Introduction

Monica was a slender woman in her early forties—or maybe her late forties. She was not sure. She sat on the back porch of her home, folding small quantities of baking soda into scraps of paper ripped from a child's school exercise book. She would sell the packets to neighbors and perhaps turn a small profit. Monica's sister Elisa sat next to her on a woven reed mat. She was combing her hair in preparation for tying small tufts of it into braids or knots. The two women looked out from the porch into the inner courtyard of their compound. They had swept the earthen ground that morning, as they did every morning, to remove the debris of meal preparation, the fallen leaves, and the loose layer of soil deposited by the wind since the last go-around the day before. Several chickens pecked about—selling them was another small business venture Monica had started.

The yard was at the center of a rectangular property, framed on three sides by small homes made carefully of mud bricks and thatched roofing and on the fourth side by a fence fashioned from bamboo and twine. The three buildings each had a veranda facing the courtyard, which was where most of the day's activities took place. Monica and Elisa sat near the door to the home where Monica stayed along with her four youngest children. Hers was the only building in the compound that was whitewashed—the edifice smeared in a mixture of lime and water—making it stand out starkly against a rural African landscape dominated by browns and greens. Monica's surname was etched into the lime coating just to the left of the front door—Salimo. To the right of the same door was an electricity box that the government had installed the previous year, as they did throughout the town of Metangula. Only a small percentage of households had the funds to activate the connection. Monica's was not one of them.

Directly across the courtyard from Monica's home used to be the kitchen and storeroom, but she had converted them into a living space by adding sheets across the two doorways and relocating the pots, buckets, and basins that used to be stored there into the front room of her own home. When I arrived in Metangula in February of 2010, I remember watching one of the sheets billow back and forth with the wind, hiding and revealing that Diana was inside, content and in awe of a belly that was growing with

NOURISHING LIFE: Foodways and Humanity in an African Town
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https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/HuhnNourishing

pregnancy. Diana was the daughter of Filomena, a woman whose home was a few hundred yards closer to the lakeshore than Monica's. Filomena had formerly lived in Micuio, a small and tight-knit neighborhood separated from the rest of Metangula by several miles of lowland fields where townspeople grew cassava and increasingly maize, interspersed with small plots of cowpeas, bananas, and a handful of other crops. The father of the child in Diana's belly was Erasto, Monica's "nephew"—a cousin of Agostinho, a minibus driver whose route plied the seventy miles between Metangula and the provincial capital Lichinga, back and forth, transporting passengers and their goods along the deteriorating tarred road. Agostinho slept at the Salimo household when nightfall found him in Metangula or when his vehicle required repair before making the return trip to Lichinga. Monica had begun hosting Agostinho when they struck up a friendship, and she had taken in Diana and Erasto when they decided to cohabitate after realizing they would have a child together. The third building, situated between the two previously described and opposite the fence, was where Monica's sister Elisa lived with her two young daughters, Andrea and Amelia. Elisa had just moved to Metangula from Lichinga, where she was raised from a young age by an aunt. She had recently divorced, and with nowhere else to go, she had moved in with Monica. The sisters were usually pleasant to one another when face-to-face, but Monica was also prone to complaining that Elisa was not contributing her fair share to maintaining their homestead and that she acted selfishly. She also suspected that Elisa had AIDS.

That day on the porch Monica and Elisa joked, bantered, and gossiped as usual, about their families and their friends, occasionally taking a moment to explain the background details they thought pertinent for me to follow the conversation. There had been a fire at a neighboring house the previous week. Monica playfully suggested that this made her apprehensive about using her own new cooking hutch, a small earthen shelter with a grass roof in the corner of the yard. Elisa had heard that Patuma, a traditional healer living on the hillside, had gotten into a fight with Clara, the woman a few households over who walked with a limp, when one removed the other's water jugs holding her place in line at the pump. To yell at one another about the incident was important, Elisa explained to me, so as to clear their hearts. Only a witch would hide their anger, just smiling and carrying on as usual while secretly plotting revenge. Avoiding suspicions of witchcraft would be especially important for Patuma, given her profession—some healers were rumored to use the label of sing'anga *(traditional healer) as a cover for nefarious or occult leanings—but also for Clara, whose barrenness put her at risk of losing her husband permanently to his other wife, who was pregnant and dangerously overdue.*

When the subject of conversation got around to Monica's appearance, Elisa drew my attention to the fact that her sister had recently rubbed oil onto her skin as a moisturizer and asked a neighbor to braid her hair. I had actually noticed myself that Monica seemed to be glowing as of late, a far cry from her usual sunken cheeks, ashen complexion, and unkempt hair. Elisa explained very empirically that the transforma-

tion in Monica's appearance had come about because Monica had recently "found a husband," meaning a serial sexual partner. This implied a reliable source of income and food. Monica often lacked these things. Though she sold baking soda and the occasional chicken, or sometimes small cuttings from the roll of tobacco Agostinho had given her as a gift, she earned only a meager amount with which to purchase necessities to complement the rice and cassava she grew on a lowland farm. Elisa looked at me directly and added in a quiet but jovial tone that Monica was no longer lacking in vitamina *(vitamins). I assumed that she was referring to Monica's improved diet. Only later would I learn that she was euphemistically referring to a different sort of "eating."*

Food in Anthropology and in Africa

Monica Salimo lived in Metangula, a small town located on the eastern shore of Lake Niassa in northwest Mozambique. This book is not about Monica, though my experiences with her and her extended family influenced what I present on the pages that follow, and they are featured in vignettes throughout the text. The focus of the volume is, instead, food as a thread for stitching together the everyday practices through which people living in Metangula defined, debated, and pursued a nourishing life in the opening decades of the twenty-first century. By using the term "nourishing" I intend to evoke both the act of provisioning substance for growth and wellness and the quality of that substance itself. "Nourishing" as both verb and adjective inherently maps onto alimentation. But I concentrate in this volume on neither the biologically nutritive attributes of food nor the acute effects on health and development that access to food entails, though these are both critically important inquiries and are, at opportune moments, engaged. While sustenance is integral to survival of the physical self, my attention in this volume is nourishment of the metaphysical and moral person. This is an organic result of my investigation, through which it quickly became apparent that I could only elucidate why the people of Metangula ate what they ate by first understanding their motivations for eating at all. Foodways—those beliefs and behaviors surrounding production, distribution, preparation, consumption, and definition of food (Counihan 1999)—were profoundly and inextricably bound up with personhood—the ideological forces and expectations that give reason, order, moral guidance, and meaning to (but do not determine) social life and lived experience. As a result of this approach, I devote much more ink to issues like ontology, cosmology, epistemology, and affect than topics perhaps expected in a volume focused on African food, like agriculture, land ownership, market access, nutrition, and food security.

To summarize ideas presented in the pages that follow, I found that humanity in Metangula—in the sense of humans as a biological species distinct from

other animals, their benevolence, and the social status earned or enabled through the life course—entailed multidimensionality. As is common throughout sub-Saharan Africa (Beattie 1980; Fortes 1987; Jackson and Karp 1990; Menkiti 1984; Ogude 2018; Riesman 1986), human "persons" in Metangula were conceived as composite beings, where relationships with others are fundamental. Here the individual self emerges through embeddedness and affinity, rather than being conceived of as independent, separate in function and self-actualization from others, and with powers restricted to single bodies. Where this volume builds on extant studies of African personhood is in its ethnographic attention to practices of "unfoldment" (Ramose 1999), or the active and continuous work through which individuals deepen humanity (both their own, and the totality of human beings') through everyday (quotidian) and every day (the inexorable constancy of) pro-social, unifying, and revitalizing acts. Throughout the volume, I aim to make clear that this orientation was not a matter of rote habitus or instinctual preference. It was, rather, an individually executed and unrelenting choice at a perpetual series of crossroads. This implies that there was always the possibility and attraction of choosing a more insular orientation through actions that privileged, for example, selfishness, greed, and apathy.

Humanity was thus not as much a permanent state as it was a perpetual process of becoming that demanded the crafting, maintenance, and deepening of life-enhancing relationships through generative acts. In this light "nourishment" emerged as much through eating as it did in richly layered and experienced foodways. The connection of food and self thus extends in this volume beyond alimentation, for example to the obtaining, cooking, and sharing of meals—each performed in ways that demonstrated capacity for reason, compassion, and consideration of others, along with a broader constitution of the self as interdependent, performative, and relational. These were traits that distinguished persons from their alters, namely animals and witches. Upon the intentional and cultivated prioritization of these characteristics, humanity was conceived to depend. In the pages that follow, I describe how embodiment of the "everyday" and "every day" project of being and becoming human was bound up with food classification and taboos, physiology, market principles, exchange relationships, cooking, meal etiquette, evaluation and understanding of body size and weight, and the management of malnutrition, among other manifestations. Through these examples, I aim to demonstrate the work involved to establish, preserve, revitalize, and nourish humanity.

In addition to making a deeply ethnographic and food-focused contribution to the rich history of African and Africanist thinking and writing about continental patterns in personhood (sometimes subsumed under the term Ubuntu, elaborated in chapter 2), this volume rests on the shoulders of an extensive body of scholarship known as "food studies," particularly the holistic analyses of eating and drinking around the world that have been contributed by anthropologists.

To attempt a review of this vast literature would be out of place. It is worth noting, however, that the origins of the "anthropology of food" are often traced to southern Africa, and specifically to Audrey Richards's ethnographic studies of the Bemba in what is today Zambia. While her *Hunger and Work in a Savage Tribe* was published in 1932, it is her later *Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia* (1939) that is better remembered for its intricate detailing of the production of food (what and how), its consumption (and attendant contexts of distribution, reciprocity, and hospitality), and the nutritional impact of these practices. In her focus on physiological needs (here, food) at the root of social institutions, Richards's work was clearly functionalist in its orientation—the dominant theoretical lens for anthropologists at the time. The trajectory of anthropological studies of food has since proceeded in tandem with the discipline as a whole—with contributions from structuralists, materialists, and political economists, for example, as well as thematic foci on topics such as gender, identity, and globalization.[1]

Among this diverse and burgeoning body of literature, Richards's volumes continue to be upheld as exemplary for their comprehensiveness, as well as for their blending of symbolic and biological considerations. Today the former is most often taken up as the "anthropology of food" (food as a system of communication and praxis that provides meanings and reveals patterns in social behaviors), and the latter as "nutritional anthropology" (food as biological imperative, impacted by social processes, but resulting in health outcomes to be studied through a combination of methods from nutritional science, medicine, and anthropology). Adherents of both approaches lament their continued separation (Chrzan 2013; Dirks and Hunter 2013; Ham 2017; Holtzman 2009)—mind and body, mental and material, utility and reason, apart, each pairing split for separate inquiry. The present volume contributes to dismantling this Cartesian divide, but less through a blending of the two anthropological approaches than in its attentiveness to the inextricable entwining of their foci. While not precisely "multisensory" (Howes 2019) or "tasteful" (Stoller 1989) ethnography, nor "gustemology" (Sutton 2010), affect scholars will take interest in this volume's attention to vitality as experienced with the body *and* the mind, in tandem and riposte, and to taste as both culturally situated and unconfined to the carnal senses. These contributions build on previous studies of the sensory experience as an entry point for exploring other aspects of culture (Howes 1991; Korsmeyer 2005; Sutton 2010). Entering directly into debates about affect theory is not, however, among my own aims.

This book also contributes to a rich literature attentive to food as it folds into relationality. Anita von Poser (2013), for example, offers a carefully detailed consideration of foodways as a realm for making and undoing ties of kinship in Papua New Guinea. Through exchange of sago, the staple crop, individuals show that they are "watching others and being watched," entwining planting, cooking, and sharing meals with the expression of empathy and transparency of feelings through which relationships become binding. Janet Carsten (1995) similarly

assesses exchange of nourishment and commensality as enabling individuals to become persons in Malaysia through their full participation in social relations, thus processually making them into kin. Miriam Kahn (1986) also found food to be integral to relationality in Melanesia, with a focus on the asymmetry and ambivalence between men and women, and the use of "hunger" as a metaphor for the repression of greed, which was the outcome of failures to invest in social relationships. Shifting back to Africa, Ramah McKay (2018) takes a different approach, providing a forceful critique of the ways in which food aid in Mozambique operates as if health and wellness are located in individual bodies. Instead, she asserts, persons are inherently relational, and the distribution and consumption of food thus integral to the performance and expansion of networks of care. For McKay, these networks provide an important safety net in times of need. Paul Wenzel Geissler and Ruth Jane Prince (2010) instead conceive of the connectivity between individuals as integral to their very being. The pair's ethnography on "touch" among the Luo in Kenya focuses on the intertwining of persons through shared substance (for example, through food) and how these encounters enable life to continue in a manner that makes possible the transformative growth through which individual and collective life continues.

In their metaphysical approach to commensality, I find much kinship with Geissler and Prince's volume and also with the broader body of Africanist literature on substances, flows, health, and relatedness on which their work builds and to which it contributes (Devisch 1991; Myhre 2018; Setel 1999; Taylor 1992; Weiss 1996). Of these works, Brad Weiss's (1996) analysis of Haya (Tanzania) cosmology is of particular interest for its attention to "moral gastronomy," through which lived worlds are "made" and embodied through production, exchange, and consumption of food. In his attention to the shifting grounds on which foodways are performed and evaluated, Weiss's volume was also a predecessor to Jon Holtzman's (2009) ethnography on Samburu (Kenya) foodways as a complex site for thinking about, expressing, and experiencing the ambiguities, ambivalences, and contradictions of historical and emergent changes to social relations, particularly as they align with gender and age. Holtzman's richly detailed volume is also noteworthy for its assertion that food is not an arbitrary domain for the meeting of history, meaning, and practice. It is the simultaneity of food as material, social, and symbolic and the sensuousness and embodiment associated with eating that give it a special (though not unique) ability to tie everyday experience to broader cultural patterns and to link morality with memory.

Kristin D. Phillips (2018) is likewise interested in the "moral landscape" of patronage, reciprocity, and mutual support as it plays out in rural Tanzanian foodways. Mindful of the paradoxical and simultaneous existence of scarcity and abundance, she explodes the singularity and the banality of "hunger," finding that the experience of being without food patterns relationships between individuals, approaches to God, entanglements with government, and everyday life more

broadly. In her consideration of morality and relationality as driving food-related ideas and practices, Phillips's approach is quite similar to mine. But where Phillips is attentive to the social experiences and material conditions through which a pro-social moral compass has emerged, my own work frontloads mutuality as reflective of long-standing ontological engagement in questions about the nature of being and becoming human, which in turn guide social experience and material condition.

The present volume additionally builds upon a growing and hearty stock of food-focused ethnographies about peoples and cultures of Africa.[2] It is important to note that this wealth of anthropological studies, however, makes up only a small, almost negligible, fraction of works attentive to African alimentation. The production, preparation, and consumption of food in Africa is more often written of—in scholarly, as well as gray literature from nonprofits and government entities—in relation to core themes like nutrition (how it is lacking), food policies (strengthening or changing them), food security (causes and coping mechanisms for famine), and agriculture (systems for controlling and improving crop outcomes).[3] While these topics are each important and deserving of attention and their analyses often insightful, the predominance of these perspectives can lead to a portrait of the continent's foodways as dictated by or even restricted to the project of survival. In popular culture the same is true—bookstore sections on cookery are noticeably thin in their representation of Africa in comparison to other world regions, and laypersons are more likely to associate Africa with famine than with cuisine. These realities have the impact of sidelining, in the words of historian James C. McCann, "Africa's fundamental energy and creativity in the history of cooking, and the way the flavors and textures of food adds character and quality to life's daily rhythms" (2012, 199–200). The affective experience of African eating, in other words, is elided, along with the potential for African agency and cultural meaning. The lens of Africans as victims and of African societies as deficient, passive, and timeless (whereas those in the global north are righteous, modern heroes engaged in beneficence; Phillips 2018) further contributes to the perpetuation of widespread misconceptions and stereotypes about the continent as inferior and in need of foreign interventions in order for its countries to develop and its peoples to civilize (Keim and Somerville 2018; Wainaina 2005).

Lack of public awareness of the complexities of African cuisine is understandable. The majority of the sub-Saharan African population relies on small-scale subsistence farming (Hanson 2018), poverty is pervasive (World Bank 2018), malnutrition is widespread (Akombi et al. 2017), and dietary staples are repetitive and calorie dense. Traditional meals for the African subcontinent are almost always made up of a stodgy mass of flour and water that serves as the main source of calories, accompanied by a side dish with ingredients that vary little except with environmental and financial seasonality (Osseo-Asare 2005). The consistency, constancy, and bland (or sometimes pungent) flavors of African diets make

them not only unpleasant to many unaccustomed consumers, but also incomprehensible. Why anyone would voluntarily eat such fare is easily conceivable as little more than the product of limited resources. But evaluations of African diets in this manner ignore the fact that many Africans *do* perceive variety in their "simple" dishes, mild spicing arguably allowing for an appreciation of intrinsic flavors and texture variations that are both likely underappreciated by foreigners whose palates are not trained to perceive these subtle differentiations (Ikpe 1994; Lentz 1999; Messer 1984). Research has shown that many Africans also evaluate their culinary fare as being in no way lacking or inferior (de Garine 1997; Lentz 1999) and that Africans with the financial and logistical means to adopt completely new food styles often choose not to (de Garine 1997; Ikpe 1994; Hansen 1999; M. Johnson 2016).

What I aim to put forth in the present volume, then, at its most basic level, is that simplicity and necessity need not indicate total focus of alimentation on meeting biological needs. Planting crops, harvesting produce, processing raw foods, and preparing meals, in other words, garner carbohydrates, fats, and proteins, yes. But nutritive ends are rarely the full extent of what these processes and products accomplish, anywhere. Sustenance, the seemingly universal rationale for eating, does not drive all alimentary behavior. This is true even where local diet might seem to an outside observer to be oriented toward little more, and even when the vocabulary of nutrition has been taken up (as it has been in Metangula) as the language through which motivations for and results of eating are discussed. My more complex aim is to provide a detailed case study of foodways as a matter of nourishing life, for in Metangula it was only through performing generative acts that enhanced the wellness of others (in this volume, as focused on alimentation) that a person could experience the fullness of humanity. Understanding the dimensions of nourishment—inclusive of, but also beyond nutrition—in Metangula requires an ethnographic lens, a willingness to retrain one's gustatory palate, and above all the intimate engagement of the place and its people.

Bem Vindo Metangula (Welcome to Metangula)

The Mozambican town of Metangula, where this ethnography is based, stretches approximately two miles east-to-west and about five miles north-to-south as the bird flies, but much of this area is either water or mountain terrain. The town itself is situated along a thin strip of habitable land, where a majority of the residents reside in six densely populated neighborhoods (Seli, Michenga, Thungo, Sanjala, Chipili, and Micuio) sandwiched between the bays, rocky outcrops, and sandy beaches of Lake Niassa on one side and the steep foothills of Mount Chifuli on the other. The undulating landscape between is covered in the remnants of semi-deciduous miombo woodlands and dotted with towering baobabs

Figure 0.1. Metangula, from the Sanjala hill looking north toward Mount Chifuli onto the neighborhoods of Seli and Nchenga. Photo by the author.

and expansive mango trees. A small peninsula juts into the lake, supporting additional residences and much of the town's government infrastructure. Metangula is the capital of Lago District, the westernmost district in Niassa Province, which itself sits in the far northwest corner of Mozambique and borders both Malawi and Tanzania. Metangula town is also the administrative headquarters for the Municipality of Metangula, a decentralized local governing unit that includes its own six neighborhoods and also six surrounding villages (Chuanga, Chigoma, Michumwa, Mpeluca, Capueleza, and Mifungo).[4] At the time of research, government presence included district and municipal offices, along with a naval base, police headquarters, and a level-one health center (one tier below a hospital). Metangula also proudly boasted a community radio station, an expansive Catholic church, and the only gas station west of the provincial capital of Lichinga.

Lago District gets its name from Lake Niassa. *Lago* means "lake" in Portuguese. It was David Livingstone who named the lake "Niassa" when he mythically became the first foreigner to set eyes on the body of water while on a circuitous tour of the region that resulted in his quest to end the east African slave trade (as well as the epigram "Dr. Livingstone, I presume").[5] The body of water had before that time been known to the outside world mainly through hearsay and marked vaguely on maps with names such as Zaflan, Zambre, Hemozura, Mar-

avi, Nyanja Grande, Nyinyesi, Sumba, and Uniamesi (Ransford 1966, 11). Of course, the local population had known of the lake for as long as they had been living in the region, which by most accounts was, at the time, several hundred years. Others, probably hunter-gatherers known locally as "Batwa" or "Akafula," had been living there for about two thousand years before that (Morris 2016), and they had surely noticed the body of water, too. When Livingstone spied the vast inland lake—the third largest in Africa and eighth largest in the world—during his travels, he asked what it was called. A porter reportedly told him that it was "Niarra," which meant "lake" or "large body of water" in his language. Livingstone heard "Niassa," and so he called it "Lake Niassa," creating, as with so many other geographic features in Africa, a repetitious proper name derived from a common noun (here, "Lake Lake"). When the Nyasaland Protectorate, for which the lake served as an eastern border, declared independence from Britain in 1964 and became Malawi, the new government renamed Lake Niassa as "Lake Malawi." Tanzania and Mozambique, which border the body of water on the opposite shore, however, continue to call it "Niassa," though Tanzania spells it "Nyasa," giving the lake three official names. In this volume, I will use the label preferred in Mozambique—Lake Niassa.

I would like to stress at the outset of this book that I have depicted the town of Metangula at a particular moment in time, hovering around the year 2010. To respect and reflect that reality, I have written in the past tense about the beliefs, values, activities, and organizational structures that I engaged with. This feels a bit awkward. While avoiding some of the pitfalls of depicting a people and place as existing in an unchanging and ahistorical "ethnographic present" (Fabian 1991), writing in the past tense at the same time freezes temporality in a way that suggests that it is no longer in existence (Archambault 2017, 21). At least some of what I have written about here no doubt continues into the present, making use of the past tense feel like a slight. But this choice seemed necessary in order to acknowledge culture as something more than a set of static behaviors and beliefs—mandate, resolute, and unresponsive to a world where the parameters of living shape-shift over time. Culture is best conceived of as principles used to negotiate acceptable and tenuous solutions to contemporaneous contradictions, ambiguities, and circumstances. These things are ideally explored in a contextualized space and time. And so, here we are.

Engaging with a place—whether past, present, or future—requires the capacity to envision it. To give you, the reader, the ability to imagine the lakeshore town of Metangula as the setting for this ethnography, allow me to paint a picture of what it was like there when my research took place. It is a June morning, let us say, which means that it would be the drier and cooler of the two seasons. The air would be crisp, but not cold. Being near to the equator, the sun would begin to lighten the sky above the mountains around 5:00 a.m., as it would year-round. Those with a charged cell phone or a functioning watch might have referred to

their formalized timepiece to know the exact hour of sunrise. Most residents of Metangula, however, did not own such luxuries. "Come back when the sun is like this," they would tell me when I came calling and they were busy with other matters, signaling when I should return with their arm held out at an angle that indicated where the sun would be in the sky when they would be ready to receive me.[6] The day would be punctuated with other reminders that time was passing—a rooster's crow, prayer calls from one of the mosques, mobs of uniformed schoolchildren coming from and going to morning or afternoon classes, and the predictable onset and cessation of scheduled radio programming.

On this morning, like any morning, there would also be a steady stream of residents walking the radiating dirt paths that organized households along rough thoroughfares and connected the neighborhoods of Metangula. Many of the women would be walking with infants or small children strapped to their backs with colorful *capulanas*, versatile cloth panels commonly used throughout Africa as a sling for carrying small children, but also as women's clothing by wrapping it around the hips or above the chest and securing it with a tug in one direction and a tuck in the other. These women would be greeting one another using teknonymy, referencing individuals by their children's names, or substituting kin terms like *titia* (auntie, from Portuguese *tia*) or *kaka* (brother) for a personal name. Such practices are common in societies that emphasize the importance of relationships for developing individual identities. In their encounters, these women would ask about one another's wellness: *Mwauka bwanji amake Fani?* (How did you wake up, Fani's mother?); *Ndauka*, *dada* (I awoke [well], sister). Most residents in Metangula spoke Chinyanja as their primary language. Government offices and schools in Metangula, however, operated in Portuguese, a reminder of Mozambique's history as the colonial-era territory of Portuguese East Africa. The nation has been free of Portuguese rule only since 1975.

Chinyanja speakers are typically identified as culturally Nyanja, and they share much affinity with others grouped in the "Maravi Cluster," a label describing Bantu-speaking matrilineal peoples in southeast Africa north of the Zambezi River, south of the Rovuma River, and east of the Luangwa River, predominantly living in the modern nation-states of Malawi, Mozambique, and Zambia. Other groups typically labeled "Maravi" include the Chewa, Mang'anja, Chipeta, Mbo, Nsenga, and Zimba.[7] Cultural affinities are also strong with the Yaawo, Makhuwa, Sena, and Tumbuka. Key shared (though not unique) characteristics of Maravi populations include an emphasis on the importance of sibling relationships; marriage bonds that are initiated and dissolved with few formalities; expectations of sexual fidelity within recognized marital unions; importance placed on physical reproduction; childhood initiation ceremonies, especially for girls; a male-only secret society; and a decentralized political organization featuring leaders primarily concerned with arbitration and spiritual matters. While it is important to remember that each population has experi-

enced distinct historical trajectories, environmental pressures, and political alliances, ethnographic observations and analysis from one group are often useful in working through data from another. Throughout this volume, I reference case studies from a variety of Maravi groups for context and comparison, especially drawing from works on Chewa populations living in Malawi, with whom many in Metangula felt more affinity than they did with their Mozambican compatriots.

Some of the women we left behind exchanging morning greetings might have had trousers underneath their waist-wrapped *capulana*. This would be helpful when making their way into the hills to gather firewood (for cooking) or grasses (for roofing or fence making). They would return home balancing neatly bundled, incredibly heavy loads of these materials atop their heads and without wearing their *capulanas* (which were too restrictive for the quickened trot necessary to make the journey as short as possible). The men would be busy with other tasks, if they were awake after fishing the previous night. Some would be heading to the mountains along with the women, looking for bamboo to sell or to use to construct a home or repair a fence. Others might be trolling the streets dressed smartly in trousers and a collared shirt, in search of piecemeal day labor. Many would be sitting on verandas, performing various tasks related to preparing and

Figure 0.2. Men repair fishing nets while seated on a beached canoe. Photo by the author.

maintaining fishing gear. There would be plenty of people also taking their breakfast of tea, perhaps along with a small bread roll, a bowl of porridge, a roasted sweet potato, or a boiled portion of pumpkin or maize.

Other women would be leaving home balancing basins of dried maize or cassava atop their heads. They would be on their way to a local mill, where these staples could be ground into flour for afternoon and evening meals of *ntchima*, a polenta-like stiff gruel. Previous generations had processed maize and cassava (and before that, finger millet and sorghum) using a mortar and pestle. While mills reduced the workload, women still soaked, dried, and sifted flour by hand, to ensure the final product was going to taste right. These tasks also occupied the mornings of many women. Others would be among the crowd at the pumps, along with children, extracting buckets and jugs of water for their homestead's use that day. Canalized water had already been available in Metangula for several years by 2010, but few households could afford the cost of a connection, let alone the monthly bill. As a result, the service was primarily restricted to the neighborhood of Sanjala, where government buildings and employee residencies were located. Even then, the pipes were nearly always dry. For tasks that required a lot of water, like washing dishes and clothes, or for bathing, most in Metangula headed for the lake. Large sex-segregated crowds peopled the shores from dawn until early evening. It was young girls who tended to wash dishes. Older girls and women typically took care of the clothes and bathing young children, who might be playing soccer or sitting idly in the sand nearby as their bodies dried. Locations with large rocks atop which clothes could be pounded clean and heels scraped smooth were especially coveted.

On this morning we would also surely find many men, women, and children making their way to the main market in the neighborhood of Seli to buy or to sell staple goods. The lifeblood of the market was in two central blocks of market stalls. In one, hawkers purveyed breakfast-related and snack items like sweet potatoes, bananas, pumpkins, breads (wheat, banana, and maize), and boiled maize. Others sold *bolos* (fried dough fritters) and *gelo* (plastic vials of frozen or chilled orange, raspberry, pineapple, or cola-flavored Jolly Jus powder mixed with water) for one metical each (about three cents), making them popular items with schoolchildren milling about before classes at the nearby secondary school. "*Mili, mili*" (thousand, thousand—from the Portuguese *mil*), the vendors would call out to entice customers with the cheap price. This recitation was an old habit from the years before July 2006, when the government responded to hyperinflation by lopping three zeros off from the metical and issuing a new currency, turning one thousand (*mil*) meticais into one metical "nova familia" (new family), abbreviated MZN and henceforth referred to in this volume simply as "meticais." The move was a bid to promote integration in the world economy and stimulate economic growth. At the time of research, the United Nations Development Programme ranked Mozambique the fourth poorest nation in the world—be-

hind only Congo, Niger, and Burundi (Klugman 2011). While exchange rates fluctuated during research, sometimes dramatically, the American dollar fetched on average about thirty meticais in 2010. A day's minimum wage for those who were employed in "unskilled" labor might be only twice that amount, or around two American dollars.

In the second block of market stalls, vendors sold common items for afternoon and evening meal preparation—beans, leafy vegetables (like chard, rape, and mustard greens), tomatoes, onions, and peanuts, mainly. Other seasonal items might include sorghum, sesame, the occasional green pepper, carrot, or avocado, and every so often the palm-sized mushrooms that grew on termite hills. Once I saw a pineapple. Outside of this second block of cells was a patchwork of sandalwood, bamboo, and tarpaulin where a group of vendors regularly sold the culinary staples needed for meal preparation: oil, sugar, salt, tomatoes, and onions. The municipality was constructing a third block of stalls for sellers of meat and fish, who otherwise spread out on tarpaulin-covered bamboo tables just outside the formal market. The meat was usually goat, sometimes live chickens or ducks, and very rarely a slaughtered cow or pig sold in one kilogram portions (around two pounds each) from a wheelbarrow. The availability of particular species of fish was dependent on the time of year, the wind, and positioning of the moon, but offerings usually included *usipa*, a small sardine-like fish, and *utaka*, a small bony cichlid. If it were indeed June, there would also likely be *bonya*, young *usipa* fish so small that vendors sold them in dried, clustered masses. Catfish and *chambo*, which both make for an excellent fillet, made their fair share of appearances in the market as well, along with other varieties of seafood—Lake Niassa boasts more than five hundred species. Vendors, who typically bought their fish in the morning directly from fishers, had a busy task of shooing flies with whisks, particularly as the day wore on and their stock began to lose its freshness.

Over time, the two original blocks of market stalls had become surrounded by a sea of individual concrete bunkers, creating the mazelike market that is so common in African towns and cities. Customers would weave through the narrow passages to find the nonperishable products they were after: plastic goods, electronics, packaged foods, tools, seeds, school supplies, cleaning supplies, toiletries, clothing, and shoes emerged from these stalls afresh each morning. Colorful *capulanas* hung from wooden slats, and televisions flickered with images of Brazilian soap operas, Nigerian films, and American pop music videos. If this morning were like any other during harvest season, there would also be trucks unloading maize hauled in from highland farms. The de-cobbed kernels might be sold by the sack, but more likely by the twenty-liter bucketful, just outside the southern market wall. Prices fluctuated with supply and demand. When the harvest was in full swing, as it would be in June, the price was low, maybe ninety meticais per bucket. During the planting season the price might reach double that amount. One bucket of maize could be ground into enough flour to make the *ntchima*

Figure 0.3. Vendors sell tomatoes and onions in the market. Photo by the author.

that would feed a family of five for about two weeks, if they received no visitors. But there were always visitors.

At the opposite side of the market, a few men, women, and children might be gathered in the hope that northbound transportation would become available that day. Such a scenario was unlikely, and they would soon begin to walk if they hoped to reach destinations like Chuanga, Messumba, Chia, Ngoo, Cóbuè, and Ngofi—sparsely populated villages dotting the coast, where many had family and friends and some had farmland. The farthest locations would take several days of travel to reach by foot. Those on their way to Lichinga, the only sizable city in Niassa, and other eastbound destinations could hail one of the minivans, busses, or pickup trucks regularly trolling the streets looking for passengers in the early hours of the morning. The journey to Lichinga took only an hour and a half since the government tarred the road. Before that, it took upward of three times as long—that is, when the route was navigable at all; in the rainy season it sometimes took three days. Those traveling north, or west across the lake, could also do so via the MV Ilala, a converted steamer ship with a one-hundred-ton carrying capacity, plying the waters of Lake Niassa since 1951 (Cole-King and Chipeta 1987, 40). The ship called into port at Metangula on Tuesdays and Saturdays when it was on schedule (and, more often, Wednesdays and Sundays

when it was not), its booming horn eliciting gleeful calls of "Eee-lah-lah" from any child within earshot and some wayward adults. The route north stopped in the town of Cóbuè before heading over to Likoma and Chizumulu, Malawian islands completely surrounded by Mozambican waters, and then to the mainland Malawian town of Nkhata Bay. The route more directly west from Metangula docked in Malawi at Nkhotakhota before proceeding to other destinations south. This journey cost the same as the land route to Lichinga when purchasing a ticket in the ship's hull, where passengers jostled for space amid sacks and sacks of maize, dried fish, and other products being transported as gifts or for sale.

As the sun rose higher into the sky each day, Metangula would become abuzz with activity and gossip. Women would be passing the day much as they did the morning: attending to the tasks of meal preparation, household maintenance, caring for children, and otherwise ensuring the resources with which to live. They would also visit friends and family to chat, to gossip, and to pass along news of funerals, impending visitors, and local dramas, as well as to make requests for help on constructing a home or purchasing beans for the evening's meal, and such. Some would be making their way to lowland gardens, where they tended crops such as cassava, rice, pumpkins, cowpeas, beans, leafy greens, and a handful of other edibles, dependent on the season and which seeds they were able to obtain. But many did not have fields, and so they were dependent entirely on the market and gifts for their sustenance. To earn the funds with which to purchase foods and other goods, they engaged in petty trade and piecework. Men, for their part, might also spend the day farming or earning money through day labor. Many men, though, spent much of the day walking around town, politicking, drinking alcohol, or attending to fishing gear in need of repair. At least, these were my observations when I did encounter men. Sometimes it seemed to me as though Metangula's men simply disappeared between meals.

When school was not in session, and when they could evade chores, children were everywhere in Metangula—playing marbles, cards, jump rope, hopscotch, or an alarmingly violent game of tag in which a ball was hurled between two players at a third trying to stack bricks or fill an empty glass bottle with sand. Boys might be playing soccer in pitches or any other clear space they could commandeer. They would pass between them balls handmade from condoms filled with air, covered in layers of plastic bags, and laced together with twine. Other young boys would be busy modeling clay or wire cars, constructing playhouses from grass and very small bricks they had previously crafted and dried in the sun, or wandering around town in a "minibus" fashioned from several reeds tied onto a length of bamboo. Girls meanwhile bundled small handmade clay dolls against their backs with their *capulanas* to carry them like children and formed small globs of mud they served to one another as "meat" and "*ntchima*." Some nearing puberty practiced practical culinary skills by gathering twigs to start a cooking fire and making small meals from maize bran or whatever other scraps

their mothers provided or they stole from kitchen stocks. The girls did not venture as far from home as boys in their play, as they were generally expected to come home immediately whenever their names were called. In their play, then, the girls and boys would be honing skills and behaviors and learning expectations that would characterize their gendered, adult lives—women at or near home and directly caring for others, men out and about engaged in politicking and provisioning, though in reality this division of labor operated along much fuzzier lines.

Around 5:30 p.m., the sunlight would have begun to fade. Within what always felt to me like a matter of minutes, the sky would be black, with the first hints of the Milky Way overhead, so brilliant that it could be mistaken for billowing noctilucent clouds. The streets would become quieter as girls and women worked at preparing the evening meal at each hearth and as boys and men bathed and waited for supper. After mealtime, children would be back at play underneath the few streetlights with functioning bulbs or around the edges of several bars that filled with men and women, mostly men, imbibing in boxed wine, gin, and bottled brews. The brightly colored Triângulo was especially popular for such activities. Occupying a prime location at the intersection of two main roads and proffering cold drinks (via gas-powered generator before the arrival of electricity) and a variety of snacks, this was a favorite spot for those who were lucky enough to have a few extra meticais to spend and plenty who did not. Groups of young men would likely be crowded around single bottles of twenty-five-metical gin, while the more economically advantaged patrons might consume a full bottle of beer (costing thirty-five meticais) on their own. Others with fewer resources drank the home brews of *kacholima* (spirits) and *kabanga* (beer) while seated on oil jugs, metal car parts, brick molds, and wooden benches in a neighbor's backyard. A mug of *kabanga* cost five meticais, the same price as a double shot of *kacholima*. The sound of music from the Triângulo and other gatherings would drift with the wind across Metangula until late in the night, long after most had gone to sleep and the fishermen had set off on their nightly excursions, in preparation for another day tomorrow.

Methods

Between 2005 and 2017 I made six trips to Metangula, each varying in length but totaling together about two years of residency. The longest of these trips lasted fifteen months (February 2010 through April 2011), and it is my formal research during this period that makes up the backbone of this book. During my first four visits to Metangula I was focused on transforming a run-down schoolhouse into a museum and library as part of Projecto Património Arqueológico e Cultural (Archaeological and Cultural Patrimony Project), spearheaded by archaeologist Julio Mercader at the University of Calgary. Monica, with whom I opened this

introduction, lived near that schoolhouse. We struck up a friendship when she began to send me cooked sweet potatoes to snack on while I worked on curating and fabricating the museum's exhibits. Later she would be key in facilitating my access to local events. On subsequent trips to Metangula, Monica introduced me to her sister Elisa and then to sixteen-year-old Diana, though I had known Diana's mother, Filomena, for much longer. I truly dreaded seeing Filomena for many years; she was confrontational, intrusive, and frighteningly sharp. The first time I met her was when she called to me from the outer veranda of her home in Micuio, her voice booming and deep. She commanded that I take her picture with my camera, and I obliged. Each time I saw her thereafter she demanded a printout of the image. When I repeated the excuse that I lacked a printer she became increasingly indignant. When I finally did bring her the photo on my next trip, she eased up a bit in her demeanor and generally exuded less malice toward me. Over time, she showed herself to be a very patient interpreter of the intricacies of local customs and the Chinyanja language.

In all, during my time in Metangula I maintained regular, close contact with several dozen individuals and their respective households. Many of these individuals I met through snowballing (as with Monica, Elisa, and Diana), but it was also often that I would meet two people independent of one another and later find out that they were friends or family (like Diana and Filomena) or sometimes enemies (like Judite, my host mother, and Jose, a traditional healer, both of whom you shall meet in the pages that follow). Such was life in a small town of about ten thousand people. Of these close contacts, there were several individuals that I visited more often than others—"key informants," as anthropologists once called the persons on whom our discipline relies especially for gaining access to local events, individuals, and understandings. Some now prefer the term "collaborator" to acknowledge the active contributions that these persons make to the formation of anthropological insights and analyses. Indeed, I could not have collected these data or come to the conclusions presented in this book without the contributions of individuals like Monica, Elisa, Judite, Jose, and Filomena. I would like to extend the idea of agency evoked in the term "collaborator" and envision that these acquaintances and I chose one another for the ethnographic work we engaged in together—they were among those who graciously invited me to join them on their verandas or to chat at their places of work, and I was attracted by their openness to answering questions, frankness in discussing sensitive topics, thoughtfulness and thoroughness in offering explanations, and availability.

Ultimately, for both parties, the interactions came down to an intellectual curiosity to think about everyday life from a new perspective—and also, good rapport. This was honed through repeated visits, reciprocal gift giving, and shared meals that not only helped to situate my observations for analytical purposes, but also allowed me to conduct the research at all. Mutuality, or entwining one's life with that of others, was considered a normal part of everyday life in Metangula,

but also a necessity. Those who did not regularly chat with friends were assumed to be mentally disturbed or perhaps even nefarious witches. The research method of regular, informal, intermittently directed conversation with confidants was thus necessary to be accepted as a functioning, human person, and I was directly told on many occasions that my interest in talking with people and my ability to laugh and make jokes with them is why "my notebook was full," as recounted in the vignette that opened the preface to this volume. This does not mean that I was ever accepted as, or that I ever suffered from delusions that I was, a full-fledged community member. In Metangula, regardless of the chorus of "Arianna" calls that I heard as I went about my business each day, I would and will always be an outsider.

More than simply chatting, my principal research method for this project can be characterized as long-term, situated, unstructured interaction with the local population. The technical term for this is "participant-observation," which means that I lived among the people I was researching, and I actively engaged alongside them in the activities that made up their lives. Such emulating of and integrating myself into everyday life in Metangula attuned both my senses and my intellect to the daily experiences of local persons and exposed me to a broad range of situations that piqued my curiosity. This is largely what the discipline of anthropology intends in basing its research methodology in grounded theory—rather than explicitly beginning with and testing extant theoretical frameworks and hypotheses, analysis emerges for an anthropologist through collecting data inductively and iteratively. This produces contextualized understandings and insights that often nuance, and sometimes unravel, the patterns and universals that other disciplines specialize in defining and explaining.

In addition to everyday life, I bore witness during my time in Metangula to ritual events such as initiation ceremonies (*nzondo*, *jando*, *chiputu*, and *chisamba*), funerals and remembrance ceremonies (*sadaka*) of assorted religious traditions, national and global holiday celebrations (Valentine's Day, Women's Day, Children's Day, Independence Day, Family Day, and New Year's Day), religious festivities (Ziala, Eid ul-Fitr, Christmas, Lent), and political gatherings (which included my dancing with a local women's organization when Armando Guebuza, the president of Mozambique, was in town). I also regularly attended triweekly lectures on health-related topics and occasional cooking demonstrations organized by local health centers. Opportunities for conversation emerged organically on these sorts of occasions and also in small one-on-one discussions or informal focus groups at the market, at the homes of those who called me over to chat while waiting for the minibus to Lichinga, and so forth.

Those I interacted with in Metangula were aware that I was always documenting their thoughts and actions in writing and that I would use our conversations to help me to write a book. In doing so now, several years later, I have given my acquaintances pseudonyms when I discuss and analyze their lives. This will surely

be curious for readers in Metangula, as many of the people and events that I write of will seem familiar but misattributed. I assure them (and other readers) that this has been done only with a heavy heart, not a "big" one (which in local parlance means something akin to selfishness and arrogance, rather than its English connotation of generosity), because of disciplinary ethics and the ease with which individuals can be contacted (and harassed) with the aid of internet technology. I have not, however, changed the name of the research site, as the contextual circumstances of Metangula are so particular and my own association with it so undeniable that it would be impossible to disguise. As a matter of respect, I have also used the real names of individual elders who have passed away and who are quoted for their expertise, authority, and wisdom.

I did not financially compensate anyone for their participation in my research, though when visiting homesteads I did on occasion bring with me small gifts like salt, soap, cloth, tea leaves, or *bolos* from the local market. I also provided money for seeking medical treatment or "buying sugar" when my acquaintances or their family members were sick. Additionally, I tried to help with whatever chores individuals were engaged in while I conversed with them. These were usually food-related tasks—shelling corn, peeling cassava, removing the fibrous veins from pumpkin leaves, and such. The entertainment value of my clumsiness was probably of more value than my contribution to diminishing the workload in such scenarios. My ineptness at a variety of tasks seemed to have been widely enjoyed in fact. It is very possible that if you were to travel to Metangula and encounter somebody who remembered my time there, they would clap their hands together or slap their leg as a way to emphasize the great joy they took in watching my "mannish" way of walking (explained to me as walking with a purpose, rather than carefully and cautiously, as if balancing something on my head), listening to my nasalized speech (along with, my language teacher in Malawi would surely tell you, a tendency to confuse words that, to me, sounded similar—like *chimwewe* [happiness] and *chiwerewere* [promiscuity], or *mawere* [sorghum] and *mabere* [breasts]), and witnessing my illogical fear of fire (local women would manipulate burning firewood with their bare hands, which I was apprehensive to do myself).

I conducted this research primarily in Chinyanja, which was the first language of approximately 80 percent of people in Metangula, according to the 2007 census. Mozambique had not yet pushed for the standardization of local languages into written scripts, and the Chinyanja spoken along the lakeshore during my research boasted the variation and dynamism expected of any predominantly oral communication system. Swahili, Chiyaawo, Chitumbuka, Chingoni, Arabic, Portuguese, and English all contributed to the vocabulary of Chinyanja, and it was not uncommon to receive two or more words of various origins when eliciting a translation from Portuguese into "the" local language. Portuguese and Chiyaawo were also the primary language in a significant number of Metangula

homes (13 percent and 7 percent, respectively).[8] In daily affairs, I rarely heard Portuguese outside of the more affluent Sanjala neighborhood, where many government officials (often migrants to Metangula) lived with their families. Those living in Metangula's other neighborhoods, while they could speak Portuguese at levels that ranged from rudimentary to expertise, tended to use the language in their daily interactions only rarely. This was changing, however, as the town was becoming more diverse and as uppity children began refusing to speak anything but Portuguese with their parents.

In addition to participant-observation, I consulted for the purpose of this research several archives and special collections in Mozambique, Malawi, and the United Kingdom.[9] The documents, unpublished reports, and student theses I encountered helped me to better understand the meanings of beliefs, practices, and circumstances I witnessed in Metangula and to contextualize my research within regional patterns and historical trends. For quantitative data on alimentation, I also developed and implemented a dietary survey. There were ninety-seven Metangula homesteads that participated in the survey for at least ten of thirteen months (April 2010–April 2011). Participants were selected by first mapping the town of Metangula and assigning each homestead a unique number, then using a list randomizer to generate an order in which to visit them to request participation until one hundred homesteads were enrolled. Two part-time, paid research assistants, Helena Augusto and Judite Franco Kakhongue, collected the dietary survey data by visiting each enrolled homestead two to three times per month, on a randomized schedule that I provided. Upon each visit, they would ask the primary cook what she had prepared the previous day, using which ingredients and cooking methods, how each ingredient was obtained, and who among homestead members and guests had consumed the foods. They also tracked down as many homestead members as possible and asked them individually what they had consumed outside of the home the previous day. My spouse reviewed the surveys for quality control and entered these data into a computer for quantitative and statistical analysis. To enable correlation of dietary scores with health proxies, I personally measured the body mass index (BMI) of survey participants over five years of age using a portable scale and tape measure. My research assistants also collected demographic information for all survey participants. I employed Steven Schuster while he was a PhD student at Boston University to use these data to estimate socioeconomic level based on standard principal component analysis, with results grouped by *k*-median clustering.[10]

Orientations

I have written this volume envisioning an audience made up primarily of readers interested in food studies, anthropology, public health, and Africa. To make my

ideas as accessible as possible for nonexperts and scholars of these diverse fields, I do not assume prior knowledge of central concepts, I avoid technical language and unnecessary jargon, and I aim to mimic in my organization and presentation the inviting prose characteristic of storytelling. These strategies should not be mistaken for "dumbing down" the content. As Ian Bogost (2018) wrote in *The Atlantic* to encourage academicians to frame our research for audiences not primed to grasp the material, "The whole reason to reach people who don't know what you know, as an expert, is so that they might know about it. Giving them reason to care, process, and understand is precisely the point." Precisely. This book will also serve for most readers as an introduction to the Nyanja people living along the eastern shore of Lake Niassa in northern Mozambique. This is because it focuses on a population largely absent from the annals of academic research. My goal in writing this account should not, however, be mistaken for filling an ethnographic gap. Thus, I do not take pains to spell out in detail social institutions, cultural norms, community beliefs and behaviors, and historical trajectories of "the Nyanja," except where such discussions are explicitly pertinent to my central concerns.[11] Each of the chapters of the book begins as this one did, with an event or a conversation reconstructed from my field notes and elaborated with later insights, presenting some set of circumstances through which I encountered the meaning and making of foodways in Metangula. The vignettes that open each chapter are printed in italics in order to mark them as moments of ethnographic storytelling that introduce subjects that are analyzed in the text that follows. I have taken this corpus of vignettes, along with other events, out of their chronological order to enhance my ability to underscore specific points. All of the events and conversations that are depicted in the vignettes, and in the broader volume, however, actually happened—these are not fictitious fabrications or ethnographic amalgamations.

Following these introductory remarks, there are five chapters in this volume, each offering a themed glimpse into the foodways of Metangula, capped off by a conclusion. The ordering of these chapters is intended to introduce concepts like building blocks, to equip you, the reader, to journey with me to explore and to see the intricacies of Metangula's foodways and, through foodways, the pursuit in one African town of the universal endeavor to constitute humanity. With chapter 1 we begin by looking at the composition of the local diet, concentrating on the importance attributed to four ingredients: oil, onion, tomato, and sugar. I explain that these foods, more than others, were consistently reported to me as provisioning consumers with "vitamins." This word, however, had a different meaning in the context of Metangula than it does in its biomedical use, and I adopt the Portuguese word *vitamina* to mark this distinction when elaborating my findings. I examine *vitamina* as intimately tied with cultural knowledge of the way the body works, with a particular focus on the importance of *vitamina* for individuals' *thanzi*, or vitality, the energy and motivation for living. Chapter 2 then takes up

in more detail the use of these capacities for partaking in the life-enhancing and pro-social labor through which individuals contributed to the care of others. I situate these findings within broader African models of composite personhood, through which life is made meaningful only in mutuality and interdependency with the living and the dead. I additionally elaborate the importance assigned in Metangula to reason, forward thinking, and compassion as capacities that were integral to being and becoming human, and I examine how these principles are evident in both historical accounts and more recent market behavior.

In chapter 3, I then take up the alternatives to humanity—engaging in witchcraft or acting as if an animal. The chapter begins with a brief introduction to witchcraft as it was envisaged in Metangula to be a nefarious activity aimed at undermining the basic principles that define humanity. While the reader may have doubts about the factual veracity of witchcraft, I hope to make clear the very real social importance of distancing oneself from the occult, lest an individual face social ostracism or physical harm. I go on to examine local understandings of witches as cannibals and to elaborate how the desire to avoid *seeming* cannibalistic can help us to understand taboos on certain meats that resemble humans in form, emotion, and spirit. I also detail in this chapter the distinctions and similitudes people in Metangula saw in comparing humans and animals, focusing on their alimentary manifestations and implications. The chapter is followed by an in-depth consideration of everyday rituals related to pouring salt, an essential ingredient for meals to be culturally edible. Chapter 4 explains the parameters of these rituals, and the illnesses for third parties that resulted where the prescriptions were violated. My analysis suggests that following the precise rules was less important than adhering to their underlying expression of concern for the well-being of others and establishing oneself as part of a collectivity with the living and the dead. Such relations of mutuality demanded continuous revitalization. I additionally consider the similarities between potash and *dawa* (a broad category of substances with the capacity to heal or to harm) to enhance attention to precarity and ambiguity as aspects of being human that were lived with, rather than resolved, in Metangula and as a broader condition of humanity.

Chapters 1 through 4, then, build upon one another in a progressive argument: foods were eaten to garner the *vitamina* that fed vitality and living (chapter 1), this energy and motivation was necessary to engage in properly human endeavors related to care work, reason, and empathy (chapter 2), being human was a better alternative than being a witch or an animal (chapter 3), and humanity was deepened through revitalizing relationships of unity and belonging (chapter 4). All of these points manifested through local foodways, in which individuals supported, enacted, and sometimes negated principles deemed culturally necessary to lead a nourishing life. Chapter 5 builds upon these points but considers several practical implications for public health—namely in relation to child nutrition, dietary interventions, and sexually transmitted diseases. In order to

contextualize these points, the chapter also details local knowledge that connects body size to individual potential rather than quantity or quality of a person's diet, and decouples body size with weight, along with elongating the dependence of reproduction on sexual activity.

The book as a whole thus presents an ethnographic accounting of how the people living in Metangula in the opening decade of the twenty-first century conceived of nourishment as dependent on enacting interdependence, cooperative labor, compassion, and moral intelligence and where this positioning was both evidenced in and lived out through local foodways. The conception of humanity as dependent on mutuality, sociability, and kindness is not unique to Metangula. Scientists from a variety of disciplines have found increasing evidence to suggest a species-level evolutionary disposition that favors morality based on empathy, cooperation, and justice (Bekoff and Pierce 2009; Boehm 2012; Breithaupt 2019; Pagel 2012). And yet, humans also have the capacity for true evil (van Beek and Olsen 2016) and incomprehensible violence (Wrangham 2019). It seems, in other words, that humanity is inherently precarious and unstable; not a matter of being either (good or bad, social or antisocial, giving or greedy, sociocentric or egocentric), but having the potential for both. It is this universal predicament of ambiguity and impermanence that makes human life "always risky and at risk," as phrased by anthropologist Michael Jackson (2005). While we might be primed (biologically or culturally) for pro-social orientations, then, they still must be chosen amid other possible dispositions. In this volume I provide an ethnographic study of a population living with rather than resolving these ambiguities, with a focus on the alimentary practices through which individuals consciously and constantly cultivated, rather than achieved or enacted as a matter of rote habitus, a nourishing life. Humanity was, in other words, conceived and pursued not as an ascribed or stable state of being, but as a lifelong task of perpetual becoming. Complicating this daily work were constraints similar to those experienced across Africa in the early twenty-first century. These included limited resources with which to carry out a pro-social agenda (Klaits 2010) and emergent formulations of success and well-being that competed and sometimes clashed with those upheld as superlative in the past (Ferguson 2013). This meant that agency in cultivating humanity was at times restricted not only by the human condition, but also as a result of the context of globalization, capitalism, and the uneven economic development of global north and south.

In moving away from the more traditional Durkheimian approach to morality as a given set of explicitly formulated rules, external to the person and determinative of what we are or are not to do—as Jarrett Zigon (2008) notes, "a convenient term for socially approved habits"—we can thus see pro-sociality through a more Foucauldian lens, or morality as a matter of the processual formation of inner subjectification, produced by individuals in accordance with their pursuit of and inquiries about what constitutes humanity. Morality was, in other words, not a

matter of following rules, but a continuous feedback loop shaped and reshaped through lived experiences, evaluation, and decisions for action (Fassin 2012). This shift in focus from defining moral systems to a study of moral values and practice amid uncertainty enables a nuanced look at the everyday, and every day, moral lives of actual, living people. This is often missing in philosophical considerations of the contours of humanity, and it marks the potential for a uniquely anthropological contribution to the study of moral living (Zigon 2008).

This book, then, documents the dimensions and confines of humanity, the simultaneity and the attractiveness of alternative orientations, and the active practice (rather than mere evolutionary outcome, rote habitus, moral decree, or static achievement) of being and becoming human as these things played out in one African town at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Before moving on, I want to directly address the fact that writing this volume at times made me feel out of step with current trends in the field of anthropology. Surely some readers will remark that my approach to the research (interrogating cultural knowledge), my analysis (heavily reliant on locally contextualized meanings), and the focus on a single geographic area (in an increasingly interconnected world that necessitates interrogation through multi-sited ethnography) represents an orientation to "the field" that no longer defines the discipline. Indeed, despite pop-culture depictions of ethnographers discovering (or inventing) unknown peoples in remote places, anthropology is certainly not confined to distant travels, the ritual of extended and extensive fieldwork, and depictions of culture as a cornucopia of the bizarre. Sociocultural anthropologists study corporations, sports fans, drug addicts, doctors, and college students, along with just about any other social group, identity, or activity that humans partake in. Even then, the relevance for the discipline is, for some, born specifically out of utilizing the anthropologist's tool kit to comment on the cultural milieu of the digital age, late capitalism, and other aspects of the Anthropocene.

But there are people out there, too—a lot of them—who live in "small places" (Kincaid 1988) and who are doing small things. These small things continue to be meritorious of recording, too, as giving meaning and structure to lived life.[12] Sometimes these small things are also big things. While it may not be apparent on the surface, this volume, with its focus on the ethnographically and historically contextualized beliefs and behaviors related to foodways and humanity in one peri-urban African town, is as much motivated by the present moment as are works explicitly devoted to the problems of our era. Specifically, we are living in a time where many feel as though we are fighting—amid massive corporate greed, consumerism, xenophobia, and digitally induced anomy—for the survival of the planet and of our species. In the face of psychic numbing to daily tragedies that leaves many searching for answers, for understanding, and for guidance on how to lead a meaningful life, it is useful to consider what it is that truly makes us human. While I am not so naïve as to suggest that Metangula holds

the answers to these conundrums, the case study of a people that lives the daily work that it takes to maintain mutuality does offer an important opportunity for critical self-reflection. And, it is precisely in elucidating the in situ lived experience of a shared humanity that contemporary ethnography, as grounded in empathetic connection and moral witnessing, stands to recover its cultural point (Hannig 2017). Locating the playing out of ontology, cosmology, and epistemology through something as quotidian as food—rather than relegating their engagement to philosophy or to sacred, religious spaces—should help every reader ask what it is that you do (yes, you), or what you want to do, and what you can do—within the minutia of your own everyday and every day life—to consciously, purposefully, and meaningfully practice, rather than to merely be a part of, humanity.

Notes

1. Reviews of the anthropology of food and nutrition are periodically published in journals and edited volumes, for example Dirks and Hunter (2013); Messer (1984); and Mintz and Du Bois (2002).
2. Fran Osseo-Asare (2005) provides a geographically organized assessment of how foods are grown, cooked, and eaten across the African subcontinent (along with recipes). A sampling of ethnographies of food in Africa include Osmund A. C. Anigbo's (1987) attention to the "drama" of Igbo commensality as a symbolic event to be decoded; Tuulikki Pietilä's (2007) exploration of the commoditization of food at markets on Mount Kilimanjaro; Gracia Clark's (1994) deep ethnography of market women in Ghana; Susanne Freidberg's (2004) assessment of the impact of European anxieties on African growers of baby vegetables and green beans for export to Britain and France; the work of Karen Coen Flynn (2005), Eno Blankson Ikpe (1994), and Kwaku Obosu-Mensah (1999) on urban foodways in Tanzania, Nigeria, and Ghana, respectively; Alex de Waal's (1997) and Mary Howard and Ann V. Millard's (1997) critical assessments of the famine relief industry; and Kathryn M. de Luna's (2016) linguistically inspired but multidisciplinarily executed analysis of technology, the organization of labor, and environmental knowledge as central to understanding subsistence strategies as multiple and shifting over time. Additional contributions to the studies of African foodways that are more squarely historical in genre are reviewed by James C. McCann (2012).
3. The political economy of food in Africa is also treated ethnographically. See Parker Shipton (1990) and Mamadou Baro and Tara F. Deubel (2006) for reviews of anthropological contributions to the study of food security and famine. Seminal analyses include Johan Pottier's (1985) *Food Systems in Central and Southern Africa* and Jane Guyer's (1987) edited volume *Feeding African Cities: A Study in Regional Social History*.
4. The towns and villages listed here are sometimes spelled differently, for example "Mechumua" for Michimwa, "Caphueleza" for Capueleza, and "Chiwanga" for Chuanga.
5. Some scholars argue that other explorers or traders arrived at the Lake Niassa shore before David Livingstone or that Livingstone never arrived in person at all (Jeal 2013; Reis 1889; Thompson 2013).

6. In addition to residents of Metangula lacking formal timepieces, a wealth of anthropological literature also makes clear that temporality is conceptualized and experienced differently around the world. See Nancy Munn (1992) and Roy Ellen (2016) for a review of such literature, or see the classic work of E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1939).
7. See Elizabeth Isichei (1997, 113), Brian Morris (2000, 16–19), Mary [Tew] Douglas (1950), and Matthew Schoffeleers (1968, 103) for additional discussion of "the Maravi."
8. Statistics for Metangula's language use reflect unpublished, disaggregated data from the national census in 2007, which I obtained directly from the Instituto Nacional de Estatística (INE).
9. I conducted formal archival research at Museu Local in Metangula, reviewing a collection of oral histories I collected along with Patrick Chimutha in 2007 (LAG Oral Traditions collection), and at Oxford's Bodleian Library (home to a collection of documents related to the Universities' Mission to Central Africa, which operated churches along the Mozambican lakeshore). Additionally, I read student theses to find unpublished material that could help to contextualize my own findings. I obtained these works in Mozambique from Universidade Eduardo Mondlane (Maputo) and Universidade Pedagógica (Nampula) and in Malawi from Chancellor College (Zomba), University of Malawi College of Medicine (Blantyre), Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (Lilongwe, formerly Bunda College), and Kamuzu College of Nursing (Lilongwe). Additional repositories where I found both obscure and unpublished materials include the Chancellor College Social Research Documentation Centre and the libraries of the Malawian Ministry of Health, the Mozambican Ministry of Health (MISAU) Nutrition Department, the Mozambican Institute of Statistics (INE), and the Mozambican Technical Secretariat for Nutrition (SETSAN).
10. Additional information on the dietary survey, including survey instruments and preliminary data analyses, is provided in my doctoral dissertation (Huhn 2012).
11. For a more thorough introduction to the history of Niassa, consider *Historia de Cabo Delgado e do Niassa (c. 1836–1929)* by Eduardo Medeiros (1997), along with Luis Wegher's two-part *Um olhar sobre o Niassa* (1995; 1999).
12. For additional perspectives on the danger of anthropologists failing to pay attention to social experiences as they are valued by Africans themselves, see Francis B. Nyamnjoh (2001), Todd Sanders (2003), and China Scherz (2018).