



Figure 6.2: Mrs. Swalo's Support Diagram

foodstuffs they offer for sale. This money is then paid back at the end of the day using profits made during the day. This system also functions with petty traders who usually get their matches, stacks of cigarettes, or Irish potatoes from

large-scale traders on credit. They repay their debts once they have sold their products with a small margin of profit above the wholesale price. Among the fruit or vegetable vendors, one can also find collective transport arrangements in order to minimise transportation costs from the country into town.

These mutual support arrangements are also partly institutionalised. Various professional groups and the market people as a whole have a range of more or less formalised mechanisms. For example, restaurateurs, wholesale traders and fruit vendors all have their own informal support arrangements in case of funerals and sickness. At the same time, there is the Msungwi Market Association, the association of all market people. It takes care of the daily cleaning of the market site, functions as a market price control panel and also ensures adequate hygiene standards at the market. It also controls access to the market by deciding on the number of stalls and vendors allowed. Apart from its function as a common forum where complaints can be discussed, the association also has an emergency fund for social contingencies. The fund, to which market members contribute on a monthly basis, provides support in sickness and funerals, and may also give support in specific emergency cases, if agreed upon beforehand by the market committee.

6.2.4 Gender Relations and Economic Security

Economic relations are highly gendered. This also has an important impact on their social security function. Unless men are self-employed and have their workshop, garage or hawker on their compound, they usually work outside the household sphere. In contrast, many women are constrained to work at home or close to their homes. This is largely related to their reproductive responsibilities, which make it difficult for them to move. Many are engaged in activities that they manage to do on or from their compound, such as small-scale business, including the selling of vegetables, small consumer items, or second hand clothes. If they move away from home, it is mostly within a restricted radius that allows them to reach home quickly. Unless children are still so small that they can be carried around, women engaged in *Ganyu*, for example, usually take up assignments in close spatial proximity to their houses. In that way, they are able to leave children at home and stay within shouting and walking distance.

Women's economic activities are not only limited by their reproductive responsibilities that restrict their access potential income sources and an additional social space within which social networks may evolve; Women are also usually engaged in income activities where they earn much less than men. For example, in the building business, it is usually men who do the actual building and brick moulding, while women carry the water needed to form the clay, which

is paid much less. Most bigger business ventures that require a lot of money for investment, such as transport-businesses, usually involve men, while most women are engaged in petty-trading. This is also apparent when one goes shopping at the market, which is largely a female space. Most vendors are women, many of them commuting on a on a daily basis from the villages nearby in order to sell their vegetables in town. The fact that most women are engaged in low income sources has also repercussions on their social support networks. There is generally much less to be re-distributed than in networks dominated by men. In addition, men often work in healthier environments. Many, being engaged in formal employment relations, often have access to a staff canteen and better quality food.

Whereas their status confines women's economic spaces in both spatial and economic terms, the gendered division of labour in certain spheres of economic relations may also provide a certain level of security for women. There are, for example, specifically gendered products that may be sold by men or women only. For example, the selling of maize is considered a female domain, while the selling of meat is restricted to men only. These economic spaces are vigorously defended by both sexes and adherence to the rules is also enforced by the Market Association. However, the economic difficulties that continue to force more people from formal into 'informal working relations' are also making these economic spaces increasingly contested terrain, and include challenges to gender boundaries, mostly to the disadvantage of women. Men are increasingly trying to intrude on female economic spaces by engaging in business activities and selling female products, thus narrowing down their already marginalised economic space.

"Most of the people who are selling are women, because men usually only do business during rainy season. Most of the men who are selling are seasonal labourers who do business during rainy season when they are laid off. The empty benches that you see at the market at this time of the year all belong to them. There are specific businesses for men and for women. Before only women used to sell maize and mostly still do so. When men started selling maize, the chairman told them that they have to consult the women first, and they agreed. Men are those selling meat. One woman wanted to start selling meat, but was chased away by men." (Interview No. 110, Mr. Gatson, Msungwi Market Association)

This not only results in a reduction of the female economic space in purely economic terms, as men increasingly intrude upon and conquer traditionally female economic activities, it also means a reduction of female social networks, which used to be particularly strong within these confined economic spaces.

To conclude, productive labour thus provides an important site of network relations, on both horizontal and vertical levels. Whereas 'formal' social security institutions appear to offer a certain degree of reliability that is encapsulated in the institutionally guaranteed entitlement to certain services, in practice this is not necessarily the case. Many social services have been cut back. Those remaining are often undermined by a financing policy that does not provide the resources necessary to convert the mechanisms foreseen by public services into working social security arrangements. Against this background, remaining public social security arrangements appear to become even more multi-functional, their meaning and purpose 're-adjusted' to actual needs and the needy, which do not necessarily correspond to the ones established in the policies. At the same time, further retrenchments in public services also mean that many of these 'informal' or shadow arrangements are cut off. This usually concerns arrangements for the kin over distance.

Whereas 'formal' social security arrangements are thus much less secure and reliable than formal social and labour laws would seem to suggest, we have seen that social support provided by informal working relations does entail some degree of entitlement and obligation. The strong geographic and social contextualisation of most informal working relations in Sector 7 allowing for strong social control appears to render these arrangements relatively resilient and efficient.

Looking at the workplace from a gender dimension, it appears that female economic activities are significantly reduced in terms of type of employment, income, and geographic extension. The combination of productive and re-productive labour, and their assigned public and economic roles, makes it difficult for them to spatially extend their economic activities – and as such, also their network relations. This has repercussions for their networks, which are usually poorer than those of men. The existence of gendered economic spaces mitigates to a certain extent the economically disadvantaged position of women. However, economic constraints are increasingly jeopardising these female economic 'islands', as many men, marginalised from their own 'traditional' economic spaces such as formal employment activities, are increasingly intruding on female activities, conquering more and more of women's economic domains.

6.2.5 ROSCAS, Micro-Credit or Women in Development

Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCAS) (see Mai Swalo's network and her '*Chidyerano*' or 'Eating together'³) played an important role in economic

³ This is a play on words. Eating money is a very common expression in Malawi: while money cannot be eaten, it can be used to buy food to be eaten. In this respect, '*Eating together*' means that people assist each other in being able to have enough money to spend it.

network relations. These largely consisted of small informal groups of three to four persons. Each member contributed a fixed amount of money each month. The whole sum was then given to one member on a rotating basis for his or her own use. Mostly the money was used for extra expenses, or if people were self-employed, to boost business. Most ROSCAS were informal arrangements formed by economically active people, usually involving workmates or self-employed people. Most of the ROSCAS in the 'informal sector' we found were formed by women. Due to their generally inferior economic position and poorer networks, they generally had less access to large sums of money than men. Unless they were workmates, the ROSCA women were also neighbours or friends. The fact that they were bound by other than just business relations not only created a strong trust relationship, but also allowed for stronger social control. This was especially important for *Ganyu* workers, the self-employed, or housewives, where the workplace as a common and stable geographic and social environment did not exist.

Whereas the small-scale ROSCAS function quite well, attempts by various bigger private and para-statal companies to institutionalise large-scale ROSCAS, so-called 'SACCOS' (Saving and Credit Associations), at the end of the 1990s had largely failed. The object had been to pool more money in a collective fund, from which labourers could then get loans in a much cheaper and unbureaucratic way than with the commercial banks. Instead, many SACCOS ended in large corruption scandals, largely to the detriment of the workers. In 2001, most of our respondents who had participated in schemes in 1998 had dropped out. Most of the schemes had stopped altogether.

Many of the people who had previously participated in a ROSCA or a SACCO were engaged in 2001 in one of the various micro-credit associations which had flooded Malawi and Sector 7 in the course of my three-year absence. Most of them are run by foreign NGOs that offer small-scale loans for small-scale business.⁴ There is extremely intense and harsh competition among the different credit-associations, which also became apparent in our attempts to interview them. It took a great deal of time, energy and conviction for the various NGOs to let us know about their organisation and their *modus operandi*.

Most of the loan schemes actually work very similarly. They all provide small-scale loans ranging from MK 2,000 to MK 30,000 for each person on a short-term loan cycle of a maximum of 16 weeks. These loans are charged interest at around 24% that, in comparison to commercial loans at the Malawian Banks which charge around 50%, is considered relatively low. Whereas the loan

⁴ In Area 25A, the Foundation for International Community Assistance (FINCA), a US-based organisation and Opportunity International (OI), a British NGO operating on global level, are the biggest ones.

sum is individual, the loans are granted on a collective basis, typically to a group of between 20 and 40 people. These 'solidarity-groups' are formed through a self-selection process. Thereby, experience in business activities, financial credibility regarding the probability of being able to pay back the loan, and trustworthiness in general are important selection criteria. In practice, this means that people who are selected mostly already have some kind of business, and more importantly, also have access to a vast solidarity network that permits them to access the loan groups:

"You have to have a business. Otherwise people in your group do not accept you, because you are not trusted that you are able to pay back the loan. It is therefore good if you know each other. But the most important thing is that my whole group are friends from Area 25A with whom I stayed together before coming here and that we trust each other. This made it easier to get voted into the group."
(Interview No. 24, Group interview with women involved in micro-credit)

In practice, becoming a member of a solidarity group implied that solidarity already existed before. This meant that newcomers to the area had very little chance of being elected and gaining access to business opportunities. Most organisations argued that the group-based approach was aimed at creating and fostering solidarity relations among the loan beneficiaries, which in turn were also to provide the basis for micro-insurance schemes that many organisations planned to establish, once the loan schemes were functioning on a sustainable basis. However, the provision of group loans also seemed an important strategy in order to reduce default rates on the part of the loan organisations: if a member of the group defaults, it is not the individual but the group that is held responsible for paying back the loan. Group pressure is thus very high. An additional security is provided by the obligatory saving rate of 10% of the loan sum that every individual is supposed to render to the organisation in addition to the weekly repayment rates of the loan. This money is set aside as collateral for future higher loans and social contingencies, such as sickness or funerals. In practice, however, it mostly serves as a collateral in case debtors are not able to repay their weekly rate.

Although loan organisations had been opened for men and women in the meantime, most people who took loans were women. The Foundation for International Community Assistance (FINCA) had a share of only 10% men, Opportunity International (OI) only 20%. Despite the rising number of men in this domain, small-scale business remained a female-dominated sphere: Being more often engaged in higher paid jobs or formal employment relations than women

and doing business as a secondary source of income, many men were able to divert money from their primary source of income for their business ventures. Those men who were in the groups were usually the poor ones, who, similar to most women, did not have any other way of gaining access to start-up capital. However, their lack of business experience and contacts to female networks made it much harder for them to gain access to the loan groups. Many women would also not let them into their groups, arguing that men had higher default rates, often drinking away the money instead of investing it; an argument that also reflects the strong (re)productive responsibilities of women in Malawi.

The initial enthusiasm of finally having gained access to loan organisations had meanwhile given way to very mixed feelings. On the one hand, the loans had made it easier for women to invest in business ventures and establish their own economic activity. This was especially important for widows, whose number among the loan takers was very high. They did not have access to alternative sources of start-up capital, such as husbands. Moreover, continuous access to the loans also enabled sufficient capital to remain in the business. It was common for women to be forced to stop their business activities for a while due to crisis situations, such as funerals or sickness. For many, it took a great deal of time and effort to search for capital again in order to restart their economic activity. In contrast, women with micro-loans could stay in business, as they had the possibility to find money easily in order to start all over again. This continuous access to money also allowed for the better management of reproductive needs. For example, the availability of a large amount of money at one time made it easier to purchase larger amounts of maize at a lower price. In this respect, women were no longer forced to buy food in small amounts at high prices at the market on a daily basis, which in turn increased their food security.

On the other hand, loan organisations were perceived as having had a largely negative impact. Many women were in a much more fragile position in terms of economic and social security than before. Although the organisations promoted a holistic development approach that aimed at tackling social security aspects as well, we have seen that most of the savings earmarked for this purpose were actually used for repayments. Moreover, participation in loan schemes has also endangered social support networks, putting them under severe strain. Various burial associations and the Msungwi Market Association have noticed a rising depletion of their funds. Due to the tight loan conditions, many female vendors or restaurant owners were not able to contribute to their social funds anymore. Some women were so highly indebted that they had to cease their business activities altogether. This particularly concerned the poorer women, whose number among the participants in loan schemes was continually decreasing. Contrary to what micro-loan schemes promote, it was richer and already quite established

businesswomen who made up the biggest proportion of clients. For them, it was easier to accept the harsh loan conditions. This also included women whose husbands had a regular source of income and who might act as collateral if they were not able to pay back the loan.

The reason for the strong disenchantment with loan organisations was clearly also related to the increasing social and economic constraints that had significantly reduced the demand for consumer goods, making people poorer. My material suggests that it was mainly the tight loan conditionality that failed to take the harsh economic and social realities into account and which made women get tied up even deeper in the debt spiral. This was further aggravated by the fact that the extensive and aggressive promotion of small-scale business on part of the Malawian government, as well as international donor organisations and NGOs, have also contributed to a weakening of the small-scale business market. Many women were selling the same products, were engaged in either food production or the selling of vegetables, fruits, small consumer goods or second hand clothes. The loan schemes, which focussed only on the distribution of loans rather than the creation of business opportunities, had exacerbated this tendency, contributing to a further decrease in the incomes of the women. While women were highly conscious of the fact that *"not all women can be Finca-women"* (Interview No. 24, Group Interview with women involved in micro-credit), the loan organisations largely seemed to ignore this fact. Their sole focus were the loans issued and the payback rates that in turn, made up the core of the successful project outcome.

The biggest problem for most women was, however, that their profits were too low for them to pay for necessities and pay back their loans at the same time. It was common that part of the loans received was directly invested in reproductive needs, such as school fees or food (see also Freiberg-Strauß 1988). Whereas this worked well to a certain extent, as we have seen with the purchase of food, in crisis situations, this careful balance was easily lost. This especially concerned periods of heightened food insecurity, such as the rainy season, the beginning of the school year when school fees had to be paid, and last but not least, periods of sickness or funerals. We have already seen that, especially in sickness and in the never-ending series of funerals, much money and time was spent that otherwise would have been invested in business activities.

Although loan schemes were built on solidarity-groups, harsh payback conditions together with the increasingly difficult social and economic situation have tended to increase social tensions among group members. Around payday, one could observe many of the *'Finca-women'* moving up and down the area, busy trying to get the shares due for repayment together. If they did not have husbands who were economically active and who were able and willing to as-

sist them, they tried to borrow money from friends or other women from within the group or other relatives and friends. Since these repayments involved larger amounts of money, they were usually difficult to get. The group might compensate for the defaulted money once or twice in order to keep the loan running. But even then debts remained, which had to be paid back to individual group members. The re-collection methods undertaken by other group members might also involve violence and force: the looting of debtor's houses by group members in order to sell the furniture and other consumer goods at the market to get their share for the loan in time had become a common practice in Sector 7 employed to re-collect the debts. As a coping strategy, many women resorted to a double membership in two different loan organisations. Running two loan cycles based on different time frames allowed the women to pay back the loan from one organisation with the loan obtained from the second one, often without investing much in any business activities. Some women resorted to usury or '*katapila*'; however, having to pay back their loans at interest rates of around 50%, they were usually worse off than before.

The micro-loan schemes and their strict payback morality have also influenced individual borrowing and lending relationships among friends in the neighbourhood, which have become more and more commercialised. People told us that the charging of interest rates has also taken root in these relations, especially where large sums of money were concerned. It seems that the loan schemes have set examples for formerly private social security arrangements to be commercialised.

As a consequence, a number of women started to engage in the 'informal' ROSCAS again. While many of them had been dissolved with the arrival of the loan organisations, as the women could not afford to engage in both, the ROSCAS, though providing less money, seemed to undergo a revival.

6.3 People in Town Pray More: Religious Networks

Spirituality and religiousness play an important role in Malawian society. Contrary to modernist explanatory frameworks that relate strong religious attitudes to the rural traditional context, it is in town where religious associations are of specific importance. '*People in town pray more*' – a statement we heard over and over again – does not only refer to the fact that town people are more religious, but denotes a complex social, material, symbolic and spiritual practice, within which the communication with God is just one aspect among many oth-

ers.⁵ Religious associations are important communal spaces that, especially in the anonymous and unknown social structure of town, produce an important sense of belonging and identity. As well, similar to the workplace, religious communities represent a vast social space for the production of new social contacts and potential future support networks. Last but not least, religious communities play an important role as an institutional provider of social support and public infrastructure.

This multi-functionality of religion in the urban context is also revealed in the density of network relations related to one's membership in a religious association. They range from highly individualised relations that have come into existence within the religious context to highly institutionalised relations within the church or mosque organisation, also entailing a wider range of needs and necessities. Church or mosque support usually runs on two levels, encompassing both vertical and horizontal support relations.

Vertical support relations, i.e. support relations where direct support is provided by Christian organisations to their individual members are largely confined to the support of funerals. On these occasions, usually a fixed amount of money is given for the purchase of food or the coffin. This money is financed by church funds, which in turn are financed by the congregation, usually on the basis of a 'tithing'-scheme, i.e. monthly contributions are based on individual income.⁶ In addition, most religious associations may ask the congregation to contribute money for members who find themselves in specific crisis situations, such as long periods of sickness, or a house that has crumbled.

⁵ The importance of religion in town is also revealed in the spatial landscape of the area. Although there were barely any houses in 1998, several churches were already under construction, to which a few more had been added in 2001. In the meantime, there is a Lutheran Church, the Church of the Assemblies of God, and a Kingdom of God Church, as well as a Catholic Church. In addition, the *Dzena* mission of the Presbyterian Church has been incorporated into the area, making up the biggest community in Sector 7. Many people belong to smaller churches that have their congregations in neighbouring areas, such as the Zambezi Evangelical Church, the Industrial Mission, the United Methodist Church, the Anglican Church or the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Although having increased over the last years due to rising urbanisation, the Muslim community is a small minority within the area, comprising a few hundred people only. The Muslim community in Sector 7 belongs to two different orders or Brotherhoods, which both have their own mosques, the Quadiryra and Sukuti. They represent two different streams of belief within the Sunni-Muslims. Historically, the Quadiryra Brotherhood is older. The Sukuti only emerged in the mid 1930s as a reformist movement to the established Muslim orders, the religious practices of which were partly deemed un-Islamic. The establishment of the Sukuti movement marked a significant development within Malawian Islam: the debates and disputes that ensued partly became so controversial that the colonial government was forced to interfere (Bone 2000; see also Fiedler 2000).

⁶ Most Churches do put a lower limit on the contributions, however. With the Presbyterian Church, for example, this minimum lies at MK 5 per month. This money is used for the maintenance of the church, the payment of the priests, as well as for funerals, sicknesses and other contingencies.

Churches and mosques serve an important function as providers of basic social services in the area. The paramount role, especially of Christian churches as providers of health and educational services in Malawi, has changed little since colonial times.⁷ *Dzenza* mission from the Church of Central African Presbyterian (CCAP) runs a hospital and a big Secondary School. *Kagwa* parish of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) in Area 49, attended by most Catholics in Sector 7, runs a primary school. The Kingdom of God Church and the Roman Catholic Church, which are both still unfinished, plan to establish full-scale mission stations in Sector 7 that will comprise pre-school, primary and secondary schools, as well as hospitals. Finally, the Lutheran Church is running a pre-school, which is to be extended into a primary school. Apart from a few exceptions – the Catholic parish does not, for example, charge school fees for orphans – these services all have to be paid for. In addition to the contributions by the congregations, the profits made through these services provide the main source of funding to cover maintenance costs for the mission stations and parishes. Access to health and educational services is open to all.

Most support within religious organisations takes place on a horizontal level, encompassing both institutionalised forms of support and dyadic personal support relations that may also transcend the narrow religious context. Support on the horizontal level is usually more significant, and in most networks actually provides the major source of support. Horizontal support relations within the churches are usually highly organised. On the one hand, they are organised in age and gender groups, i.e. women's group, youth, men and the so-called 'group of elders'. These different organisations usually have their own funds to which they contribute separately, generally on a monthly basis. The women's group in the CCAP has four acres of land where they cultivate maize that is stored and used in funerals, crusades and larger regional or national meetings of CCAP-women. On the other hand, most Christian congregations are also organised on a geographical basis, divided into so-called area groups, 'cell groups' or 'praying circles', which are small local groups confined to a specific neighbourhood. These groups usually meet for additional prayers, the so-called 'mid-week prayers'. They also have their own autonomous funds to cater for the specific crisis situations of their members, which usually means funerals and sickness. In case of sickness, the members of the praying circles take over the visits to the hospital or at home and provide money for medicine. They may take over care labour, such as taking care of the children or taking over the household chores for a while. At funerals, members of the praying circles collect firewood, *Ufa* and money to cater for the ceremony in the neighbourhood. Together with the

⁷ For a discussion of the impact of the missions' educational services, especially in the farming sector on the structure of the Malawian economy, see McCracken (1977).

immediate neighbour and representatives of the women's group, they stay with the bereaved persons in order to pray and sing for the deceased. They will also wash the dead body and prepare it for the funeral. On the day of the funeral, they organise the cooking for the mourning society and usually also take over the household chores during the mourning period in the household of the bereaved.

Beyond these activities related to religious events, the praying circle also has an important integrative function for newcomers into the area, who are welcomed and introduced to the local congregation or praying circle. These contacts often lay the basis for first neighbourhood contacts, which in turn may evolve into close individual friendship and kinship relations. This social role of religion is perhaps its most important function in town, which is discernible in the following statements:

"The people from the church are your best friends, relatives, everything. They are the first people to assist you in problems and celebrations. (...) Most of my friends are from church. It is easy when you come to a new area if there are friends from the church. Wherever I have been with my husband, we found that the best community to belong to is the church." (Interview No. 120, Mrs. Mangani, Rich Woman)

The notion of religion as kin is central to understanding the importance of religious networks for urban migrants. Religion is not only an important source of identity and belonging, it is also a source of stable and reliable network relations, which in the absence of traditional kin, provide an important social safety net for old and new insecurities.

"In town the church is very important. In the village there is a network of uncles and cousins and the level of assistance is very high. In town, you are cut-off from them and it is important to get support from church especially in funerals. In town, church replaces village support. In town with the problems of life, going to church consoles one. In town there is a lot of violence and more people go to church; they resort to the church in times of problems." (Interview No. 41, Member of the Seventh Day Adventist Women's Guild)

If people have not been regular church or mosque goers in the village, they often become it in town. The common spiritual experience creates a strong feeling of belonging and identity in a social environment that many newly arriving migrants experience as inimical. But churches and mosques also represent an

important social and moral authority that keeps people grounded in the wild urban jungle and helps them to face the temptations and difficulties of town life. The disastrous psychological effects of HIV/AIDS on family structures, social relationships and the societal structure as a whole, coupled with the general economic decline, have given way to a very negative, depressed atmosphere, which often found expression in violence, alcoholism and other drug abuse. In this situation, religious associations have gained an enormous influence as a source of spiritual, moral and psychological support.

More often, however, religious networks are – similar to kinship relations – highly trans-local and provide a known network environment within which migrants move. Some churches⁸ may even have issued so-called ‘*transfer letters*’, which serve as a letter of recommendation and as a proof of membership in a specific church and church organisation, such as the women’s guild. These letters should facilitate access to the community and their specific associations, including their support structures, which they usually also do.

6.3.1 The Mosque

Within the Muslim community, support is differently organised. The mosque also has its own funds that are funded by the members themselves through their “*zakat al fitrah*”, which most members directly pay to the mosque on a weekly basis in form of their Friday offerings.⁹ “*Zakat mal*”, which corresponds to the Christian practice of tithing, is usually organised as a collective tax paid on a yearly basis in order to be re-distributed by the Mosque for social purposes and charity. In Sector 7 most people can hardly afford to pay it, which in turn means that the direct support of the mosque to their poorer members in the area hardly exists. It is only during the fasting month of *Ramadan*, when the rich, mostly Indian Muslim community in Lilongwe distributes food among the poorer communities within town, that the poor of Area 25A and 25B receive some support from the mosque.¹⁰ The beneficiaries also include widows and orphans within Sector 7 who do not necessarily have to belong to the community.

The Friday offerings that are collected are normally used for the maintenance of the mosque and the payment of the Sheik. Although most mosques have

⁸ We did not come across a case of a Muslim migrant having been issued a transfer letter. But it seems that it is rather a common practice that is not only confined to some Christian churches, but rather, is common migration practice.

⁹ While Islamic law gives the believers the option of paying their alms or “*zakat al fithra*” to the mosque or directly to the beneficiary, most people that we met give it in the form of the weekly offerings.

¹⁰ F. von Benda-Beckmann in his article on Islamic Ambon (1988) notes that many Muslims perceive the obligation of “*zakat mal*” to be met by giving the equivalent of one “*zakat fitrah*”. Usually this is done at the end of Ramadan.

their men's and women's committees, which are involved in specific activities around the religious practices, festivities and ceremonies throughout the year, their support structures are less organised than with the much bigger Christian communities. Most of their support is distributed on an ad-hoc basis. They do not have their own funds for funerals or other contingencies either, but usually contribute when support is needed, such as the *Zadaka*, which is held on the 7th and the 40th day after the death of a person and which marks the gradual process of taking leave of the deceased. In this occasion, in which people come together and eat, the women from the mosque have an important organising role.¹¹ The mosque itself only provides funding in case the contributions from the community and members of the mosque are not able to provide enough for the food and the '*Zanda*', the white cloth in which the dead body is wrapped. This is then paid for out of the mosque's funds.

"The number of people who ask for support at the mosque has grown because the community is growing, although people do usually not go to the mosque to ask for support. They only ask for support in major problems, such as funerals and sickness. But the mosque as an institution does not support people in their individual problems. If people have problems and they look for support and somebody from the Muslim community wants to give him or her, they can give. The mosque as an institution only provides support when somebody who is in town on visit loses money and has no transport money back home." (Interview No. 113, Sheik Saidi, Mosque 25A)

The Sheik of one mosque explained the lack of funds in the Muslim community as a measure against corruption and misuse. In addition, the small size of the community still allowed for the organisation of support on a more informal level. Names of sick people to be visited, the deaths or other contingencies of community members, such as weddings or initiation ceremonies, are usually announced at the mosque and the community is asked to provide money and care on behalf of the Mosque members. It seems however, that the different organisation of support is also related to a differing notion of charity and solidarity. Understood as a highly personal and individual matter between oneself and God, charity is perceived as an individual rather than a collective responsibility, which in turn may also explain why support is organised when needed. The fact that

¹¹ While the ceremony on the 7th day after death marks the end of the funeral ceremonies in which all the relatives depart, the ceremony on the 40th day after death indicates the day when the spouse is '*set free*', i.e. is able to remarry and take another spouse.

most support asked for, such as a missing 'Zanda', is usually provided by an individual and not by the contributions of the whole community, seems to sustain this observation.

The enormous increase in funerals due to HIV/AIDS has led to a closer collaboration and a certain convergence of organisational aspects of support over the years. Whereas Christian and Muslim funerals within the area used to take place separately and their organisation used to involve only Muslims or Christians, the upsurge in the number of funerals has led to a stronger collaboration in order to organise the order of the events more effectively, and to urge locals to contribute to and participate in each other's funerals.

6.3.2 Transcending Social and Gender Barriers

Religious associations thus create important circles of support and solidarity (K. von Benda-Beckmann 2004) and may also transcend these circles at the same time. This appears to be especially important for women. The women's groups are in fact the biggest and best organised groups on a horizontal level, both within churches and mosques. These so-called 'women's guilds' meet on a regular basis, coming together every week for prayers, to practice for the church choir or to do communal work. They encompass women from all walks of life, who work in different professions, and have a different economic and social status and a different ethnic and regional background; factors which, in the context of everyday life, often constitute insurmountable barriers against the development of social support mechanisms. Most of the groups are a colourful mix of housewives, casual labourers and civil servants, rich and poor, women from all different areas and ethnic origins:

"The church is important, because it improves the social relationships with the people living within the area. They all are Christians, no matter how rich and poor you are and no matter to which tribe you belong." (Interview No.58/98, Mrs. Mbela, Rich Woman)

This common identity, which is often underlined by a specific dress code (see Annex 2), represents yet another significant circle of support and solidarity, one which is of special importance for women. We have seen that they usually have poorer network relations at their disposal, especially when they tie in with other relational contexts, such as the neighbourhood or the workplace. Within the women's guild, these barriers might be much easier to circumvent. This, in turn, might also permeate the everyday context of neighbourhood or workplace relations to a certain extent.

Material support within the women's' guild itself is rather small, mainly confined to sickness and funerals. For many women, the material aspect is, however, one aspect among many others. The spiritual and emotional support provided within the group in fact provides important emotional and psychological support for many widowed women. At the same time, the women's groups provide an important informal 'chat room', where problems of all kinds are discussed.

The women's groups also seem to have repercussions on changing gender lines and positions of power. Taking up an active role in a religious organisation is not only a highly appreciated position within the church itself: church elders or women from the guild are also highly respected in the neighbourhood and the community as a whole, which in turn, also seems to have an impact on their domestic position of power. This also seems to lie in the fact that most husbands find it much easier accept their spouses' membership in a religious organisation than their involvement in economic or other activities that may enable their wives to have more social and economic independence. For many women, church activities also mean more social freedom, as spouses usually accept their duties and absences for church issues much more readily than anything else. These can also simply consist of profane entertainment, which enables women to stay away from home for several days and take some time off for themselves, for example when they go on crusades. In this respect, urban women in Malawi confirm the observations of Uhl (1986) and Kennedy (1991), who contend that women, in contrast to men, tend to disguise friendship and other close relations linguistically behind conventional notions of kinship, neighbourhood or in this case, religious associations, as a means to keep them hidden from the public and their spouse as a hidden power and support domain: *"By doing so, women do not only give a 'conventional' performance of femininity and maintain the impression that they do not call the hegemony of men into question. They also allow themselves to increase some of their power, notably in the domestic domain"* (Guichard forthcoming 21).

6.3.3 The Church as a Political and Moral Authority

Another important aspect of religious associations in town is the moral, social and political authority they display within their local communities and parishes. This is embodied in the role of the 'elders', who apart from the priest or the Sheik in the mosque also teach children and potential new members in the Madrasah or the Sunday School. Their teaching concerns spiritual matters, but equally involves social, moral and political issues. Within the CCAP, the church elders hold a so-called 'church court'. In these meetings, cases of adultery, abuse of alcohol or other drugs, or the practising *Nyau* or polygamy, which are usually sanctioned

by total or part-time excommunication, are discussed and decided. Church and mosque elders were also increasingly sought as councillors in matrimonial disputes and other family matters, such as property grabbing, substituting to a certain extent absent rural institutions and authorities, such as the family and clan members, the Traditional Authority or the *ankhoswe*.¹² We shall see that people often did not want to go to the state courts. While some did not want to go to the Chief either, feeling ashamed that these incidences were happening in their family, others chose the church courts for tactical reasons. The fact that the church court deals with disputes as sins rather than broken laws provides for some a stronger, more morally-grounded means of coercion than the Chief or the state.¹³ However, the important public role of the churches is also related to their daily counselling work that goes beyond religious issues. The Catholic parish, for example, offered legal counselling for widows involved in property grabbing (see Chapter 7).

While the 'worldly' authority of the churches and mosques is highly localised, religious associations carry significant political weight everywhere in Malawi. The conspicuous absence of the state, especially on the local level, leaves much room for the churches and mosques as important leaders of opinion, reaching from democracy and human rights through to HIV/AIDS prevention. As we have seen in Chapter 4, their political weight also attributes them with an important 'neutral' mobilising force in terms of communal issues.

6.3.4 The Changing Role of Religious Networks and Practices

The economic constraints and the consequences of HIV/AIDS have also had a considerable impact on the changing role of religious organisations. While religious organisations have always been an important source of support to which one turned if other networks had snapped, the overall strain on more intimate network relations appears to have led to an increased 'outsourcing' of support towards institutions outside kinship relations and the household. People more frequently turn to religious associations for support in situations, which before would have been tackled within the family or horizontal network relations. At

¹² Many couples that had married during our stay in Sector 7 had their *ankhoswe* among their fellow church or mosque members. This was, however, also the case for those migrants who had their *ankhoswe* in the home village.

¹³ Wanda (1988) mentions that the *ankhoswe's* role in matrimonial disputes is also recognised by the Traditional Courts Procedures Rules, which allows the issuing of a Divorce Certificate 'only if it is satisfied "that the marriage in question has been effectively dissolved in accordance with the customary law applicable"' (Wanda 1988: 127). I was unable to find out if penalisation of spouses who have failed to follow the procedures is still in use. However, the fact that recourse to traditional marriage advisors is still a common practice suggests that the institution of the *ankhoswe* is still of enormous importance, even in town.

the same time, religious organisations themselves are faced with enormous support constraints that make it increasingly difficult to realise even their usual support services. On the one hand, members are getting poorer and may contribute less to the collective funds as a result. On the other, the lack of jobs, the increasing number of orphans and, last but not least, the indefinite number of funerals provide an enormous and continuous resource strain on these very funds.

In this situation, some churches, such as the RCC, have established extra emergency funds set apart for the specific contingencies of their parish members. The parish in Area 49 has, for example, an emergency fund from which the priest may take money in order to provide support on an individual basis. The parish also runs a support programme over the rainy season for orphans in their community. They receive a certain amount of maize flour every month and are provided with a blanket and some clothes. Other churches have also started to collect money within the community for the provision of orphans and widows now and then, for example 'Zachifundo'¹⁴, a fund founded by the women's group of the Nazarene Church out of which salt, sugar or clothes for poor orphans and widows within the community are bought. Due to the poverty of the people, the funds do not provide a reliable support structure, but constitute a welcome token for most congregation members, albeit one that arrives irregularly, but does not go beyond this.

Apart from the importance of material help, HIV/AIDS has also changed the meaning and function of religious networks in terms of spiritual support, which over the years has gained increasing importance. HIV/AIDS and the overall social and economic decline have resulted in a complete imbalance in the social structure of Malawian society, which was strongly felt and expressed in an overall feeling of rising powerlessness and resignation. HIV/AIDS and the social and economic pressure it produces have also changed completely the presence as well as the future prospects of most urban migrants. The better life in town that most had hoped for has not worked out in practice. On the contrary, things have even got worse. It is within this context of powerlessness that the spiritual and emotional support provided by religious organisations has become an important source of guidance and consolation.

The changing function and meaning of religion, both in terms of increased and changing spiritual and material needs, has led to the emergence of 'church-shoppers' within the many different Christian communities and congregations. It seems that changing congregations or shifting between different congregations in the course of one's lifecycle has always been a common phenomenon in Malawi. Especially among migrants, shifting their affiliation according to the momentary social and geographic context they were living in was very common.

¹⁴ *ChiChewa* for mercy.

Yet it seems that at least in Sector 7, the phenomenon has increased and its rationale has changed, becoming more needs-oriented. This shopping for churches is related to the different material aspects that the congregations might offer, for example, specific support for orphans or access to micro-credit schemes. It does also involve the spiritual aspect, however. This is especially discernible in the case of the Evangelical Churches, and particularly the Charismatic Movement or New African Independent Churches that have gained increasing popularity over the last decades in Malawi (Fielder 2000). In contrast to many other churches, they offer a very powerful theology that involves a strong salvation and healing aspect, which has a strong appeal in times of heightened material and physical decay. While the Evangelical and Charismatic Churches are perceived as much more supportive in spiritual and emotional terms, material support is considered better with other churches. This situation finds many people in a material and spiritual dilemma and makes many reconsider their religious affiliations. Mrs. Chiumbudzo, a woman who takes care of six orphaned grandchildren and who was a Catholic before converting to the Assemblies of God Church after the deaths of three of her children and two of her grandchildren due to HIV/AIDS, says in this context:

“They provide you with emotional strength during the daily prayers and when you are sick they come to pray with you. In funerals they provide Ufa and firewood and they come to pray and chat. But they do not support you in other occasions. If you do not have food, you go to the people of your church and they will pray with you and they will tell you that God will provide food. The Assemblies of God do not assist otherwise, not even the women’s guild. The Catholics and other churches assist people, the orphans especially. They give them food and sometimes also pay for their school fees. I see it with the child of my brother who stays with me. Last month they came to write down her name. She will get a bucket of maize per month, blankets, and also some money at the end of each month during the rainy season.” (Interview No. 137, Mrs. Chiumbudzo, Low Income Old Woman).

For many young people, these special orphan programmes are also the reason why they become actively involved in church activities. They hope that with membership, they will not only receive support now, but also gain access to the church’s educational infrastructure.

“I used to go to the African Church in the village but I could not find it in town. So now I want to be a member of the Catholic Church

and I am now attending classes to be made a confirmed member. The church gave me jelly and soap since I am an orphan. I do not expect the church to give me more because I believe that the church is also not able to provide more. But if it would provide more than this, then I would expect the church to support me with education and clothes. I hope that they will support me with education, because other orphans are also helped with education." (Interview No. 143, Mr. Willias, Orphan)

Church shopping is not only related to the tight economic situation, however. Membership in the right community is also of importance when it comes to gaining access to NGO-support, as many are based on and financed by religious organisations. For example, people interested in applying for a loan with Habitat for Humanity, the Christian NGO providing loans for the construction of houses operating in Sector 7, are asked to produce a written proof from their church that they are active members in their community. This letter is as important as the persons' pay roll, which serves as collateral for their loans. The same holds for some of the new micro-credit loan organisations, many of which are based on Christian organisations.

To summarise, one may conclude that religion is thus a central aspect of social organisation and identity that links both 'public' and 'private' domains, encompassing political, social, material, moral-ideological and important symbolic aspects. While the level of vertical support structures in religious associations is rather low in both quantitative and qualitative terms, it provides an important social space that creates a feeling of identity and belonging, which is of central importance in an otherwise rather compartmentalised and anonymous urban environment.

As a boundary marker, religion seems to be particularly important for women. Their horizontal networks within church and mosque organisations are highly developed and organised. Especially the churches provide a field of activities through which women are able to enhance their social position within the church, the community and finally, the household as well. The social cohesion that religious organisations create does not only provide an important framework of morals and values that makes it easier to deal with town life; it also provides a strong ideological framework that, similar to kinship, allows personal dyadic network relations that have grown out of this context to function well. Furthermore, while religion provides a powerful means of in- and exclusion, the findings show that religion may also transcend other, normally insurmountable social boundaries between network partners that might allow for a certain degree of re-distribution of resources, for example between rich and poor. Religion also plays an important role in relation to public tasks. Apart from their function

as providers of health, education and other infrastructure, many churches and mosques play an important role in dispute settlement or as legal advisors. Furthermore, religion becomes an important criterion in gaining access to support as a measure of one's moral and economic integrity, particularly in relation to one's ability to gain access to non-governmental support, such as loan organisations.

At the same time, economic difficulties are changing and modifying religious circles of support, and their contents and functions. We have seen that both spiritual and material needs are increasing as social and economic pressure rises, and that religious organisations are gaining more importance as direct providers of support.

At the same time, their functions are becoming more compartmentalised. Religion is increasingly dominated by different, partly contradictory, needs that make people shift between different churches in order to satisfy their spiritual and material needs. It seems that the function of religion as a social identity in town that was considered important in order to make friends and have a kind of community or homey place within an otherwise anonymous town life, has been increasingly superseded by the support function as the central element of religiousness and spirituality.

6.4 We Should Cry for Each Other in Our Problems¹⁵ – Burial Associations in Sector 7

To be buried in one's home village is an important moment in Malawian society and identity. This is especially the case for migrants, no matter if in another village, abroad, or in town. It is part of the tradition. But the return home is also an important part of the identity and place-making discourse of migrants as absent villagers: although they might have stayed away from the village for the greater part of their lives, they had always remained a member of the village, the kin, and the tribe. Their return, even as a corpse, is seen as final proof of this. This notion of the long-lost sons and daughters of the village or the clan who have to be returned to their place of origin is also part of the cosmology of most ethnic groups in Malawi.

“For people in town it is their culture to be buried in the home village. Each family in the home village has its grave where all the family members are buried. They say – if one of the family members is not buried in the family grave – the ancestors are not happy and can

¹⁵ Tirirane Anthu Akumwera Pa Mavuto is the name of one of the biggest burial associations in Area 25.

cause troubles, because they say that one of their children is missing.”
(Interview No. 56, Patson Kagama)

Burial Associations¹⁶ have therefore existed since people started to migrate in large numbers to the towns in the South of the continent and later, to migrate within Malawi. They were usually founded on the basis of their common nationality, region or tribe. Money was collected in order to make sure that migrants, having died in town, would be properly taken care of and transported back to their place of origin. While transport was usually paid for by the companies, the state or by relatives, the associations made sure that burial ceremonies in town were held in the proper, traditional way. They would also organise the transport back home and take care of the bereaved; in sum, all tasks that would usually be performed by the rural kin.

This had basically remained the same up until now. In Sector 7, almost every region and district has its own Burial Association. The biggest and best-organised ones, however, were those of migrants coming from the regions situated at the far ends of Malawi, i.e. those from the North and the South. They are very well organised and have financial and organisational committees who administer their funds and oversee their activities. All organisations are auto-financed by members’ contributions that – depending on their size – range between MK 10 per person to MK 50 per family per month.¹⁷

If somebody dies, each association offers a fixed sum of money of around MK 100 to MK 200. This money is mainly used for the purchase of food for the funeral. If there is no money for the coffin, the associations may also offer money to buy one, and may provide transport to and from the hospital. Female members assist with the preparation of the food for the funeral society. They also continue to do the household chores for the bereaved family during the mourning period. Sometimes, the fund may also provide some extra post-funeral support for widows and orphans – but this is only occasional and is usually only a one-off.

Assistance in funerals is only one aspect of their wide social support spectrum, however. The fact that many associations have a dense urban and trans-local network at their disposal also makes them an important net for trans-local communication flows concerning both private and professional issues that may be crucial for rural-urban migration decisions, such as information on employ-

¹⁶ For a history of district associations in Malawi see Rotberg (1972); Anders (2005).

¹⁷ Usually, the contribution fees are inverse to the size of the organisation. However, the overall increasing price level and pressure on the funds due to the high number of funerals made many associations re-consider their contribution fees, including the big ones. The Nkhata Bay Charity Funds – one of the oldest and with more than 2,000 registered members, one of the biggest in the area – wanted to increase the fee from MK 10 to MK 20 per month in 2001. Considering the size of the association, this makes clear how difficult the situation of most burial associations actually is.

ment possibilities. Regional burial associations provide an important social network for prospective migrants in another respect as well: people from the region usually provide the first safety net upon their arrival in town. Unless they have relatives in town, newly arrived migrants are invited to stay with members of associations until they have found employment. These networks often extend into the working environment, making it easier for new migrants to get a job. This is especially visible in *Kanengo*, where certain branches and departments within the tobacco-processing industry are dominated by workers who come from a specific region, which in turn, makes it more likely for newcomers to find a job there. The regional burial associations are also a kind of substitute for home; an extension of the village community, within which the migrants may temporarily submerge while they are in town.

“The reason why we founded the association was to provide unity between village and town. As parents are in the village, they should not regard us in town as lost. They should think that we are with them and whatever we do in town, it should not be far from parents. Our neighbours here in town should know that we are welcome at home and also here in town. People in Nkhata Bay get to know the fund when they attend funerals in the village, because there is usually a representative of the fund on the transport of the corpse back home who gives assistance to the bereaved if necessary. The people in the village know then, that when they come to town they can get assistance from fund. When they drop off the bus in Area 25A the first question they ask is, “Do you know somebody from Nkhata Bay?” And when people say yes, and refer them to my house, these people come here and they have reached home. People in the village know about the fund, because friends and relatives tell them about it.” (Interview No. 146, Chairman of Nkhata Bay Burial Association)

With the dramatic increase in funerals due to HIV/AIDS, many associations have experienced a dramatic increase in membership. The high death toll has made funerals a high priority risk. Families, which had experienced several funerals within a short period of time, had been forced to close down their businesses and often to incur enormous debts in order to pay for the expenses. For this reason, a rising number of migrants are now joining a funeral association. Many already had loose contacts before, knowing the funds and the people from the same region and attending each other's funerals. But they did not pay into the funds on a regular basis, preferring to contribute to each and every funeral separately. With the rising death toll this has changed: funds now have more reg-

ular paying members than before. This is related to rising funeral costs due to more deaths and increasing price levels. What is more, upon closer examination it becomes clear that the rising number of regularly paying members in burial associations reveals a new burden-sharing mechanism designed to minimise risk. As single burial associations attached to the church, mosque, the workplace or one's own kin mostly offer a decreasing level of support, people are joining a variety of burial associations on a regular basis in order to mitigate the risk of death.

The fact that a series of additional burial associations popped up or were revived or intensified between 1998 and 2001 seems to confirm this observation. For example, a women's burial association has emerged, which focuses especially on the period after the funeral. Since most of the support is usually spent on the funeral ceremony, there is usually little left over for the women and children. This group tries to assist women in this period, both with material support and care labour.

One may thus conclude that support for funerals has become increasingly institutionalised. It seems, however, that this is not only an issue of rising needs, which in turn also require more support structures. It also seems that this institutionalisation is a consequence of the rising stratification of 'informal' collective support structures that are functioning less and less, such as neighbourhood support for funerals. The rising anonymity of town life and the increasing urbanisation of Sector 7 clearly play a role in loosening social relations and neighbourhood contacts. However, to me it appears that it is rather more the overall economic difficulties which have put these reciprocal obligations and arrangements under increasing constraint.

This has also led to an urbanisation of burial association activities. The high death toll and the tight economic conditions, including high transport costs and depleted burial funds, forces many people to be buried in town. In fact, burial associations actually provide most support in town, as only a small number of people continue to be buried in the village. The economic difficulties even make it hard for families to organise and pay for the transport of the body from the hospital to their homes in Sector 7.

As in the case of the religious communities, these support constraints have led to the closer cooperation of diverse funeral associations. Before, people from different regions and ethnic tribes hardly attended each other's funerals. Regional and ethnic prejudices were high and people felt offended and insecure about certain ceremonies, songs, dances and death rituals performed at funerals within their neighbourhood. This has changed considerably. On the one hand, the Chief has urged the tribal associations to modify their funeral ceremonies to urban standards, keeping the traditional part for the burial ceremony taking

place in the home village. On the other, it also seems that the tribal associations themselves stopped performing their typical burial rituals. The rising need for material and social collaboration, and the rising heterogeneity of the urban social environment together seem to have loosened regional or ethnic antagonisms to a certain extent.

6.4.1 Re-invention of Tradition: Initiation as a Cultural and Social Capital in Town

We have seen that urbanisation and economic difficulties have watered down ethnic boundaries over the years. At the same time, ethnic and regional identity has experienced a revival or 're-traditionalisation' (Hobbesbawm & Ranger 1983) in relation to other social aspects. This is especially the case as regards 'initiation' or moral education, particularly concerning the Malawian youth. In general, in town, the function of the peer group initiation of the village context has been taken over by religious organisations. While for the Muslims the initiation is part of their belief system and continues to be practiced in town, the Christian churches have taken over this function to a certain extent, providing an important space, within which questions as regards sexual behaviour, domestic violence, alcohol and other drug problems are discussed:

"In the village parents teach each others' children on culture, but in town parents believe that the church will do something. When a girl reaches puberty the parents come to church and tell us and then we as initiation councillors teach the girls and also the boys, which is done separately by female and male councillors. This usually lasts for one day. We teach them how to dress up, how to behave with elderly people and not to play with boys and refuse them. When they refuse boys, they cannot get AIDS and they cannot get pregnant." (Interview No. 41, Church Elder CCAP)

Although churches provide an important substitute for the 'traditional' peer group education, most parents also continue to send their children to the village for initiation. It is a part of trans-local relations that children are sent back for a few months or weeks in order 'learn' village life. Apart from agricultural tasks, this includes the initiation rites that usually take place when a child becomes sexually mature.

This initiation process in the village is not only an issue of tradition or of a knowledge transfer from village to town. It implies the acquirement of yet another set of social, material and cultural resources that foster their membership both in the village and in town. As second-generation migrants they get to know

their place of origin to which they – even though absent – still belong. At the same time, they acquire a new identity that allows them to access the village or ethnic community in town.

Financial constraints have rendered the trans-local initiation increasingly difficult, however. Some tribal and regional associations have therefore started to organise their own initiation ceremonies in town. With the southern association which I describe here, it was the increase in public transport fares that finally triggered off the organisation of female initiation ceremonies in town in 1999. Initially, they were only open for members of the burial association. Now, everybody's children may participate for a fee of MK 250. The ceremony usually takes place in the dry season, just after harvest, and lasts one week.

“During this period we take the girls to one house and tell each and every woman from the South to come and teach the girls and advise them. During this week the girls are secluded in a house, since in town there is no other place where we can go and we do not want people to see what is happening. The girls are not allowed to go outside. They stay in house and the women come and teach them everything what they would be told in the village. We tell them to come and sing and advise the girls. On the last day, each woman brings a chicken and maize flour and we celebrate the new born. We do this after their first menstruation so that they start fearing boys. We also do teach them on AIDS telling them to be aware of boys. We tell them not to wear short skirts, putting on Chitenjes and being respectful towards the Chief and the elders. We tell them also that it is dangerous at their age to get pregnant, because they may have difficulties to deliver and may even die.” (Interview No. 110)

Although in the quotation it is emphasised that girls are taught exactly as it would have been done in the village, the morals and values quoted suggest that the initiation is actually a highly modern and flexible institution that easily integrates new and urgent issues, such as HIV/AIDS. In this respect, there seems to be little difference between the village and town context, as the risks and temptations mentioned are present in both.

Apart from the initiation being an important cultural and symbolic ‘identity kit’ in order to maintain access to the imagined tribal community in town, the importance of maintaining and re-creating the initiation in town suggests that it has an important and enforcing symbolic force and authority as a means to transport new problems and threats. This re-invention of tradition seems to be of specific significance in the loose urban context, where similar problems as in

the village seem to take on different dimensions and have different social and economic consequences than in the village context.

Thus, associations based on ethnic and regional identities and origins remain an integral part of the urban social structure that goes far beyond their notion as transitory auxiliary associations of absent villagers or not yet fully integrated urbanites. While they have always had an important trans-local function as burial associations, we have seen that they have also provided the basis for a vast and resilient urban social network culture. In recent years, the burial aspect has gained new significance due to the high death toll, albeit under different circumstances: whereas their primary significance lay in their responsibility to cater for the dead body to be properly buried in the home villages, the high incidence of death has forced burial associations to change their burial practices and re-locate them to town. Although the trans-local aspect continues to play an important role in regional burial associations, the social practice also suggests a certain localising and urbanising tendency. This localisation process is also evident in a certain decrease in ethnic and regional divisionary lines, as we have seen in trans-ethnic and trans-religious collaboration in the preparation of funerals.

The urbanisation of tradition is also discernible in the re-making of ethnic and tribal initiation ceremonies. The re-invention of these traditions in town is not only an issue related to the lack of money that does not permit sending children back home to get a proper initiation. It rather seems that the symbolic force and authority of the traditional initiation has undergone an urbanisation process, where it has been refilled with partly new meaning and content, and has gained a specifically urban character.

6.5 Conclusions

In addition to household and kinship, associational networks play a central role for social security in town. Their enormous importance is largely grounded in the great variety of network relations they contain, which in turn also cover a multitude of different needs and risks. Associational networks encompass a myriad of different dyadic and polyadic relations, some of which are highly institutionalised, having highly specified functions and providing very specific needs. The workplace, religious associations and ethnic and regional organisations thereby represent the core arenas.

The importance of the workplace as a site of intense social exchange extends over both formal and informal working relations. On the one hand, this relates to institutionalised sources of support, such as social security mechanisms in the formal employment sector or the employers' liabilities in informal working

relations, for example, in case of sickness or funerals. On the other hand, we have seen that the workplace also allows for the development of a series of important exchange relations among workers. Easier access to and the greater availability of money makes the workplace a relatively rich and reliable network sphere in comparison to other network relations.

However, the economic decline, together with the overall retrenchments in the formal employment sector, have also had an impact on social networks in the workplace, significantly reducing their social security capacity. While informal employers' liabilities are simply becoming less due to economic constraints, Structural Adjustment and the civil service reform have further reduced the already marginal public social security mechanisms. In addition, budgetary constraints are undermining the remaining mechanisms, as the public sector lacks the financial resources in order to make them work. This also has consequences for other 'informal' social security practices that have developed in the shadow of formal social security.

The increasing scarcity of formal sector employment and the rising informalisation of working relations has also led to fissions in the overall economic space, largely to the detriment of women. They are usually engaged in badly paid jobs, such as *Ganyu* or small-scale business. The micro-insurance schemes that have made it easier for many women to gain access to economic resources in order to invest in business activities have eased the situation to a certain extent, allowing women to engage in bigger and more profitable business activities. However, the overall economic difficulties have undermined these newly gained economic opportunities. The civil servants and private sector employees that have been laid off in the course of the policy reforms are increasingly intruding on female economic space, thereby further marginalising female economic activities. This has also had repercussions on network relations. While women's network relations in the economic sphere are already poorer due to their low paid activities, the further reduction of their economic opportunities also reduces their social networking options.

The variety and multi-functionality of network relations equally concerns religious and regional or ethnic associations. While these networks are important support relations in their own right, we have seen that they also provide network sites where other lines of in- and exclusion may interrelate and coincide. This aspect is of central importance for social security, as it enables people to overcome ethnic, social, economic, and gender boundaries that in other social, economic or cultural contexts may represent insurmountable support barriers.

In contrast to the inner circles of support, where the conditions for accessing material help and care seem to be tightening up, stratifying and fostering lines of in- and exclusion, specific support practices within associational networks

suggest the opposite. The enormous social and economic pressure on support relations waters down network boundaries to a certain extent, rendering them more permeable and allowing for an expanding solidarity, such as we have seen with the cooperation in the organisation of funerals across religious boundaries. While people try to cope with rising economic and social difficulties via expanding solidarity, they also draw on more institutionalised risk-spreading mechanisms. Increasingly, people are insuring themselves with burial associations, in order to cope with funeral costs.

The shift towards more institutionalised support structures is also visible in other areas. The number of people that turn towards associations for direct support has increased substantially. Horizontal network relations that especially in religious organisations had taken up the bulk of support up to now, are increasingly drying up. At the same time, we have seen that household and family relations are being exposed to support constraints. This is especially problematic for orphans and widows, who make up the largest number of those who turn to religious organisations and other NGOs for support.

The heightened competition for resources and dwindling network structures also changes network behaviour and practices, such as we have seen with the religious networks. The data suggests that religious networks are being perceived in a more functionalist way. This implies both material and spiritual aspects and needs. Whereas before it was 'merely' important to belong to a religious association in town, the social and economic constraints and the overall increasingly compartmentalising network structure fosters more needs-oriented religious behaviour.

The analysis of network relations shows that associational networks also provide an important source of identity and belonging. This sense of belonging continues to be an important asset and emotional security for those who were born in town as well. The re-creation of traditional identities in town is, however, not only an important custom, which implies the passing on of important social and behavioural norms, such as we have seen with the re-invention of initiation rites in town; these trans-local identities also provide social and symbolic assets that allow for the creation of strong social networks in town.

Chapter 7

Living Trans-locally: Urban-Rural Networks and Trans-local Aspects of Social Support in Town

7.1 Introduction

The fact that urban migrants have remained firmly rooted within their trans-local support relations has for a long been interpreted as the ultimate proof of the weak urban roots of migrants (Mitchell 1973; Mayer 1963; for a critique see Ferguson 1999; Potts 1997b). The frequency with which people returned to their home village provided thereby an important indicator for their 'urbanity': the higher the frequency with which migrants returned home during their stay in town, the lower was assumed to be their 'urban involvement' and thus, their urban identity (Mitchell 1973; Mayer 1963).

While urban anthropologists largely explained the low urban involvement of African migrants as a function of a modernisation and urbanisation process not yet completed, dependency and world system theory argued that this life in a 'dual system' was a deeply structural condition of modernisation itself (Gugler 1971; 1991; Amin 1972). The 'peripheral capitalism' existent in most developing countries would only integrate a small part of the economic production and the domestic labour force into the capitalist world economy. Most people would remain only half-integrated, working largely in so-called 'informal' and insecure labour relations. In order to make a living, migrants would be forced to continue living in a 'dual economy', diversifying their income sources and by the same token their social security relations over both the capitalist and subsistence sec-

tor. This also explains why they maintained strong rural ties and a circulatory migration pattern (ibid.)

While it is an undisputed fact that urban migrants mix different strategies and resources anchored in rural and urban areas for their living and their social security, this chapter argues that rural-urban support relations and coping strategies are more complex and broader than the dual economic approach would suggest. An analysis of trans-local relations shows that the village has a much broader and diverse meaning than being the mere starting and end point of the urban migrant's itinerary, which ends with the migrant's return home after a hard working life in town. This is also true for the spatial dimension. The space within which migrants move and within which resources are exchanged and network relations established encompasses more than 'town' and 'village'. People do not only move within a much broader rural radius, but also move between cities and within urban areas. At the same time, we shall see that the economic aspect – though playing an important role – is just one amongst many that defines rural-urban relations. Thus, notions of solidarity and support over distance, for example, maintain an importance beyond immediate economic necessities and social security considerations.

Albeit taking an urban perspective, the chapter shows that living translocally is important for both those left behind as well as those in town, providing a fall-back strategy in times of contingencies. At the same time, we shall see that this trans-local social security economy is becoming increasingly stratified, as conditions for a return to the village or for continuous urban-rural support are getting more and more difficult. This concerns both urban and rural living conditions. Scarcity of land and labour are not the only factors that make a return to the village difficult. The poverty situation has also challenged customary social security mechanisms and other social and cultural norms controlling and defining access to material or other resources, which in turn has also influenced trans-local support relations. We shall see that customary mechanisms of distribution and control that should ensure the well being of a wider group of people, such as witchcraft or the division of property, are increasingly being turned into highly individualised, rapacious mechanisms.

Whereas trans-local social security strategies appear to be increasingly narrowing down, being thinned out due to lacking social and economic resources, the observation of trans-local relations over a number of years reveals that network relations, far from being static, are highly dynamic and resilient. Indeed, town and village are becoming disconnected, as traditional rural-urban exchange relations are increasingly difficult to maintain. Nevertheless, we shall see that overall changing social and economic conditions and constraints have also led to the adaptation of old and the formation of new trans-local social security

strategies, including the rekindling of already 'dead' trans-local support relations.

7.2 The Village as a Network Site

When people migrate to town they usually have very clear notions and expectations of how they are going to frame their trans-local relations. While most migrants are planning to return to their village at the end of their working life, their relation to the village and the rural kin until then is usually imagined as 'just visiting' or '*kupita kumudzi kukacheza*'. 'Visiting' is imagined to take place on a regular basis, usually every year during the cultivation period. The timing of the visit is related to the agricultural calendar. It is in this period that fertiliser, seeds and a labour force, which make up an important part of urban-rural support relations, are especially needed.

Most of the support to the village evolves around cultivation, including the continuation of cultivation on part of the urban migrants. Migrants whose place of origin is not too far from Lilongwe migrate back for some months in order to work their fields together with their relatives. It is usually wives and children who go back.¹ If the village is farther away, the cultivation is done over a long-distance. At the beginning of the cultivation period, migrants send money to their siblings or parents to whom they have entrusted their land in their absence. This money is used for buying agricultural inputs and paying for an additional labour force. The urban migrants come to the village only for a week or two, during which they help with the cultivation. Unless the village is very close and permits cheap transportation of the maize to town, most migrants leave their harvest in the village. Apart from some maize being taken to town by the migrants on their occasional visits to the village, the maize constitutes an important support and food insurance for the rural kin, to be consumed during hunger period or sold if money is needed. Even if migrants do not have any access to land in their village, which is in fact the case for the majority, 'visiting' is considered a constitutive part of trans-local relations. Visits usually take place during the cultivation period or just after the harvest, during the dry season in June or July, when migrants may expect a share of the harvest to be taken to town.

Apart from cash for agricultural inputs, cash remittances to the village are used for daily needs, such as the usage of the maize mills or the purchase of salt. Many migrants bring along consumer goods and food items that are hardly affordable to their rural kin, like sugar, bread, tea or second hand clothes. Richer

¹ Due to the high drop out rate during the cultivation period, the Malawian school curriculum has been adapted to the agricultural cycle.

people may also send money to pay somebody to look after their old and sick parents, who have nobody else to take care of them in the village. Another major social support is the provision of school fees to younger siblings. The provision of education based on the logic of chain migration², i.e. one urban migrant providing the expenses for the education of a sibling or nephew in the village, who in turn, is supposed to migrate again, is yet another central aspect of rural-urban support relations.

However, upon closer examination, one finds that the way people portray their trans-local relations often describes an ideal situation rather than reality. The regularity with which migrants visit their families back home and the type of support they provide on these occasions, differ substantially from expectations. Most migrants who have come to town during the last five years have actually never seen their home village since their departure. If visits do take place, then it is usually for major life-cycle events, such as weddings, funerals or sickness. If at all, most trans-local support is actually taking place outside a visiting context, being sent by mail or via co-villagers who happen to go to the village or are in town for business matters or schooling. Support usually consists of money, as it is easy to transport, or tools and consumer goods difficult to find in the village, like hoes, tin buckets and pots, clothes and shoes. But even this support is very erratic. If migrants have some extra money, they may send some money or clothes to the village. More often, however, it is in response to a request from the rural kin that migrants react. Most people cannot even remember the month or the year they last sent support to the village. For many migrants, especially the very poor and those with a volatile income, supporting their kin back home practically does not occur.

This does not necessarily mean that people do not want to provide support and try to evade their social obligations towards their rural kin. In general, most migrants considered keeping up their rural relations very important and felt a strong obligation towards their rural kin. Many budgeted for support back home, reducing their expenses in town in order to be able to send some money to their rural kin, especially for foreseeable contingencies, like the cultivation period or the start of a new school term. However, difficulties and contingencies in town, such as a sick child, the construction of a house or – worse – the loss of employment, may force one to spend the money which has been carefully economised over months. Worsening social and economic conditions not only reduce the resources to re-distribute; the fact that people are increasingly having to take care of kin living close-by means that resources are also diverted from, and are going missing for, the rural kin.

² See Chapter 3.

Case 7.1: “It is difficult to send support in time” Christopher is from Mulanje District in the South and came to Lilongwe in 1997 to look for employment. Demographic pressure and the resulting land shortages have forced him into labour migration. As the educated one among his siblings, having been financed by an uncle in Chilinde, he also had high hopes that he might do the same for one of his siblings. In the beginning, he used to stay with this maternal uncle. But when he found employment in Area 25A, he moved to Sector 7 where he rents a small house on his own.

His support to his family in the village consists mainly of the support for school fees for two of his younger siblings. He tries to send the fees three times per year, but, as he adds slightly embarrassed, he does not always make it in time. He then tells his parents to borrow the money from some richer villagers in the meantime, until he receives his salary at the end of the month.

He says that in the past it was easier for him to send the amount of money needed and in time. School fees were low and it was easier for him to manage. Now that school fees are high it is very difficult. In addition, Christopher is taking driving lessons. He wants to have a higher qualification in order to get a better-paid job. But he had to stop, because he did not have the cash to pay the examination fees and to bribe the civil servant in order to pass the exam.

He also supports his parents, especially during the cultivation period. He works in a hardware shop, which allows him to get seeds, fertiliser and other agricultural inputs at a lower staff price. If he cannot pay for the items he may get them on loan. He can ‘send’ the items via the shop, telling his parents to get it from the same shop at the trading centre in Mulanje. With the support to his parents it is different, because there is not the same pressure as with the school fees. *“If I do not send them hoes, they can still use the old ones and start cultivating. If I do not send them the maize, they can use the local type. But if I do not send them the school fees then the children cannot attend school and this is really a problem.”*

Christopher has not been to village since he left in 1997. The high transport costs to the South and the big responsibilities in terms of support made a journey home unaffordable. It was only when his uncle in Lilongwe died during our field stay that he went back home, accompanying the dead body of his uncle. His boss and workmates had contributed some money, which enabled him to pay the fare. On this occasion, the family also decided that Christopher would have

to take care of one of his younger brothers who stayed at the uncle's house. Christopher plans to send him to the Technical College so the boy can get a good job.

As the only economically active person in town, his family has very high expectations of him now, especially as regards the education of his siblings. Yet, he is very worried both for his kin and for his own future. He fears that it will even be more difficult for him to send support in the future. Whereas it is more important than ever to attain a higher education in order to get a higher paid job, the chances are bleak. Being forced to invest a growing part of his resources into growing social responsibilities, investments in his own education, which would in turn, allow him to better support his siblings, appear to be increasingly difficult to realise.

Despite the distance and the lack of visits, urban migrants thus usually remain strongly integrated in their kin support networks. They often have very specific obligations arising from their urban living conditions, such as the provision of school fees that Christopher, due to his regular cash income, is expected to provide. These trans-local kin relations and obligations are not confined to village and town alone, but may also run within town. As we saw in the last chapter, networks in town have increasingly come to encompass kinship relations. This also infringes on support relations to the village: the fact that people now have more kin in town appears to have led to a re-allocation of resources and responsibilities towards kinship relations in town, while putting further strain on trans-local support relations at the same time. The generally deteriorating economic conditions make matters worse. Although the geographic extension of kinship networks within town over the last years has enabled rural and urban migrants to shift and share mutual expectations and obligations, the high death toll due to HIV/AIDS has led to a perforation of social networks. A diminishing number of potential providers is confronted with a rising number of needy and dependents. While bottlenecks and time delays in trans-local support relations are common, it appears that the overall changing social and economic framework is severely endangering established mechanisms of trans-local support, such as the provision of school fees or support during the cultivation period. Urban migrants cannot make it in time any more or worse, as foreseen by Christopher himself, may simply be forced to stop.

7.2.1 The Hunger Crisis³: Reviving Networks by Force

We have seen that general difficulties have loosened social network relations, often reducing support relations to a few network partners. At the same time, trans-local support has shifted into town more and more, focusing on urban-based kin and friends, while relations to the village are confined to 'mere' life-cycle crises. Yet, the severe hunger crisis that Malawians were experiencing in 2002, whose beginnings I was able to follow during my stay in Sector 7 in the second half of 2001, led to a revival of some of these 'old' and apparently 'dead' trans-local network relations.

The hunger was a permanent pre-occupation among the urban migrants. Although they were also expecting food shortages in town, particularly the situation in the villages, which were expected to be hit especially hard, was a permanent source of worry. Many villagers had written letters to their urban kin telling them about their difficulties and reminding them of their rural obligations. Alerted by the letters or news brought by rural visitors, many town people had started to engage in *Ganyu* in order to generate some cash to be sent to the villages. As I have mentioned before, most of them were women who could not expect to get any support from their spouses to sustain their rural kin (see Chapter 5).

At the same time, there were also an unusually large number of rural visitors in town. On the one hand, there were many, especially old people, who were invited by their children for a month or two to stay with them. Many of them had not received any support from their children in years. On the other hand, many came without being invited in the face of the intensifying hunger crisis and the fact that most of the letters that they had sent to their urban kin had remained unanswered. While the high transport costs and the poverty usually provided a secure geographical 'firewall' to ward off unwelcome relatives, in the extreme crisis situation, many borrowed money from co-villagers in order to get the fare together or walked to town 'to ask for support' from their kith and kin in Lilongwe personally. The following case study illustrates how this 'shopping for support' was realised.

Case 7.2 "Mai Ganyemba": 'I have to come here, otherwise I do not get it.' Mrs. Ganyemba is from the Central Region. She is a widow of around 40 and lives in a small village in Dedza District, about a two-hour bus drive from Lilongwe. She lives with two of her own children and two children of her late sister. She had been in town for more than a month when we met her at her younger son's place.

³ For a detailed analysis of the hunger crisis see Devereux (2002) and Anders (2005).

It was not his own place, but the half-finished house of a rich civil servant for whom he looked after the house in exchange for free rent. She had come to town to ask him for money in order to buy fertiliser. But it was clear that he would not be able to provide the support. He told her to wait until he would get the cash from his current work as a builder, but Mai Ganyemba had no hopes any more. She has been provided with food during this whole month, which she considers to be an enormous support. She would not have had all this food in the village. Yet she is disappointed that her son cannot give her money. She hopes that he will at least give her some transport money so that she can go back home. She should already be back in the village and start cultivation.

Mrs. Ganyemba also tried to ask her daughter in Chinsapo, who is better off than her son in Sector 7.⁴ This woman is the daughter of her elder sister. This daughter usually supports her when she comes to the village, bringing money and some clothes. This occurs once a year, sometimes twice. It was the first time that Mai Ganyemba went to see her. She says that she just went there to chat. She did not tell her daughter about her problems, because she does not want to bring confusion in the family. *“Sometimes the husbands may think that you come to ask for support when you just visit somebody”*. Although Mrs. Ganyemba was careful not to admit it, in the end she was happy when her daughter finally gave her the transport money to go back to the village.

It is already the second time that Mrs. Ganyemba has come to town to ask for help. She only comes here when she has really big problems, mostly during rainy season. She is very disappointed about the support she got. For her, it is a long way to go to get support in town. But she adds, *‘I have to come here, otherwise I do not get anything.’*

We heard many stories like Mrs. Ganyemba’s during our field stay. It was mainly people who did not live that far away who could come to town three or four times, or send children, nieces and nephews, to beg for support.

Especially richer people were confronted with a whole crowd of rural relatives flocking at their plots and waiting to be helped. And indeed, in the face of their presence, many urbanites intensified their efforts in trying to raise support. They either tried to raise support with their urban-based network or tried to make some extra money by doing *Ganyu* themselves or finding working opportunities for their rural kin.

⁴ Chinsapo is another township in Lilongwe lying to the north of the city centre.

Yet for many rural relatives, the support remained confined to the support they received during their stay. One could observe that the urban migrants were simply hoping that the villagers might sooner or later realise that they would get nothing from them and disappear again. For some urban migrants, keeping the relatives waiting was, indeed, an evasion strategy for not wanting to provide further support. This was especially the case with the richer people, who already had their poor urban kin clinging to their pockets (see Chapter 5). In his study on civil servants in Lilongwe, Anders (2005) vividly describes how the latter dealt with all too numerous and demanding kin by spreading rumours of pending unemployment or by changing residence and moving to less spacious houses. For many migrants, not being able to provide maize or money filled them with feelings of shame, embarrassment and aggression, for they had to admit that they were not able to support their kin the way they had wanted and were expected to.

“When people come here with the expectations to be helped, I am forced to look for it, even if I do not have it. It means that we will eat less for a while, but I cannot let them down. Once I used to help them a lot. I have already told them that business is low and that I cannot give them the money in case they think about coming to town. Once I used to help them a lot, but now I am failing to provide support.”
(Interview No. 101, Mrs. Mauluka)

7.2.2 Individualism, Poverty and Ambivalences of Support

The hunger that had driven many villagers into town gives an impression of the strong presence of the village in town, also beyond emergency cases. Despite the geographic distance, the two cases show how strongly migrants remain involved in their home affairs and how strongly the village actually controls town, even to the extent that it influences individual decisions concerning the future in town. In this respect, rural-urban relations in Malawi hardly fit into modernist moulds of village solidarity versus urban individualism. This also confirms the findings by Englund (2001), who in his research on urban migrants in Lilongwe shows that urban migrants do not necessarily perceive compliance with kinship obligations and personal well-being as mutually exclusive. On the contrary, only through personal well-being and growth would one be in a position to care for others. This would not only allow for growth as a moral person, but would also allow one to increase one’s social status, which in turn would also increase one’s status in the community. Individual aspirations and collective obligations are thus not necessarily perceived as contradictory. However, this does not mean that there is no tension or ambivalence between the two. In fact, in Sector 7

people talked a lot and complained about a new 'individualism' and 'selfishness'. People were criticised for only looking after their own family and forgetting about friends and neighbours in town, not to mention their rural kin. If they provided support, one would have to pay it back, as it was based on strict reciprocity. People were described as 'isolated' and 'independent' or as having fewer relatives than they would have had before.

It thus seemed that what Ferguson (1999) called 'cosmopolitanism' has finally also taken root in the comparatively 'backward' and poor modernity of Malawi. In contrast to the 'localists', who continue to hold on to their rural relations, he describes the usually richer 'cosmopolitans' as those urban migrants who distance themselves completely from the village and their rural kin. This would not only include the way they maintain their trans-local relations, or the question whether to re-migrate to the village in the future: 'Cosmopolitanism' would also challenge the rural as a way of life and a source of identity that would proliferate a negative form of dependency, creating long term reciprocities and obligations that would hinder both rural and urban kin from prospering (ibid). This cosmopolitan ideology and new individualism is indeed discernible, as migrants try to redefine their position as modern Malawians in town who are at the same time faced with rising expectations on part of their poor relatives. This is, however, far from being clear-cut, but is full of ambivalences for both rich and the poor, as the following case shows.

Case 7.3 "Mr. Chamba": 'I do not like to rely on my relatives.'

Mr. Chamba is from *Ntcheu* District in the Central Region. He came to Lilongwe in 1990 after having finished school to look for a job and started to work with ESCOM, the Malawian electricity company. His life follows the typical civil servant's career in town: In contrast to many migrants who just survive, his regular income allowed him to build a house in Sector 7. Recently he has acquired the neighbouring plot where he plans to build another one. With the SACCO at his company he was able to save some money, which he had invested in poultry business. It is largely his wife who looks after the animals. Mr. Chamba has another small business which his nephew from his home village is taking care of. The boy is selling 'freezers', a kind of iced lolly, at the market after school in exchange for food, shelter and school fees.

Mr. Chamba has a vast trans-local support network, which seems to function very well. He supports his relatives, principally his mother in the home village. He considers it an obligation as her son and more so, as her son who is rich enough to be able to support her in a generous and regular way. He also provides agricultural inputs for the rest

of the family in the village: his sisters, nephews, nieces and uncles. He has even managed to build a house in the village for his mother together with his other migrant brothers, in which they all will have a place to stay on their occasional visits.

At the first glance, he seems to be a successful urban migrant who is even managing to fulfil his trans-local obligations and expectations. Yet upon closer examination, one finds that most of the trans-local support he provides is on a borrowing basis only. Apart from the support to his mother and support for certain contingencies, like sickness or death, his siblings are expected to pay back the support they have asked for, which is mainly money. He says, *"I know that this is not usual in Malawi, but I believe in self-reliance. I do not like to rely on my own relatives. Sometimes when people just rely on relatives, they end up in problems if the relatives die. We Africans are failing to develop our families because we depend on others. I must do with what I am earning. I do not want to rely on relatives even if they are better off. Last week my brother in Blantyre came and saw that I am not able to develop my second plot. So he offered to help me, but I refused, because I believe that – when I die – these relatives will have the power to take my house from my kids because they have helped me."*

He does not have any plans to build a house for his return in his home village. But he is considering going back in the future. At the moment, however, he thinks it is better to put his money in an insurance policy for his children than to build a house in the village. If he died, it should be his wife and children that benefit from what he has earned, not his relatives. He is also training his first-born child to be self-reliant. If he has a problem, he tells his son not to ask him but to find out what he can do by himself. He will train all his kids to be self-sufficient, also his daughters. He wants to educate his kids, because when he dies he does not want them to have problems. He teaches his children to cultivate. During the next cultivation period, he actually plans to send his eldest son to the village to learn about village life.

The only support he gets and accepts from his relatives is when he has family concerns to take care of, such as weddings, sickness or funerals. When there is a funeral, relatives may help him to buy a coffin. But he does not rely on relatives for food or money. *"It is better to sleep without food if you do not have food or to go to friends, because whatever friends will give you, you will have to pay back. With relatives it is different. If you go to your relatives to ask them for money, they will*

always give you and you will not have to pay back. But you will also stop to be self-reliant."

Mr. Chamba appears to fit well into the 'cosmopolitan' mould. His refusal to continue or engage in support relations that may contain future claims, and his strong emphasis on self-reliance, almost have an ideological-religious character and are not solely confined to his urban environment and way of life. He tries to 'educate' both his town-born children and his rural relatives in self-reliance. However, while he invests in life insurance policies in order to guarantee his children a good education in town, he is fulfilling his duties towards his rural relatives, as any good '*localist*' would do. He is supporting his mother and his wider kin and, although he is not willing to build a house in the village on his own, he did so together with his brothers. Despite his strong rejection of this culture of dependence, he is thus deeply anchored in both worlds. And although he seems to despise the village culture, at the same time, he perceives it as an asset that he is trying to pass on to his children by sending them to the village to learn cultivation and the village life, in case they have to return one day.

Showing strong ambivalences towards the village and the rural kin as a support network and the moralities they transmit does not, therefore, preclude the mechanism itself remaining important for the urban migrants. Clearly, Mr. Chamba has the possibility to invest in both worlds, the town and the village, buying himself out of dependencies and reciprocities to a certain extent, while maintaining his presence in the village at the same time. In contrast to many poorer people, he thus seems to be able to afford a certain individualism, retaining strong agency in deciding what support is to be given, to whom, and when. However, much of the individualism with which urban migrants tend to portray their trans-local relations (see also Anders 2005) is far removed from reality. On the contrary, as Anders (2005: 181) shows, they are under strong pressure on the part of rural relatives to comply with their obligations. The refusal to help and give support in family issues, such as deaths, funerals or sickness, would mean that the kin – in this case the rich civil servant – is perceived as "*morally bankrupt*". Moreover, I would suggest that with the economic decline and especially HIV/AIDS, the tensions between compliance in collective arrangements and the maintenance of an individualistic modern lifestyle have substantially increased. As we shall see in the course of the chapter, migrants are increasingly forced to pool scarce social and economic resources, which has increased the importance of the village once more.

Individualist tendencies or strong ambivalences towards rural support are an undercurrent that is also discernible among much poorer people and their networks. Most people with whom we discussed rural-urban relations were actually very critical about this culture of dependency. My findings suggest that the newly acquired political and economic freedom in the course of democratisation, as well as rising social and economic tensions, have allowed this long-concealed issue to surface and have made it more articulate at the same time. As we saw in the introductory chapter, economic and political measures and a strongly rurally-oriented political discourse have for a long time left little room for open criticism or individual strategies on the part of urban migrants to develop independently of their rural kin. Now, people do not only have more political space to articulate their criticisms, their new economic freedom has also made it easier for many migrants to remain in town by engaging in self-employment and by buying and constructing houses, increasingly engaging in a life beyond typical migrant trajectories.

I think, however, that much of this observed individualism is actually related to what I will call a 'forced individualism', as people are simply not able to maintain their wider network relations. People would usually refer to multiparty and democracy as the reasons for the rising individualism that has taken hold of the Malawian people and let them forget their 'culture' and 'tradition' of mutual support. However, beyond this apparent ideological change and cultural decay often lie economic and political measures that have been taking place since the transition to democracy and that were perceived as the major causes for the rising individualism and declining mutual support.

"People are more concerned with well-being of their own families and it is more difficult to support others. People have become more individualistic. The reasons are foremost the prices. They are just rising higher and higher and people think twice if they want to give money away. They believe that if they give it away, they will not have money for themselves in case there is an emergency. In former days, people used to think that if you help your friends you will get it back in the future. With multiparty things are changing. People do no longer think like that. People now do whatever they want. Now, if you get supported you only get support from close relatives." (Interview No. 76, Mr. Mzoka, Retired Civil Servant)

On this occasion, people would often evoke the village as a paradise lost where the solidarity and altruism of the former days still existed. However, Structural Adjustment and HIV/AIDS have also had a severe impact on rural

social relations, as the following account of an old woman from the rural South of Malawi shows.

“People in the village have changed in the way they behave. People think they have to do things that benefit themselves, not for the benefits of others. In the past people did things together. They would discuss problems together. Now people are doing their own things, they are independent and they can do what they want. If you want to tell somebody about your problems, it is useless. People are now independent. They think that they are not depending on others, and each house takes its own decisions; in this house like this, in the other house like that, but you do not decide together. There is also a change regarding the way people live together. In the past families lived together and just gave each other, because you saw what the other needed. Now people live in isolation. They only live with their children and when you lack something and you go there, the relatives may give you, but not always.” (Interview No. 57, Mrs. Pindani, Woman from the village)

Although this portrayal of the village past might be exaggerated and idealised, it nevertheless shows how strongly Structural Adjustment and HIV/AIDS have changed social and economic conditions in the village and how strongly individualism and social isolation are also experienced as major insecurities in the village context (see also Loiske 1995).

Individualism is thus, far from being a largely urban phenomenon, something that encompasses both town and village. As such, it also has strong repercussions on rural-urban relations. Whereas on the one hand people do indeed become more individualistic because of economic growth, the individualism which implies a down-sizing of support relations is also a consequence of economic decline, and is an adaptation strategy in response to the overall social and material resource constraints and insecurities. Cordell et al. (1996) claim that trans-local relations in West Africa are increasingly maintained by rural relatives, who come to town in order to extract some support by force from their urban kin's pocket. We have seen that this was also common practice during the hunger period in Lilongwe. At the same time, people – both rich and poor – remained very ambivalent about their trans-local obligations. A strong commitment on the part of the urban migrants to follow their obligations continues to exist, at least in extreme crisis situations, such as we have seen with the hunger.

7.3 Going Home⁵: The Village as a Place of Return Migration

As we have seen so far, the village retains its continuous presence and remains an important reference point in the urban migrants' lives. Apart from one's moral obligation, the continuation of support relations, the visits, and the return for cultivation, seem to serve one goal only; the eventual return to the village. Although we shall see in the following paragraph that the reality of returning home is much more complex, ambivalent and difficult to realise than portrayed by the migrants, the discourse on return migration is very vivid, for both urban migrants and their rural kin (see also Englund 2001; Anders 2005). Urban migration is therein defined as a necessary but merely transitory absence from the village that only will be completed upon the migrants' return to the rural homestead, which remains the only and 'true' home and origin.

The maintenance of this close link to the rural homestead is also strengthened through marriage. A strong ideology exists among unmarried migrants in town '*of marrying somebody from the village*'. Many men and – though to a lesser extent – women are not married when they migrate to town. Young girls who have come to town to continue their education or to look for employment often hope to marry somebody from town in order to be able to stay, especially if their plans for education and employment did not work out. In fact, many couples we met who came from the same ethnic group, region or village actually met in town, mostly via mutual acquaintances or kin from regional or ethnic associations. At the same time, a veritable marriage market has evolved between the village and town. It is common for male migrants to return home to look for a wife, or for the rural kin to arrange a marriage for their urban kin. The importance of marrying a woman from the village constitutes much more than a mere symbolic act to foster trans-local relations. Marriage is both an integral part and a condition of a return strategy to the village.

"I met my wife during holidays in Mzimba. The parents encourage you to marry somebody from the home village, but it was also me who wanted to have a wife from Mzimba. If I take her to my home village, she is also close to her own home village and can visit her relatives. (...) Marrying a woman from town is difficult, because the household-chores in the village and town are very different and for her it would be very difficult to get used to village life. I can see it with my children who grew up in town. They are used to town life and not to village life. It would have been easy for me to get a wife in town, but I wanted somebody from my home district. I was not sure

⁵ '*kupita kumudzi kukakhala*'.

at this time, if I wanted to stay in town and I am not even sure now.”
(Interview No. 45, Mr. Msopo, employee)

Whereas the above quotation shows a certain ambivalence around an effective return to the village, the ‘return-discourse’ is usually very clear on how it is to take place: usually, the migrant has become rich in town and returns to the village at the end of his working career in order to enjoy the fruits of his working life and live out his role as the long lost son who returns home to care for his parents and rural kin and share his wealth.

This notion of a return migrant hardly ever corresponded to the harsh reality of rural-urban migration. Even in the heyday of labour migration, a return to the village was usually constrained by the seasonal and market-related ups and downs in labour demand in the South of the continent. Following migration trajectories, one can see that most urban and international labour migrants returned home several times during their working lives in response to social and economic constraints. The return to the village as a social security strategy has even been incorporated in the Malawian welfare system. The low pensions and the fact that – being based on a provident fund scheme – they did not provide any long-term security, forced many civil servants to retire to the village or to a rural area closer to town in order to make a living. While some people were simply forced to return, the return to the village was promoted nevertheless: most state and private companies provided – and still do – loans for the construction of houses in rural areas as a form of security for old age.

Although the liberalisation policies in the course of Structural Adjustment allow people to remain in town more easily, the same policies still give the village continued importance as a site for social support. We shall see that the generally deteriorating social and economic conditions both in the village and in town have changed the character of return migration as regards timing and frequency, the type of contingencies related to it, and finally, in terms of its importance as well – which on the whole seems to have increased. While those who are supposed to return after a long working life in town no longer do so, it appears that an increasing number of people are submerged in a rural-urban trans-local economy, moving back and forth more frequently in order to make a living (see also Ferguson 1999; Potts 1995). The widespread social and material resource constraints seem to make rural-urban migration more volatile and compartmentalised. This in turn influences trans-local support strategies, and rural-urban notions of in- and exclusion, identities, and belonging. In the following section, I discuss some aspects of this changing trans-local social security economy, most notably in relation to access to land and social resources, as well as regards the reversing of the notion of return migration in old age.

7.3.1 Access to Land: The Village as a Site of Means of Production

Even if people migrate to town, land remains crucial. We have seen that most trans-local support evolves around cultivation, the latter being a central aspect of rural-urban relations. Cultivating thereby always encompasses two aspects. First, participation in the productive activity of the village, both personally and over distance, is an important aspect of survival, especially for the villagers, and provides an important insurance mechanism in hunger periods. Second, cultivation has a strong symbolic dimension. For the absent migrants, it remains the central mechanism for maintaining and re-assessing one's membership and position in the lineage and the village, and by the same token, one's entitlements and access to land, labour and care: *"You support them in order to make sure that despite all those years in town you are still one of them. Otherwise they may say, we do not know you anymore!"* (Interview No. 107, Mr. Jameson).

However, most of these strategies are not effective any longer. The extreme land scarcity in Malawi due to demographic pressure and decreasing land fertility has had a severe impact on access to land. More people are being pushed off their land and are forced to migrate into town and as well, the number of landless migrants moving between the rural areas of Malawi in search for land, mainly from the South towards the Central Region, has increased dramatically over the years.

Land scarcity has also challenged mechanisms of gaining and maintaining access to land: one major change is rising commercialisation. Although commercial relations are generally confined to outsiders, they affect inner-village relations. Traditionally, land in the village is divided among different lineages. It is the head of the lineage that assigns land to each of its members. If extra land is needed because the lineage is growing, the village headman may assign additional land from the remaining so called 'virgin' or 'reserve land'. This land is also used to open up land to strangers to the village who want to settle there. The decision is at the discretion of the village headman, who also keeps an oral record of the land demarcations. Together with the Group Village Headman and the leader of the lineage, the village headman is also addressed in land conflicts.

Land scarcity and commercialisation have rendered most of these mechanisms obsolete. Outsiders may still be assigned a place to put their hut, but they usually have to lease land from villagers. The resulting land scarcity has led to an upsurge of disputes over one lineage trying to encroach on another lineage's land. As well, 'lease-arrangements' among the lineages have been made more insecure: in many regions in Malawi, lineages lease land, or usufruct rights on the land, among themselves. In return for a share of the harvest, villagers can use the land for a season or two, depending on the agreement made. With

growing commercialisation and land scarcity, these usually oral arrangements are often being terminated before the time agreed, e.g. once landowners have found a better paying tenant. At the same time, many of these tenants are not villagers anymore, but migrant 'strangers'. Thus, increasing competition over land not only jeopardises land tenures among the old village lineages because of a growing commercialisation from outside, it also renders access to land within the village increasingly a question of money.

HIV/AIDS hardly relieves land pressure. Land may lie idle because its owners have died, but the missing labour force makes it hard for people to till it. This affects food production, which remains insufficient despite the access to land. In addition, the fact that people are not able to till their land also makes it difficult to establish or maintain a claim on land. This is especially difficult for orphaned children, whose numbers have increased enormously due to HIV/AIDS. Unless they still have grandparents in the village, or can rely on the village headman to have kept an oral history of the land demarcations, these children, especially if they were born in town, have hardly any chance of gaining access to their deceased parents' land.

Maintaining access to land has also become more difficult for the urban migrants. Asking urban migrants in 1998 about their land back home, most did not doubt at all that they would be able to get it back, no matter how long they had been in town and no matter how much they had invested in their rural relations. In 2001, the same question was answered with much more caution. The changing situation as regards land has also had a profound impact on notions and practices to maintain access to land despite one's absence. I shall offer some explanations for why this is taking place and explain how people cope with the new situation.

Whereas showing interest in one's land had always been an unwritten rule in rural-urban relations, usually via sending remittances to the rural areas (Interview No. 159), most urban migrants did not cultivate their land while away. They usually entrusted their land to one of the kin to take care of in their absence, either cultivating it or defending the absent migrant's claim if this were questioned within the lineage or otherwise. In fact, it appears that most urban migrants did not cultivate in the village at all, and those who did, were the exception rather than the rule. Nevertheless, going back to the rural areas and gaining access to land was not really a problem. Land was abundant and most disputes were simply solved by encroaching on new lands, as the following quotation from the still scarcely inhabited Northern Region shows.

"It is true that some people are not happy if you come back, because if someone joins them, something has to change. The relatives have used the land among themselves and when someone comes

back they have to change. In some families this might cause a lot of troubles. (...) But people should know that this land belongs to your family, even if you are in town. They can also use this land, but when you come back, even after 20 years, they have to give it back to you, because they know that it is your land. But even if you come back and you find that somebody is using the land, you can let him continuing using it and you can open up a new land. In Mzimba⁶ there are a lot of small villages close to each other and people know which land belongs to which family. If you come back after a long time, it can happen that your family says that they do not know you any more and you can start quarrelling. Then you usually go to the chief, since he knows the history of the land of each family, the demarcations and how much land belongs to each family. And if the relatives are still not willing to give you your land, the chief can still decide to open up new land for you. In my home village land scarcity is not a problem and therefore it cannot happen that they chase you away." (Interview No. 45, Mr. Msimba)

The mechanisms described in the quotation are far removed from most of the rural reality in today's Malawi. Leaving one's land lying idle for too long during one's absence has become a risky endeavour. Most relatives who have cultivated a migrants' land for years are reluctant to give it back to their returning kin. The rural kin not only needs more land because of a decrease in land fertility or the growth of the family, many villagers are also engaged in commercial farming and are reluctant to give the land back to their relatives, as this would mean the loss of an important source of income.

Against this background, the maintenance of access to land over distance has become a central issue for urban migrants. This has become even more the case, as social and economic difficulties have rendered the village and village land important again as a potential social safety net. The hunger crisis in 2001 and the overall chronic food shortage seemed to have acted as an additional 'eye-opener'. The attempts by many migrants, who had not cultivated in years, to recommence cultivating their land in the village as a complementary food security strategy had made the actual severity of the situation in the village overt. Many realised only then how precarious their chances of ever being able to return actually were. This was widely discussed, especially among women. For fear of having to return home if their spouses died, many had intensified their efforts to keep up the contact to their rural relatives. This also included attempts to cultivate their land in the village. As it turned out, this did not prove to be that easy, as the following case shows.

⁶ A province in the Northern Region.

Case 7.4 “Mrs. Chamba”: ‘It is a problem if you are not cultivating’

Mai Chamba comes from a village in the Central Region. She came to town upon the death of her parents in 1991 in order to stay with a sister of her mother. There she also met her husband who is an employee at ESCOM. Since 1995, they have lived in Sector 7. They have four children. She is not employed, but takes care of her husband’s poultry business, and from time to time also sells vegetables from her kitchen garden in the backyard of their plot.

Mai Chamba has very close contacts to her village, and goes back and forth on a regular basis. In contrast to many other women, she gets support from her husband in order to support her own kin. She mainly supports her sisters, who are both widowed, and their children. She regularly sends them money for agricultural inputs, school fees for the children and for other contingencies that may arise. Mai Chamba considers it her duty to help them. *“It is expected from me to support them, because they are my real relatives. And if I ever have to go back to the village, it is those people who will welcome me.”*

Yet, this did not prevent Mrs. Chamba from becoming involved in a major conflict over land with her rural kin. She had inherited some land upon the death of her parents together with her brothers and sisters. But since all of her brothers and sisters are scattered all over Malawian towns, they left the land lying idle for many years. Until last year, this did not cause any problems. Then she got the news that her in-law, the wife of her deceased brother, had started to cultivate a part of Mrs. Chamba’s land. She immediately went to the village and filed a complaint against her in-law with the village headman. However, the latter ruled against her, arguing that the in-law may take the land. The fact that she was cultivating it was proof enough that she needed the otherwise unused land. Mrs. Chamba was furious, also because she suspected that the in-law had bribed the TA in order to win her right to cultivate. However, the case did not stop there. For fear that Mrs. Chamba would challenge the decision of the Chief, the in-law decided to call for the *Inkose Gomani* (the highest authority among the *Ngoni*) to confirm the verdict. But, contrary to expectations of the in-law and Mrs. Chamba, the *Inkose* overruled the decision of the village headman, telling them to share the land. Contrary to the Chief’s argumentation that set the actual use against inherited rights, the *Inkose* decided in a more Salomonic way. He argued that the land did indeed belong to Mrs. Chamba, but that she had to share it with her in-law. The children of the in-law, being the

sons and daughters of her brother, belonged to her lineage and thus, had a right to the land.

After this incident, Mrs. Chamba started to cultivate immediately in order to prevent further encroachments in the future. Hearing her story, her brothers in town have also started cultivation now for the first time since their departure. As she cannot afford to go back to cultivate herself, Mrs. Chamba only cultivates cassava. It does not require too much work and she can leave it to her sister.⁷

However, Mai Chamba can foresee that she will not be able to keep up the cultivation of her land, because it is simply too expensive and too complicated. She plans to entrust her land to a trustworthy kin – “one from within my compound” – as she says. She knows that there is no guarantee that she will get it back when she needs it. In her village, land encroachments both by other lineages and within single lineages are increasing. *“There is a danger that if you do not cultivate, people may simply take your land. This would not have happened before. But now that there are so many people in search for land. And there are many who are dying and there is nobody to cultivate the land. And then it is just taken by others. But I know the boundaries of my land. I grew up in Blantyre, but during the holidays my mother always brought me to the village and we cultivated. It was also then that she taught me the boundaries of our land. If I want I will get it back.”*

Land thus continues to be an important resource all along the migrants’ itinerary. In fact, as Potts argues (1997), access to land is a key variable in determining the extent to which urban-rural migration can operate as a successful coping strategy. Yet access to land has profoundly changed, rendering the return to the village an increasingly difficult endeavour. Knowing one’s boundaries and ‘being one of them’ does not suffice any more; it has been replaced by access criteria based on daily use and immediate need, as in the case of Mai Chamba. But even if the kin to whom one has entrusted the land do not encroach upon it, in many cases, it no longer is a sufficient guarantee to maintain access to land. In the meantime, it has become common practice in many areas in Malawi for the village headmen to take away the land if it is not cultivated. While most of these cases go unnoticed for the urban migrants, or they may just hear it by coincidence as in the case of Mai Chamba, some migrants in Sector 7 were given notice. Especially with the upcoming hunger crisis, the village headmen had

⁷ Being a root, cassava does not necessarily need to be harvested, but can remain in the ground for a long time. As such, it is indeed an important and convenient alternative to maize, as it does not require much work and attention.

notified some of our respondents via mail, setting a deadline for the urban migrants to take up cultivation. Otherwise, their land was to be re-allocated to co-villagers.

Whereas land scarcity in Sub-Saharan Africa is a widely discussed issue,⁸ Mai Chamba's case shows how important and at the same time precarious the situation of labour is in most village economies. Many villagers whom we interviewed in town, and who were trustees of the land of their absent sons' and daughters' brothers and sisters, complained that the biggest problem for them was the lack of sufficient labour to work the fields of the absent migrants. While this was partially related to their old age, it was mainly the high HIV/AIDS death toll that rendered the labour force scarce. Some were in the position to hire additional labour with remittances sent back home from their urban kin. Such labour is usually provided by those villagers who do not have enough land and earn some additional income by doing some *Ganyu* during the cultivation period for absent landlords or co-villagers. However, most rural kin simply did not have the capacity to cultivate additional land. The alternative, to lease it to their co-villagers or strangers in order to keep the land cultivated, was tricky. Especially those tenants who were 'village strangers', who leased the land against cash, had started to make claims of individual ownership on the land, arguing that they had bought it. Accounts of rural visitors in town were full of stories about 'privatisation attempts' of land they had leased out.

Whereas HIV/AIDS severely weakens the labour force, as people are too sick and too few to be able to feed themselves,⁹ Mrs. Chamba's story shows that HIV/AIDS may also lead to the complete annihilation of land rights. The fact that rural relatives are not in the position to cultivate their land, or worse, that there is nobody left in the village to take care of it any more means, for most urban migrants, that they lose any claim on their land.

The story shows that the cultivation of land today is the only effective place-making strategy over long distance. The probability of gaining access to land has become relatively independent of any other support that one may have provided during one's absence, yet one's expectations as an absent migrant are linked to this support nevertheless. The return to the village as the classical exit option and alternative to town life, a notion that underlies the very concept of the trans-local

⁸ See for example, Devereux (2002); Moore & Vaughan (1994); Toulmin & Quan (2000).

⁹ Collective arrangements for sharing work or labour on village level do not seem to exist. I believe that – similar to land – monetisation and the overall scarcity of labour due to AIDS and out-migration may be some of the reasons for this, but I do not have sufficient information to confirm this suggestion. Labour arrangements in case of sickness were only mentioned within the framework of religious associations.

support economy, is therefore no longer a viable option for most migrants. Potts (1995) also confirms this, observing for several other Sub-Saharan countries that it is especially the commercialisation of land that renders re-migration to the village impossible. While most migrants are no longer in a position to return, they try instead to look for land somewhere else in rural areas (see Potts 1995; Ferguson 1999). People are becoming village strangers to their own village, and are closing ranks with so many other migrants searching for land. Many urban migrants have migrated to other rural areas to look for a piece of land and a place to stay. Anders (2005) mentions that the migration to another village aside from the home village is also a strategy to fend off requests for support from villagers and relatives back home. This and the fact that many return migrants wish to continue to live with certain urban amenities might also be the reason why most of these places are close to town. Many migrants have started to cultivate in these villages, which over the years have become some kind of 'substitute home villages', even providing equivalent social relations. Over the years, urban migrants have established close links to the people in these places, also to the extent of considering taking up residence there. They may even continue returning to their original homes and cultivating there, especially if they still have relatives in the village. It seems, however, that for themselves it will be these new villages to which they will 'return' if they decide to leave town at all.

7.3.2 Going Back Reconsidered I: Aids, Unemployment and Widowhood

I have already mentioned that return migration to the village is hardly ever an event that takes place once in life at the end of a working career, as imagined in the classical modernist migrant's trajectory. Loss of employment, sickness or divorce have again and again led migrants back to their villages for a few weeks, months or even years. In addition, it is common practice for urban migrants to send their children to the village for a while in order to be taken care of by their grandparents or as a sanctioning mechanism, as in case of family disputes or teenage pregnancies.

The extensive social and economic insecurities have re-shuffled the fragile equilibrium of mutual dependencies in trans-local network relations. This has also had an impact on migration patterns. The observation of an old woman from the Central Region visiting her daughter in Lilongwe that "(...) *a lot of people from the village nowadays migrate to town, but a lot of them also come back again*" (Interview No. 48) encapsulates the situation well. More people are leaving the villages because of land pressure and lack of employment opportunities in the countryside. At the same time, they are faced with a lack of employment opportunities in town. This concerns both the 'formal economy' and the 'informal

economy', which together cannot absorb the urban labour force any longer. In this situation, many migrants return to the rural areas again. Those who have enough land in the rural areas may return permanently, trying to engage in commercial agriculture. This especially concerns educated returnees, who as an alternative to a career as a civil servant – which is barely possible any more – choose a career as a farmer. Others simply return for a limited period leaving again for town after a while. In this respect, it seems that circular migration patterns have intensified, cutting stays in town short in order to return to the village (see also de Haan 1999; Potts 1995). Yet, this only holds for a certain strata of urban migrants, i.e. those who can also 'afford' it, because they have sufficient land and social resources to cut urban stays short. For most urban migrants, the opposite is the case. They are increasingly being forced to abandon their trans-local strategies, as they are simply too poor to go back, and have got stuck in town, where the broader economic opportunities still make it easier to make a living.

With HIV/AIDS, rural re-migration for care labour has gained increasing importance. Re-migration by sick urban migrants in order to be taken care of by their rural kin and to die in the village is very common nowadays.¹⁰ The rising rate of widowhood is yet another consequence of HIV/AIDS that also has an impact on rural re-migration, and as we shall see, many women decide to go back to their home village. While this return is related to major difficulties in terms of access to land, Mrs. Klaver's story also makes clear the importance of the 'social' when it comes to returning home. This is especially the case when one returns as an impoverished migrant with no resources to re-establish one's full village membership.

Case 7.5 "Mrs. Klaver": 'People did not welcome me' I met Mrs. Klaver for the first time in 1998. By then she was a widow and was living with five of her seven children in a house that she had built with the assistance of her brother, a rich businessman living in Kawale, another area of Lilongwe. Her husband, a civil servant, had bought another plot before his death, on which Mrs. Klaver planned to build a house in order to rent it out in the future.

At that time, her major sources of support were this brother in Kawale and one in Dedza, a commercial farmer, who supported her with maize. He also gave her money in order to lease some land in a nearby village where she cultivated. She also got support from

¹⁰ This is often related to very practical considerations concerning what have become unaffordable transport costs to the village for people who die in town. If people do not want to be buried in town and they are still in the position to go home, they usually travel home before they die. At the same time, this also reduces the burial costs for the urban kin.

two daughters and their husbands. They paid the school fees for two of her children and sometimes also gave them transport money or clothes.

Mrs. Klaver did not work. While her husband had been alive Mrs. Klaver has been engaged in occasional small-scale business, selling doughnuts or *Chitenjes*. But after the death of her husband it was difficult to find the resources to continue her small-scale business. Occasionally she engaged in *Ganyu*, carrying water for the builders. But due to her age, she tired quickly of the heavy work and could not bear the long hours. She complained that it was very difficult to get support together. Although both daughters were better off than her, the support was little and irregular, because both of them depended on their husbands. The biggest support was her uncle in the village, who guaranteed that they had at least enough food. But Mrs. Klaver was also worried that being severely ill, he would die soon. All her hopes were on her son in secondary school, whom she hoped would soon be able to find a good job in order to sustain her and his siblings.

When I came back to Sector 7 in 2001, Mrs. Klaver was gone. Her second-born son Joe told us that she had been forced to go back to the village. He had meanwhile moved to a much smaller house made of unburned bricks that he had managed to build with the help of some friends at the adjacent plot that his father had bought. He had rented out the bigger and much more beautiful house, which was also fully furnished. He told us that the death of both of her uncles in the village and in Kawale, and the divorce of one of her daughters, had eventually forced Mrs. Klaver to go back. The divorce of the daughter did not only mean the loss of vital support: Mrs. Klaver had had to take Joe out of school, as it was the in-law who used to pay his school fees. Moreover, the daughter and her children came to live with the family again, imposing an additional burden in an already tight situation. Joe started to engage in small-scale business selling fish and rice, but it was not enough to feed the whole family. When the uncle in Kawale finally died in 2000, Mrs Klaver decided to go back to the village with four of her children.

Land was not a problem for her. Although the Chief in the beginning had not wanted to give Mrs. Klaver her land, arguing that she had already been gone too long, she eventually got her land back with the assistance of her stepmother. As the lineage elder, she still

knew the boundaries of the lineage land and helped Mrs. Klaver to get her share back.

Nevertheless, the return has not been easy. People thought that she would come back as a rich woman. They expected that she would be able to build a house in the village and bring gifts to the rural kin in order to seal and renew the village bonds after such a long time. These expectations were not just pure invention, but based on very vivid experiences and expectations: When Mr. Klaver was alive, he used to send a lot of remittances to his wife's kin and also financed the education of some of his siblings. When they realised that her return was not as a rich lady but as a result of poverty, the situation changed. The children of Mrs. Klaver's sister built her a house upon her arrival in the village. They did this for traditional reasons, because she is the eldest mother of the lineage, but they do not support her in any other respects, such as cultivation.

Meanwhile, the stepmother has died and Mrs. Klaver has inherited her land. Although she now has more land than expected, it is difficult for her to cultivate the whole patch. She is old and, apart from her children who are still too young, there is nobody to help her. Her eldest daughter, who could be of help, is sick and needs help herself. In the absence of any help from her wider kin, Mrs. Klaver can only cultivate a small part of her land. This is also the reason why she has had food problems this year, as the harvest was really bad.

Mrs. Klaver also wanted her three eldest sons to return to the village with her, but they refused to go back. Being born in town, and having grown up there, they refused to go to the villages, where *"life is simply too hard."*

Joe Klaver is supposed to send part of the monthly rent to his mother to provide her with cash. Most of the time, however, the money gets 'stuck' in town. Apart from his wife and a small child, he also has to take care of his two brothers. Due to his sickness – he obviously suffers from HIV/AIDS – he is also not able to engage fully in his small-scale business. Mrs. Klaver has another daughter, who is married in Balaka, and she also supports her mother sometimes. But it is hard for her, because she depends on her husband.

Mrs. Klaver had thus been very lucky, being able to get her land back despite many years of absence. It shows how closely property is bound to social relations, and that the one does not go without the other. Her story shows that going back needs 'life-long' preparation, and how important it is to be on good

terms with one's rural kin if one wants to be welcomed after 30 years of absence, which also includes the fulfilment of rural support obligations.

Her story also shows that having gained access to a patch of land does not necessarily provide the social and economic security aspired to when migrants decide to return. Her poverty, and the fact that she was not able to provide the gifts the community expected and that for years had flown so generously, seem to have cut her off from a broader kin solidarity, such as the support in cultivation, which Mrs. Klaver, being an elder woman with small children, had expected. The high death toll due to HIV/AIDS seems to make matters worse.

Thus, the problem of a lack of land is increasingly compounded by a lack of kin or rather, of labour force. Whereas in Mrs. Klaver's case it is the lack of productive labour that does not permit her to be food secure, especially old villagers who had to take care of their urban-born grandchildren would bemoan the scarcity of care labour.

In addition, the years in town have changed lifestyles and decision-making patterns. The re-integration into the tight village structure and kinship hierarchy after years in town is not easy, especially as most of the returnees come back in a weak social and economic position. The Chairman of the Nkhata Bay Burial Association, who has experienced the fate of so many widows and the decision they have to make between remaining in town or going back to the village, said in this context:

“Land is usually not a problem in the Northern Region if women decide to go back. The critical question is if there is somebody who can take care of them and their children in the home village. If this is not the case, they rather stay in town. Another problem of going back and a reason why a lot of widows stay in town is the difficulty to handle going back home and give back the responsibility you had in town to your family and to your relatives in the village. If the women have stayed in town for a very long time, it is difficult to stay in the village, because you are dependent now. (...) If they have a living, women usually stay here. They are staying in town because here they are self-reliant, while in the village they would depend on others. They are used to town life and cannot simply go back. If they go back there are usually a lot of conflicts resulting out of this situation of dependency.” (Interview No. 146, Mr. Bwalo, Chairman Nkhata Bay Charity Fund)

In this context, Peil (1997: 150) points out that widows in their middle and old age are more likely to prefer to remain in town than men. Their children can easily support them there and they may also continue to fulfil their economic

and social role by trading or looking after the grandchildren. Women do usually not see the move to their husband's home or the dependence on their own extended family as a worthwhile alternative. Mrs. Klaver's return shows that this is indeed the case. As many other women, she tried to remain in town, trying to make ends meet with small-scale business activities and relying on her urban-based kin network. However, if the family network in town breaks down as well, as providers get divorced or, as is increasingly often the case, die, the return to the village often seems to remain the only alternative.

7.3.3 Going Back Reconsidered II: Rural Re-migration after Retirement

While a growing number of people are forced to go back to the village because of sickness, unemployment or death, those who are 'supposed' to return to the village at the end of their working life, i.e. the civil servants or private employees, increasingly remain in town. Economic and political liberalisation in the course of the democratisation process has made it easier for many of them to find an economic outcome after retirement, especially in the 'informal' and private economic sectors. Many retired civil servants have started a business or continue working in the private economy, for example, many retired schoolteachers continue working in the flourishing private school sector. Others have found work in private NGOs or church organisations.

The possibility of remaining in town has also profoundly challenged migrants' future plans, especially the plans of those for whom the return home was considered a *sine qua non*. The liberalisation and commercialisation of the urban housing market, plus the many land invasions, have made it easier for many people, even the poorer ones, to acquire land and housing in town. Unless people are rich enough to build both a house in town and in the village as a source of security in their old age, people are shifting their place-making strategies into town. Acquiring a plot or two in order to build a house not only provides important material security, which can be sold in times of distress or rented out; as the village as a place of return migration is falling apart due to a lack of material and social resources, the house in town is increasingly considered a place of belonging and home, also providing important psychological security.

This does not mean that the idea of going back has been abandoned completely. Rather, the wider economic opportunities in town and the possibility of remaining in town without having to fear any political restrictions, allows for the postponement of a rural return. Pension schemes in Malawi allow retirement at a very young age. Most civil servants actually retire after 20 years of service. Going back to the village thus usually had little to do with old age or ceasing being economically active. In fact, most pensioners who returned took up farming,

often on a commercial large-scale, or otherwise started a business. This is still the case. However, the fact that now one may stay in town and exploit urban economic options instead of returning to the poor village makes more pensioners stay in town. Most of them simply perceive this as a postponement of their final return to the village, when they are 'really' old, meaning that they are no longer able to work and continue living the expensive town life. Moreover, many migrants argue that if they stayed in town, it would be more difficult and expensive for their children to maintain them, as life in the village is much cheaper, and also quite simply because "*old people just do not belong to town*" (Interview 36, Mrs. Lipete). However, it appears that the stay in town is more than a simple postponement of rural re-migration. Against the background of changing economic and demographic conditions and constellations due to both urbanisation and social processes in general, the stay in town also should be perceived as an important strategy of 'keeping options open'.

Case 7.6 "Mr. Kamanga": 'I have not yet decided if I want to go back' Mr. Kamanga comes from Nchizi, which is one of the southern districts. He came to Lilongwe in 1973 when his office was moved from Zomba to Lilongwe in the course of the establishment of Lilongwe as the new capital.¹¹ As a civil servant he was assigned a government house in Area 18, where he lived with his family until his retirement in June 1995. He had planned to return back home, but as so many urban migrants, he did not really want to go back to the village. He wanted to find a house in Nchizi Boma, the central trading centre of the region, where one has access to the supermarkets, post offices, the public transport system and where his children could continue schooling.

He had already asked people from his district who had returned earlier to look for a place for him. But he did not really find a suitable place. This was also when he decided to look for a plot in town, because he had to leave the house the government had rented for him after retirement. With the land invasion-taking place in Sector 7, he was able to acquire a plot and immediately started to build a house, using the money that he had received as his severance pay. Since then, he has stayed there with his wife and his five children.

He is still looking for a place in Nchizi; now more than ever, he says, as his daughters are grown up and he seriously has to think of going back. While telling us about his plans to go back, Mr. Kamanga told us that he and his wife had recently bought another plot in Area

¹¹ Englund (2002) mentions that the re-location of the administration was only completed in 1978.

49, a quickly expanding neighbouring area of Sector 7. The house they are building will belong to one of their daughters who will most probably remain in town. They are all in secondary school and Mr. Kamanga hopes that one of them may go to university one day. But until his daughters are old enough, he plans to rent the house out in order to have an extra-income. He is thinking about using the money for building another house in the home district, to which he would then retire with his wife. He will not build this house in the village, but in the trading centre of Nchizi Boma. He does not want to live in the village, but only wants to go to the village for cultivation. As he used to cultivate during almost the whole period that he stayed in town, it would be easy for him to gain access to land. He used to cultivate the land in his mother's village, but stopped a few years ago. It was too costly to bring the harvest to town and the relatives who he had paid to cultivate his land were too busy to cultivate his land as well. This is why he left the land to his mother's nieces and nephews, who are now cultivating it. If he decides to go back, he will cultivate in his father's home village, because there is more land.

But Mr. Kamanga is still not sure if he wants to go back. In the beginning it was very hard to for him and his family to survive in town on the pension money. But since 1997, he has been cultivating a piece of land in a village close to town, which makes them food secure. He also dreams of buying a small computer and starting up a typing business. At the moment, Mr. Kamanga has not yet decided what to do. But if the business works out in town, he says, he would prefer to stay in town.

Despite his relatively secure urban existence, Mr. Kamanga has not yet abandoned the idea of returning home, and continues to search for a piece of land. With the same enthusiasm he plans for his future in town, having bought an additional plot and trying to realise his business ideas. Rather than exchanging one type of old age security for another, keeping a wider range of options open for people to fall back on thus seems to represent an important strategy. This is, however, largely confined to those who have the social and economic resources to be taken care of. Apart from having laid down a decent economic basis for himself, Mr. Kamanga also has a reliable social and family network he can fall back on, as his children will most probably not return to the rural areas. In fact, it seems that the demographic changes that have occurred due to urbanisation are also modifying and 'localising' trans-local support mechanisms. The usual arrangement included that old aged parents would re-migrate to the village in order to be taken care of by one of their rural-based relatives or children, while

the children, nieces or nephews who remained in town would support them financially.

While remaining crucial for old age security, the urbanised second generation hardly wants to return to the village. In fact, many children expressed the hope that their old parents would not leave town, or otherwise even migrate or re-migrate back from the village to town in order to stay with them. This is on the one hand related to the rising financial difficulties in overcoming distances, especially for those who come from far away. On the other hand, it is a response to the increasing scarcity of care labour due to HIV/AIDS in the villages, which increases dependency on urban kin. Many of the prospective rural caretakers have died. Moreover, many returnees – instead of being taken care of themselves – are faced by a number of grandchildren whom their children have left behind. It is they who are assuming the responsibility of taking care of these children.

Overall, indeed, my data suggests a tendency towards a broadening stream of old age migration into town. In contrast to 1998, where those over 50 and above were only a few, in 2001, their number had increased significantly. These old people either came from the village or other areas in town. They followed their children in order to stay with them, or were called in to take care of their orphaned urban-based grandchildren. Although I do not have exact data, many old visitors from the villages confirmed our observation that out-migration of the elderly from the village had been rising. Some of these rural migrants only came to town on a temporary basis, returning again after a few months in order to start cultivation. But we were told that a number of old villagers had left the village permanently. They explicitly took their leave, entrusting their land to the remaining kin or the village headman, as any common migrant with the intention of staying away for longer would do.

7.4 Re-defining Trans-local Support

The generally deteriorating situation has immobilised many people, especially the poorer ones, cutting them off from their trans-local networks and strategies, including a return to the village. At the same time, they are struggling hard to be able to make a living in town. Nevertheless, we have seen that a return home to the village or the keeping up of intense trans-local relations also remains highly ambivalent for those who can afford it. While people are increasingly able to live in one locality, which is town, the ambivalences related to a return are also related to changes in trans-local network relations and strategies that have developed over time. The scarcity of material and social resources in the trans-local networks has had a profound impact on mechanisms and strategies and access to them. While some have simply dissolved, others, such as witchcraft

and the division of property, have been assigned a new inverse meaning. As we shall see, strategies and mechanisms of controlling or gaining access to social support are increasingly turning into mechanisms of misuse and theft.

7.4.1 Witchcraft

One of these aspects is witchcraft or '*mmfiti*', which has been mentioned already at different points in this book as providing an important organising principle of support relations, especially those over distance. While witchcraft had always been an important aspect and organising principle of social relations in Malawian society, the policies of economic liberalisation over the last two decades have led to an upsurge in witchcraft practices. This intensification of witchcraft, which has also been observed in many other developing countries, has been widely interpreted within the anthropological discussion as an old/new mechanism to cope with modern change and growing uncertainties (see for example Comaroff & Comaroff 1993; Ciakawy & Gschiere 1998; Rutherford 1999; Stevens 1997). Especially the consequences of Structural Adjustment and HIV/AIDS are cited as the major causes, having accelerated social change and contributed to rising uncertainties and, by the same token, witchcraft. In its role as a catalyst of social change, witchcraft always assumes a double function. While it contains and controls social change brought about by modernity, it also serves in accessing new opportunities arising out of the very same modernity, such as new investment opportunities brought about by economic liberalisation or new positions of power in the democratisation processes occurring all over Africa.

Serving as a powerful means of in- and exclusion, witchcraft also assumes an important identity aspect that defines family, the village community or the urban neighbourhood (Ciakawy & Gschiere 1998). In this respect, witchcraft extends far beyond the traditional rural context with which it has long been identified in both geographic and politico-economic terms, to encompass urban, national and even intercontinental network relations, as well as the economic, social, political or legal spaces and relations in which they are anchored (*ibid.*).

The importance of witchcraft as an organising and sanctioning principle has also become apparent in the trans-local relations among the migrants in Sector 7. On the one hand, this was related to urban migration itself. In 2001, incidences and accusations of witchcraft were mentioned more frequently as a reason for people to migrate to town and within town than in 1998. On the other hand, witchcraft has also gained prominence within trans-local relations: although people had fled the village because of witchcraft accusations, this did not mean that witchcraft had lost its power. Being able to transgress local, national and even continental boundaries easily, it also had the power to get a hold

on the migrants' lives and possessions in town, against which precautions had to be taken.

These precautions were often of a very prosaic nature, i.e. providing support and satisfying trans-local support obligations. Witchcraft accusations and incidences came mainly into play when there were disputes over land in the village or when trans-local support was lacking. The function of witchcraft in controlling access to support is also discernible in the special power it is attributed in kinship relations. While distance may diminish the immediate threat of witchcraft to a certain extent, this is not the case in close kinship relations, in which witchcraft is said to work best, no matter if it is in close proximity or over a long distance.

Witchcraft is mostly and vigorously discussed in the context of trans-local relations when it comes to a return back home. The idyllic picture of the village that normally used to be portrayed by the migrants suddenly disappeared, giving way to a picture of the village as even more individualistic, greedy and violent than town life. Witchcraft thereby played an important role. When talking about a possible return back home, the most important preoccupation was the fear of becoming the victim of witchcraft or witchcraft accusations, which – as regards material and social consequences – usually had similar effects, as the following quotations by villagers, returnees and those who think about going back show:

“It was difficult for my son to go back to the village, because he and his family are used to town life. But it is our culture. When we have finished working, we go back to the village. (...) When he came, he brought 11 bags of maize for his family and me so that he did not need to rely on me for food. The people in village welcomed him and they built a house for him. Now he started cultivating maize for his own family. People in the village fear him, because he was a policeman. Otherwise they just chat with you, but with him they do not say anything bad. My son continued drinking tea in the village. People do not say anything when he and his family is around, but when they gossip, they say, ‘Look at those *azungu*¹² people, they drink tea!’ But people do not bewitch automatically everybody from town. They just bewitch those who show-off. My son does not want to show that he is a policeman. He is very humble. And although he drinks tea, he tries to live like the villagers.” (Interview No. 43, Mrs. Chalira, Woman from the village)

¹² Mzungu (pl. *azungu*) is the ChiChewa word for white man/European.

“People fear to go back home because of *mmfiti*.¹³ People in town are not jealous, if you are prospering. In the village this is different, because if you eat different food, such as chicken every day, they may bewitch you. People find a place somewhere else outside the village to stay, maybe in the next trading centre. This is for those who have made money. The others who remained poor can go back anyway or they wait until they get poor, i.e. when they have finished all their money in town (laughs).” (Interview No. 28, Mr. Patson, Young migrant from the North)

“In Malawi, there is a strong fear to show your wealth and do things that may tell that you are rich, because people fear *ufiti*. For this reason, we have put our television in the bedroom. We fear that other people might get jealous. If you do not go to your neighbours and ask for help, people think that you hiding your wealth and that you are keeping things for yourself. But people are brought up differently. Some are used to ask for help and others not. They just stay and wait until better times are coming. When we came to Malawi, we had a lot of property. But we sold it because we wanted to be just like the others. Malawians take until you do not have anything any more. They are only happy if you are as poor as them. (...) There is a lot of *mmfiti* in Malawi. That is why we did not go to the village. Friends in Zimbabwe warned us that if we went back to the village we would die. If you stay with relatives and you do not share your wealth, it is difficult to stay with them. They will be jealous.” (Interview No. 16, Mr. and Mrs. Mseu, Transnational migrants who returned from Zimbabwe after the transition to democracy in 1994)

The statements clearly bring out both dimensions of witchcraft as described above. First, witchcraft is a powerful mechanism of social control and re-integration of those that have been absent for so many years. Aiming at balancing the social void and economic differences that had been created during their years of absence, the returnees try to minimise social tensions and re-establish themselves within the village order. This concerns the material aspect, as clearly visible in the first quotation in which the son brought back not only food for his own family, but for the wider kin group as well. At the same time, the quotations also clearly reveal that the re-adaptation to the village context and witchcraft is not only about the control over and access to material resources: equally important is the re-assessment of the control of the symbolic and social village order, which is

¹³ *Mmfiti* (pl. *ufiti*) is the ChiChewa word for witch.

mainly expressed in the conflicts and gossiping about the different consumption pattern and lifestyles of the urban migrants, epitomised in the urban habit of 'drinking tea'.¹⁴

Second, the statements show that witchcraft is a very effective mechanism in accessing the riches of others that goes far beyond any notion of the returnees' obligation to re-distribute his wealth among the community or the kin. This is revealed very clearly in the somewhat ironic statement of Mr. Patson that only a poor returnee may have nothing to fear from witchcraft accusations. This fear is not just related to the fact of having to share one's riches or having to change one's eating or dressing habits: the anxiety of the trans-national migrants, who for fear of witchcraft incidences that may end in murder did not return to the village, was very common and had increased over the years. In fact, looking at the migrants' trajectories and their life histories, witchcraft accusations and incidences in which people got killed or were accused of having killed or devoured¹⁵ others are part of almost each and every individual migrant's history.

Witchcraft has always been an integral part of trans-local relations, especially in the context of a possible return. It seems, however, that overall material and social constraints, and the fact that people are not necessarily obliged to return home any more, have increased social tensions and by the same token, witchcraft as a means to control and gain access to care and support.

The ambivalences towards the village also find their geographic expression in the fact that many plan to go back to the rural areas, but to a place at "*a safe distance*" (Anders 2005: 183) from the village, halfway between town and the countryside. Like Mr. Kamanga, many retired civil servants in fact plan to buy or rent land or a house some distance from the village. As such, they may avoid major conflicts with their rural kin and be able to continue their urban lifestyle, while using their land in the village at the same time. This strategy is only open for those who can afford it, however.

The poorer ones, like Mrs. Klaver, are usually given little choice about returning home. Contrary to Mr. Patson's statement that the poor kin are usually free

¹⁴ The aspect of consumption patterns and different lifestyles coming into being with modernisation became a central aspect of post-modern studies on development and globalisation throughout the 1990s (see for example Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 1987; Hall 1997) Especially in the Malawian context, a study of the modernisation process from the perspective of different consumption patterns and lifestyles would be worthwhile and could fill another book. I shall only add here that drinking tea in Malawi not only represents a characterisation of rural and urban differences, but that access to tea itself is stratified. As in many developing countries in which the highest quality cash crops are all destined for export, the tea sold in Malawi is usually of poor quality. In addition, there are three different types of tea available, again of differing quality and price, thus creating a differentiation among those Malawians who may afford to buy tea.

¹⁵ The accusation of having eaten or devoured others has also a strong symbolic notion, as it also implies that by eating the bodies of others, one also devours the person's life and life energy.

of witchcraft accusations, in their case, witchcraft accusations may even be more threatening than for richer people. While richer people, if involved in witchcraft disputes, may also decide to leave the village again, poorer people are far more dependent on the support of their rural kin and have many more difficulties leaving than those who live at a distance and have means to rent and lease land and labour if they get into trouble with their rural kin.

7.4.2 Dividing Property: From Sharing to Grabbing

The rise in insecurity due to market liberalisation and the political changes have also had their impact on other 'old' and 'traditional' mechanisms of social support. One of the most pronounced and widespread changes that has been taking place in Malawi over the last decade concerns property grabbing or '*kulanda katundu*'. From being an important social security practice that has existed for many years, i.e. the division or sharing of property or '*kugana katundu*' after the death of a spouse among the kin, it has turned into a rapacious means of exploitation and theft.

The division or sharing of property is carried out in both matrilineal and patrilineal societies and usually refers to property to be shared¹⁶ – 'goods', 'things', 'riches' or 'possessions' or '*chuma*'. This includes the property that people have brought into and acquired during a marriage, such as livestock, consumer goods and household items, like cars, houses and plots. These 'things' are usually moveable goods that can be owned, traded and divided, in contrast to land, labour and children that are usually inalienable to the lineage. Property sharing served various purposes. Apart from simply sharing what had been acquired during the marriage, the sharing was also to compensate the family of the deceased spouse for his/her productive and reproductive services rendered during the marriage, such as cultivation and the rearing of the offspring. By the same token, sharing had an important social security function for the family of the deceased, who had often lost an important source of support.

Beyond the actual material value, the sharing of property had also a strong symbolic dimension to foster social relations between two lineages beyond the death. This was especially important in matrilineal societies, in cases where women wanted to enter a second marriage. The children of the first marriage are often not accepted by the second husband, who feels no obligation to support them. Usually, they are left to be looked after by the woman's parents, but may – if relations are good – also be left with the parents of their deceased fa-

¹⁶ As Anders notes, the practice of sharing is usually denoted with two terms. While *kugawira* is referred to as the practice of sharing among social equals, *kugawa* is referred to as the sharing with social inferiors (2005: 155).

ther. Growing poverty in recent years has also made many women share their property in order to prevent witchcraft accusations, for fear that the family of the deceased husband might accuse them of having killed their spouses for their property.

In the rural context, property sharing represented in many ways a trans-local support mechanism, as spouses often came from different villages. With the rise of rural-urban migration, this trans-local dimension has acquired a new geographic extension. In fact, it is townspeople who are supposed to be rich and to have easier access to consumer goods who often become victims of property grabbing, mainly through their rural kin.

Property sharing itself has always been a contested issue followed by major disputes among family members. Listening to the stories of older migrants, property grabbing has always also existed as an abusive practice. However, in the context of growing overall insecurities, there has been a shift away from property grabbing as an occasionally abusive practice and towards its widespread abuse that encompasses both rural and urban areas, as well as rich and poor.

Property grabbing mainly concerns women. This is related to their overall weaker position in relation to the control of material resources within the household and the wider kin. This holds for both matrilineal and patrilineal societies, especially in town, where it is usually men who control resources in most households.

Property grabbing usually takes place immediately after the funeral. Normally, the male relatives of the husband, usually the uncle or brothers, come to the house of the deceased and take away all the property, from the cars, beds, and mattresses to spoons, pots, pans and glasses. They usually come with a lorry to transport the property either back to their own place in town or to the village. Mostly, however, the household goods are taken to the market and sold on the spot. If they do not have a truck, they may also sell directly from the house in a kind of garage sale, to which the whole neighbourhood is invited and where property is usually sold very cheaply. Sometimes, the relatives may decide to postpone the theft of property until after the mourning period, which normally lasts for a year and is sealed with a ceremony in the deceased person's village. During this ceremony, the widow is 'set free' by the family of the husband, which means that she is allowed to re-marry. On this occasion, the division of the inheritance and the tutelage of the children are also decided upon. This is usually the case when there is a lot and different types of property involved, such as auction shares or pension money. Relatives then need more time to assess their claims and collect information about the property of their deceased kin.

In Sector 7, almost every widow we interviewed had had similar experiences. If she did not have problems, it was mainly because she was too poor to 'share' something. The absence of their kin, which has already been mentioned in the context of difficulties in gaining access to support from their spouses, is also apparent here. The fact that widows in town often do not have anybody in close spatial proximity to support and protect them and their children against this theft makes them easy prey for the rural kin of their spouses.

Case 7.7 "Mrs. Mlumbe": 'Life as a widow is hard!' Mai Mlumbe is a primary school teacher in Area 25A. She lives in Sector 7 with her two children. She only came here a few months ago to move into her house that she started to build after the death of her husband a year prior to our encounter. He had been a high rank officer at the Tobacco Auction Floors in Kanengo where he had a very well paid job. The couple had also engaged in tobacco trading. From the profits made they had bought the plot in Sector 7 in 1995. They wanted to move here upon the retirement of the husband when he would have to leave the company house.

Instead, Mrs. Mlumbe started to build the house when her husband died in order to move here with the children, using the severance payments of her deceased husband. She holds the legal title for a huge spacious house. This is also the reason why the relatives did not take it away from her, as they did with all the rest of her property.

When we met Mrs. Mlumbe, she was at the end of the 12 months mourning period, waiting to be called to the village of her husband for the death ceremony during which the division of the property would be decided. She was very anxious about what the relatives of her late husband would decide. Although her husband had left a will in which he had also left a share of his heritage to his wife and the children, she said that she would not contest the decision of the relatives who clearly would not consider the will. *"I do not want to quarrel. I will not take them to court to prove that some of the property was given to me. If they want to get everything, I will let them do so. Otherwise they will bewitch me and even kill me."*

The relatives had already come once, immediately after the funeral, to get a first idea of the amount of property the brother had left behind. Her brother in law had asked her to give him the husband's salary, and had told her that he would come back at the end of the mourning period to get the rest of his brother's property. He also took Mrs. Mlumbe's stepchild to the village, the son of her husband's first wife, who used to live with them. She suspected that the son had

only been taken in order to gain access to 25% of her husband's pension money that he had left to the boy. In fact, during the time of our interview, Mrs. Mlumbe had already heard rumours that her stepson had been chased away by the relatives once they had gotten hold of the money in order to stay with his real mother's mother.

After her return from the village, Mrs. Mlumbe was very depressed and for a long time she refused to tell us about the events that had taken place in the village. As expected, her late husband's family had decided to take all the goods that her husband had bought before the marriage, which practically meant all the household items. In addition, they took all the bankbooks of her husband arguing that – having been opened long before he met his wife – the money was meant for them. They also decided to sell the hawker at the market in A25C, which she had built together with the husband and which they had rented. They planned to give her half of the profit, but Mrs. Mlumbe was not really sure if they would do so in the end. In his will, Mr. Mlumbe had left 50% of his pension money to his wife, which the relatives could hardly take away from her, having been written down in the company's record and brought to the knowledge of the District Commissioner.¹⁷ But for all the shares and additional 'private' monies that were left to her and her children in the will, she would hardly have a chance to get a share. The rural kin considered the will just a piece of paper without any value. In contrast, they argued they had traditional rights to the property, arguing that it had been the mother of the late husband who had educated the son and therefore, should benefit from the money. They did not feel any responsibility for the children of Mrs. Mlumbe and their deceased brother, who did not belong to them and whom Mrs. Mlumbe as a working woman could take care of perfectly well herself.

Sitting in her empty house, from which the kin had literally taken everything that was not nailed or screwed down, Mrs. Mlumbe considered herself very lucky nevertheless. Working colleagues of her late husband had held back some money for her children. They had taken 2/3 of his pension money and had given it to her before sharing the money according to her husband's will. She had thus been able to get more than the 50% that was left to her. Her late husband

¹⁷ According to my information, in case of state companies, the way the employee has ordered that his/her money is spent is kept as a record in the company and with the District Commissioner, in case a spouse or the deceased's relatives decide to go to court It is very difficult to contest these decrees.

had also held shares at the company SACCO, which he had left to his first-born son, and some shares from the company. In both, the work-mates had changed the titles and made his children the beneficiaries.

Despite the fact that she had been quite lucky compared to many other women in Sector 7, the death of her husband had changed her life considerably. She became poor, which for her as a comparatively very rich women meant a substantial material change and, being a widow, especially a poor one, also meant a big social change – with the death of her husband and her impoverishment, she had lost many friends. She felt socially isolated, and showed clear signs of depression. *“There is a problem in the Malawian culture, because it is only when a husband dies that his relatives come to grab property. But when a women dies, her relatives do not do such a thing. The husband’s relatives have more power. They think that your husband, just because he stayed in town and was well-to-do, is a millionaire.”*

Mrs. Mlumbé is still richer than most people and widows in Sector 7. She has her own house that cannot be taken away from her and she has a permanent employment – conditions that are not very common for most women in Malawi. Yet, despite these favourable circumstances her case shows that widowhood has drastic consequences leading to material and social impoverishment.

In contrast to Mrs. Mlumbé, many women lose their house and are forced to move somewhere else in town or back to rural areas. Although many women are working and providing a substantial share of the household income, the death of the spouse is always a major blow. Their largely volatile and insecure sources of income make it difficult to make a living in town on their own, especially if they have no one to look after their children. In addition, parts of the property taken away often include business items, i.e. things that both spouses needed for the joint business ventures, like fridges or cooking pans, thus preventing them from continuing their businesses. Apart from constituting basic necessities of everyday life, such as beddings, cooking pots, radios or bikes, the theft of these items also means that basic securities that could be sold in case of emergencies are taken away.

The case also shows that economic decline usually also encompasses social decline. With the death of their main provider, women often become complete dependents, which reduces their network relations dramatically: although they might have been generous providers all their lives, this does not guarantee that their support once provided will be reciprocated. Apart from the relations to their husbands’ kin, which usually end completely after his death and the theft of property, their wider social relations do not provide a durable social safety net. Pervasive poverty in town and the fact that they have turned from a potential

provider into a recipient makes many friends run away.

However, widows also face social isolation on a collective level. They are perceived as a threat to the social order in their search for a new husband and potential provider, especially now that there are so many of them. In fact, many widows hope to re-marry in order to secure a future for them and their children. Thereby, the line between the search for a new husband and supporter for the family and prostitution is a very fine one. Promises of marriage and support are often deceived, as we have seen with Mrs. Phiri's case in the last chapter. This also concerns daughters. I have already mentioned that many female orphans try to marry in order to be secure and leave their (foster) families. Their desperate search for a husband often ends in prostitution.

The precarious social and economic circumstances have also weakened other fundamental social security practices that seemed to be firmly anchored in customary law, such as the fate of the remaining children. Especially in societies with a patrilineal kinship structure, it was common for children to be taken care of by the spouses' kin. Nowadays, this responsibility is rarely taken over by the kin any more. Unless – as the stepson – they are a potential source of or access to wealth, the children and their future are left in the hands of the mother. One may argue that this has always been the case, as the wealth of children was always also related to the fact that, apart from their importance as a labour force, they would guarantee continued access to land within the lineage and the village. It seems, however, that the worsening social and economic conditions and the growing number of orphans have diminished the proper value of children. From being considered the *"vessel of the mortar"*, as a Malawian proverb says, who need to be carefully nourished and reared, they seem to have turned into a material and social burden.

At the same time, the case for customary and traditional obligations is strongly put when it comes to defending the unequal division of property. The justification for the theft usually follows a very 'traditional' line of argument, claiming re-compensation for the investment once made in a potential migrant, such as education, and the expectations that he had never succeeded in realising, such as the construction of a house.

In this respect, women appear to be standing quite literally on lawless ground when it comes to contesting their rights and entitlements. Unless they are sufficiently economically independent and have grown-up male children or male kin close by to support and defend them – also physically – against the assaults of the kin, it is very hard for them to stand their ground. In addition, many women are simply dismayed that the kin, with whom they had been on good terms for years and whom they had supported together with their spouse until his death, could suddenly turn against them and take away quite literally everything.

A modification of the inheritance law in the 1990s in order to counter this development made it easier for women to protect their rights. The law¹⁸ was celebrated as a legal revolution that would help strengthen the position of women against the arbitrariness of and the loopholes in customary inheritance law. It allows them to appeal to the District Commissioner in case of property grabbing. Thanks to the Malawian government and a number of NGOs that offer legal advice, most women know about this right. However, only a few make use of it. Many are afraid that if things are decided in their favour, their relatives might not leave them in peace, fearing death threats that are usually disguised behind witchcraft accusations. The power of these threats often extends far into the future: women who were able to safeguard their property with the assistance of their children or friends are cautious even years later, fearing that their relatives might come back to claim the remainder of what they were able to save or even worse, the property they have built up for themselves since the death of their spouse. Another reason why many women decide against going to court is that reaching a verdict usually takes a long time. Even if the decision reached is in their favour, relatives are by then often no longer in the position to return the property, as they have usually already 'eaten up' all of the money.

Many women do not want to involve the state court, as this would force them to disclose and share any property and money they were able to hide from the relatives, i.e. they fear that in this way they might lose even more property. In fact, it appears that the subversion of both customary and state law to which many women resort works best. Successful attempts by women to fend off their rural kin and prevent them coming to town in order to get the property not only involve companies and working colleagues who deny information on salaries, pension funds or insurance policies, manipulating legal titles and wills; women also support each other by hiding furniture, television sets and radios with neighbours in order to save at least a share of the goods for their family.

7.5 Conclusions: Immobility and Shifting Boundaries

In this chapter, I have tried to show that trans-local network relations continue to play an important role in urban migrants' lives. However, their meaning, content and form differ substantially from a dualist economic, social, cultural and spatial order. Trans-local practices and strategies, their content, and their purpose, are highly dynamic and underlie substantial changes that are highly individual and situational. These changes are not only a result of the distance between

¹⁸ Government of Malawi (1999) Wills and Inheritance Act, Chapter 10:02 of the Laws of Malawi. Zomba: Malawi

two separate spaces, but are embedded in a wider, rapidly changing social, economic and political environment. By the same token, the chapter has shown that this trans-locality is defined as much by the urban migrant as by the rural kin. Town and village thus appear as a highly interconnected, multi-layered trans-local space within which people span their support relations, trying to survive by resorting to both town and village strategies and resources, and re-mixing and re-organising them in new ways in order to survive. In so-doing, they also give these relations new meaning. To what extent people are able to use and misuse this trans-local space depends on their social, political and legal resources, as well as gender and age.

This process of divesting and re-investing meaning (Vaughan & Moore 1994: xxi) does not only concern the quantitative aspect of support, i.e. what kind and how much support is provided. It also encompasses competing notions of rights, obligations, solidarity and reciprocity that organise support relations.

The rising economic opportunities that allow for a future in town seem to have increased ambivalence towards rural support. Whereas the support towards the rural kin remains an important value and virtue, it seems that an urban individualism has taken roots in Sector 7. Rural support is increasingly perceived as a 'moral obligation' rather than a gift that is expected to be returned in the future. This development is mainly confined to richer migrants, who have the economic means to buy themselves out of their ambivalence to a certain extent, being able to invest in both a rural and an urban future. While ambivalence towards rural dependents is widespread, it seems that much of the individualism complained about is derived from a 'forced individualisation' that has little to do with individual economic self-interest. On the contrary, worsening urban living conditions seem to increase again the importance of the village as a network site.

At the same time, overall difficulties have stratified access to village resources, tightening access modalities and conditions of reciprocity. The heightened competition for land, labour and social care renders investment strategies in the village and the rural kin more important in order to maintain one's entitlements to village resources. The tightening competition over increasingly scarce resource-support not only leads to a rising number of disputes over land – as well, these conflicts are fought by means of physical force, as we have seen with property grabbing or the increase in witchcraft incidences. Established social security practices and institutions, such as property sharing or the inheritance law, are increasingly stripped of their social security function and are turned into rapacious means of gaining access to resources by force.

The changing access conditions in the trans-local social security economy are also discernible in the dynamics taking place in the legal arena, which represent a

tightly interwoven trans-local fabric of 'formal', 'informal' and 'traditional' law. Heightened competition over resources also challenges norms, rules and regulations relevant to access to social and material resources, such as land, care, or the heritage of a kin; issues often regulated by both state and customary law. It seems that people are not only shopping for support but also for legal regulations in order to justify their entitlements (K. von Benda-Beckmann 1994). However, rather than using one law against the other, the strong intertwinement and mutual dependencies make people use their 'own' set of legal strategies which may shift from one situation to the other. While the overall changing social and economic conditions, including the changing notion of property, allow for an increasing misuse of inheritance rules in order to gain access to property, state law is bypassed in order to retain some of the property as well.

This circle of insecurity migrants are caught up in has also challenged patterns of migration and by the same token, the usage of migration as a social security mechanism. Many migration studies on Sub-Saharan towns have suggested de-urbanisation due to a rise in rural re-migration over the last two decades in many Sub-Saharan regions (see Ferguson 1999; Potts 1995 for an overview). In the case of Lilongwe, rural-urban migration flows represent a more differentiated picture. On the one hand, it appears that the village has gained importance as a network site. The generally insecure sources of income have intensified circular migration patterns, as people move more frequently between town and village to make a living. On the other hand, we have seen that land and labour shortages render this strategy a very selective and stratified one that only a few may afford. Most migrants are not able to follow a circulating migration pattern. The poverty in town and in the village cuts them off from trans-local social security strategies, forcing them to remain in town or re-direct their migration itineraries, as they move on both within rural areas and town in the search for work and land.

Chapter 8

Conclusions: The Scattered Landscape of Social Security

This book started out by questioning the major assumptions concerning social security as a modern phenomenon embodied in the welfare state and embedded in the specific social, economic, political and moral orders of capitalist society, which, so it was argued, still looms strongly in the analytical and political debate on the subject.

Bringing together the various strands of social security that I have unravelled in the empirical sections, this concluding chapter aims at mapping out a different perspective of social security and tries to re-locate it beyond a specific concept of modernity, in which it seems to be trapped.

Understanding social security as an analytically and spatially unbound field of institutes and institutions within which circles of support (Palriwala & Risseuw 1996) and solidarity (K. von Benda-Beckmann 2004) are continuously shifting, adapting to changing contexts, needs and insecurities, I will summarise the major findings of my empirical analysis, discussing them in the light of the theoretical issues raised in the introductory chapter. In the concluding paragraphs, I will take up some policy issues of specific relevance to this study regarding the current debate on 'informal' social security and social policies in developing countries; specifically, the discussion on social and human capital which provided the overall framework and point of departure for this study.

8.1 The Rural-Urban Borderland: Social Security between Town and Village

The exploration of social security practices reveals that social support networks in town lie far beyond a modernist understanding of social security and insecurity related to the notion of the city. This not only refers to the significant absence of public state support systems for a large majority of people, but also concerns non-state or 'informal' social security. This urban informality in which people live and manage their social security differs substantially from the modernist 'rural' notion related to it. Networks in the rural-urban borderland are highly heterogeneous. They are a patchwork of a variety of mechanisms and actors embedded in different, partly interlocking social, economic, political, cultural, moral, legal and institutional orders pertaining to 'formal' and 'informal', 'rural' and 'urban', and 'modern' and 'traditional' domains. These networks, far from being static, are in a continuous process of making and un-making, responding to changing social, economic or political local and global conditions, as well as the changing needs and insecurities of the social actors involved.

The dynamics of network relations are especially visible when people move. Migration changes network relations considerably. On the one hand, the move to town means that new relationships have to be created. While rural kinship relations may loosen or even dissolve when migrants move away from the village, the urban context requires the establishment of new networks. These are usually based on lines of in- and exclusion, where kinship is just one factor amongst many others, including religion, close spatial proximity, the same working environment, political associations, a common ethnic, cultural or regional background, or a specified 'neediness' as defined by the state, NGOs or donor organisations. On the other hand, migration re-shuffles existing social network relations, ascribing them with new meaning, content and function. With the move to town, kinship relations change substantially. The new spatial situation also re-shuffles kinship hierarchies, re-positioning relations of distance and proximity within these new spatial constellations. While the close kin in the village loses its importance as a support network for daily and immediate contingencies, distant kin in town turns into close kin and assumes close kinship responsibilities and obligations.

At the same time, friendship becomes an important relationship in town. It provides an important additional layer to already existing 'multi-layered' relations among neighbours or workmates, denoting a specific quality of relationship. Contrary to modernist conceptions, which ascribe friendship purely altruistic emotional characteristics, friendship assumes important social security functions in town. These functions differ according to the different degrees of

friendship involved, which may range from very close relations among kin to more loose borrowing relations among workmates or churchgoers.

These qualitative changes in network relations as regards their social security capacity may also translate into kinship relations. While existing kinship relations may change over distance, being filled with new content and meaning, 'new' urban relations among neighbours, workmates or members of the same congregation may evolve into kinship relations. These new kinship relations are not a substitute for rural kin left behind, but provide an extension to the already existing kin. This also includes the ascription of new kinship ties, as well as the specific support rules and regulations related to them.

Town also means an increase in more institutionalised support structures within social support network structures, for example churches, mosques, burial associations, NGOs and – although marginal – the state and public assistance. Apart from religious associations, which provide an important social context for the creation of a series of individual support networks, most of these institutional relations are highly specialised as regards the type of support provided, such as support for funerals or support for orphans or widows. NGOs and donors have assumed an important role on the communal level, mainly as regards the provision of social infrastructure, such as water and schools. Over the years, the support of NGOs and donors has also gained ground on an individual support level, such as with micro-credit schemes. These new support opportunities, coming largely from outside, have severely challenged hitherto existing social security structures.

Urban migration does not mean the exchange of one social and economic reality for another. On the contrary, we have seen that the village remains an important focal point for urban migrants in town. The extent to which people may make use of these trans-local economics differs, however. For migrants, especially the richer ones and those from close-by, migration into town is usually part of trans-local economic or social considerations that include as well the rural economy and their kin in the village. They usually commute on a regular basis, thereby combining both rural and urban employment and income-generating opportunities. For the poorer ones, trans-local options are highly stratified, as social and economic constraints both in town and in the village increasingly confine rural-urban support relations. Rural-urban exchange relations continue to provide an important source of cash and agricultural inputs, skills, know-how and information, traditional knowledge and customary rule of law. However, they are becoming more and more loose and erratic, and are increasingly confined to family issues and extreme crisis situations. This also concerns 'long-term social security issues': while the village remains the most important social safety net in urban crisis situations, such as long-term sickness, unemploy-

ment or old age, we have seen that these options are increasingly difficult to realise.

The village thus retains a significant presence in town, last but not least, as an important symbolic asset. We have seen that the village in town provides an important source of identity and belonging. This also holds for second-generation migrants. Although many parents send their children to the rural areas for initiation and village life, many migrants have never been to the home villages of their parents. They are taught their rural identity by parents or kin and friends from the same village, often organised in regional or ethnic associations. This teaching may also include urban-based initiation rites, which symbolically link the children to their rural homeland and identity.

These relations are also of relevance for social support. Common ethnic or regional backgrounds constitute important elements of identity for the creation of social networks in town. Most of these relations assume a quasi-kinship quality. The same holds for religious associations, which are mostly national or international networks within which people move. Their trans-local character creates relations based on trust that significantly ease access to social and material support relations in town. At the same time, this trans-locality is not only a virtual one. The information flows between town and village, often within the framework of regional or religious associations, provide important trans-local control mechanisms that make it difficult to evade trans-local obligations to the village, as well as the obligations towards other co-villagers or members of the regional association in town.

The geographic anchoring of these networks in town is no coincidence. Newly arrived migrants often move in close spatial proximity to their urban relatives. This urban kin, who have usually organised the migration to town, also provide an important social link for the newcomers and a starting point for the creation of new network relations, as well as for inclusion within existing ones. This partly explains the location of urban social networks, which geographically and socially are very close to and may even coincide with the ones of their relatives, sharing the same network partners or the same working environment. At the same time, the growing density of network relations among kin is also the result of a rising inner-urban gentrification process that has been taking place in Sector 7 over the last few years. Kinship as a social security institution thus remains of particular importance in town as well, providing a nodal point of social support networks. While we have seen that the overall spatial re-organisation of the area has been engendered by wider social and economic restructuring processes, it appears that the commercialisation of land and housing has also eased a certain gentrification process among kinsfolk located in other areas of town, who finally have had the opportunity to settle close to their kin.

However, whereas town does seem to allow for an extension of network opportunities and relations, this does not mean that the quality and resilience of urban social security networks have been improving for most migrants. While in contrast to the village, network opportunities may have increased and broadened, the overall lack of resources imply that only a few are able to convert these network opportunities into properly functioning social security arrangements. Overall, it appears that the vast web of trans-local network relations can be used by only a few. The lack of material and social resources leads to a shrinking of network relations, both in town and over distance, and results in a serious reduction of the quality of social security these networks provide.

8.2 Working it out¹

The network structures, their shape and extent, and the use people may make of them in the course of their lives and their stay in town, do not represent a homogenous systematic picture, but are highly dynamic and individual. Gender, age, class and cultural background influence network structures. At the same, migration, urbanisation processes and the overall changing social, economic and political context have a profound impact on the structuring of urban network relations.

Although the household remains a nodal point of social support in town, support relations within this network are experiencing substantial changes. Especially for women, the move to town is often related to a decrease in social and economic status. Whereas many had expected that town would open up more earning possibilities, also for the maintenance and the support of the rural kin left behind, for most this did not materialise. On the contrary, the cash economy that makes it easier for men to not to divulge their income, and the fact that most women in town lack their rural kin, whose presence would make it easier to enforce their husband's duties of maintaining the household, puts women in a disadvantaged position. They have major difficulties in gaining access to adequate support for themselves and their children, rendering the maintenance of the household, especially in terms of ensuring a sufficient supply of food, very difficult. Although men expect working women to contribute to the household, a rising imbalance is visible. In spite of their largely having very insecure sources of income, it seems that many women have to come up with an increasingly large share of the household expenses.

Structural Adjustment policies, including high prices and continuing inflation, retrenchments in social services and the labour market within the frame-

¹ This title is inspired by Finch 1989.

work of Good Governance, and the demographic consequences of HIV/AIDS, have made matters worse. Although more women are engaged in labour relations, more of their money is required to flow into the maintenance of the urban household.

The chronic insecurities that most Malawians are exposed to, and which culminated in the hunger of 2002, of which we saw the beginnings in 2001, have severely challenged the social security economy of all migrants in town, narrowing down substantially their bargaining space in dealing with social and economic insecurities. Network structures have shrunk. Although the size of network relations in town experiences seasonal fluctuations, the economic decline caused networks and mutual support arrangements to implode, reducing network relations largely to their 'inner' support circles (Finch 1989).² Network relations in town focus increasingly on the core family and close kin relations, while trans-local support relations to the village or other areas in town are dissolving. While networks shrink because people lack the resources to serve them, network structures simply die, as HIV/AIDS increasingly rapidly perforates existing social support arrangements, mainly reducing the number of support providers. This does not only completely re-shuffle circles of support, meaning that existing network structures have to cope with a rising number of needy; HIV/AIDS has also completely re-written rules and regulations of support, even to the extent that responsibilities have shifted between generations. While it has already substantially challenged the social (in)security in the present, including changing needs and risks, it has also significantly changed perceptions of the future. This holds especially for those directly concerned, but due to the extent of the problem in the meantime, also concerns Malawian society as a whole.

At the same time, economic and social constraints put a severe strain on existing network relations. The scarcity of economic resources has already heightened competition for support. The fact that most networks are faced with a rising number of dependents due to HIV/AIDS has rendered access to support even more tenuous. This increasing stratification of support structures is clearly revealed in the changing rules and obligations of support, which are exposed to an increasingly intense negotiation process and 'working it out'. This is especially pronounced in kinship relations, which are very differently and extensively interpreted by providers and recipients of support. Growing support constraints have also increased acts of violence and force in order to gain access to social support; as we have seen in the case of property grabbing. Another mechanism

² I have taken the notion of inner support circles from Finch (1989), who uses it as metaphor to describe shifting hierarchies of network relations in kinship networks in Britain throughout the 20th century. The fluidity of kinship and other support relations shifting between 'inner' and 'outer' circles of support (1989: 239) is also discernible in the migrants' networks.

is witchcraft, which has increased substantially in people's perceptions of support relations both in town and over distance over the last years, largely as a consequence of economic and social decline. Both as a means of producing psychological pressure, and as a cover for pure acts of violence, it is a highly effective means of gaining access to and control of social support.

Those who do not belong to the immediate kin, i.e. dependents living within the household, such as old people, the sick, and large numbers of orphaned children, particularly experience these support constraints. Especially the latter are exposed to highly insecure support structures. They are the most vulnerable sector of society. Often exploited as a cheap labour force by their foster parents and exposed to strong stigmatisation, their age and their physical ability do not allow them to defend or maintain their entitlements to support or care.

HIV/AIDS has increased enormously the number of single parent and grandparent-headed households within the area, of which most are simply surviving. To cover lacking social and material resources, people have started to pool resources over distance. In the meantime, it has become common for grandparents to move from the village or other areas into Sector 7 in order to take over the care labour for their orphaned grandchildren, while being supported by married children or other kin living close by.

On the one hand, we have seen that networks shrink. On the other, economic constraints have led to an increase in agencies and providers. As hitherto more inclusive support structures are becoming ever more split and compartmentalised, people are forced to draw on different resources and agencies. This expansion of the social security mix does not necessarily mean more security, however. Most of these arrangements are very fragile and arbitrary. Rather than providing stable support structures, which can be used on a regular basis, most of these arrangements are very short-term, often providing only isolated arrangements (Simone 1997). It seems that the dissolving social and economic structure of society, which especially in town is more pronounced due to urbanisation processes, does not allow for the production of structural support arrangements.

The search for alternative providers also encompasses institutional support, such as that provided by NGOs or regional or religious associations. HIV/AIDS and its consequences have increased the role of religion, both in terms of psychological and spiritual support and in order to cope with the social, economic, familial and other (in)securities of the disease. As the horizontal networks within their realm are increasingly breaking apart, mainly due to resource constraints, people increasingly turn to their churches and mosques for direct support; a pattern which until recently was the exception rather than the rule. The fact that material considerations have gained in relative importance over the years is also

discernible in the fact that people increasingly consider changing their religion for reasons of material support.

Rising material demands also increase pressure on religious communities, which are largely auto-financed. AIDS increases the number of members in need, but decreases paying members at the same time and by the same token, also their support capacity. Most organisations have reacted to the new situation by establishing new funds for orphans and widows. But these support measures are not regular and hardly fulfil the needs of the people.

HIV/AIDS and the huge burial costs that most families are faced with have led to the spontaneous growth of many new support networks created for this specific purpose. Burial associations have always existed in town and in migrants' environments in order to enable migrants to be transported home and receive a decent funeral. With the coming of HIV/AIDS, these networks have gained increasing significance, growing not only in number but also in size. Most of these networks consist of regional or cultural associations of migrants from a specific region in town. However, due to the enormous demand, their support is mainly confined to town. Most assist in funerals only. Faced with the harsh situations of those left behind, some have, however, also started to engage in organising support for orphans and widowed spouses.

8.3 The Localisation of the Trans-local

Village people usually harbour great hopes of getting support from their siblings or daughters and sons when these migrate to town. Yet we have seen that trans-local support relations are usually not activated over a long period of time. The effort of coming to town, organising a life, looking for a job and building up an urban network usually absorbs a great deal of material and social resources, as well as time, leaving little for making the effort to send home. The urban migrant, who has been educated in the village and sent to town in order to support his rural kin on a regular basis, helping them to climb the ladder of modernity and come to town, or at least supplement their life in the village, is increasingly an exception rather than the norm.

While a strong institutional and moral discourse celebrating the importance of trans-local relations to the village still exists, rendering the maintenance of these relations an important social and moral obligation, accounts of the type and regularity of support to kin in the village, timing of visits, re-migration and so forth that migrants relate are often far from reality. Being able to provide regular support is largely an issue of class and economic status, affordable only to the rich and those living close by. Most poorer people, and among them specifically the women, do not have the resources necessary to maintain social

relations with the village. The irregularities of their mostly informal sources of income and skyrocketing prices in town make it increasingly difficult to send regular, reliable support to the village. In fact, we have seen that for most poor migrants, support relations and trans-local links to the village are very erratic or have stopped altogether. Whereas we have seen that they may be re-activated in extreme crisis situations, on the whole it appears that – at least from the perspective of the poorer part of the population – village and town are increasingly drifting apart. Rural-urban relations are largely confined to family issues, such as funerals, marriages and sickness or extreme crises, as we have seen with the hunger situation or HIV/AIDS. Most of the support is actually highly localised, being confined to kinship relations in town. This usually also implies relations in close spatial proximity, as already the distance to kin living at the other end of town often represents an insurmountable barrier in gaining access to support.

This stratification of rural-urban relations also concerns trans-local economics. Against the background of the lack of food and rising food prices, combining productive resources from village and town has gained increasing popularity as a coping strategy. Increasingly, people are trying to pool rural and urban resources together in order to make a living. However, it is a strategy to which mainly the richer migrants can resort, or those in villages in which land is not a problem. In fact, trans-local economics are largely confined to richer people, who came to town to enhance their economic position rather than as a consequence of a forced migration. They are able to fall back on a relatively secure country existence, i.e. they have access to enough land to be able to make a living, or have the economic resources to lease or buy land in rural areas.

While richer people are able to invest here and there, mixing strategies and resources, poorer people are less able to do so. For them, opportunities to engage in a “*multi-spatial livelihood*” (Foeken & Owuor 2001: 127) are increasingly scarce. The scarcity of land and labour options forces them to leave the village more often, migrating in search of land in other rural areas or labour in town. By the same token, their poverty also makes it more difficult for them to come back to the village in order to engage in trans-local economics or in order to re-migrate to the village in case of urban difficulties, such as transitory re-migration for cultivation during periods of heightened food insecurity or in case of unemployment. They usually remain in town and try to find a solution there, and only go back to the village if their economic problems combine with other problems, such as sickness, which make it difficult for them to be productively active in town. Among this group are also those who go back because they are in need of social care and do not have a viable network in town. For most, it actually means that they are re-migrating in order to be taken care of by their family until they die.

While trans-local relations are thus more difficult to maintain than in the past, leading to a disconnection of rural and urban economies, maintaining trans-local relations has at the same time become more important: Listening to historical accounts of migrants and villagers, returning to the village and regaining one's position within the village has never been easy. Yet the fact that there was enough land to go round made it easier to regain a place and land to cultivate, even for 'unsuccessful' migrants who came back to the village without much in their pocket and who had not really provided much support over the years. However, land scarcity in most regions of Malawi has tightened access to land considerably, especially in the case of absent urban migrants. The maintenance of trans-local support has become increasingly important in keeping return options open. This is also the case for those who have access to land and who have left it with their kin in the village. Increasingly, this land is only defensible by continuous cultivation over distance, which in turn requires a certain amount of resources that even richer migrants do not have at their disposal. Furthermore, this not only concerns material resources: apart from land, HIV/AIDS has severely reduced the rural labour force, which also renders cultivation in one's absence increasingly difficult.

These findings challenge the debate on an overall trend towards de-urbanisation in Sub-Saharan Africa (see for example Potts 1995). It seems that this trend does not hold true for land-scarce Malawi. Although the high death toll due to HIV/AIDS has reduced the labour force significantly, this has not eased land pressure thus far. On the contrary, the decreasing fertility of land seems to have increased the need for land. At the same time, it appears that the overall commercialisation of land has changed entitlement to land. Rather than being given back to returnees, a preferred option is to sell or rent land out on a commercial basis to the many other rural-rural migrants moving in search of land.

8.4 Mobility as a Social Security Practice

Taking a functional, trans-local view also requires re-assessing migration as a social security strategy. Migration has always assumed a social security function, as a risk mitigation strategy to deal with insecurities in the place of origin (F. & K. von Benda-Beckmann 1994). Contrary to modernist assumptions, migration has always implied more than one move between town and village, as trans-local livelihoods require a continuous circular migration pattern between town, village and beyond.

My findings suggest that mobility patterns in Malawi have intensified. It seems that mobility is increasingly becoming a central element of lifestyles and ways of living, as people are continuously on the move both in-between and

within rural and urban areas (see for example Simone 2005; Englund 2001). Overall, it appears that mobility has increased, as social and economic conditions force more people to move and remain mobile throughout their life. This has also changed mobility trajectories. On the one hand, it seems that the classical circular migration pattern, which usually describes a pendular movement between town and the home village, has decreased and is today largely confined to those able to maintain their trans-local relations on a regular basis, and to those living in close spatial proximity to town. At the same time, however, this pattern has intensified, as people are forced to move more frequently between town and village in order to make a living. On the other hand, it seems that a 'new itinerant migration pattern' has emerged. In contrast to the classical pattern, it seems that a rising number of people are forced to be continuously on the move forward, with few options to return or stay in a place for a longer period of time. People are increasingly forced to move for both labour and care. At the same time, overall social and economic conditions both in the villages and in town make it increasingly difficult to remain in one place. Thus, people do not stop moving once they are in town: migration to town does not usually mean the end of a migrant's itinerary, but often is one place of belonging amongst many others. Within town, people remain on the move. High rents, land invasions and the search for jobs and social support continue to displace people. In this respect, mobility provides a kind of stability or as expressed by Simone (2005: 20): "*An increasingly "normalized" practice deployed to constitute both an experience of stability linked to the capacity of individuals and social actors to continuously orient themselves to shifting terrain of economic activity and political disposition*" (see also Andersson 2001, De Bruijn et al. 2001). This mobility as a "*stable social form*" (Andersson 2001: 91) finds its most extreme expression in the nomadism for support that we have seen with the HIV/AIDS orphans. In this case, how the shrinking of material and social support capacity does not allow people to permanently establish access to support is especially visible. Furthermore, it also shows that the lack of material and social support prevents orphans from establishing any kind of spatial permanence, even a transitory one. On the contrary, it seems that people are increasingly forced to be at home within migration itself. This also concerns the urbanisation process, which, as we have seen, is continuously displacing people. This results in negative consequences for social security, as people are neither in the position to maintain a hold on the city, nor to create sustainable social networks and a place called home.

Mobility also implies an accelerated social mobility that leaves its spatial imprints. This concerns both those who have not yet made it into the city and those who have already been there. On the one hand, Structural Adjustment makes it ever more difficult for newly arrived migrants to gain access to the city. It ap-

pears that they are increasingly immobilised within the margins of town, where they are continuously on the move in order to maintain their marginal access to the city. On the other hand and to an ever-greater extent, the overall changing policy framework is also marginalising and informalising civil servants, *the* heroes of Malawi's modernisation process. They are increasingly forced to draw on a range of different urban/rural, formal/informal, legal/illegal resources in order to make a living and manage their life in town, including as well strategies of social support and care.

8.5 Re-defining Urbanisation and the City

The analysis of social security networks in a rural-urban borderland like Sector 7 reveals a type of urbanisation that challenges conventional concepts of urbanity and the city. Urbanisation processes in Sector 7 are largely taking place without and beyond modernisation. This 'broken' urbanisation represents a dense web and conglomerate of different strategies and more or less urban life-styles within which rural/urban, modern/traditional, formal/informal, as well as legal/illegal relations, norms and rules, resources, identities and ways of earning are mixed and re-combined. This does not mean, however, an absence of the 'urban'; nor can these urbanisation processes be reduced to a kind of 'proto-urbanity' that socially, economically and geographically still has to be incorporated into the city and modernity. The city as a modernist project might have failed to a large extent to produce key aspects of modernity, such as industrialisation and capitalist development, a class system of workers and entrepreneurs, a welfare state and a sense of citizenship with a national and political consciousness (Simone 1997). Yet "*(t)he hesitation on the part of urban populations to make irrevocable investments in clear identities, affiliations, locations and ways of earning or living do not necessarily mean that there has been an absence of social transformation or a refusal of the urban*" (*ibid.*:15).

On the contrary, we have seen that these borderlands encompass a wide range of different, partly contradictory urbanisation trajectories that exist side by side. On the one hand, people have more difficulties finding an entry point into modernity and the city, being confined to largely 'informal' ways of living and earning. On the other, more people are forced out of modernity and exposed to re-ruralisation and de-urbanisation, as the arrival of a rising number of civil servants into Sector 7 has shown. Their urbanisation trajectories seem to be running backwards, as they are increasingly drawn into a social and spatial marginalisation process and are forced to fall back on rural resources in order to cope with town, or even re-migrate back to the village (see also Ferguson 1999, Anders 2005). Most people will hardly ever leave these marginalised areas, but

will remain caught up in the rural-urban borderlands: Their 'not yet' and 'not any more' modernity and urbanity seem to have come to represent the urban 'normality' for an increasingly large number of people. Yet this does not mean that they are able to fall back on a marginal, but stable livelihood or network relations. While most of them will not be able to move up the social ladder of modernity, they are forced to be ever more mobile, as they are displaced by marginally richer people who push them off their land back into rural areas or into other marginal areas at the edges of town. This 'tragic of the boundaries' is also evident in an intensified place-making process. In the absence of adequate public infrastructure, including plots, housing and other public infrastructure, people are increasingly involved in 'informal' and 'illegal' processes of appropriating the city. But as soon as they are successful and manage to arrange for some infrastructure, they are forced out again by the better-off.

These processes also involve recurrence to different resources and strategies, including formal and informal, public and customary laws, as well as concepts and ideologies of political parties and NGOs. While these counter-legalities have for a long time been considered resistance strategies of the poor and marginalised, we have seen that they are also used by the rich and powerful and by an impoverished state structure that lacks the means and the authority to foster adequate city development. However, this "*democratisation of appropriation*" (Anders 2005: 186) has not really altered relations of power and dominance. Although in a continuous process of marginalisation themselves, civil servants and the better-off are still in a better political, economic and social position to usurp and expropriate urbanisation processes initiated by the poor.

Structural Adjustment policies have had an enormous impact on urbanisation processes. Moreover, the study has shown that the demographic collapse due to HIV/AIDS also poses a major challenge for urbanisation. The disease has not only re-shuffled network relations, but also truncated and cut-off many migration and urbanisation patterns and trajectories along which people used to move. Regarding the extent of the disease and its demographic consequences in the future, it appears that HIV/AIDS will have to be considered a key element in understanding the extent and modes of future migration and urbanisation processes in Malawi.

8.6 Social Policy and the De-politicisation of Critical Approaches

At the beginning of this book, I mentioned that the research to this study was largely inspired by the changes that the debate on social security and social pol-

icy in developing countries had undergone over the last two decades. The realisation that social, economic and political realities in most developing countries are far too complex to be dealt with using social policy concepts modelled on welfare state capitalism has led to the development of new policy approaches aiming towards a stronger incorporation of non-state social security arrangements.

In these approaches, so-called 'human' or 'social' capital is attributed a key role. The social cohesion, trust and solidarity that is assumed to be particularly strong in smaller familial, communal and other associational networks is perceived as the central resource for the development of flexible locally and regionally self-organised social security arrangements, organised by non-state organisations and the so-called 'civil-society' in addition to and as a substitute for the state (Holzmann & Jørgensen 2000; World Bank 2001).

Although these approaches increasingly try to take account of the complex normalities and (in)securities in developing countries, trying to incorporate them into a new social policy practice, the analysis of social security in Sector 7 shows that the assumption of a pre-given and static 'traditional' and 'informal' solidarity and reciprocity is highly questionable. Quite the reverse, we have seen that circles of support and solidarity are highly dynamic and contingent. The chronic social and economic insecurity that most people are exposed to has substantially reduced the social security capacity of most network relations, rendering rules and regulations of support and reciprocity highly contested issues. The rising number of dependents and the high death toll due to HIV/AIDS that is slowly disintegrating network relations increases the pressure on already fragile network relations still further. While international development policy propagates a shift towards informal and traditional arrangements, including the privatisation of health, education and the pension care system, we have seen that these very arrangements are to a decreasing extent capable of providing the support and care needed, and that people are increasingly turning to institutional support mechanisms in order to cope with deteriorating informal support systems.

Against this background, the new policy approaches and especially the social capital approach have been widely criticised as promoting a neo-liberal, market-based approach to social security, representing yet another "*resource optimisation strategy*" (Ratinoff 1999: 46) in the course of Good Governance and Structural Adjustment (see for example Morales-Gomez 1999; Moher 2000; Fine 2001). Especially in the context of the 'new institutional economics' and the 'post-Washington consensus' of the Bretton Wood institutions at the beginning of the 1990s, the African state had become widely criticised as the major impediment to development, being considered highly inefficient and ineffective (Morales-Gómez 1999; Bayart 1993, Anders 2005). Informal arrangements are

seen as ready-made alternatives to an increasingly conflated, bureaucratic and corrupt state that does not only function badly but also squanders a great deal of its much-needed resources. Critics state that the new policy approaches not only imply a privatisation of a hitherto public policy field in terms of mechanisms and arrangements, such as the establishment of private pension funds or the introduction of payments for health services, but that they also imply an important rights dimension. They suggest that social security is increasingly degenerating from a citizen's right and a human right of the individual to be met by the public and the state into a private responsibility that depends on one's individual social, economic and physical capabilities and resources (Morales-Gómez 1999).

The social capital approach promoted by institutional economists has been rightfully criticised as a largely neo-liberal device. I believe, however, that the discussion of social capital and social security also has to be linked to a broader methodological concern that has been intensely discussed, especially among anthropologists doing research in the field of development studies. The uncritical incorporation of critical discourses, approaches and aspects into international development discourse and politics as a strategic element of cutting off their critical potential and using their terms and concepts in order to legitimise and devise harsh neo-liberal policies has been extensively described by anthropologists over the last decade (Ferguson 1999; Escobar 1995; Hobart 1993; Arce & Long 2000). In this context, the current 'social' capital discourse that is intimately related to the debate on social security has also been widely criticised as a new attempt to depoliticise its critical potential, being fed into what Ferguson (1999: 248) has called the "*anti-politics machine*" (Fine 2001). And, as I outlined briefly in the introductory chapters, international organisations, including the World Bank and the International Labour Organisation are in fact already on their way to creating new and modifying hitherto existing social policy concepts and approaches. While most of these concepts are criticised as attempts to further depoliticise and economise social policy concepts, this does not imply a recourse to an equally depoliticised and economised, i.e. rational analytical, approach. On the contrary, I hope that I have shown that, especially as regards the rapidly changing social and economic conditions in Malawi and elsewhere in developing countries, broad analytical approaches to social security that are firmly anchored in a political economy are urgently needed: they not only allow better assessment of social security practices and policies, but are also of a higher analytical and political value.

Notwithstanding these arguments, I believe that, especially from a politico-economic point of view, it remains important to maintain a common concept of social security. While a functional approach to social security permits disentangling the concept from its modernist etatist assumptions and prejudices,

social security always remains an important political notion and a universal social right. Rather than allowing a divisionary model between North and South to develop, social security analysis needs to focus on the societal practice within which it develops and functions, and which also in developed countries is increasingly moving beyond capitalist and modernist normality. This study shows that only the "*engagement with the societal practice*" (Kaufmann 1977: 62) will also allow for adequate social policy approaches and definitions that may differ from the welfarist approach and differentiate between North and South, but that do not necessarily imply a total commodification of social policy rights and measures.

Appendix A