Figure 5.2: Mrs. Jameson's Support Diagram

The fact that men do not comply with their family maintenance duties also has repercussions for women's own incomes. Almost all women we interviewed were economically active, and were often engaged in more than one economic

activity at the same time. Whereas there were a few who had only become economically active as a consequence of harsh living conditions and rising price levels, most women had actually expected and hoped to become economically active in town when they migrated to it. They had planned to use the money earned as an additional household income that would allow them to purchase more clothes and other consumer goods and provide regular support to their kin in the village. Instead, for many women, a large part of this money earned went into household expenses. On the one hand, this is indeed related to the increasing price levels, which over the last years have meant an enormous increase in household expenditure. On the other, it also seems to be related to a strong imbalance in household relations that makes it more difficult for women to control and manage their income. If women are economically active, men usually have high expectations that they too contribute to the household expenses. A variety of cost-sharing arrangements exist. Some women receive a share of the household budget on a weekly or monthly basis to buy food and relish and to pay for the expenses of water and soap, while all the other expenses have to be made up by themselves. Other men buy the monthly share of maize flour at the beginning of the month, and give their wives some extra money to buy the basic necessities on a daily basis. In some cases, women cover the expenses during the first half of the month, and only when their salaries are finished do their husbands step in.

Although it was emphasised by both men and women again and again that both decide on the expenses, a strong imbalance does exist as regards the control of women's own and their husbands' salaries. Although both men and women claim that money is pooled and expenses are decided upon together, it is actually the husbands who decide how the money is spent.

This trend is especially pronounced for those engaged in very volatile sources of income, where household budgeting and division of expenses is much more difficult and insecure. In such cases, household arrangements are usually negotiated on a daily basis. This does not only render the household as a whole more insecure, but also makes the control over income and share of expenses much more difficult. Women's usually economically weaker position and social dependence also confines their decision-making power, making it hard to gain access to the salaries of their husbands. Moreover, most men keep their wives in the dark about their salary, giving them less than they are able. In respect of this, it is especially difficult with volatile income sources to establish the actual income and ask for the 'right' share. What is more, men usually work away from home, thus making it even more difficult for women to control their income and expenditure.

> "My husband is in the mining business now, providing brown
> stones for sceptic tanks and the foundations for houses. I have no

idea how much he earns, because he does not want to disclose it, but it is he who decides on the money. When I am receiving my money I divide it into two parts. One part I send to my relatives in the village. The other part I use for food, household items and sometimes clothes. My husband does the same. When I ask him for money, he sometimes gives me. But it is good to have your own money, because sometimes when I ask him, he tells me that he does not have any money, although he has." (Interview No. 22, Mrs. Tall, Poor Woman)

Whereas both men and women thus retain some money for their 'personal use', it remains much more difficult for women to channel their resources. Men usually are in the position to maintain their share of income more easily. For them, it seems to be much easier to get away and shirk their financial and caring responsibilities. Many women complain that men simply drink away their money or take it to other women, rather than supporting their families. For women, this is more difficult. Due to their reproductive responsibilities, they are usually more present in the household, which in turn also increases the immediate pressure on them to provide support. While they expected to support their parents back home, their money usually goes on food or clothes for their children.

My data does not allow me to draw any conclusions on matrilineal and patrilineal differences as regards the support behaviour of male spouses towards their wives' kin. It appears that this is a complex issue that depends on a variety of influences, of which descent is just one among many others, such as economic capacity or personal sympathies. If any conclusions can be drawn at all, my data suggests a slight tendency for matrilineal obligations towards the wife's parents continuing to play a role.

5.2.1 Claim and Reality

The importance attributed to network providers on the household level did not always reflect real support relations, however. The special emphasis attributed to a network partner by assigning him or her a qualitatively and quantitatively important role in one's social network was often used as a means of criticising and rendering actual support relations ambiguous (see also Englund 2001). In fact, the support diagrams were often used as a means to discuss, stress or redefine support rights, obligations and entitlements, on the part of both providers and recipients. By underlining the 'traditional' obligations and claims, or one's own expectations as a recipient towards a provider, and comparing this to the actual support (which was usually much less or non-existent), people were able

to criticise their network relations, and their arbitrariness and uncertainty without directly complaining or admitting their insufficiency, as the story of old Mai Phiri shows:

> **Case 5.1 "Mai Phiri": 'I cannot say that this is support to me'** Mai Phiri is an old woman who came to Sector 7 only recently to stay with her son's family. She only came back to Malawi in 1994, when her children asked her to return from Zimbabwe where she had spent half of her life. As a divorced woman with two young children, she faced difficulties in remarrying and for this reason, she decided to leave her children behind with her parents in her village in the North of Malawi. She hoped that she could support them better from a distance. Although she remarried in Zimbabwe, she decided to return to Malawi in 1994 nevertheless. Having no children in Zimbabwe to take care of her, she decided to come back home. First, she stayed with one of her sons in a village along the lakeshore for a while. But he died in 2000, and she had to move to town to stay with her only remaining son who stays in Sector 7. It is apparent that he is also suffering from HIV/AIDS. Support is very scarce and it is clear that she is not happy with what she gets and what she expects. While she would not directly complain about the scarcity of support she receives from her son, she adds: *"I cannot say that this is support to me, because they are my relatives. I get food and money. My son gives me shelter and is taking care when I am sick. He buys medicine. He is my son. He cannot just look at me, when I am in problems. He cannot just leave me."*

5.2.2   Single Parent and Grandparent-Headed Households

The precariousness of support at the household level is even more pronounced where single parent or grandparent-headed households are concerned. Their number has increased significantly over the last three years, mainly due to HIV/AIDS. This problem concerns mainly women. Although we have seen that the provision of care and material support on part of male spouses is far from being secure, their death usually means enormous insecurity for most women. Apart from the psychological pressure they face upon suddenly becoming a single-parent and taking full responsibility for their households, the death of the spouse is a major material insecurity, especially for those women who are involved in insecure labour relations and find it hard to make ends meet.

Some have a viable support network of grown-up children and in-laws, as well as siblings or other kin living within the household or in close spatial proximity, which provides a reliable and secure support network that may be easily

accessed. However, these networks are mostly very volatile and insecure. Most arrangements are limited in quantitative and qualitative terms and in relation to time: Relatives of the husband, who used to be supported by the deceased and are now expected to reciprocate support, may simply not fulfil their obligations, or at least not to the extent they are expected to. Support from female children is insecure, as they depend on their husbands for the support of their parents or siblings. Grandchildren or children living in the household may marry or just leave the household. While this is on the one hand positively perceived, as it relieves some financial pressure from the household, it adds a new insecurity on the other, as a source of material and care labour is gone.

Case 5.2: Single Parent-Headed Household Mrs. Phiri is a woman of 40 whose husband died a few months ago. She depends on her charcoal business and the money she earns by supervising the water-kiosk during opening hours just opposite her house. She had a permanent position as a housemaid in a rich woman's house in Kanengo, but she left a while ago, because she had quarrelled with the housewife. Now that her husband has died, she depends a great deal on the support of her son in-law, who is living with her at the moment. Together with her daughter, he moved in Mrs. Phiri's houses after they were thrown out by their landlord in Area 25A, because they were no longer able to pay rent. *"Now it is all in the hands of the husband of my elder daughter. Now it is Veronica (the eldest daughter, B.R.) who is supporting the family. It would be easier if I had a son. The support is not very close because my daughter is married and my son in-law can decide any moment to move out. And I will not know how to feed the children, if he takes the daughter away."* .

There are also some relatives of her husband living in Sector 7 and in another area at the far end of Lilongwe. While some of them completely ceased to support her after the death of her husband, some of them still support her from time to time, bringing food or relish when they come to visit her. One nephew also gives her money that she mostly uses for her only son for school fees, transport money and clothes, because she desperately wants him to finish secondary school. But this support is irregular and too little. She says that the support is not adequate considering the fact that they are related by blood, and that both she and her husband consistently supported these nephews for years. Although she is grateful that they still support her, support relations have also tightened up with these nephews. Support, she adds, was much easier to get when her hus-

band was alive. She also has a relationship with a working colleague of her late husband who gives her money from time to time. They made plans to marry after his divorce. This man gave her the money to start a charcoal business and some money on several other occasions when he came to visit her. She considers the support as large and hopes that he will continue supporting her, but she adds, *"If he gave me money every day, it would be better. (. . .) It is different if you have a husband at home, because he cannot let you starve for two or three days. As this one is not my real husband, it is quite difficult."*

Despite its major insecurities, the story of Mrs. Phiri reveals the importance of marriage as a social security institution. Although support expectations might not always be fulfilled, as we have seen in the previous section, marriage seems to create stronger support relations and entitlements. This also concerns support relations other than with the spouse himself. Loss of a spouse usually means that access to his or her network is gone, thus further increasing the pressure on existing network relations. The greatest anxiety is, however, that these networks may also break away and collapse, rendering life even more insecure, as more people could lose their jobs or simply die. This is especially the case with grandparent-headed households. These are households headed by old people, typically taking care of their orphaned grandchildren. Their number has increased significantly over the last years due to HIV/AIDS. Many older people remain economically active and try to generate some income in order to get by, becoming involved in small-scale business or continuing working instead of retiring. Most of them, however, depend entirely on the incomes of others for the survival of the household, such as grandchildren living with them or children living in close spatial proximity.

5.2.3 'EDZI'[4] – Shifting Uncertainty and AIDS-Nomadism

The high death rate due to HIV/AIDS has perforated existing network relations, and significantly reduced network sizes. In addition, HIV/AIDS has challenged notions and 'rules' of gender relations, age, time, solidarity and the order of society as a whole. This also includes basic lifecycle arrangements, such as the so-called 'intergenerational contract' between the young, who are supposed to be taking care of the old, and the old – arrangements AIDS has turned upside down. Grandparent-headed households taking care of orphans have always existed. However, the fact that HIV/AIDS kills especially the economically active population – who are supposed to take care both of the old and the young – and

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[4] Chewanised expression for AIDS.

this at an exponential rate, has indeed meant an overall shift of social responsibilities towards the older generation. This is not confined to the social dimension: HIV/AIDS also challenges the fundamental principles of the economic order of society, as changing insecurities and responsibilities force people into a new economic division of labour, as the following story shows.

> **Case 5.3: Shifting Uncertainty** Mr. Mbela is one of the richest people in the area. He has been here since 1998, when he migrated back with his parents and his whole family from Zimbabwe. In his family, HIV/AIDS is discussed rather openly, since one brother and his wife died a few years ago. This event has left a deep imprint on the whole family, also in other ways. He considers the support he gives to his parents, who are living on the same plot in a small separate house in the backyard, as 'middle', because he mainly supports them with food. He also gives them clothes, medicine, money, anything they want; but only in 'big' problems. Usually, they provide for themselves, since they do some small-scale business. His father sells tobacco and his mother doughnuts. He considers the support as very close in terms of food, because as they live together, they can easily get food any time. When they need money they ask him. It is expected of him to support his parents because they rely on him. But they also do their small-scale businesses, because they do not want to suffer, if their son gets sick one day. In case he gets sick, they want to have some money they can use. When they started doing business, Mr. Mbela was angry and told them to stop working, since they were old people, but they refused. At the market, where his father sells tobacco, people got very jealous. They told him to stop working, as he was an old man with a rich son in a position to support him. They told him to stay at home and let them do the business. They also beat him and tried to rob him: But now the issue is solved. The parents use their money for themselves because he has a large family to feed, and he can use the money for other things. He only pays for the labour needed to cultivate his parents' tobacco fields, because he does not want them to cultivate at their age.

In the light of this, old people are supposed to leave the economic space to be filled by those who are, in accordance with their age, supposed to be economically active; but shifting uncertainties are forcing them into continuing their economic activities. Moreover, the new fissures and shifts that HIV/AIDS has caused in the long-established order of individual life-cycles through premature death, reduced life spans or long term sickness, have also created new insecuri-

ties and situations of uncertainties. These force people to take up economic activities again, or remain economically active in old age. Especially in the face of the difficult economic situation, which has already narrowed down the economic space considerably, this opens up new lines of conflict over economic spaces and intergenerational responsibilities. As the case shows, this is largely independent of economic status and the existence of actual risk at hand.

The most challenging situation on the household level due to HIV/AIDS is, however, facing those who are too young or too old and sick to be able to take care of themselves. HIV/AIDS was already a major issue in 1998: Many families had experienced sickness and death within their kin, either in town or in the village. In 2001, the consequences of HIV/AIDS were much more apparent. Almost everybody had dead family members to mourn, or sick brothers and sisters to take care of. The 'common disease' (a *ChiChewa* expression), as AIDS was usually called, had indeed become a sad normality. While there are a lot of people dying, leaving behind an increasing number of households led by a single parent or grandparents, AIDS has also affected households in which both parents are still alive. Most of them have orphaned nieces and nephews or grandchildren to be taken care of. In the meantime, in fact, almost every household in Sector 7 has orphans to look after. Most of them are migrants sent to town by their rural kin, or who have come themselves hoping that their urban relatives might be willing to take care of them. In addition, there are also a rising number of 'orphaned' old people, who have moved to town to be taken care of by their urban-based children, who are often the only ones remaining.[5] Another important group of AIDS-migrants are the sick people who come to town to look for medical assistance and care. In contrast to the other AIDS-migrants, they rarely remain, trying instead to get home before they die, one of the main reasons being to reduce the funeral costs of their already overburdened urban kin.

The orphaned children are, however, the largest group of dependents by far. The fact that it is especially the economically active who are most affected by HIV/AIDS, but who are at the same time supposed to act as the main providers for their children, results in an enormous imbalance and overload of existing network structures. Almost all households have orphans to care for. This may range from families who are looking after a single orphan to families who have six to ten children (!) to support. The number of children and the generally deteriorating social and economic conditions renders the support relations extremely precarious and tense, leading to enormous competition for social support in material, social and emotional terms. These constellations compete within their support networks with reference to the quantity of the support and care, which is usually little, and to its limited time horizon. Orphans are increasingly forced to

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[5]   For the issue of rural-urban old age migration see also Chapter 6.

behave like nomads. As support relations are increasingly limited in time, they are forced to migrate behind social support and care between town and village, in the rural areas, and also within town. As the following case study shows, the notion of nomad does not suggest that they are moving between different nodal points and sites within their trans-local social support economy where they can be sure that they have access to a reliable source of support, at least for a while. Rather, 'AIDS-nomadism' means being exposed to a permanent state of insecurity and anxiety regarding support relations, in which one network site may snap for good and where the alternatives to turn to are at the same time increasingly limited and overburdened.

> **Case 5.4: AIDS-Nomads or Moving for Support** Jessie Phiri is 13. She has been in town since 2000 when her mother died and her father's brother took her and her younger brother to town. She grew up in a village in Nkhata Bay. But when her father died, her mother took her and her brother and sisters back to her home village, where they stayed with her grandmother. After a year they moved to Karonga, to a sister of the mother, because her grandmother could not support them all. Her brother was sent to stay with the uncle in Sector 7, while the other siblings stayed with the grandmother. In 1999, Jessie also came to Lilongwe to stay with the uncle. He wanted her to continue schooling and it was easier here than in the village. Her mother followed in 2000. She worked at a white lady's house, but died in the same year.
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> When we first interviewed her, Jessie had moved out of the uncle's place and had gone to stay at her auntie's house, which is also in Sector 7. This auntie or *'sister'*, as Jessie calls her, is a half-sister to the uncle and had invited her to stay, because she needed someone to do the household chores. But actually, Jessie came here because she and her brother were not treated well at the house of the uncle. There were a lot of quarrels, especially with uncle's children, who considered Jessie and her brothers intruders who did not belong to their family and who were dependent on the goodwill of their uncle. They also had difficulties in getting enough food. Sometimes when they came home from school, there was no food left for them. They were also the ones doing all the household chores and even selling activities for the uncle who has a small-scale business at the market.
>
> Her brother still stayed with uncle. It was not easy for Jessie to go away, because he wanted her to stay. The brother also wanted to come and join her, but uncle does not want to let him go. He told

him to stay to do the household chores. Her aunt calls him from time to time. Then he eats here and stays the whole day. Sometimes he comes without being invited. Jessie visits him every day and she is still welcomed at the uncle's place. Jessie wants to stay at aunt's place and does not want to go back to uncle's place. The aunt and the husband of the aunt do not let her feel all the time that she depends upon them. She knows now what a happy life is and also got fatter. *"Living a happy life means to stay with people who are treating you well."*

When we met her again in September 2001, Jessie was back at her uncle's place. She told us that her uncle had asked her to come back because the spirits of her late father troubled him and had told him that she should come back. Jessie went back, because she was afraid. She wanted to stay at auntie's place where support was much better and more frequent, but aunt told her to go back. She says that she does not like to stay with the uncle. He talks too much and he does not like her and her brother, always telling them that they are orphans. There is an aunt in Michinji, close to Lilongwe, another half-sister of the uncle, who is engaged in farming. Jessie is sent there from time to time to ask for maize for the family. This aunt always treats her well and gives her food and clothes. Jessie has already asked her if she could stay with her, but the aunt refused to take her, as she already has a lot of orphans to support. Jessie is worried about her education. She wants to continue schooling in order to find a good job and be able to take care of her brother and other siblings. But she doubts whether her relatives will be able and willing to pay her school fees and a school uniform. She told them that she would need a school uniform. But they told her that there is no money, because there are too many children to support. *"If you are somebody who is dependent on the help of others, you should not think about your situation. You lose weight when you are thinking about your situation, you will not get fat. You get sad."*

Apart from the extreme scarcity and volatility of support, the story of Jessie reveals the extreme psychological pressure and the stigmatisation orphaned children are exposed to. This appears to be related to both the rising number of orphans and the resulting network pressures, and to the nature of HIV/AIDS itself. The rising stratification of support relations on the household level due to economic difficulties and the large number of orphans has put orphans in an extremely precarious and vulnerable position as regards support. Their status is also increasingly used to control their behaviour and their claims for support.

Complaints about support constraints or misbehaviour on the part of the orphans are usually met by their foster parents by telling them *'not to be so proud'* and not to behave presumptuously towards those they actually depend upon. At the same time, it is also AIDS itself that engenders an enormous stigma. The fact that most of these children might also be infected by the disease puts them under extreme psychological pressure. They are often chased away when they want to socialise with other children. Although the sickness itself will never be mentioned, references to the way their parents died, such as *"When your mother died, she was very thin..."* (Interview No. 135, Chairwoman of Women's burial association), still make everybody understand. They also reveal the unease, helplessness and social pressure AIDS puts on orphans in particular, but also on the society as a whole.

While orphans are perceived as a burden, Jessie's story shows that they are exposed to extreme exploitation at the same time. Although it was one mouth less to feed, the uncle's sickness, which increasingly began to show, made Jessie a much-needed labour force both in the household and with the selling activities at the market. In addition, the good relationship she had with the auntie in Mijinchi rendered her an important social resource that would guarantee an easier and maybe more continuous flow of support, which was much needed in the approaching hunger season.

Households are therefore far from providing a homogenous network structure. The number of household members, the type of their relationship, their economic status, decision-making power and division of labour do not automatically translate into entitlements and obligations of support and – to an even lesser extent – actual support relations. Rather than a closed and steady system of mutual support, the household is better described as a network of sites, where specific social support relations coincide that reveal a very fragmented support structure, the support capacity of which is anything but reliable and permanent. Whereas it remains a central site of exchange, support relations within the household are increasingly under fierce contestation.

Although the economic situation has already weakened support relations, AIDS seems to have made matters worse, and has led to their further stratification. While the number of providers is constantly decreasing, a rising number of people are fighting over increasingly scarce resources, leading to an enormous social and material support vacuum. This also challenges claims and entitlements to support, which are becoming increasingly arbitrary, and fosters the growing hierarchy between providers and recipients. For some, the household as a permanent network site is even dissolving, giving way to a nomadism for support, as we have seen in the case of the AIDS orphans.

At the same time, it is the specifically urban context that re-shuffles network relations on the household level. Economic activity is partly improving the economic status of women in town, allowing for more economic freedom than in the village. This economic freedom is at the same time constrained by different urban power constellations, which make it more difficult for women to control their resources. Furthermore, men are pulling out of their responsibilities, leaving the responsibility for the maintenance of the household to their wives. The specifically urban working conditions of largely insecure and volatile sources of income, and the fact that men usually work outside the household sphere, appears to make it enormously difficult for women to have any degree of control over their husbands' income.

5.3   Beyond the Household: Kinship, Friendship and Neighbours

While the household remains central to most individual network structures, network relations beyond the household make up an important and usually also the largest part of network contacts within migrants' networks. They encompass a vast range of network partners linking different social, economic and geographic spaces and organisational levels, from dyadic face-to-face relations to broader networks embedded in political, religious or cultural organisations and associations. Most of these relations are confined to a very specific type of support or specific contingencies, such as sickness, funerals or the borrowing of money. The specificity of this support also defines their importance in a network structure, as does the type and quality of the relationship, among which kinship and friendship play a central role.

Especially in the literature, friendship is specifically discussed in the context of migration as an important social relation and a kind of social capital that develops in contrast to and in the absence of kin relations in the village, which the migrants had been forced to leave behind (for a critique see Grätz et al. 2003). This argument holds true to a certain extent. Especially older people, who have been in Lilongwe since its foundation as the capital, mentioned that during the Banda-period when access to town was strongly limited, kin in town was practically non-existent. For social support, one usually had to rely entirely on relations other than kin relations, which largely encompassed friendship.

Since the transition to democracy this has changed considerably. Apart from the second generation of migrants who stayed in town, the increase in migration has brought more kin to town. Kinship relations in social support networks have increased over the last years, as almost everybody now has kin in town. Most of

this kin lives within close spatial proximity. Since 1998, Sector 7 has undergone gentrification. On the one hand, most of the children of first generation migrants have stayed in the area, occupying a plot that their parents had bought for this purpose. On the other, more kin from the countryside and from within Lilongwe have moved into the area. They either sought to move close to their kin in Sector 7 or – coming from the village – had been found a plot or a house to rent by their urban kin in close spatial proximity. Close spatial proximity, which allows for a more frequent exchange of care, food and information, or provides an opportunity for socialising which had not been possible before, has made many of these relations a vital part of individual networks.

The increase in kinship did not lead to the disintegration of friendship relations. On the contrary, while kinship plays an important role in these extra-household-relations, friendship assumes a central role in the compartmentalised social structure of town, and also fulfils special network functions. Most of these friendships have come into existence in the urban context. Religious associations, such as the church or the mosque, the workplace, the neighbourhood or the school are the main places where friends are made. They may also grow out of joking or greeting relations in public space, such as the street or the market, when people discover that they speak the same regional language or belong to the same ethnic group.

At the same time, friendship relations may also have a trans-local character, i.e. be between people who knew each other before migrating to Sector 7. Many grew up together in the same or neighbouring villages, or were in the same peer group, having undergone initiation together. Others were friends at school or have been living in the same area in another part of town, or another city. Friends play an important role in support relations that may turn into stable relations, but are usually considered rather volatile and superficial, when compared to kinship relations, for example. This transitory character of friendship is also apparent in relation to their support character, which is largely based on a strict borrowing basis.

5.3.1 Friendly Kin

Looking at support networks of urban migrants, friends and kin seem to be clearly defined categories of relations with differentiating functions (see also the support diagrams of Mrs. and Mr. Jameson). However, listening to the migrants' explanations of specific kin or friendship relations reveals that both terms encompass a wide array of different meanings, functions and qualities of (support) relations. Moreover, an examination of the development of support relations within networks over time reveals that friendship and kinship are far

from being static and mutually exclusive concepts. Rather, they are closely inter-related, often overlapping categories, with relational boundaries that may shift over time, acquiring different meanings in due course (ibid; Guichard forthcoming). These changes are especially pronounced in urban migrants' networks that, due to migration and urbanisation processes, are continuously re-shuffled.

While kinship relations are usually thought of as continuous and steady relationships, migration and urbanisation processes do change them significantly. The new social, economic, cultural and geographic situation that kinship relations are exposed to, reveals that closeness in the sense of classificatory kinship terms is only one 'determinant' among many that defines a support relation. Usually it is a mix of relational and emotional closeness, economic capacity, and physical closeness that determine the degree of a support relation among kin.[6] In this respect, the distance to the village seriously challenges kinship relations. Whereas the distance to the village often loosens these support relations over time (see Chapter 7), kin in town, and specifically those in close spatial proximity, gain specific importance. This does not mean that close kin in other areas of town are not important at all. If people have close kin in town, such as siblings or matrilineal uncles or nephews, this almost always involves some kind of exchange or support relation, even if this is infrequent and confined to specific contingencies, such as family issues. However, physical proximity is an important quality in kinship relations. High transport costs and above all, the time that elapses before reaching a sibling's house in another area or at the other end of town to ask for support, mean that people tend to differentiate little between their perceptions of geographical distances within town or to the village. In this respect, intense support relations amongst kin in close spatial proximity are not merely a vital source of support for the individual network partners, they also change kinship relations in a way that may even override classificatory principles of relational distance and proximity:

> **Case 5.5: Re-shuffling Kinship** Mrs. Mbalo is a rich businesswoman who lives in one of the habitat houses. She just came to Sector 7 a few months ago with her husband, her three children, and a younger sister of Mr. Mbalo. She took the girl so that she could go to school and have proper support, because there were so many children at her home. Before, they had lived in Area 25A for eight years. She came to town with her husband, who had grown up in town but had taken a wife from his village. They came to Sector 7 because they got a loan with Habitat and were therefore moving into their house.

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[6] See also the discussion of Guichard (forthcoming) on the role of friendship within kinship relations.

Apart from her husband, who she considers her biggest source of help, providing her not only with her basic human needs, but also with the capital required to start her successful firewood business, relatives make up an important social safety net in her network. She considers her mother in law to be an enormous source of support. *"She comes when I am sick and takes the children to her home and she also assists me when I have troubles with my husband. I consider the support as very big, because whenever I have any kind of problem, I can go there. I consider her like my own relative."* Although she does not say it, it seems that Mrs. Mbalo's marriage is not particularly stable. This is also the reason why her eldest son stays at his grandparents' place most of the time. He comes to his parents' to eat, but rarely stays overnight.

The other central figure in her network is her elder sister. This sister came to town soon after Mrs. Mbalo had left the village to follow her husband. She used to stay in the village before. But, with the new kin in town, the sister's husband also moved to town to look for employment. During this period he stayed with the Mbalos. It was only when he had found a job that he went and got his wife. They are living in Area 25 A, but the support with the sister did not change. *"When I am sick, my elder sister comes to do all the household chores. The support from my sister is very big, because without her I could not stay. When I am sick, the neighbours may come in the morning to greet me, but the sister stays here for the whole day. I can even call her during the night."*

Kinship relations thus play an important role in support relations, even to the extent that they provide extensive intra-household exchange relations. While economic capacity and closeness of kinship play a role, Mrs. Mbalo's history reveals the crucial role of physical closeness: Not only does it ease the logistics of support, it is a central structuring element of kinship relations that may go far beyond kinship relations related by blood or classificatory kinship relations and the rights and obligations related to them. The physical closeness which allows for an intense social practice of exchange re-shuffles kinship relations in town, re-measuring kinship relations and outlining a new urban kin network that follows different lines of distance and proximity and support expectations and obligations to the one left behind. This process of network and kin creation is also a very conscious one that is simply forced upon migrants by the new social context:

"It is true that close relatives are more supportive because if you get sick, close relatives will try their best to support you, because you

are close to them. (...) Close relatives in town are not those from the same mother, but those who live close. Distant relatives are those in the village, because they are very far. But had I been in the village, this situation would be the other way around." (Interview No. 83, Mrs. Tall)

Mrs. Mbalo's story shows, however, that the emotional aspect also plays a crucial role in support relations. The fact that people *"relate well with each other"* is especially emphasised in relations, which go far beyond institutionally prescribed rules and obligations. To what extent this aspect of friendship or *"emotional economy"*, as Guichard (forthcoming) refers to it in a modification of Scott's (1976) moral economy, influences the amount of support is difficult to establish. What people always emphasised is that these special trust relationships that evolved beyond the 'normal' also involved a specific form of asking for support, both in terms of quality and quantity. This was considered beyond what would be appropriate in kinship relations, and even more so in the case of friendships. While in friendship relations, forms of support are usually based on borrowing, which also entails friends having the right to claim something back, in kinship relations, support is usually considered a gift. These different support relations also encompass different forms of asking.[7] Among friends, one may ask directly for support. Unless kin are friends and have a very close relationship, among kin the asking is based rather more on story-telling encompassing an unspoken request for support. This indirect way of asking also usually gives an indication of how much money or which type of help is needed. Support is never directly asked for, however, and people never ask for more when the support is considered too little. If kinship relations are very close, this boundary of rights, entitlements and obligations is extended, allowing not only more direct claims for support, but also more frequent ones.

5.3.2 Related Friends

While kinship relations are simply divided into close kin *('achibale'* or *'abale')* and distant kin *('anansi')*, different types of friendships are assigned specific names. Friends in a general and loose sense are usually referred to as *'mnzanga'*, meaning fellow or kinsman. They may also include some form of exchange, but this is usually small and often temporarily confined to a certain period, for example, among seasonal labourers or during short-term assignments while doing *Ganyu*.

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[7] In *ChiChewa* people would usually say *"ndithandizeni"*, meaning "Can you help me...?" or *"tandibwerekeni"*, meaning "May I borrow...?". These expressions are especially used with friends, while with close relatives one would say *"ndipatseni"* , "Can you give me...?" as an expression of a strong entitlement and the present-like character of support.

Usually, however, they are simple *'chatting friends'*, as one of our respondents put it, with whom one mainly socialises. Close friendship relations that may also encompass intense exchange relations are called *'anansi',* literally meaning the people of the same clan or people from the same locality. People would usually refer to them as *"people with whom they stayed together for a long time"*, thus sharing a common history that also included the exchange of support. This refers both to the village context and to town, referring to people with whom one has shared the same neighbourhood, working environment, or religious association.

Friendship relations may, however, also develop into kinship relations. This is usually the case with very close and intense friendship relations, where tight social, economic and emotional relationships exist. Many urban migrants find them either within religious associations or the workplace. *"When you come to town you have to look for your own relatives. And these you find in the church and the workplace"* (SDA-Chairwoman, Interview No. 84). This specific type of kinship is also expressed in the name they are then given: They are called *'achibale'*, a kinship term which is usually only used for blood relationships. However, people always add that they are not relatives in the sense of blood relations (*'those sucking from the same mother'*), but that they are bound by other ties.

If one looks more closely at these relations, one finds that most of these kinship relations are actually based on a common ethnic or regional origin. These special kin do not necessarily have to be close. Their kinship function is largely related to the function they assume in town. This is mainly 'family business', which also requires a certain common cultural background and knowledge, such as marriage, burial rituals, or dispute settlements. In times of sickness, or when a new baby is born, they come to visit and chat, bringing along some token, such as food or soft drinks. The *achibale* is also the one and often the only one who knows one's place of origin and one's parents. This is of specific importance in town: In case of serious problems, the ethnic kin will be the ones to report back to the village.

Another important aspect in these relations is chatting. This has not only a socialising function; it also gives people the opportunity to speak their own language in a *ChiChewa*-dominated environment, and also provides an important forum where news, gossip and information about the whereabouts of the *achibale* in town and those over distance, back in the village, or in other areas of Malawi, are exchanged.

At the same time, one finds that it is especially the 'ethnic and regional kin' that lead to very intense relations that go beyond family issues, where food, money and material and emotional care are exchanged on a regular basis. It seems that the common background creates some kind of a 'natural' trust relationship that can only be established over time in other social contexts. While

urban kinship relations are recruited from all kinds of social contexts, it appears that the most stable ones are those which are multi-layered and which are based on a common regional or ethnic background, as the following case shows:

> **Case 5.6: Relatives in town** Mrs. Tall is a poor woman from the South of Malawi. In her support network, friends play an important role in network relations. Apart from her friends, who are anchored in the neighbourhood and those related to the workplace, her friend in Area 24A plays an important role in her support network. This friend comes from the same village as the respondent. They grew up together and were part of the same peer group. They also went to the same school. When the respondent came to Lilongwe with her husband, this friend was already in town. She had been married in Lilongwe a few years earlier.
>
> They consider each other as relatives; 'achibale'. Mai Tall calls her 'my elder sister.' She considers the size of the support they exchange large, because she exchanges more support with this woman than with her friends here in Sector 7, "just like relatives do": The maize flour is put in a bigger plate and Mai Tall also gives her more money than her neighbours. She gives her, for example, 50 Kwacha instead of 20. And this exchange is never borrowing: Mai Tall just gives it to her, because they are related. They exchange money, Ufa and emotional support. The support is also large, because Mai Tall gives her the same amount as the friend gives to her, or as Mai Tall put it, *"The exchange is large, because it is equal."* However, the support is considered difficult to access because the friend has recently been in major economic difficulties. Nevertheless, Mai Tall continues to support her. Asked why she continues to do so she says, *"It is expected of me to support this friend, because any problem I might have here in town, it is this sister who will go to the village to report, because she is the only one who knows my home village."*

These relationships may also run through generations, being inherited from parents who have grown close in town to their children who in turn, continue this relationship. The story of Mrs. Tall shows that this kin is also assigned classificatory kinship terms, such as uncle, elder brother or sister, daughter or son, or – such as with those in the second or third generation – are also tied into the lineage, using kinship idiom, such as sharing the same parents: *"This relative I know from some time. They came here after I moved here with my father. We used to be children by then. Our fathers were supporting each other. I call her sister because we are children of our parents." (Interview No. 64, Joe Klaver, Poor Man).*

Although this 'added kin' may substitute kin and support relations left behind in terms of the support they provide, it does not substitute existing relations. They are simply added to existing kin relations as additional sisters or uncles. They may also represent relations that one never had, such as an elder brother who may substitute, at least in town, one's own role as the firstborn and therefore, responsibility for the well-being of the youngest. For this reason, we met many young urban migrants who were the nephews of older and already established urban migrants, uncles with whom they lived and who taught them some business or crafts and who helped them with 'learning the town life'. Migrants of the same age group and within the same working environment or neighbourhood would call each other sisters or brothers and share more exchange relations.

Notwithstanding the shifting meaning and function between friendship(s) and kinship(s), it seems that basic differences remain. The enormous importance of a balanced reciprocal arrangement with her elder sister that Mai Tall emphasises as an important basis of their relationship also shows its limits. Although it is indeed very close, and an intense and steady support relation exists, relatively strict reciprocal support relations seem to suggest that rights and obligations of support in these 'fake' kinship relations are, however, weaker overall and may shift more easily than in 'normal' kin relations. Against the background of enormous economic constraints, this kin seems to be the first to undergo changing support conditionalities.

5.3.3 Debt Relations and Support Hierarchies

Whereas balanced mutual support is an important pre-condition for continuing and 'successful' support relations, debt relations also constitute important support mechanisms, especially in the long run.

The importance of creating debt relations that are not immediately reciprocated and balanced, and which might provide an important source of support in future contingencies, is especially discernible in friendship relations. I mentioned before that friendship is not always thought of or conceptualised as an enduring, long-term support relationship. Often, the social context in town does also not allow for this. The short-term working assignments in which most people are employed, or the settlement pattern in Sector 7, where a high turnover of both business partners and neighbours is the norm, often cut social relations short. Nevertheless, they are an integral part of network relations. Although they usually provide little support and may also be limited in time, they have an

important risk-sharing function: The establishment of and investment in a myriad of debt relations does not automatically imply that these relations are also reciprocated. However, they do allow for a wide array of potential providers and increase the chances that at least one of them may be in the position to provide support when needed. These debt relations not only run on a dyadic level but more often run polyadically, encompassing as well *'friends of friends'*. Typical for these network arrangements are friends from the workplace or neighbours. The latter provide rather loose, but important networks in daily and often immediate needs:

> "We support each other and ask each other for maize flour and relish. These friends are my neighbours here in Sector 7 and in A25A. When they have problems, they send a child and I do the same. The support I give and get is very small, because if I support friends, it is as if these friends kept this support I was giving them for me and the next time when I am in need they give it back. With money, we have to give it back. If I have borrowed money or other things from friends, I only get it again, when I have returned the support in the meanwhile. If I need help again, I have to look for somebody else, which means that I go to another friend. Therefore, it is very important and good to have a lot of friends. The support from friends is very close, because when I ask my friends, they immediately give me. And I give them, because I always have things at home and I do not have to go to the market in order to get it. It happens that you do not have it and then you just tell them that you do not have. If you know somebody who has the thing, I can also send the person there. This happens also to me. If a person does not have what I want, I just go to the next one. Sometimes if a person comes to ask for support and I do not have, and there is a friend of mine to chat at my house, this friend can offer to provide support. It is expected of neighbours to support each other, because if you do not support your neighbours today, they will not support you tomorrow."[8] (Interview No. 133, Mrs. Msimba, Low Income Woman)

The knitting of debt relations is thus an important condition for maintaining a wide range of support options, as many of these debt relations one has invested in may not be reciprocated in time, or cannot be reciprocated because

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[8] It is important to note that exchange is not only based on money for money. It is common that poorer network partners also reciprocate their support relations in kind by offering their labour, washing at neighbours' houses or sending their children in order to fetch the water from the borehole or the water kiosk.

of economic difficulties. They usually reach far beyond the immediate neighbourhood, also into other areas of Lilongwe. Debt networks are perceived as networks for 'daily use', for which support is not really budgeted, in contrast to kinship relations. They are also not invested in with the direct intention of getting the support back one day but rather resemble a general 'social' investment, which may at least increase one's social status and reputation and in turn, one's creditworthiness with others. This loose notion of reciprocity also appears to be linked to the nature of the relationships. The highly dynamic social contexts within which most of these relations develop, such as the workplace, the market or the neighbourhood, also contribute to their high volatility: People continuously create new relations, while others may break away. If friendships stop, they are simply sought elsewhere.

> "I also get support from the people I used to work for. Some are in A25A and some are in Sector 7. If I am in trouble I go to the ones who are close-by and to those whom I think can help me at the moment. It depends on whom I think has money available at the moment. The support is not very close though, because sometimes I go there and they tell me that they cannot help me and I do not force them. This has always been like this. With friends, there is no change in the support, because when you make friends with people you work for, they support you and then you meet new friends and the support is more. And after a while the support gets less and then you meet new friends again. So there is some sort of balance, although the support with some friends might get less. But a new love is 100 Percent!" (Interview No. 67, Mr. Kachazu, Self-employed Builder)

However, economic constraints also seem to make it difficult to maintain a wide web of debt relations. Whereas these relations were perceived as an investment in social relations based on an overall reciprocity from which everybody profited in the end, borrowing relations have changed substantially. People increasingly only gave money away when they were sure that they would get it back. This also concerned small amounts of money or food, which in turn limited severely the extension and resilience of debt networks. Resource constraints forced people to budget even more tightly, not allowing them to give resources away without getting them back immediately. Debt relations continued to function in spatially confined networks, where the social control was strong enough for people to pay back their debts on a regular basis and where a certain trust relationship had been established over time, such as among the business people at the market.

These friendship relations in particular are thus not very resilient when it comes to invoking support, and their volatility makes it easier to end them; a thing which is considered impossible with kinship relations, to which a much higher moral obligation is attached, which renders them more resilient in terms of support. This higher resilience and reliability is not only based on a higher kin morality, though: Kinship relations are simply taken better care of, also in relation to support. The quotation by Finch as regards kinship relations in Britain holds for the Malawian context, as well: "*Quite simply relatives are people whom you treat differently*" (Finch 1989: 233).

> "If your friends are wrong you just stop supporting them. With relatives it is different. You can be angry for a while but then you think that they have nobody else to support them and after a while you discuss. (. . .) With your parents and relatives it is simply not possible that you relate so badly that you stop talking and supporting each other." (Interview No.103, Mrs. Mbalo, Rich Business Woman)

This also attributes kinship relations with a central position within the network hierarchy. While friendship relations encompass a broad range of network providers with more or less resilient network partners, kinship relations are usually fewer, but are considered much more resilient and reliable. This reliability is not necessarily related to the quantity of support. Whereas the amount of support is indeed considered important, it is their network qualities that render kinship relations so central for social security.

> "The support from my relatives is very small, but very important. It is very small, because I only go there when I have money problems or in case of sickness. When I do not have food, they also give me food or money to buy some. This year I went there only once. Usually if I do not have food, I just stay, because I do not like to ask them too often. I also go to my friends to ask them. First I go to my friends, and if they cannot help me, I go to my relatives because they have to help me. I consider the support as very close, because when I ask them, I know that since we are related, they will give me or otherwise will look for another solution if they are unable to support me. Friends you cannot force them to support you, but with relatives you can say, 'What are we going to do then', if they cannot help. And they are forced to look for a solution, because they are expected to assist. From friends it is not expected."(Interview No. 69, Mr. Kachazu)

The central position of the kin thus actually puts them at the bottom of the hierarchy when it comes to asking for support. Whereas friends and neighbours

provide networks for daily contingencies, kin is called for in extremely difficult situations only. It is an exit option, asked for only in extreme crisis situations, if people are let down by other network partners and have exhausted all other options, including 'just staying', which usually means forgoing meals or eating nothing for a few days. This also partly explains the sudden increase in kin relations in many networks during my second fieldwork phase. Whereas gentrification and rural-urban migration have played an important role in the rise in kinship relations in social security networks, the sudden increase also has to be attributed to the hunger in 2001. In this extreme crisis situation, many people have re-activated kinship relations that had been dormant and invisible for years.

5.3.4   Neighbourhood

Neighbourhood in densely populated urban areas in developing countries is often imagined to be a very close-knit web of relations, in contrast to neighbourhood in the big cities of the industrial world, where people living next to each other often hardly know each other. Looking at neighbourhood relations in the borderlands of Sector 7, one finds that there is not a great deal of difference. Neighbourhood relations in Sector 7 are usually described as loose, distant and difficult. The anonymity of the area is a common complaint of many newcomers. All in all, neighbourhood support resembles typically urban Western style neighbourhood relations, and is confined to the exchange of missing household items, such as salt, relish, some tomatoes, or a cup of maize flour. Beyond this daily exchange of household items, chatting and the occasional borrowing of small amounts of money, the neighbourhood in Sector 7 as a support structure is rather insignificant.

While the neighbourhood as a network as such is thus not very important, the neighbourhood provides an important social environment within which social support relations evolve. The importance of the neighbourhood as a social space is especially relevant for women: their reproductive responsibilities and the fact that many women work from their compound makes the neighbourhood a largely female-dominated and populated environment. In this regard, the notion of neighbourhood encompasses other 'reproductive areas' as well, such as the maize mill, the borehole or the water kiosks. These locations provide important meeting points where people come together in the course of their daily tasks and constitute important sites where information on working opportunities is exchanged, or health and marriage problems discussed. In addition, children playing together provide an important link for intra-household relations to develop. Another important mechanism to knit social relations is visiting – and

people visit each other a lot. Especially on Sundays or during the hot afternoon hours, one may find groups of women sitting here and there, chatting or on their way to another house to pay a visit. The public character of neighbourhood relations, i.e. support under the scrutiny of everybody, is also an important condition for their functioning. The fact that close spatial proximity makes it hard to hide support exchanged provided an important sanctioning and control mechanism in order to guarantee balanced network relations and find the right checks and balances for this fragile and usually very poor network, as the following citation shows:

> "Today one of my children went to the neighbours home to chat while the neighbour was preparing food. But before they started eating I went there and took my child. I do not like it, because I believe that even if you have little food you need to share it and help especially the youngest children, because they suffer most if there is no food. I believe that my neighbour should let my children eat there. In the past my neighbour's child often came to eat with us, but in the recent months I saw that his mother always came to pick him up, just before we had lunch or supper. So now I do the same. There is less food now and I suspect that the neighbour took her child when I cooked in order to tell me that my child should stop eating over there." (Interview No. 133, Mrs. Msimba)

Although the hunger crisis was already apparent when this interview took place, seasonal ups and downs are common in all support relations. People usually understand the signs, gestures and actions that neighbours set in order to signal a periodic closure of the support relations, such as Mrs. Msimba in the citation. Especially within the neighbourhood, helping out with maize flour or other food items, or children being allowed eat at other peoples' houses, usually ceases completely during the rainy season when food is scarce. These exchange relations only revive after the harvest, when food is abundant and maize prices have gone down.

In addition to these very powerful non-verbal sanctioning mechanisms, gossiping and – though to a lesser extent – witchcraft accusations provide yet another series of very powerful mechanisms to ensure that neighbours do not overstretch demands with specific network partners and towards the network as a whole (see also Gluckmann 1963; Finch 1989). The fact of somebody going to a neighbour once too often may not only mean the end of the specific neighbourhood relation, but may endanger the wider network structure of the neighbourhood.

The visibility and transparency of the neighbourhood as a network of exchange also seems to be the reason why neighbourhood relations largely remain on a very superficial level and are largely avoided as a source of support . In fact, neighbourhood relations are economically rather than geographically defined. Unless people are linked by factors other than mere neighbourhood relations, communal support across different economic classes is rare.

> "It all depends on how you chat, because some – after chatting – can gossip about you. They may tell other people lies and these people can confront you. To avoid this, it is better if you stick to your friends. These people are not good to chat with, because they will talk badly about you and tell wrong things about you. Another reason why I do not chat with these people is that the other neighbours are better off than me. If I asked them for food, they would say, look at this woman, if it were not for me, she would not have food. And they would be pointing at me, something I fear" (Interview No. 83, Mrs. Tall, Poor Woman).

Gossiping thus also serves as an important mechanism to control support across social boundaries and keep social relations and the whole communal structure in place. The social stigmatisation of being poor or living off others is a strong mechanism to fend off too many demands made by the poor on the rich. It also serves as a mechanism to remind rich people of their communal obligations they owe as a result of their status.

The highly stratified character of neighbourhood networks also shows in friendship relations that have evolved in this context. The vibrant exchange of information, goods and services that takes place within the neighbourhood often provides the basis for very intense friendship and kinship relations. *'My friend who is also my neighbour'* is a very common characterisation of network relations among women. These neighbourhood relations often continue to exist beyond the geographic proximity within which they evolved. While for daily petty neighbourhood support, new relations in the new environment have to be sought, these trans-local friendship and kinship relations in the neighbourhood context remain vital sources of support.

Social barriers within the neighbourhood have always been high. The heterogeneous social structure within the area of rich and poor, highly educated and non-educated, has always been strongly visible. While the small number of people living in the area and the pioneering atmosphere at the beginning of the invasion and the fight for urban infrastructure had to a certain extent covered up these strong social hierarchies, the growth of the area over the last three years, including as well the change in the social structure towards the higher income

strata, has further stratified support relations. This is especially visible at the neighbourhood level.

> "Now neighbourhood support is getting less. It was more when houses were few and far from each other. Now that there are more, there is a problem of gossip and people support each other less. There is a problem because people want to show that they are better and they expect their wives to change into nice clothes, do their hair, change their shoes for people to admire them. If they do not change they gossip. They say, 'We see these people doing these businesses and they do not dress well'. So when people hear this about themselves, they just stop supporting the people who gossip. But for me, I just listen and forget. When they are in problems, I just help them. I consider myself a reliable neighbour. But I do not support neighbours very often because of the gossip. People have an inferior complex (sic) and do not like to ask better-off neighbours. They are usually too shy to ask because they fear that they are talked about. Rich people help rich people and poor help the poor because when one is trying to become rich, he ignores the poor people and he thinks, 'If I am going to support this poor person, how is he going to help me?'" (Interview No. 96, Mrs. Mbalo, Rich Woman)

The overall difficult economic conditions make matters worse. The rising gap between rich and poor appears to make support between rich and poor even more difficult, as the barriers to mutual support are growing and there is a stronger degree of reticence on both sides to engage in such support. However, while the widening gap between rich and poor renders support on a communal level more difficult, this does not mean that it stops. As we shall see in the next chapter, it is simply transferred into other social contexts dominated by other norms and values that may allow for the superseding of economic differences, such as with neighbours who belong to the same religious organisation, or workmates. It is no coincidence that many of the religious associations are also organised on the basis of a close spatial proximity that clusters their members in neighbourhood sub-groups.

5.3.5   Class as a Structuring Element of Support

Class as a structuring element of support is not confined to neighbourhood relations only. It also plays a central role in more intimate and therefore supposedly less stratified relations, such as friendships and kinship relations. Whereas friendships are usually based on relationships between people who have more

or less the same economic background, the issue of rich and poor is of specific relevance and ambivalence in kinship relations. The economic ability to provide support changes kinship relations significantly and entitlements, rights, and obligations of support, depending on whether one is at the poor receiving or the rich giving end.

Many of our respondents had a rich relative 'hidden' somewhere in their social support network, usually within Lilongwe. Most of these relatives turned out to be very distant relatives they hardly knew and who often had come into the family by marriage, and were thus actually non-kin. Nevertheless, the fact that they were rich turned them into kin. People usually portrayed these relationships as very close, inventing kinship relations that did not exist or portraying them much closer than they were in reality, including of course, also the rights and obligations of support that this relative had towards them. Stories of angry poor relatives who had walked long distances to their rich relatives' compounds in Area 10 or 12, residential areas for high ranking civil servants, and waiting there for hours and days only to find that they were sent back home after having received a meal and being told to come another time, I heard more than once during the field stay. Many of these poor relatives knew that in purely relational kinship terms, they were considered distant relatives who did not really have an entitlement to be supported at all. They also were conscious about the fact that most of their rich relatives already had a lot of other people to support. Nevertheless, in their eyes, the fact that their relatives were 'rich' changed their support obligations:

> "My cousin in A10 is the son of my father's sister. He supports me when he comes to visit me. He wants me to visit him, but I have no transport money. When he comes here, he sees my problems and gives me firewood and money. He does not come very often. Last time that he came it was three months ago. Since his child died in April 2001 he never came again. The support is very small. Although my brother is well to do, he does not want to support me frequently. It is expected from him to support me, because I am his relative. This is different from anybody else who is related to me, because from these people I do not expect to be helped. I do not ask him because my brother is supposed to know, because he is my relative. When you are poor your rich relatives are supposed to help you without you asking them. I am also shy to ask him, because this brother is supporting a lot of people from his wife's side. It would be easier to ask for me if my brother would be from my mother's side and not from my father's side." (Interview No. 70, Mrs. Imam, Poor Woman)

Whereas the poor thus claimed a strong relationship, Gerhard Anders (2005) in his research on civil servants in Lilongwe has beautifully shown that rich people perceive their role and support obligations clearly quite differently. Although they viewed their capacity to provide support as an important responsibility, they were very ambivalent about their support obligations, especially as the 'rich relative'. On the one hand, they were unwilling to provide more people with more support, simply because of their capacity to do so. On the other hand, people were torn between their obligations to support and their wishes to improve their own situation and that of their family. This was especially the case for those civil servants who themselves were coming under rising economic pressure and for whom the obligation to support and the desire to improve one's own life were increasingly coming into conflict (ibid.).

As much as rich relatives are seen as important network providers, their position is not one of rich kin from which support can be extracted endlessly and without good reason. On the contrary, rich relatives also have a special position in social support networks.

> "My elder brother, the son of my elder mother, a high level civil servant, gave me money to do my driving licence in 1999. Now he does not support me and we do not even visit each other. But I know that if I were really in problems – if I am dying or if my children are dying – he will assist me and be there. My other brothers in Lilongwe would go and tell him and he would help me. He is a reliable brother, because also the people in the village depend on him. I do not go there to ask for support now, because he once gave me money to increase my knowledge and he now expects me to use my own knowledge to earn money. I only go there in emergencies, but then I can be sure that he will help me. (...) For minor support, I prefer to go to ask my friend Ishmael."(Interview No. 50, Mr. Humber, Poor Man)

The citation shows that people are thus extremely aware of not overstretching these network relations. They are not used for just any contingency, but provide something like a wild card that is only activated in the face of major problems, such as the death of family member, or famine, or for larger expenses, such as school fees, school uniforms or for further education. It appears, however, that the relationship always remains a difficult one, even if people are related, because the exchange to be reciprocated can never be the same. In this respect, their special position as a kind of insurance that is only activated in special cases, such as family emergencies, also appears to be a guarantee that the support will continue working, at least from the poor recipients' perspective.

5.4 Conclusions

Urbanism as a way of life thus encompasses a highly complex and dynamic net of social relations that underlie very different rationalities and moralities. They all have specific functions in relation to specific urban (in)securities, underlying specific rules and regulations. These relationships are not static, but underlie strong fluctuations and changes in the course of the individual life cycle and the urbanisation process. While network partners may change, leading to the expansion or contraction of network relations, we have seen that existing relationships are also underlaid by the potential for new interpretation and re-negotiation. They may become more tight or less so, or even shift in meaning.

These changes do not only take place in relations that have come into existence in town, such as friendships among workmates or neighbours, they also encompass 'traditional' relations, such as kinship, which continue to play a central role in urban support networks. On the one hand, this relates to migration itself. Although migration does not mean that relations to the village are cut-off, the spatial distance significantly re-shuffles kinship hierarchies. Whereas close kin in the village is out of reach, the kin in close spatial proximity, to which one might only be loosely related, becomes a central network provider in town. Close spatial proximity as an important pre-condition for vital exchange relations equally holds for inner-urban trans-local relations. As we have seen, there is little difference in accessing support relations as regards the time required to contact kin in the village or kin living in areas at the other end of town.

This gentrification of kinship relations also translates in shifting kinship relations, i.e. from the 'outer' circles of support, this kin moves to the 'inner' circles of support (Finch 1989). This inner circle of support also encompasses so-called 'fictional' relationships, i.e. relations that are not bound by blood. These relations are usually based on close friendship relations that have come into existence in town, but often share a common ethnic or regional background and identity.

On the other hand, kinship relations also change with the changing social, economic and cultural environment in town, which challenges power relations and dependencies between providers and recipients of support. These changes do not necessarily follow classical modernist notions, as we have seen at the household level. Although the household provides a central source of support, household relations show a strong imbalance that especially constrains the situation of women. Whereas most of them are economically active and contribute to the household income and expenses, they have less decision-making power and control over their own income and those of their spouses than men. Their relative dependence on their spouses' income, also as regards their reproductive responsibilities and the absence of their rural kin in town, undermines signifi-

cantly their entitlements to maintenance. Social and economic constraints and rising price levels make matters worse. Rather than using the money to invest in their own network relations, it seems that they are to an increasingly large extent responsible for the maintenance of the household as a whole. As we shall see in one of the next chapters, economic incapacity to maintain trans-local network relations has severe consequences for social security, especially for women, as the way back to the village as a final urban option is increasingly diminishing as a result.

Whereas lacking economic resources deepens support hierarchies within households, further stratifying access to support, HIV/AIDS re-shuffles completely the notion of the household as an economic and social support unit. HIV/AIDS perforates whole family networks, shifting responsibilities back to the older generation or concentrating them on a few remaining network partners, and highly competitive network structures lead to the partial or even complete exclusion of their most vulnerable members. While most orphans already find themselves in a very vulnerable position, being forced to stay with distant kin who are in turn themselves overburdened with the high number of dependents, an increasing number of them are no longer in the position to find or maintain a place within the household of a relative. They are exposed to a social stratification of support, being forced to move between different network partners in order to survive. These AIDS-nomads are in this respect forced to 'shop' for support with different network providers in order to complement their inner support circles, which provide the basis for their survival. As well, the dissolution of this inner support circle and the absence of alternatives increasingly forces orphans to shop for network relations, also over long distances and within social contexts they had never been to in order to survive.

Overall it seems that the bargaining space for dealing with difficulties is narrowing down considerably. People are in an increasingly difficult position to shop for and provide for support. What is more, economic constraints do not only make support in existing relations less; they also change support mechanisms, as we have seen in the case of debt relations. The new, much stricter conditions of support that regulate debt relations have severely limited access to this exchange arrangement. The stricter differentiation and stratification also concerns other support relations, such as we have seen in the case of neighbourhood relations, which are not geographically but largely economically defined. Gossiping is thereby an important sanctioning mechanism that does not allow one to overstretch one's entitlements or even to transgress economic boundaries that would allow for a real re-distribution of support. On the contrary, with rising urbanisation and the economic crisis, this economic stratification seemed to have increased further, fostering lines of in- and exclusion between rich and poor.

The ambivalences in support relations are also clearly visible among rich and poor kin, where support obligations and entitlements were fiercely contested and re-negotiated. While the poor increasingly try to expand their entitlements towards their kin in order to gain access to support, the rich have been trying to do the opposite, trying to evade and limit export expectations. In this respect, economic constraints not only reduced the bargaining space of the poor beneficiaries, but also of their rich kin, who are coming under increasing pressure, torn between the desire to improve their lives and expectations that they will provide support.

Chapter 6

Expanding Boundaries: The State, Labour, NGOs, Religion and Regional Associations

6.1   Introduction

When people move, the search for new relatives, friends and network partners also encompasses the wider urban environment in which their daily life evolves, such as the workplace, churches and mosques, or cultural, ethnic or sports associations. These institutions provide an important space for the creation of new network relations. At the same time, migrants' social security networks also include more institutionalised forms of support, such as those provided by the state, or the assistance provided by non-governmental organisations whose presence in the area has increased substantially over the years. These associational network relations are at the core of this chapter.

Within all these network relations the notion of community plays an important role. Having for a long time been perceived in anthropological research as an entirely rural and traditional phenomenon that could only evolve in the socially and geographically small, dense and confined environment of a village structure (see for example Amin 2002), in the urban modernist cosmology, community did not exist at all or at best, only in fractures and pieces. The social disintegration taking place in urban areas, leading to a weakening of kinship bonds, the declining significance of the family and the undermining of social solidarity, was said to compel the urbanite to get involved in urban-based groups and associations. *"It is largely through the activities of the voluntary groups, be their objectives*

economic, political, educational, religious, recreational, or cultural, that the urbanite expresses and develops his personality, acquires status, and is able to carry on the round of activities that constitute his life career" (Wirth 1938: 23). These communities were largely perceived as negative, representing a highly fragmented and 'disorganised' social form that, in contrast to the close-knit and inclusive community of folk-society, was superficial, impersonal and transitory (ibid.).

This negative notion only changed in the heyday of post-colonial urbanisation, as associational networks in town, especially those based on tribal bonds, were increasingly analysed as important catalysts of urbanisation and modernisation that would help the migrant to settle and adapt in the completely new and unknown urban environment (Mitchell 1966; Mayer 1963; Southall 1961).

While it was assumed that most of these networks would eventually disappear with ongoing urbanisation, the urban crisis in the 1980s revealed that most of these associations actually constituted an integral part of town life, also in relation to the delivery of urban services, such as housing, infrastructure or transport. Since then, development politics have tried to incorporate urban associations in urban governance and development in addition to and as a substitute for an impotent and overburdened state (Tostensthen, Tvedten & Vaa 2001); as we saw in Chapter 4, with mixed and highly ambivalent results.

This chapter concentrates on the social support that urban associations provide on an individual level. Although we will see that these institutions provide a wide range of different support mechanisms, I argue that their importance as regards social security for migrants largely lies beneath the institutionalised level. Communal associations provide important psychological security, creating feelings of identity and belonging in an urban environment, which by many migrants is perceived as highly anonymous, heterogeneous and insecure. Furthermore, they also provide the social grounds for the development of vibrant personal networks of social exchange (see Amin 2002; Cohen 2000; Appadurai 1996). Some associations have a strong trans-local character, and their networks and notions of community extend far beyond the urban boundaries. Most of them are, however, confined to town only. While being based on 'traditional' identities, morals and values, we shall see that these are thoroughly urban, representing largely 'imagined' trans-local and traditional communities that have become urbanised over time and filled with new meanings of an 'invented' tradition and culture (Hobbesbawm & Ranger 1983).

At the same time, the chapter shows that this patchwork of associational urban networks within and across which a myriad of dyadic and polyadic network relations develop is also thinning out. HIV/AIDS, Structural Adjustment and the economic difficulties that developed in due course have also left their imprints on associational network structures.

6.2   Networks in the Sphere of Productive Labour

The sphere of productive labour is considered an important source of support. Apart from close kinship relations and religious associations, the workplace is one of the most important social network sites in town. *"If you are not praying and working you cannot expect to get any help"* (Interview No. 84/98; Chairwoman of SDA's women's organisation) was a recurrent statement that we heard in many interviews during our field stay.

The importance of the workplace is thereby not only related to the fact that it is the place where migrants often make their first social encounters in town; it is also a very 'fertile' source of network relations. This refers on the one hand to the richness of network relations that the workplace contains, encompassing relations both on a vertical level between employer and employee and on a horizontal level among the employees themselves. On the other hand, this refers to the relative richness of labour relations as a source of social support. We shall see that support provided among workmates is relatively high in terms of money exchanged and usually also guarantees continuous access to support, as workmates practically always have access to money, either through their regular earnings or through cash advances on the part of their employer.

6.2.1   Formal Employment

The workplace in town is usually associated with state or 'formal' social security. This is especially the case in Malawi, where, apart from employment relations, public social security schemes practically do not exist. We have already seen in Chapter 3 that only a small number of people in Sector 7 are employed in the 'formal sector economy' and therefore have access to public social security. This group encompasses the civil servants who still make up the biggest group of 'formally' employed in Malawi, and private employees employed in the tiny industrial and commercial sector. Unsurprisingly, quality and quantity of formal support are conspicuously low. This becomes particularly apparent when one examines the impact public social security services have and the role they play in the everyday life insecurities of their beneficiaries. Despite free access to public health care, the pathetic condition of most public health care facilities forces many to pay for their services out of their private pocket, as most of them prefer to use private dispensaries. Those employed in industry have to a certain extent access to better services, as most big companies have their own in-house schemes offering basic health care to their employees. Many private firms and organisations, including NGOs and international organisations, provide health care insurance that partly covers health care expenses for the whole family. This

also has an important trans-local implication, as distant relatives from the village may gain access to low cost health care via their urban kin, who may introduce them as close kin for this purpose.

Apart from old age security and survivors' benefits (see Chapter 7), formal sector workers are entitled to monthly salary advances and a number of allowances designed for specific purposes, such as the purchase of houses, furniture, bicycles or motor vehicles. In addition, almost all companies and organisations provide so-called emergency loans, in case of funerals or sickness. In case of funerals, many companies also take over part of the costs, paying for the coffin or the transport of the dead body back to the village. While migrants make extensive use of these services, one finds that the way they are used and in which type of contingency differs quite substantially from the prescribed needs and insecurities they were designed for. In the face of deficient health insurance and a dismal public health care system, many civil servants use emergency advances to pay for medical care, for example. Many of the houses in Sector 7 were built with loan and salary advances meant for the purchase of bicycles or furniture. For many employees, the salary advances they would be entitled to only in case of emergencies are an integral part of their income, without which they would not get through the month.

The tight fiscal control introduced as part of the Good Governance reforms has made most of these services inaccessible for civil servants, however. The short-term budgeting introduced with the Civil Service Reform, which releases the recurrent budget on a fortnightly basis only to prevent corruption has practically hollowed out the loan and emergency scheme. Short-term budgeting does not leave any money to replenish these funds, which in addition are based on long-term repayment structure, which cannot be accounted for within this short-term budgeting system.

The overall retrenchments that have taken place in the public sector, together with this practical exclusion from further schemes, has also meant a debilitation of the wider support network. This especially concerns extended family relations, particularly those over distance. Many employees had financed seasonal support for their rural kin through institutionally provided emergency loans or salary advances. While many migrants tried to raise this support via other channels, it largely meant a reduction and more often, a stoppage of trans-local support relations.

Apart from the material support provided, employers are also an important source of support in terms of information passed to their employees about vacant posts and employment opportunities for themselves or searching relatives. This also includes the vacancies published in the daily newspapers that most public offices and institutions received on a daily basis and which would not

normally be affordable to most civil servants and employees. These information flows are also important for 'informal sector economy' activities. A large number of civil servants have their private businesses, which they operate in addition to their low government salaries. Many of these businesses are based on their information channels in civil service. Making use of the information on state-aided business ventures, test series on new hybrid seeds, easier access to loan schemes and the distribution of private assignments in relation to government projects within the civil servant corps is common practice.[1]

6.2.2   Informal Employment

Contrary to conventional notions of the informal economy which is usually characterised as unregulated and unprotected in terms of social security and labour relations (see for example ILO 2000), informal labour relations in Sector 7 provide a different picture. Although not regulated by state law, informal employer and employee relations are usually organised around a more or less standardised set of rights and obligations. Contingencies covered are very similar to those in 'formal' labour relations, such as salary advances, emergency loans, and help in funerals and sickness. Some labour relations also encompass skill-training arrangements similar to medieval apprenticeship arrangements in Europe. People pay a certain amount of money in order to become an apprentice in one of the urban workshops. While they do not get a salary, they are given food, lodging, clothes and some pocket money. Among these apprentices one can also find non-paying 'relatives' who often turn out to be male fellow villagers who came to town to learn a business.

   The functioning of these non-formal labour relations is largely based on their strong embeddedness in the local social context. The closeness of relations that evolve in daily interaction in the usually small-scale businesses and workshops between employer and employee creates mutual expectations and obligations, as is discernible in Mr. Kachazu's support diagram (Fig. 6.1). *Ganyu* work, especially in the building sector, is not as casual as the term might suggest. Many casual labourers work in groups, which include builders, water carriers, brick moulders, and others, usually under the guidance of a foreman. If they work well, the same foreman may engage them for an assignment any number of times. In fact, most contractors like Mr. Kachazu have an established working group. This also entails certain obligations and responsibilities in terms of social support. He supports his workers with small amounts of money or advances in salaries for them to buy food or matches. He is also expected to support them

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[1]   This also seems to be one reason why many civil servants, despite the worsening conditions, do not want to leave the service (Anders 2005).