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I was at the market and the aim was to buy medicine tablets like penicillin tablets or Bactrium sold secretly in certain shops within the trading center. My wife was not feeling well of an outbreak of a certain disease known as *zilonda* in our vernacular (Chichewa). I believe – I can elaborate – the disease is like malaria with paining on the chest and sides of the belly internally and sometimes, if it's not treated quickly, people say it kills. Because it goes with coughing persistently and the sputum contains blood, I believe it's "Internal Sores." Whenever one is sick with this, tablets like the above mentioned are taken plus aspirin tablets to try to kill the internal sores. In my area I noticed many people suffering from an outbreak of this disease this month. It was like what had recently happened, the last few months from January to end March, when there was the cholera outbreak which killed at least some. Now the issue was to try to get the tablets from the shops in my trading center. The police come regularly with their inspection searching for these drugs sold by smugglers and take them away and make any shop selling them pay a fine. Then they sell the secret tablets, and those shop owners, they sometimes say, 'I don't have while they have it.' Therefore I went straight to Mr. Mackson's bicycle shop and sat there. The aim was to gain my momentum on how I could get these drugs. I found Mr. Mackson fixing a bicycle puncture, and soon after my arrival there, Usufu [described elsewhere as his best friend] also came. We were chatting. I presented my concern about my need of the drugs and Mr. Mackson said that if I am lucky I can find them but if I'm not lucky I might not be able to buy them. Usufu asked me to give him the money and he would buy them for me, for he is a well known trading youngster, so I gave him the money and he went and bought the medicine for me. And I asked Mr. Mackson a deliberate question, saying 'But what do you think are the reasons why these drugs are sold secretly like this yet they are meant for business?' And Mr. Mackson said, 'Indeed it's secret because they are afraid of the police who come regularly nowadays. It's a good business because in the hospitals people are dying a lot, the medicine, for example, penicillin, bacterium, some capsules, tablets, can only found in private hospitals and shops because some of the medical officers are selling these drugs.' He said much concerning the payments of the medical staff. He asked me why I am not doing even a little business now. I said I don't have capital right now because I had exhausted all my money during the hunger recent months.

Mr. Mackson laughed and said, 'No! You misused the money for girls!' He was laughing. And I laughed too and said, 'No! I don't, you know that I am married and I am older, nowadays I don't go for ladies.' Mr. Mackson was laughing and said 'No! It is very difficult for you the youth because you are going together with the world. You the youth of today, I don't know, especially here in Malawi, may be because of *Jando* initiations for boys or the *Msondo* initiations for girls, maybe that is what is leading people astray here so that you can find a young little girl aged 10 greeting me [as if she is a grown-up] "*AMackson Sharp?*" [? Teacher Sharp?] and he laughed. And I laughed.

Then Usufu came. He brought me the medicine. And Mr. Mackson said, 'Fancy a young girl sleeping with Mr. Kella the school teacher, fancy that.' Usufu joined the conversation: "I came to wonder when I heard that: that a young school girl is sleeping with a big and old teacher Mr. Kella. He was once caught at his room one day when his wife suddenly returned, the wife fought her but still the young girl continues with the man.' Mr. Mackson said, 'Like this, AIDS can't end. But ending this disease is very simple, the only way is "hold your heart" (he said *kulegwira mtima*, have "self control.") Usufu said, 'Mr. Chipalu, don't be cheated that there are some who don't have this AIDS, it's only that the time of starting the sickness differs.' Mr. Mackson said, 'No! there are some who don't have it, indeed there are many because hearts differ. You are fond of going with girls, other people are fond of something else, some like beer and some gambling. God is wonderful.' Usufu said, 'Of course but remember what you said about AIDS, especially here at M\_\_\_, about *jando* and *msondo*, I heard you when I was coming. For example here young girls are the one who are rapidly spreading this disease because shop owners here, and school teachers during

hunger periods like these years, are fond of going with these young school girls and giving them money. And I heard also that when a girl, a young girl coming from *msondo* is told to *kutsatsa fumbior/kutaga mauta* (the first is Chichewa, the second Yao, it is a traditional custom where young girls are told to sleep with an older man to prove that indeed she has grown up because she has gone through *msondo* initiation. And Mr. Mackson said, 'Even boys are told to exercise their penis to prove that indeed they are healed from the cuts', he was laughing and we laughed too. I asked where was the owner of the bicycle he was mending and he said it was his own, since he was an expert then he needs his own bicycle to be under daily service every day, rather than being busy doing daily services to girls and laughed.

Usufu continued, 'I should tell you the truth, I have slept with many partners and indeed I have to confess, Mr. Mackson, that if it is the case of AIDS I believe I have it even if I did not go for a blood test, I just assume that because the time I was going to South Africa I had great luck sleeping with some of the pretty young girls. I had been dreaming about them even when I was in South Africa and some are married women, particularly those married to the so-called bosses of shops, and I had been given money by them sometimes.' We laughed. And he continued saying 'You said the truth that everyone has what pleases him, for example I don't like beer but I like going for ladies.' I asked, 'Mr. Mackson, judge!! Who is better, between that one who trusts going for beer and those who go for ladies?' Mr. Mackson said, 'No one is better because they involve wasting money, better to stop and try to feed your parents and children and wife.' And I said, 'I have asked not because I have an aim [to do one or the other], no! But I just wanted to know your opinion on how you look upon these issues?' Mr. Mackson said, 'But indeed the worst and stupidest are those who go for ladies, because of AIDS which has come nowadays. We people in the past, we indeed enjoyed ourselves a lot with girls, we were having as many as ten or more sexual partners and we still remained healthy. But nowadays, even having one partner, one becomes afraid because of contracting AIDS--I mean those who consider and care for their lives and not those who don't love and care for their lives. A wise man nowadays studies academically because it may help him keep from getting this deadly disease. But we in the past, we had the pleasure of going after ladies for we were only afraid of gonorrhoea, and *chinyela* and *mtayo* but for these we had medicine from herbs and we lived. But not that which has come nowadays, once you take that you are certain to die. Young men and women are dying not the actual death planned by God but because of their likings – they have no self-control and they catch AIDS.'

I asked, 'But what do you think are other ways by which a person can catch AIDS?' He said 'There is no other method or other way of catching AIDS apart from doing sex, even the radio says if you abstain from sex you will combat this deadly disease. But as I said earlier on that's very difficult for the youth because they go after the world.' And I asked why? And he said 'Nothing [else], it's their time – everything has its own time.' Usufu said, 'Indeed everyone has his own time. You find someone has contracted AIDS last year or long time ago, say 5 years ago, but still he or she is still living and healthy, but some are dying, positive or even ones who are not positive, and the one who has AIDS is the one carrying the healthy one to the graveyard.' Mr. Mackson and I laughed and said indeed God is very wonderful. 'But it is therefore advisable to still try to protect one's life, once life is lost it is not found again,' Mr. Mackson concluded. Usufu was just laughing. And I asked, 'What do you think people say about the chances of contracting AIDS?' Mr. Mackson said, 'The chances now so great, so high, because people nowadays have the bad conception of saying what this Usufu is saying, that don't be cheated everyone has HIV/AIDS. As a result people are getting it. And another reason is that they trust condoms, and so they are indeed getting the disease. I tell you the condoms are not perfect and many of them have oil which makes the plastic very porous and it breaks apart without a man or a woman noticing. Therefore instead of protecting oneself then one destroys one's life. Because what I have noticed is that because of condoms, people –even if they notice that this person seems to have AIDS or shows signs of it--they choose to sleep with her and trust the condom, but when they reach the place to start their exercise (we laughed) then a man may later come to change his first idea and sleep with her without using the condom because of the great persisting seductions an enticing lady may display professionally.'

We laughed. And Usufu commented and said it had happened to him when he was in South Africa, where he met a certain lady, a Zulu by tribe, one of those known as "Take me away" (the prostitutes) and they went to the room, he had a condom in his pocket but when they arrived at the place, especially at the bed, the way the lady treated him he forgot that he had a condom in his pocket and indeed he did plain and when

he realised, the game was in process he kept ignoring it and indeed he played with her “plain” all the rounds he had with her. We laughed and laughed. And I asked again ‘But do you think all people are misled by the conception you said or do you think some people do something in order to attempt to keep from contracting AIDS?’ Mackson said, ‘I have never seen them [do something else], I just heard that they use condoms which don’t protect them, for they are not perfect.’ And Usufu said ‘Indeed, condoms burst and a lot of people say the oil found in them makes a woman develop vaginal sores and even a man develops penis genital sores which is a disease as well, indeed condoms are porous.’ and indeed its porous.

And I asked: “What can you do if you hear that your other sexual partner has AIDS? What do you say, friends?’ Usufu said ‘I can’t do anything except stay with her, because AIDS is quite different from other diseases like bilharzias, where it happens that one partner may have it and another may not. But AIDS is not like that, if a partner has it definitely you also have it, and you’ll just be waiting to die.’ Then I made clear question: ‘Would you still live with your extramarital affair despite her having AIDS?’ Usufu said, ‘No! I mean that only if it happened to my spouse and not a mere sexual friend, for instance, but only my spouse.’ Mr. Mackson and I laughed. Usufu said, “I am only living with my wife alone, and even if I heard that she went for a blood test and had her blood examined and was caught to be positive, I would know that even me I am positive as well, but I will continue sleeping with her because of the children I have with her.’ We laughed and laughed. And I asked: “Usufu, the same as before?” He laughed, saying ‘Yes! Why not, the same, so that we will be living in a happy life, no different, rather the differences shouldn’t be noticed, but you live as before even though each of you knows that you both have it. You follow whatever the radio always says, that having AIDS does not guarantee that it’s the end of the world, but you try to feed your body with various foods and fats so that you may be healthy a few more years. Thus I make sure I maintain the standard of eating’. (I believe – Usufu told me this another time when we were also chatting about this disease--that he makes sure he eats a well-balanced diet. I hope I recorded this in one of the diaries I have been writing to you professor.) Then Mr. Mackson asked, ‘Eating different types of food [until] when? For with this disease it takes a long time for you to die so it will waste the little money you have and in the end it is in vain for those having it will definitely die.’ We were laughing. And Usufu said: “I don’t say that I have [AIDS?], but everyone nowadays cares for his own life – people take aspirin for relieving the pain though one is not sick but as preparation for further attacks of headache.’ We agreed with him. (N.B. I didn’t pressure him more here because I could notice that he might come anger soon – but the reality had already been revealed that he suspects himself of having [it] for he had slept with many, including wives of shop owners from S.Africa.)

We just brought the topic into mere laughing until Mr. Mackson said, ‘All is nothing but rather all be trusting your wives, they are your second mothers. A wife is the one who really cares, for us men life would be difficult without them, it would be difficult to stay [without sex]. It’s not only that they relieve our sexual desires but also that they help us physically as well, they play a big role on us men. And therefore it is good that they should receive great respect and consideration and be loved. If you love your spouse you can’t lust and desire to go for another one, if you respect your wife you can’t accept that some one, say a young girl, becomes a problem to your wife by ever publicizing that she is even the same size as your spouse.’ We laughed after Mr. Mackson concluded. We agreed but Usufu also added that ‘Indeed it is like that but you knows that it’s nature, and therefore it becomes very difficult to control--God is the one who controls nature and no-one else, [God] has already written in his file those dying with water accidents, thunder or lighting, those who will die without sickness, those who will die with AIDS and even those who die by hanging themselves or taking poison. God is a clever and wonderful, a good example is one which was already given, that a person may be found to have AIDS and but still live for some years, but those people not having it and may be dying earlier with other diseases that God has written for them.’ We all agreed and Mr. Mackson said, ‘And as for AIDS, only try to be faithful to a wife and have self-control, you may see that you will reach our ages. But if you’re not, just know you will die soon and leave us still living in this world because of *chinyamata* (“youthmanship”).

We laughed and he said, ‘Indeed I am saying the truth, on the radio I heard a certain song entitled “*Manga Lamba*” (Chichewa, means tighten the belt) and it emphasizes this AIDS epidemic’. [Added in red ink, probably later] (I don’t think this is true. I have been hearing it but I forget whether it says this about AIDS). Then finally Usufu mentioned the name of this Malawian singer and said “It’s called Alufeyo Dzombe, the one who sang that song.’ He continued, saying ‘We have a lot of Malawians singing nowadays.’ And Mr. Mackson said indeed and even this AIDS messages is being disinterminated

[disseminated] by them now and then through their talented songs. I agreed with Mr. Mackson and said 'But we are the ones who are [too] stubborn and obstinate to change in order to avoid catching it' – and I concluded saying 'But indeed it's nature!' Usufu agreed and said indeed its nature. Mr. Mackson, a man from Mozambique, only laughed and said nothing except 'not nature but your heart!' until I said farewell, for lunch hour was coming. I went home – I left them chatting more about medicine. The End.

## 02/06/2002

I was at the funeral in our village of a certain very old man who had died. As usual, some of us men went to the graveyard. The man seemed to have 90 something years before dying. At the graveyard there were many people indeed this day, because he was well known. I was going to go to church today but decided to attend Mr. Innocent's funeral. While we were digging the graveyard, there was a lot of talking with teasing and mocking, accentuated with laughs. This is proper at the graveyard at home, but at the funeral you can only chat, not laugh. Parts of the conversation at the graveyard were like:

Certain man: But gentlemen, is it true that we people of today, we will live many years like this one for whom we are making his last house here! (NB – 'last house' meaning his graveyard).

Someone: Someone said but God is wonderful, some people will likely reach this age, maybe especially these young ones but only if they are careful, if they safeguard their lives.

Someone asked: How can that young one (referring to a certain young boy I believe aged 8 years who stood well around the grave in process) like this safeguard his life? (Young men are allowed to visit the graveyards only if they are circumcised for they are considered to be grown ups now)

The person responded, saying by concentrating much of their lives in education and not going for ladies and dying quickly of AIDS.

And another one said: Indeed gentlemen nowadays AIDS is a world wide concern and here God indeed wanted to really show Himself that He is superior to mankind, even though the Europeans are saying that they are superior, that they are superior scientists, but indeed they are failing to cure this disease.

Someone said: No! [although] they are totally failing, they are still fighting or busy researching to find the real medicine to cure this disease.

Before this one could finish talking, someone else joined the conversation. He said gentlemen indeed HIV/AIDS is a global concern and even on the radio we hear a lot about the many who are dying of it, so surely for our generation it can't happen that we who are gathered here reach the age of this old man before we die of AIDS.

The majority agreed about [that we wouldn't survive] because of the rapid spreading of this AIDS, saying that by scientists project that it will only be in 2020 that mankind will see the glory or rather will notice the change in individual life for the better, it will not be of good outcome.

Someone said Why? Some will be free of AIDS? And said that when the government is making its plans it doesn't consider failure, they are very optimistic, they don't look on the failure side. The government assures [everyone] that they are indeed trying their best to sensitize people about the danger of this disease through dramas, and even condoms.

People laughed because he mentioned the condom. And the man who was speaking said: 'Oooh! Yes! It is very sad to hear that even now there are some men who pretends to be clever at a group like this one yet he is a stupid man in hands of a woman.' People laughed and laughed and someone asked: Gentlemen we should not be laughing but we should also be taking notes in our mind and be asking the meanings behind. So he asked: Friend what do you mean when you say 'becoming stupid in the hands of women?' The man who brought up the subject responded and said – okay, I mean that there are some men who become silly in time of "style" (he said style in English meaning – doing sex!) And people laughed and some commented that every man becomes silly indeed doing this, you know how Samson from the Bible was deceived and became weak in the hands of his wife. We were laughing and the man said then what I really mean is that there are some men who feels shy introducing the condom to a woman about using it and be choosing not to use a condom and people laughed.

And some commented that is very difficult. Someone really knows that he has taken the condom but he chose to feel sweet and we were laughing. Always around the grave only strong energetic men are asked to assemble. Some stand there while one person or two are working down the grave pit and old people sit far away, discussing and some smoke, for the law is that there is no smoking at the graveyard. And the contest was much. Some said using a condom depends on the type of girl you have meet. There are some women who are really seductive so that your brain and mind become very intoxicated and the end result is you can even say that: 'Indeed I planned to use the condom with you but I tell you the way I had seen you and desired you, I failed to resist, you are very beautiful and I wanted to feel the real sweetness of you.' And we were just laughing indeed.

Mr. Labison added that women are very different, there are some women that whenever they have just shown you their thighs you can't withstand her, the seductiveness persists and pressures your mind, you wish to sleep with her right then and you find no use for a stupid idea of using a condom. Mr. Labison added ' I am saying this because of my own experiences. I had even done this myself, and it was in 1980 at the restaurant of Mr. Mhone. A certain woman that time was selling boiled sweet potatoes and I told her to bring some for me for I wanted to buy her sweet cooked potatoes and I liked her as well. When she came with her plate full of potatoes I bought some and told her to leave the potatoes and come [back] later on to receive her money. She did and when she came later on to receive her money, I tried to propose her and those days I was buying maize from the villages for my boss named Mr. Kayira who hired me to be buying for him. And she accepted my proposal and we sat near, very near each other, on one chair. And when I saw her very plump thighs, for we were the only two there, it was lunch hour, I asked her to at least roll up her skirt up her waist and she did and definitely I did sex right there! We begun laughing a lot and Mr. Labison continued saying that 'Occasions like this happened to me 2 times. And the second time was a long time ago as well, in the 1970s I believe at Usufu's shops – that shop was built a long time ago and I had a girlfriend called Fanny that time and she came and found people were loading a truck with bags of maize and when she came indeed I did sex right away there and men who were packing the truck stopped packing and gathered around us watching us doing sex while masking, or rather hiding, us from the many people watching us.'

We laughed greatly and he continued saying, 'And I tell you that was a long time ago, before AIDS came here in Malawi. I believe I could do such things because the only diseases we were afraid of in those days were like *kanyela* and *chitayo* and common ones like gonorrhoea and syphilis, but they were able to be treated and cured traditionally. And you can't do [that] nowadays, and if you do, just know that you are to die of AIDS because that time condoms were not found. And some commented saying indeed one can't do that nowadays, definitely [one] can catch AIDS. And someone continued, saying: 'Everyone uses his own time and we fulfill whatever God has set, our graphs of life differ.'

By this time the grave was about to be finished. And then someone added, saying those written to die of malaria will die of it and those to die of AIDS no matter what will die of that. Then I had a chance that I could as well ask as my normal question pertaining to my work since the conversations stressed a lot in my concerned areas. I asked. "But when we are staying [?] what do you think people do or say, say a man or woman, what do they do or say when they are afraid they have contracted AIDS?"

Someone said here it's a village and a lot of people even now dispute the messages being proclaimed, they are not aware of AIDS signs and when these signs appear on them it's the time that they start wasting their money and be giving it to the traditional healers, they are thinking they have been spelled by witches. Yet [there is] AIDS, they forget their bad movements, what they had been doing before. And someone said indeed women are beautiful, attractive and very seducing indeed and if you are not careful you may end up contracting AIDS.

Someone said: "You people, you are not answering the question right. Nowadays, what I really know is that when people are loving together as a couple and when one first appears with these signs of AIDS people divorce their wives and want to marry others who are looking healthy and this is not good because it means infecting the healthy ones of the generation to come. And in this way the whole nation in 3 yrs time will be totally infected." Many were agreeing and one old man said, 'They believe and definitely know that the world has come to end and this is the time proclaimed both in Quran and Bible. Especially this disease AIDS is what is going to end this world fast in addition to war and crimes we hear from the radios.'

In conclusion, the conversation went on like a contest, with some saying more about the badness others saying the goodness of a condom, and some said that only men who are infertile are able to use the condoms while the fertile neglect its use. They went on to say that it is good for man to change his behaviour, to live morally, blameless, and faithfully in order to live long lives. And they admired the deceased old man having such years before dying, which implies that in the past ([un]like this generation) people were very obedient and they understood parents' advice. And went on saying that lack of understanding is another fact why a lot of us are becoming infected and we chatted and chatted until the food came, then the story changed.