to their workmates as a "fieldwork family." Fieldwork and the field offer the same opportunities for adventure, novelty, and leisure to Malawian staff as they do to foreign graduate or undergraduate students who look forward to a summer in Africa, even if the economic investments of these parties in research may be drastically different.

Fieldworkers liked learning what rural Malawians do, being exposed to the cultural beliefs of rural people, learning about Chewa culture, playing *bao* (a traditional game of skill and strategy played on a board with pitted holes and small stones or seeds) or football with young men in trading centers, and listening to elders' stories in the villages.[13] Fieldworkers enjoyed interacting with people of different backgrounds, cultures, and beliefs, and saw fieldwork as an opportunity to understand "the real life of the people and their culture and to see what it means to be Malawian" or to see remote parts of Malawi.[14] For fieldworkers, then, as for foreign researchers, the households they visited and the villagers they met stood in for an imagined real Malawi different from what they were used to: indeed, this is the poor, undeveloped, and backward Malawi that motivates data collection in the first place. Fieldworkers also look upon and construct rural research participants nostalgically, as symbols of a nation of peasant farmers, bearers of tradition, and masters of cultural knowledge, as foils to their more modern selves.

Just as Anna Tsing's (2004, 122) Indonesian "nature lovers" learn to love nature as a modern, technical, and scientific thing, so too do fieldworkers (and anthropologists, for that matter) come to see the field as something outside their everyday worlds that must be embodied through discipline, training, and experience. Interviewers who were working in their own districts or villages (in the case of LSAM) emphasized this difference in order to lend credibility to their new role as expert interviewers and to draw attention to their belonging in a community of researchers. This role and its associated symbols (project T-shirt, badge or photo ID, clipboard, canvas bag for holding soap and surveys) gave them significant status and cultural capital among their peers, who, in cases where projects hired locally, might also be acquaintances or family members (Justice 1986, 102–103; Riedmann 1993, 47–65). Through their initiation into research culture, individuals learned to see research par-

ticipants as different, even as they mastered a set of techniques to align themselves with the field.

Training sessions produced expectations and stereotypes about village culture meant to guide the actions and interactions of fieldworkers on the job. Trainings employed a cultural competency approach based on predictions of behaviors or scenarios one is likely to face when interacting with, for example, someone from a different ethnic group or gender than one's own. During the training session for LSAM's HIV counselors who would be deployed to villages to test and counsel research participants, a supervisor said, "In Rumphi, you might find that a man can have seven wives; in Balaka, there [they also have multiple wives] too."[15] Other assumptions manifested in the supervisors' explanation that men in village households do not cook or carry water and that women do not build houses. The training manuals that accompanied these lessons in cultural sensitivity presented a number of scenarios likely to happen in the field (a place described as "never short of drama, dilemma, laughter or even tears" by the veteran supervisors who authored the manual). The scenarios were followed by formulaic suggested responses to guide the counselors in real time. Throughout, the manual and the training sessions objectified culture as a stumbling block to the progress of research in the field: "Everyone is molded by culture and . . . defends his culture and it is not easy to change one's culture just by comparing to some culture practiced by some people somewhere. . . . Us [*sic*] as counselors are not supposed to advise but rather just give information, have a small mouth [hold one's tongue] and avoid developing anger [creating bad feelings] in the people you are working with."[16]

Interviewers at another training session were encouraged "to try not to change whatever they [villagers] might believe . . . or tell them it is wrong to believe in *afiti* [witches]." By relegating culture to the realm of the traditional, old fashioned, rural, and backward, the training sessions produce a temporal and spatial distance between the fieldworkers who are presumed to be naked of culture, and villagers (or others) who are imagined to be mired in culture. These sessions and the talk and rhetoric common to research worlds effectively make culture visible to fieldworkers by inventing it—and containing it in the field—which facilitates fieldworkers' imagination that they are links or translators between two worlds glossed as the field and the office. This recalls Wagner's (1981) argument that anthropologists invent culture as their object of study upon entering the field. Trainings further compel the imagination of a national topography characterized by field sites, pockets of stagnant culture,

intersected by the paths of mobile and cosmopolitan fieldworkers; the field constructed in the space of training sessions functions to negate the coeval existence of fieldworkers and respondents (Fabian [1983] 2002). The trainings ask interviewers to black box culture in order to render it incapable of complicating or slowing down fieldwork. This black boxing plays a central role in "seeing like a research project" (Biruk 2012), where the sample is the standardized and bounded unit that acts as a tidy container for data. In inventing culture as something other, fieldworkers and supervisors shore up their own performances of objectivity, neutrality, and professionalism. Data collection is framed as a scientific, rather than a cultural, enterprise; rather than waiting to be collected, then, data are invented in the social processes that constitute survey research.

Historian of science Lyn Schumaker (2001) observes that fieldworkers associated with the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute (RLI) in its heyday came to view themselves not as mere research assistants but as researchers. The same was true in Malawi, especially among supervisors who worked for many years with projects (indeed, LSAM supervisors have been coauthors on research articles published in demographic journals). Identifying as a researcher entailed performances that theatrically emphasized the difference and distance between science and culture or between the rational and irrational. Telling jokes and sharing silly villager stories were one act in these performances. These took diverse forms, but articulated a general theme of backwardness or stubbornness about change: villagers are short sighted when they carry maize to a nearby trading center or *boma* to sell it, or villagers think maize mill owners grind children's bones into maize flour, or villagers believe in bloodsuckers, for example (see chapter 3 for an extended discussion of bloodsucker stories).[17] The conclusion of one of these stories was met with generalized agreement among a narrator and her audience that "villagers believe the craziest things!" This storytelling conjured a narrativized foil to fieldworkers charged with researching villagers and solidified their higher social status (Riedmann 1993, 33–46; Englund 2006), not least to the anthropologist in their presence.[18]

CHECKING AND CREDIBILITY STRUGGLES IN THE FIELD: MAKING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Even as fieldworkers enact a social, cultural, and geographic distance from rural Malawians, they also performatively draw attention to their difference from foreign researchers or project staff. Fieldworkers stake a claim on authentic local knowledge that only they possess. This entails the maintenance of

boundaries between local and global expertise that function to sequester and sacralize the former. This boundary work hinges on explicitly or implicitly identifying oneself in opposition to those who occupy different social positions in research cultures.

Well into LSAM's 2008 fieldwork season, the American researchers modified the division of fieldwork labor. The study employed numerous American and British graduate and undergraduate students. As these students framed it, they did the grunt work for the project: photocopying surveys, buying soap gifts for research participants in town, supervising data entry teams, coding qualitative data, making trips to the airport to fetch foreign team members or gear, crunching numbers, organizing databases, and so on. A few students were engaged in small projects of their own, while others were described as lazy by LSAM's principal investigators. Either way, though, the graduate students often had idle time when fieldwork teams were out in the vans for the day. After some deliberation, researchers assigned the students a new role as checkers who would leave the office to travel to the field a minimum number of times each week of their stay in Malawi. A student would accompany a team of about ten fieldworkers to the field and help supervisors check the questionnaires for completeness and errors as the interviewers submitted them during the day. This checking process, usually accomplished by the Malawian supervisors alone, is an important way to reduce the number of follow-up trips to fill in the blanks left by negligent interviewers. If errors or omissions are discovered while a team is still near a household, the interviewer is sent back the same day to correct them (this is termed a callback). If they are discovered later, the team has to make a special trip and loses valuable time and gasoline in the process.

When the project directors introduced this new plan over a late dinner of chicken and *nsima* one night, the supervisors were not enthused. They claimed that the non-Malawian checkers would "slow [them] down" and be "dead weight." In the course of the next few weeks, their fears were made manifest (in their eyes). The new checkers tended to question things that the supervisors were confident should not be questioned on the completed surveys. Each time an error or incongruence was flagged on a survey by a checker, the team had to deal with callbacks to the household in question. For instance, azungu checkers would flag questions on the survey where an interviewer had filled in the age of a child in Standard 4 as fourteen years or had written 30,000 *kwacha* (at the time, 214 USD) for the amount a rural household had saved last year. Supervisors explained that one must be Malawian in order to know basic things, and to check most of the figures and

information filled into the questionnaires. They suggested that a Malawian would know that it is not unheard-of for a fourteen-year-old in a rural area to be enrolled in Standard 4, even though most pupils in that grade would be nine years old. Similarly, they said, although 30,000 kwacha is a large sum for a rural family to save up, some families run maize mills or enjoy bumper tobacco crops. Checking, then, is a form of expertise that entails having an eye for checking; checkers are able to quickly assess whether a recorded datum makes sense in the universe of possible responses to a survey question. Team members endorsed hierarchies of checking where foreign checkers were on the bottom and longtime fieldworkers possessed the greatest ability to accurately "eyeball" a survey's pages (Coopmans and Button 2014, 774).

The supervisors suggested there were specific kinds of local knowledge the survey sought that the American students were unlikely to be able to gauge for accuracy: how much cash crops like tobacco or groundnuts had fetched per kilogram the prior year, how much money a family saved or loaned in a year, or how many times a respondent reported having sex.[19] In the words of long-time research supervisor Andrews:

> That's the problem with having someone check questionnaires, like the azungu they [principal investigators] are sending as checkers to us. . . . Someone from somewhere else doesn't know the area. They are not familiar with what is happening on the ground. . . . You can have the azungu working in the field, which is proved through simple calculations, but if you are trying to study something which is . . . sort of a local thing, something unknown to them, you have to have people who know what is happening on the ground, so that your data can't be questionable. These guys don't know enough about the context, about Malawi, to be able to check a questionnaire and to correct the interviewer's work. These people just here for a few weeks just can't do that kind of work![20]

The claim that azungu checkers lack the local knowledge needed to properly check and preserve the quality of research data articulates a solid boundary between these two categories of experts, preserving certain tasks, translations, and contexts as the sole purview of the Malawian fieldworkers. Andrews casts local knowledge as possessed only by native Malawians or by those who have assimilated to the local culture. We might interpret this as an instance of what Steven Epstein (1996) terms credibility struggles. The kinds of knowledge that are second nature to Malawian local experts but alien to azungu checkers have the potential to enhance data quality, according to fieldworkers. In

survey research worlds, the positions occupied by the Malawian local experts are always already relative to those occupied by non-Malawians. Fieldworkers are interested in preserving their status as purveyors and owners of local knowledge and in portraying this expertise as indispensable to the smooth operation of data collection.

It is via these kinds of boundary work that local knowledge is produced as a valuable entity. Indeed, projects such as those depicted in this book provide fruitful sites for rethinking anthropological analyses of how knowledge is defined and arbitrated, how it is justified, communicated, learned, or withheld. Anthropologists have long taken interest in hierarchies of knowledge that privilege technical, scientific, explicit, and Western knowledge at the expense of indigenous, local, tacit, or vernacular knowledge. An underlying thread in critical development and global health studies is an effort to uncover, rescue, or elevate local knowledge that is often marginalized or discredited. Local knowledge has become associated with the nuance that global designs and projects lack. Yet the example of survey project fieldworkers illustrates how, in global health worlds, "local knowledge" must carry with it the scare quotes that de-emphasize its stability and legitimacy (cf. Peters 2016). More generally, this case indicates the epistemological specificity of local knowledge: indeed, the peripatetic nature of LSAM (which took up temporary residence in three different districts in the course of three months) belies the fact that local knowledge is not something possessed, rooted in a specific place or person, but rather a set of techniques and self-presentations, a habitus (Boyer 2008, 44). Countering common representations of fieldworkers as intimately familiar with the people and places they collect data from and in, and as natural translators between global and local (e.g., Madhavan et al. 2007, 374–375), I suggest that it is through their engagement with data that fieldworkers gain local knowledge. Their expertise reflects their structural position in a research world and, predictably, often resonates with their patrons' existing assumptions (Tilley 2007, 17–19). Amid countless accounts that narrate how local knowledge is cannibalized or exploited by global projects, the case of fieldworkers in Malawi meanwhile illustrates that local knowledge comes to exist—and to gain value—because of them.

Student checkers were short-term visitors to Malawi who were unlikely to return again in the future. They had little to no knowledge of Malawi and, in some cases, could have just as easily ended up in a completely different country. To them, Malawi was a kind of undifferentiated field, a place to get research experience. Conversely, many of the Malawian research team members—as mentioned above—viewed themselves as researchers who had accumulated

years of experience and wisdom about survey work in Malawi. Further, although some of the students were close in age to some of the supervisors, the longitudinal nature of these projects means that successive crops of students remain the same age while the veteran supervisors and fieldworkers grow older. The tensions around checking point to some of the frictions that arise between Malawian and non-Malawian fieldworkers, and provide the former with an idiom of critique that not only preserves local knowledge as their domain but also reclaims the authority, wisdom, and locality their age and experience afford them. In a sense, fieldworkers framed checking as a practice rooted in tacit knowledge, even as we note that this and other forms of local knowledge emerge rather from a portfolio of skills and bits of information acquired through exposure to research projects (Prince 2014).

ECONOMIES OF TRUST IN RESEARCH WORK CULTURES

Researchers, especially those new to working in Malawi, recognized the importance of assembling a fieldwork team composed of professional, trustworthy, and competent fieldworkers. They, and the fieldworkers themselves, saw a direct correlation between a professional, committed team and high-quality data. Foreign researchers drew on knowledge from peers in their research networks who were working in Malawi. Dr. Smith, an American principal investigator for RAM, recalled her original naive fieldwork plan: she had planned to go to the University of Malawi and hire research assistants there. However, in discussions with other researchers, she came to understand how important it would be to have experienced fieldworkers on her team. Eventually, the stamp of approval from a fellow foreign researcher in her network was enough to convince her to hire John as her supervisor and delegate to him the authority to determine the composition of the field teams.

In recruiting and retaining fieldwork teams, researchers emphasized that they sought out people they could trust. This resonates with scholarly framings of the relationship between interpersonal trust and the production of good knowledge. Steven Shapin (1994) shows, for example, how the codes and conventions of gentlemanly conduct in seventeenth-century England also determined which people (and by extension, which knowledge claims) were credible, reliable, or trustworthy (see also McCook 1996). Trust, however, is not something inherent to an individual; rather, it is built over time and within unfolding social relations. Although Dr. Smith trusted John enough to allocate him significant (hiring) power in prefieldwork planning, he would also have to continue to earn her trust for the duration of fieldwork. Trust between researchers and fieldworkers was established within a distinct research

culture as it mapped onto an underlying social field. The cultural norms of research by which trust is built up are rooted in a certain interested disinterest on the part of both researchers and fieldworkers. This interested disinterest upholds the shared misrecognition of large economic and educational gaps between researchers and supervisors (Redfield 2012; Geissler 2013b).

Research work culture encompasses norms for social interaction, expectations of sharing (of everything from blankets to food to workload to billiards games in a local drinking joint to music files to stories), and guidelines for behavior. Interactions and impressions that transpire outside of the bounded workday inform not only how fieldworkers interact with one another, but also how much or how little foreign researchers come to trust individual supervisors or interviewers. Trust informed researchers' evaluations of the data collected by a certain supervisor's team of interviewers, how much independence a specific fieldwork team was granted, whether a researcher allowed an interviewer to borrow his computer, or whether a graduate student loaned a supervisor 100 kwacha (at the time) for dinner. Because trust must be continually and consistently performed and negotiated, becoming trustworthy—effectively recruiting a new person into one's network—is a full-time job. Whether distant from the eyes of their bosses or sitting next to them at dinner, they maintained an interest in being deemed good fieldworkers.

Disagreements or conflicts between supervisors and researchers were rare, even if behind-the-scenes talk sometimes indicated friction. Both parties were uninterested in conflict that could threaten their mutually beneficial relationship to one another: to oversimplify, researchers wished to collect data as efficiently as possible, and supervisors wished to run an operation that was stress free and earn a salary. Relationships between fieldworkers and researchers were effective not only in producing knowledge but in proving useful to individuals even amid antagonism (Schumaker 2001, 249). Dr. Smith (RAM) explained:

> When you're working with a big project like this one, you can't have all the control. People have told me, you know other researchers, that they think I don't supervise fieldworkers enough. They say, "Your supervisor is a free agent!" And, well, it's true. My supervisor is not here every minute, even on days when we are doing data entry. Like yesterday afternoon he was off in the car scouting [scheduling interviews for the next day with local leaders]. And I know when he's out that he's taking care of his own personal business, but the thing is, overall, he is available to us twelve hours a day. He gets his job done.[21]

She knows her supervisor often conducts his own business or errands on the clock, even though he does not explicitly inform her of this. Her assumptions are borne out by my own experience in the field, where some supervisors engaged in brief business meetings, dropped off or picked up family members from nearby spots, stopped to meet friends, visited the market, or picked up a laptop from a computer repair store. However, this does not break the trust between them—trust is a give and take. The researcher surrenders some time and money in exchange for assurance that the job will get done. Indeed, the supervisor explained that he preferred working for RAM over others because, he said, "They [RAM's researchers] are not constantly looking over my shoulder." In this way, a mutual disinterest in conflict or confrontation that might have created bad feelings and negatively influenced fieldwork ensures that both parties achieved their interests.

In addition to being trustworthy, fieldworkers were expected to possess local knowledge useful to outside researchers. In discussions with supervisors about why the research project may have hired them over other possible individuals, they consistently mentioned trust and their possession of local knowledge as major factors. I quote one supervisor, speaking at length, to illustrate the kinds of knowledge that the local experts themselves think researchers are seeking:

> Most of the time . . . when people from outside come here to do their research, the main advice they ask from us is [about] the processes they have to pass through for them to do their research in a proper way. So maybe you go to a site: which people should we meet first so that our job should go smoothly? So we tell them, "These are the authorities we have to meet first so that things go well." Aside from that, like, cultures in local areas . . . we have to explain, to say, okay, we are in this area, and this is what we are expected to do in this area, and we should behave like this. . . . For example, the Yaos mostly don't drink because they are Muslim and on Fridays they go to mosque so we tell the researchers to do interviews in non-Yao areas on Fridays so we don't disturb them in mosque. . . . We may even have to tell these kinds of things to interviewers, as well. Like one time an interviewer offended a Yao man who had been cooking us lunch by bringing in one of his [the interviewer's] mice for lunch. The Chewas do prefer to [enjoy] eat mice, but the Yaos . . . it's taboo for them, you know?

This supervisor's comments indicate that fieldworkers have become familiar with the expectations, demands, and needs of foreign researchers. Through

sequential interactions with growing numbers of projects and researchers, they come to possess an increasingly convincing, packaged, and commoditized form of local knowledge, scripted to match the anticipations of foreign researchers. Notably, the examples of local knowledge stated here deal with logistics or with cultural caricatures of ethnic or religious groups (e.g., Chewas like eating mice). They exemplify the unstable, shifting, and constructed nature of local knowledge as it fits into and is shaped by a marketplace; fieldworkers broker their embodied human capital—stores of information, habits, and practices—to researchers who wish to enlist it so as to produce valuable data.

Though research projects take for granted their need for local knowledge, the content and meanings of the category itself often go unremarked. In many projects and contexts, foreign researchers solicited local or cultural knowledge from their Malawian supervisors or interviewers. They asked, for example, about the specific differences between types of traditional healers in the rural areas (see above), about the details of initiation ceremonies, about the availability of antiretroviral medications (ARVs) at local hospitals, about local perceptions of female condoms, or about widow inheritance or other cultural practices.[22] Researchers often assumed the responses given by experts to be experiential, authentically local, or, in Dr. Smith's words, "from the horse's mouth."[23]

Researchers generally overestimated the amount of logistical local knowledge possessed by their employees. It was in the interest of fieldworkers to appear familiar with the research area in question, even if it was terra incognita. Once in the vans for the day, distant from the eyes of the researchers, the team's peripatetic meanderings betrayed their nonknowledge of certain regions or villages. The fieldworkers maintained flexibility and nonchalance, cobbling together directions from young children or women on their way to the borehole (often giving them rides in exchange for directions to a chief's house, for example), hiring a local scout (often the son of a village headman), and/or asking door to door to learn the location of a certain village, household, or headman. Many times, teams were lost amid dense grasses or stuck on the wrong side of a bridge felled by mudslides in the rainy season. However, so long as the team made sufficient progress that day, fieldworkers maintained their credibility.

In the case of both cultural and logistical information, it is notable that fieldworkers often explicitly attributed their own local knowledge to their past work on research projects. In a conversation about whether young girls in rural areas fall in with sugar daddies who give them money or gifts

in exchange for sex, for example, a supervisor prefaced his response with, "When I was with the adolescent intervention pilot study, we found that . . ." The research studies these fieldworkers have participated in, then, enjoy a new citational life distant from the world of Google Scholar. Local knowledge was not ready-made, but fashioned and packaged via mobility and exposure to the national landscape through research project employment. In this sense, local knowledge reflects the economic and epistemological context in which it attains value. Whereas discussions around data among researchers often center on the impact of fieldworkers on data (they have the capacity to ruin or improve data), we note that data also very much impact fieldworkers as they engage with them.

Fieldworkers cultivate an ability to display the very kinds of expertise and competence that researchers seek out as they clock time working with research projects, and researchers recognize the value that continuity and cultivated expertise add to their data. American fieldwork manager Patrick told his audience at a training session, "The more time you spend with us, the more valuable you are to us." He asked that fieldworkers sign a contract in which they promised to stay with the project for the duration of data collection. Later, he explained to me that it had been difficult to find interviewers this field season because the project was competing with the national census, which paid much better for similar work.[24] The value of sticking with a project for the duration of fieldwork and over the course of many years is weighed pragmatically by fieldworkers. Each project job is a platform for expanding social connections and increasing the probability of future financial gain. John, RAM supervisor, explained why he had "deserted" a project that originally hired him many years earlier to work for another one: "They didn't bid high enough for me!" Andrews, too, elaborated on the dynamics of the marketplace of expertise: "Research is getting much more expensive. . . . Even I am getting more expensive myself. Now I can negotiate, say things like, "They [another project] are giving me this and that." Working for the same employers year after year also allowed supervisors more room to negotiate for raises and better living conditions in the field. Clocking more time in research worlds and learning the ins and outs of the marketplace of expertise enabled fieldworkers to more effectively broker local knowledge to possible employers, to increase their negotiating power, to access resources, and to earn more trust from their international counterparts.

Living Project to Project: Itinerant Knowledge Work

FLEXIBLE ACCUMULATION IN THE CONTACT ZONE

Although project employees frequently voiced complaints about grueling work schedules, they were better off than most of their peers because they had a temporary but guaranteed salary. Even if financial remuneration for work on research projects was low, the research project offered diversified social connections and social capital, defined by Pierre Bourdieu (1986, 248) as "an aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition." International research projects are crossroads of social and informational capital that can often be converted into economic capital, as others have documented for an array of global health projects in Africa. Transfers and exchanges of this sort occur every day during fieldwork. A research project is a contact zone, a place where diverse actors meet and engage in transactions and relations that are mutually transforming, even as they play out in asymmetrical relations of power (Pratt 1991). Pratt's concept helps us to look beyond both data themselves and the temporary institutions in which they are produced; in this section, I show how alternative forms of value are produced as side effects of research itself, often redirecting fieldworkers' imaginations, hopes, and anxieties.

Fieldworkers accumulated many kinds of capital during fieldwork; indeed, even as they wished they could stop living project to project, they recognized the potentials inherent in proximity to a transnational research collaboration. First, valuable material objects regularly changed hands between foreign and Malawian project staff members. At first glance, the transfer of secondhand objects from foreign to local staff at the close of fieldwork periods might seem insignificant. However, such objects were often reinvented or revalued as they passed hands, not only from the staff member to a local counterpart but from the counterpart to family or friends in the future. Clothing or running shoes were sometimes kept for personal use but also served as highly valued gifts to kin living in rural areas, who often expect monetary or in-kind gifts from wealthier relatives. Despite the ephemeral nature of research work and relatively low salaries, it was nevertheless assumed by kin of project staff that they would share the wealth the staff member accumulated through employment. Both middle-class and poor Malawians outfit themselves in kaunjika (secondhand clothes for sale at rural bomas and city markets), an important stylistic and practical resource in a country where international clothing outlets are not present. The secondhand clothing, backpacks, or coats given to project

staff members were usually of better quality and newer than that available at weekly markets. Other gifts were much more highly valued. Very frequently, friends to American staff would find themselves with a mint-condition cell phone at the conclusion of fieldwork, an item that could be used personally or sold for a large sum. American staff members were compelled to give things away at the close of fieldwork and frequently referenced the poverty and difficulty of finding electronics in Malawi as motivations for, in some cases, bestowing an iPod, digital camera, old laptop, or USB key (flash drive) on a research colleague. Such gifts were likely to be kept and not sold, due to the high status they would give to their owner at a time when access to technology and connectivity was coveted.

Though the material utility of such objects is apparent, it should also be noted that they often played a key role in the ability of individuals to market themselves to future projects. Namely, researchers prefer to hire research staff members who are "well versed in English and understand what we as Americans are looking for."[25] Often, the Americans who are charged with the task of hiring fieldworkers are relatively young (either graduate students or recent PhDs) and, therefore, likely to find common ground with a young Malawian. As often as American research team members shared their music with Malawian counterparts, they also exhibited a hunger for Malawian or Zambian music they could share with friends back home. Flash drives became a future-oriented object for their owners. The owners of these drives could use them to store résumés or cover letters to potential employers and access these documents quickly at Internet cafes (in 2007–2008, smartphone or wireless access to the Internet were minimally available to elites in Malawi). Flash drives often enjoyed wide circulation among groups of close friends; upon inserting one into your computer you were likely to, first, contract a virus and, second, to observe files named for multiple people. In more than a few cases, project staff members would give or sell laptop computers at affordable prices to Malawian staff members. Obviously, this object's potential for enhancing future career and social prospects is very significant. It should be noted that familiarity with and a clear ability to use technology significantly enhances one's chances of being hired at a higher level on a research project, especially in 2007–2008 when smartphones and laptops had yet to achieve mass circulation in Malawi. Working as a supervisor or interviewer, for example, requires an ability to work with digital recorders (to record interviews with research subjects), iPods (used by some projects as transcription devices), cameras (to photograph research subjects), GPS technology (for mapping sample sites), and laptops (if one is on the data entry team or a typist of interviews).

Joining a research community was also an opportunity to acquire social capital. First, the friendships that formed between foreign and Malawian research staff members became a resource to be tapped into later, when the former returned to Malawi for another round of fieldwork or to start up another project. American research staff told me that before returning to Malawi for "another fieldwork season," they would e-mail or SMS friends in Malawi to inquire whether there was anything they needed. Most research staff members suggested that being a courier for gifts was "the least they could do" since their friends in Malawi had very little access to the commodities and technology Americans took for granted. Furthermore, project staff would often furnish loans or monetary gifts (via one of the many Western Union outlets in Malawi) to help their Malawian colleagues "[go] on in school" or "[start] a business"; loans were disbursed in person or with the help of e-mail, Skype, and Western Union after foreign project staff members returned home. Thus, an open line of communication to a friend across the ocean became another node of support in already existing networks of kin and acquaintances. One supervisor who worked on numerous research projects told me, "Many of us tend to each have our own azungu," a person from abroad who was most intimate with him or her.[26] (I am, I gather, a number of Malawians' "own azungu.") Especially in cases of emergency or tragedy, such nodes could be easily activated.

Social capital was often converted into financial capital through recommendations for employees passed from people who had spent time in Malawi and people who were anticipating arrival in Malawi; a longtime supervisor explained, "These researchers employ people they know, who they have worked with. . . . They know someone they are familiar with already will do a good job."[27] In more tragic cases, too, the friendship networks born in the space of the research project were immensely important to Malawians. In mid-2009, members of GSIP received news that a Malawian supervisor had passed away; news from LSAM via a Listserv reported that an elderly woman who had worked as a cook for the project had endured a forcible break-in at the project's housing compound. Most recently (2016), a former MAYP supervisor experienced severe financial hardship. In these cases and others, digital connections mobilized financial and other resources from Americans and Europeans affiliated with the projects directly to the family of the deceased and the affected individuals, respectively. Americans and Europeans who have worked on survey projects in Malawi have also raised money via e-mail, GoFundMe, and so on for colleagues in Malawi experiencing financial hardship. Of course, individual relationships often include transfer of funds

to support businesses, educational plans, or children's schooling fees as well. In this way, transnational social networks forged within projects have unpredictable value in the future (Jackson 2012).

Working in the field, distant from the eyes and ears of foreign research staff, sometimes permits local experts to accumulate resources by siphoning them from the project. Various forms of siphoning such as conducting personal business on project time (as described above) remained hidden and did not necessarily threaten researchers' authority or project protocols; were the fieldworkers to make these actions explicit, however, they would lose credibility and trust. In some cases, research project supervisors used their own cars for some work-related tasks, necessitating reimbursement for fuel used on project time. Fieldworkers could often take advantage of the nonknowledge of their bosses of, for example, the price of fuel to fill their gas tank for the next week (if they used their own car for project business). Another benefit commonly siphoned from projects was mobile phone airtime. Projects provided airtime cards to fieldwork supervisors so that they could check in with their interviewers about their progress or locate them if they were lost. In the field, supervisors almost never phoned interviewers (airtime depletes very quickly if it is used for phone calls); if absolutely necessary, they would send an SMS, which cost significantly fewer kwacha. Supervisors used their siphoned airtime for personal calls to friends, lovers, or family and viewed these *maunits* (airtime units) as a perk of the job. If supervisors knew that the boss providing them with the airtime had little knowledge of how long units last, they might try to negotiate for more by claiming they had depleted their units making phone calls in the field that day. In some cases, project staff who stayed in the office failed to realize that many of the rural fieldwork sites lacked reliable cell phone coverage in 2007–2008, making both phoning and SMS messaging difficult or impossible.

John, an experienced fieldworker, managed to draw on and activate social capital with great acumen. When we first met in 2005, he was working as an interviewer for LSAM; by 2008, he was the head supervisor for RAM.[28] Since 2005, he had married, had a child, started a minibus business, completed a master's degree abroad, and traveled widely. He dressed well, often wearing a tie and dress shoes to work on days when we stayed in the field office. In the years following 2005, he visited numerous international cities, often staying with researchers or graduate students affiliated with the research projects he had worked for. In addition to his role as a head supervisor, John also ran a business in a suburb of Blantyre, Malawi's commercial capital. John is exemplary (though not representative by any means) of the imagined social mobil-

ity this chapter depicts. With each serial job for research projects, he gained increments of credibility, status, expertise, and authority that subsequently permitted him to expect and negotiate for more money, resources, trips, and benefits. Early in his project-to-project career, his personal laptop computer and mobile phone were acquired through his work with research projects. At times between 2005 and 2008, John capitalized on the distance between himself and his employers to take on work from more than one research project simultaneously, a feat made easier because one employer attempted to oversee John's work from abroad via Skype.[29]

In 2008, projects began to put in place contracts stating that an employee may only work for a single project at a time. In June 2008, the recruitment and training for LSAM happened to overlap in time and space with the recruitment and training for National Statistical Office census enumerators. The statistics office posted a list of local people who had won positions as enumerators on the bulletin board at the front of the building where LSAM was holding its training sessions. A supervisor noticed the name of one of the project interviewers on this list; although this interviewer had already been selected as an enumerator for the census a week earlier, he had attended two days of LSAM's training. This "eating from both sides" was deemed underhanded, and the interviewer was not paid for the trainings he attended.[30]

Although some Malawians working for research projects were duplicitous with their employers, it makes sense to view all such tactics to maximize social position and financial gain in the context of the flexible labor pool they occupied. Again and again, research supervisors told me that being flexible is essential in this kind of work. The descriptor "flexible" was fitting for many reasons, not least of which involved the efforts of these individuals to diversify their social and financial capital networks. Their strategies were diverse, but work on a research project became a platform for forging profitable relations and practices. One twenty-nine-year-old male who worked as a research supervisor for ten years explained that he grows tobacco by reinvesting the money he earns doing research to do farming. From these earnings, he employs six men who monitor and harvest the tobacco each year. In 2007, he supplemented his income by selling thousands of kilograms of tobacco. This supplementary livelihood strategy is an example of his flexibility; he can go to his home in northern Malawi three times a year to check on the tobacco and still earn money as a research supervisor. Today, he is well employed—still in the research world—as the research manager for a consulting firm that helps foreign researchers set up and carry out data collection in Malawi. He has traveled frequently abroad and is a coauthor on several academic articles.

For some individuals, then, knowledge work has become a contemporary form of migrant labor that enhances rural accumulation in a village home; "mobility is . . . a lifestyle in which improvements in the village are pursued through a stay in town," where "town" stands in for the field (Englund 2002, 139). We might even suggest that the thin mattresses and simple accommodation in rest houses rented by research projects have become a contemporary corollary to the workers' living quarters associated with mining camps in South Africa and Southern Rhodesia.

ON BEING STUCK IN PLACE

Fieldworkers were perpetually poised to learn of better opportunities, higher pay, and rumors of new projects coming to Malawi. Research world gossip networks were efficacious in spreading invaluable information: who was working for which project, how much a project was paying, and the paths and trajectories of in-country azungu. The going rates for one project versus another were important forms of knowledge for interested would-be interviewers and supervisors. Gossip gleaned from known social network members was the main channel of such information. However, it is important to note that even opportunities to move upward within the research world were tempered by close analysis of the social and economic benefits; John, for example, was invited by a group of Americans to be one of the Malawian trustees of a new organization but declined this offer when he discovered that a Malawian law prohibits trustees of such organizations from working for the same organization.

Fieldworkers rely on a larger structure they have little knowledge of or access to. For example, in late 2007, a large research project received word that their proposal had not passed ethical review and therefore could not be immediately implemented. Anticipating approval, the project had already begun training its staff, including nurses who would act as VCT counselors for the project. When the researchers received the news, they passed it on to a cadre of well-qualified nurses who had expected months of steady employment but were left suddenly unemployed. Similarly, fieldworkers who were part of ready-made field teams contracted out to research projects often complained that their salaries were not paid on time by the consulting firm or center they worked for: "They will just call us and say, 'You'll get the money in two weeks.' And, well, we have no choice but to wait for it."

Because most of the interviewers and supervisors were typically in their twenties or early thirties at the time of this fieldwork, they harbored career aspirations; males and females alike complained about the instability of this

kind of research work, where they were forced to live project to project. They described how they became stuck in the work of research: "This kind of work doesn't propel me forward at all. I've just been getting some money but I am starting to think I need to make a next step. I am just . . . stuck." Victor, a long-time supervisor on research projects, and his wife, Margaret, a data entry clerk working for numerous projects, wanted to study for an MBA and a master's in development studies, respectively, he said, "so that we can stop this working constantly for other people and just have our own organization." Victor tried to diversify his income by investing in a minibus using money he had made working on research projects. He was thrilled at this prospect, and his business plan exhibited much foresight in its desire to market the minibus to all the projects he worked with (projects paid about 8,000 kwacha [$57–65 at the time] per day to rent a minibus and driver to conduct fieldwork). However, his plan came to a tragic end when he "went in" with a colleague who promised to buy the bus while in South Africa for a business trip. Victor fronted as much of the price of the minibus as he could afford and waited eagerly for the bus to arrive. When it did, his friend handed him back the sum Victor had fronted and proclaimed that he had decided to do it alone. Victor accepted the news ambivalently: "I'm sad but he just had more capital than me. He has worked longer than I have in research, and he had the financial means to double-cross me."

Fieldworkers tended to internalize feelings of failure if they "were just staying, sitting idly" while "others were working." Many supervisors were graduates of the University of Malawi and were embarrassed if they failed to secure employment for even a short period of time. Nonetheless, research jobs were scarce, which meant college-educated young people stayed for some portion of the year in the village (or the town) they were from. Whereas foreign project staff members assumed that fieldworkers were happy to go home at the end of a long and exhausting fieldwork contract, they dreaded returning home where they would no longer be earning money. Esau, a supervisor with LSAM, said, "You know, in the old days it was very easy for anyone who went to college to find a job because graduates were so scarce and there were lots of new companies coming in [to Malawi]. But now there are just so many of us and jobs want five years of experience and, well, if I don't know someone, I won't get a job anyway." Following his work with projects in 2007–2008, Esau did eventually find stable, if relatively low-paying, work as a schoolteacher in a lakeshore district.

Certainly, since 2008, a number of fieldworkers—primarily supervisors and those with a college education—have enjoyed success: enrolled in graduate

programs, found work with NGOs or other international organizations, taken positions in government bodies such as the National AIDS Commission, became entrepreneurs, or found work in survey administration or as consultants. In particular, LSAM has made significant investments in a core group of its longtime supervisors: they have found well-paying work in research worlds, obtained graduate degrees, traveled to present papers on which they are coauthors at foreign conferences, and so on. Yet it was well known at the time that the likelihood of moving up in the world of research was small. Nonetheless, even as they felt stuck in place by living project to project, fieldwork jobs stoked hopes and generated new imaginings of alternative futures and careers. Living project to project simultaneously provides opportunities for and blocks to social mobility. A person's position in the social field of a research project correlates with chances of achieving financial or career success. Though rhetoric and public talk on the part of project members celebrates the equality of all team participants, status distinctions and hierarchies within the project are often preserved and maintained through talk and practices. Chisomo, an LSAM supervisor, described how interviewers (who had only finished secondary school) saw their superiors and notes the spatial hierarchies implicit in their accommodations in the field: "[They] tend to think we think we are too good for them. You know, we went to college and had this shared experience and they didn't. And also, you can see on the project how this pans out; while we [supervisors] get the nicer chalets [at the rest house where fieldwork was based] as accommodation, they complain about how they are there in the public, crappier rooms."

In my rough map of the rest house where LSAM was based in mid-2008 (figure 2.2), the spatial distribution of project staff members is evident. Namely, the "nicer chalets" are self-contained (with bathroom) and set off to the side of the main building beneath shade trees. They are quieter, cleaner, and more expensive per night than the "public, crappier rooms." These rooms were darker, cramped, and generally less clean, and their occupants had to share bathrooms they often complained were not well kept. Additionally, the interior rooms, if not fully occupied by fieldworkers, were sometimes rented by the general public (often truck drivers who were rumored to bring sex workers into their rooms at night), creating a sense that the project members in these rooms were no different than everyday guests who could afford only this cheap accommodation. While supervisors largely stayed in the same caliber accommodation as foreign project staff members (chalets), the fieldworkers, data entry clerks, and drivers were relegated to the interior rooms. Despite rhetoric of collaboration and equality that dominated research work

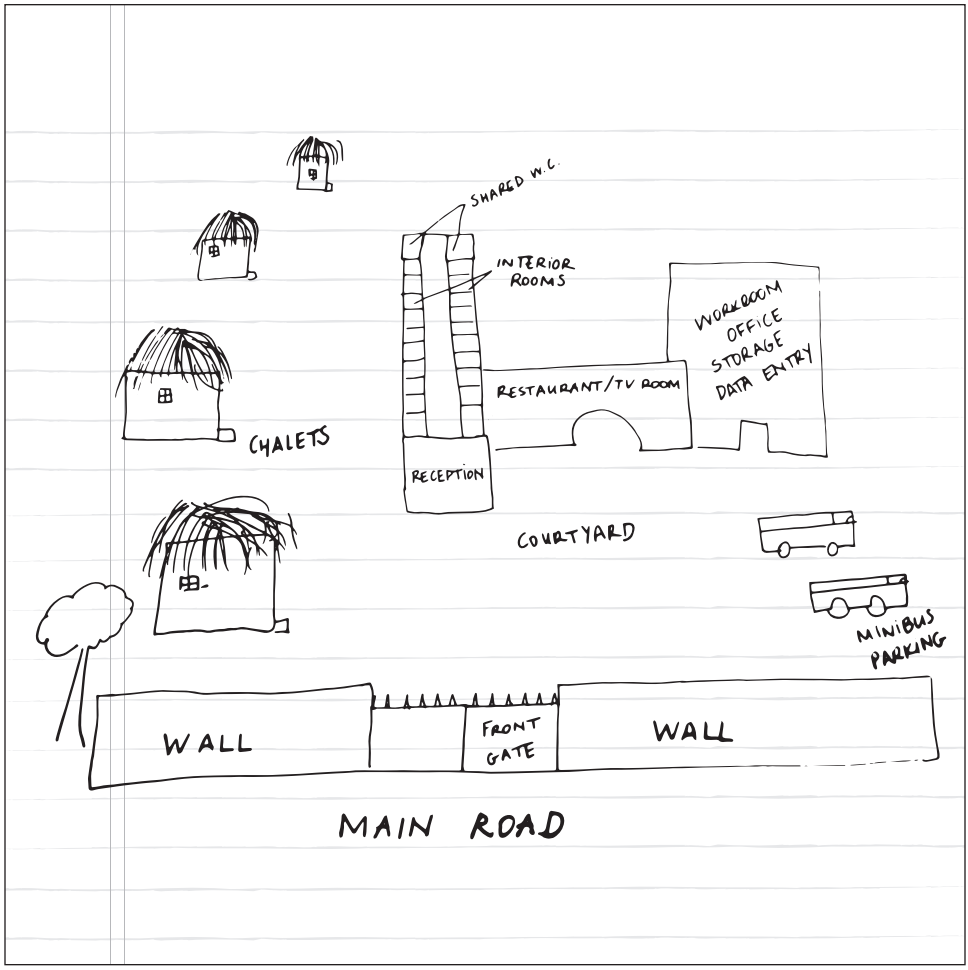

FIGURE 2.2. Author's rendering of LSAM headquarters, 2008.

cultures, the spatialization of inequalities at the Mpaweni is a metaphor for the boundary work that upholds status distinctions and hierarchies between project staff members, made explicit in American field supervisor Patrick's suggestion, "I think the level of room should reflect the hierarchy and status of the person."[31]

When supervisors went out for drinks or billiards in the evenings, they would often restrict invitations to other supervisors or foreign graduate students and framed the exclusion of interviewers as professional (e.g., "We cannot drink with those who work for us"). Only interviewers who had finished

college were hired by MAYP and RAM, so interviewers and supervisors socialized more freely during nonwork hours. Nonetheless, in conversations among themselves, supervisors often expressed pity for interviewers who became jobless when a project moved from one site to another. Indeed, a number of supervisors viewed their role not only as a professional one but saw themselves as mentors who aimed to train their charges, as well, in good work ethic. I observed, for example, a conversation between LSAM supervisor Andrews and a novice interviewer—whom he referred to later as *kamwana* (childish, not grown up)—who was struggling to follow the instructions for data collectors in the field. Andrews told him that he knew the interviewer was capable of doing the work and suggested, "In life it means nothing to have potential if no one knows [you have] it." Later, Andrews told me he thought it was important that interviewers gained skills besides simply doing fieldwork working on projects like LSAM.[32] They considered firing interviewers one of the most difficult parts of their job and often asked foreign project staff members to do it for them. Because they had less contact with those who had hiring and firing power on research projects, interviewers were least likely to move up in a project. Thus, although knowledge work could lead to upward mobility or increased capital for fieldworkers, interviewers and supervisors led a precarious existence characterized by differential levels of ambivalent stagnancy based on their role in the project and specific social connections and intimacies. In the process of making valuable data, fieldworkers also fashioned new kinds of value and aspirations: the fates of data and their creators are linked.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how brokering and translation on the part of hundreds of fieldworkers are central ingredients in data collection and add value to data. The commodification of data for consumption by researchers and policy makers has likewise commodified the kinds of expertise and know-how central to its collection. Local knowledge, often taken for granted, is performed and constructed in the space of social relations, and such performances betray the different, competing interests of the variety of persons who encounter one another in the contact zone of fieldwork. As Lekgoathi (2009) illustrates in his study of the construction of apartheid-era knowledge about the Transvaal Ndebele, African researchers and informants play a central role in making African societies accessible (logistically and culturally) to outsiders. Northern researchers reinterpret Malawian ideas, traditions, customs, be-

haviors, and contexts through the prism of their training in a certain discipline and their scripted impressions of Malawi—most influentially, however, they complement these perceptions with the local knowledge they so highly value (Watkins and Swidler 2012). Yet becoming a good fieldworker does not entail mastering a body of stable local knowledge or being native to a geographic or cultural place, but rather learning and embodying new ways of seeing that rely on and reproduce difference and distance between knowers and known, science and culture, and office and field. Data collection is an endeavor that is shaped by and shapes the subjectivities, aspirations, and dreams of those who collect it. In this sense, the rhetoric of cooking data might also be read as an idiom mobilized by overworked fieldworkers to level critiques against their employers and negotiate the low morale that might result from being stuck in place (Gerrets 2015a).

Maintaining focus on the relations and practices that make up fieldwork, chapter 3 centers the encounters and transactions between fieldworkers and interviewees in the process of data collection. Specifically, it considers how a kind of standardized reciprocity—where respondents are given a bar of soap as token of thanks for information they surrender—becomes a site of negotiation and debate about the value of health data for different actors in research worlds.