

Shifting Boundaries: Social Security in the Urban Fringe of Lilongwe City, Malawi

**Wijkende grenzen:
sociale zekerheid in de zelfkant
van Lilongwe City, Malawi**

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He re-enters Cape Town on the N2. He has been away less than three months, yet in that time the shanty settlements have crossed the highway and spread east of the airport. The stream of cars has to slow down while a child with a stick herds a stray cow off the road. Inexorably, he thinks, the country is coming to the city. Soon there will be cattle again on Rondebosch Common; soon history will have come full circle. (J.M. Coetzee, Disgrace)

*If you move, the support changes but your obligations remain the same.
(Interview No. 107, Mr. Jameson)*

For Keebet who taught me much about my profession.
For Matteo who taught me much about life.

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Abbreviations

Agricultural and Development Marketing Board (ADMARC)
 Alliance for Democracy (AFORD)
 Capital City Development Committee (CCDC)
 Christian Hospitals Association of Malawi (CHAM)
 Church of Central African Presbyterian (CCAP)
 Community Development Committee (CDC)
 Community Development Committees (CDCs)
 Council of Non-Governmental Organisations in Malawi (CONGOMA)
 European Union (EU)
 Foundation for International Community Assistance (FINCA)
 Free Primary Education (FPE)
 German Technical Cooperation (GTZ)
 Gross Domestic Product (GDP)
 Human Immunodeficiency Virus/
 Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV / AIDS)
 Interantinal Monetary Fund (IMF)
 International Labour Organisation (ILO)
 Malawi Congress Party (MCP)
 Malawi Council for the Handicapped (MACOHA)
 Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (MPRSP)
 Malawian Christian Service Committee (CSC)
 Malawian Christian Service Committee (CSC)
 Malawian Congress of Trade Unions (MCTU)
 Malawian Electricity Company (ESCOM)
 Malawian Kwacha (MK)
 Malawian Social Action Funds (MASAF),
 Malawian Young Pioneers (MYP)
 Medial Aid Society of Malawi (MASM)
 Member of Parliament (MP)
 Mgwirizano Coalition (MC)
 Ministry of Gender, Youth and Community Services (MoGYCS)
 Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP)
 Minsitry of Educaiton (MoE)
 National Adult Literacy Programme (NALP)
 National Democratic Alliance (NDA)
 National Statistica Office (NSO)
 New African Independent Churches (NAICs)
 Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)

Opportunity International (OI)
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)
People's Progressive Movement (PPM)
Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP)
Public works programmes (PWP)
Roman Catholic Church (RCC)
Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCAS)
Saving and Credit Associations (SACCOS)
Sector Wide Approach (SWAP)
Seventh Day Adventist (SDA)
Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP)
Traditional Authorities (TA)
Traditional Housing Area (THA)
United Democratic Front (UDF)
Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)
United Nations Children's Funds (UNICEF).
United Nations Development Programme UNDP
Urban Poverty Alleviation Programme (UPAP)
Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WENELA)
Workmen's Compensation Act (WCA)

Introduction

When one arrives at Lilongwe International Airport and takes a taxi to the city centre, the drive leads along an endless straight tarmac road bordered by huge empty areas of soft hilly grassland and never-ending rows of trees and bushes. Especially during the rainy season, when the grassland stands high with maturing maize, one hardly notices the huge, low-built settlements dispersed between the rolling hills along the city boundaries which have come to host the major part of Lilongwe's population and where most of the city's development is taking place. The scattered settlement structure of Lilongwe, interrupted by large undeveloped green areas, and its huge geographic extension, with two tiny urban cores, resembles a huge village rather than an urban settlement, and makes it hard to believe that one is entering Malawi's second largest and fastest-growing town.

The encounter with a city and an urbanisation process that hardly fits into classic notions of modernisation and development and which, despite rising poverty rates and social insecurity, continues to grow, lies at the core of this book, which examines the social security of urban migrants in Lilongwe. This apparently so paradoxical modernity and urbanity that is arising, despite worsening social and economic conditions and dramatic poverty, has become the norm in most Sub-Saharan cities, which are among the fastest-growing in the world. It is estimated that 40% of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa are already living in the major cities: and 72% of these city dwellers live in poor areas, or so-called 'informal settlements', which mostly are located at the outskirts of the city and which often lack any public services, such as water, sewerage or housing (UN-Habitat 2004). Most inhabitants of these settlements are employed in the so-called 'informal sector economy', which usually means that they depend on insecure and precarious working relations and do not have access to any 'formal' or public social security. For the majority, this will not change in the near future.

This 'informal' or 'marginal' city also provides the social, economic and geographic context in which this research on social security is located. Sector 7 / Area

25A is one of these typical urban fringe areas at the outskirts of Lilongwe City, around 15 km northwest of the city centre. Hidden from the main road to Lilongwe Airport, it forms part of Area 25, a partially well-developed Traditional Housing Area (THA) which comprises three other sub sectors: Area 25/A, Area 25/B, and Area 25/C. Having been occupied by landless urbanites shortly after the transition to democracy in 1994, Sector 7 was one of the first so-called 'Unplanned Traditional Housing Areas' (THAs) or 'Traditional Housing Area Layouts' that have since then sprung up all over Lilongwe at an ever-increasing pace. Starting my research in 1998, I had the unique opportunity to observe the urbanisation processes taking place in Sector 7 almost from scratch. My return three years later in 2001 gave me the opportunity to follow up on these developments and the social, economic and spatial twists and turns the urbanisation of the area, its inhabitants and their social security arrangements had taken.

The development of Sector 7 and the lifestyle of most of its inhabitants hardly fit conventional notions of urbanisation and migration as predicted by the grand theorists of modernisation and development, who declared the city to be the motor of progress and development.¹ The notion of the 'African peasant' whom urban industrialisation would draw into town, where he would then be 'proletarianised', 'modernised' and turned into a citizen who would assert his political and social rights, which amongst others, would also encompass the development of a welfare state, has to be seriously reconsidered. Whereas modernity hardly arrived in the countryside, we shall see that also in town it has only partially taken root. Most people actually live in an economic and social reality that encompasses more than just one mode of production or form of living. Thus, most people in town are engaged in both 'formal' and 'informal' working relations, including subsistence activities such as agriculture and livestock rearing, in order to make a living. This fragmentation of living conditions also includes social security. Most people in Malawi depend on a mix of so-called 'formal', 'informal' and 'traditional' social security arrangements. In contrast to social security provided by the state, the latter two can also be referred to as 'non-state arrangements' (Leliveld 1994), encompassing both 'traditional' customary arrangements and those 'informally' evolving in day-to-day practice.

In Malawi, as in most developing countries, it is in fact these non-state initiated mechanisms that provide the biggest source of social support. In the absence of comprehensive 'formal' or state social security systems, which are mostly only marginally developed, familial, communal and associative networks based on kinship, religion, ethnicity or informal arrangements provide the major source of economic and social support. This also holds for those integrated

¹ For an excellent summary and critique on modernisation theories and especially the role of the city see Simon (1992); Simone (1997); Anderson & Rathbone (2000).

in the 'formal' sector economy, who are usually only marginally protected by public social security systems.

The importance of these non-state schemes for social security has caught the attention of both researchers and policy makers (for example Midgley 1984, 1987; Drèze & Sen et al. 1991; Getubig & Schmidt 1992; F. & K. von Benda-Beckmann et al. 1988; The World Bank 1990; Van Ginneken 1996, 1999). Especially the failure of Structural Adjustment programmes in most developing countries, which, contrary to predictions, have led to rising pauperisation and informalisation of large parts of the population in most developing countries, have brought the subject of social security onto the agenda of research and policy. This was also reflected in a paradigm shift in the international development regime towards a poverty-oriented development strategy at the beginning of the 1990s. Within a renewed focus on the social dimension of development, new strategies that aim at integrating non-state arrangements into comprehensive social security schemes have been developed since that period (see for example ILO 2000; Holzmann & Jørgensen 2000; OECD 2001). While these approaches thus finally seem to recognise the complex social and economic realities in most developing countries, many researchers are critical of the largely unchanging assumptions on which these new policy approaches are based (for example F. & K. von Benda-Beckmann et al. 1988; 1994; Midgley 1984; Drèze & Sen et al. 1991; Leliveld 1994; Lachenmann 1998, Fine 2001). In the light of this, one central argument and aim of this book is to show that the reality of social security in developing countries is far too complex and dynamic as to be approached and analysed with recourse to an understanding of social security that remains strongly associated with and caught up in a notion of social security closely related to the Western-style welfare state. Notions, norms and practices of social (in)security are usually far away from modernist assumptions of needs and insecurities associated with the capitalist urban mode of production on the one hand, and the traditional subsistence mode of the village on the other.

Moving beyond a binary understanding of social security, I shall take a de-centred, functional approach to social security, as developed by Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann (1994). The understanding of social security as an intrinsic aspect of social life embedded in the wider social, economic, political, cultural or legal context of society, enables the drawing of a more coherent and complex picture of social security realities and dynamics of everyday life in the city. As well, a context-driven analysis of social security also allows for an adequate assessment of social security: arguing for what Kaufmann has called "*engaging with the societal practice*"² (1977: 62). I will show that the social security of most urban migrants in Sector 7 is not necessarily a question

² Own translation: "Einlassen auf die Praxis der Gesellschaft." (1977: 62).

of public/private, state/non-state, formal/informal, modern/traditional or urban/rural, but rather a question of availability of material resources, social relations, status, power, knowledge, and last but not least, timing and place.

'Unravelling' social security along various aspects and layers of social organisation, my arguments will also shed light on the dynamics and ambiguities of social security arrangements. These are not static, but are constantly adapting, transforming and modifying according to individual and collective needs and insecurities, as well as in response to changing wider social, economic or ecological conditions. The exploration of these 'analytic borderlands' (Sassen 1996: 185) shows that social security is actually a "*bricolage*" or "*make-shift-mode*" (De Certeau 1984: xv) of notions, norms, practices and entitlements pertaining to different social (security) domains that are continuously mixed, manipulated, and re-negotiated by the different actors involved. This also concerns rules and regulations of support. We shall see that people constantly manipulate and re-negotiate support rights and obligations, thereby drawing new boundaries or lines of in- and exclusion.

Being a geographic borderland situated at the margins of town, Sector 7 also draws attention to the spatial dimension of social security. Social security is not only embedded in different economic, social, legal and institutional realities: its multi-sitedness is also spatially defined. Social security networks of urban migrants in Sector 7 are usually anchored in different geographic sites that extend far beyond the city boundaries. This trans-local condition (Glick-Schiller et al. 1992) of social security also challenges notions of identity and belonging, all of which are of vital importance in gaining access to social support and care. We shall see that this is especially pronounced in a 'geographic' borderland situated at the margins of the city, like Sector 7. Rural-urban borderlands, like Sector 7, epitomise these delineation and boundary-setting processes in a specific way, as 'new' migrants try to re-assert and redefine their 'urban' and 'rural' identities in the encounter with the city, the urban 'autochthon' population and the 'rural' relatives left behind.

The exploration of social security in an urban context must finally also include yet another, typically urban understanding of social security, i.e. as "*issues of management and control*" (Simone 1997: 3). Questions as to how people – in the absence of adequate infrastructure and social services – gain access to these services and organise their living in town has for a long time been at the core of urbanisation studies (for example Castells 1983; Gilbert 1994; Gugler 1997; De Sousa Santos 1977; Fernandez & Varley 1997; Rakodi 1997). These aspects are, however, often left out or analysed separately from studies on urban poverty, livelihood and survival strategies. Whereas the importance of trans-local network relations for the urban livelihood has become in the meantime an unchal-

lenged fact (see for example Potts 1995; Lomnitz 1997; Gugler 1997; Tacoli 2001), the influence of the city and urbanisation processes on the organisation and formation of local and trans-local social security networks and practices, as well as notions of (in)security, remain widely un-theorised.

Trying to obtain a comprehensive view of the social (in)securities of urban migrants, this study understands urbanisation as an integral part of local and trans-local social security practices. Rather than viewing urbanisation and migration as compartmentalised, self-contained social processes, I shall argue for a more interconnected and integrated view. Linking together different social, economic, political, legal, cultural contexts, experiences and places, these processes not only influence each other, but also have an impact on the making and re-making of social (in)security, its notions, needs, and coping strategies.

Organisation of the Study

Aiming to get a hold on the dynamics of social security practices in-between the city and the countryside, 'modernity' and 'tradition', and kinship and the state, I will take a 'mobile' and unbound perspective on social security practices that allows their analysis across geographical, political and analytical boundaries. My research shall thereby highlight the following set of arguments and questions:

- Has the composition and quality of social security mechanisms and strategies in urban Malawi changed over time, and if so, for whom and why?
- How strong is migration (still) as a social security strategy, and how vital are social networks over distance for the urban population, as well as for those left behind in the villages?
- To what extent do these changes induce a specific qualitative and quantitative transformation in the context of 'informal', 'traditional' and 'formal' schemes?

Accordingly, the study is organised as follows. In Chapter 1, I will discuss and expand on the theoretical and methodological approaches laid out in the introduction, challenging the notion of social security as a mere aspect of modernity and urbanisation and trying to re-position it as a dynamic concept in the context of urbanisation and migration processes. Chapter 2 gives a short overview of the political economy of Malawi with special reference to the social policy sector. It shows that social security in Malawi has always been highly informal, a system in which non-state institutions and mechanisms have played an important role. Chapter 3 focuses on urbanisation and migration processes in

Lilongwe and specifically Sector 7, the research area. I shall argue that marginal areas and borderlands like Sector 7 represent a normality of modernity and urbanity for a rising number of urban inhabitants in Lilongwe, as well as in many other developing countries today. This borderland situation, in which a variety of different lifestyles and ways of living pertaining to different rural/urban, modern/traditional and formal/informal domains encounter one another, mix, and exist side-by-side, hosts to a rising extent also those migrants who due to Structural Adjustment and Good Governance have experienced a social, economic and spatial marginalisation. Chapter 4 will show that this marginalisation process has also intensified the struggle over the city. Whereas access to the city, including land, housing and infrastructure, has always been difficult, we shall see that urbanisation attempts by the poorer autochthon part of the population of Sector 7 are increasingly being hijacked by the relatively marginalised, yet richer and more powerful civil servants, who – ousted by social policy reforms – have been gentrifying the area over the years. The poor, in contrast, are forced to be continuously on the move, being marginalised further, to the edges of town and beyond. In this way, they not only lose access to a better and healthier infrastructure, but are also deprived of the chance to create a permanent place called home, including permanent social network structures.

Chapter 5 deals with local social security arrangements in the city. We shall see that the heterogeneous urban context allows for a broad extension and expansion of network relations and institutions. This may also lead to the creation of new kinship relations, which remain a nodal point of network relations in town. At the same time, the chapter shows that overall social and economic pressure has highly stratified urban support relations over the years. Especially HIV/AIDS has had a severe impact on network relations. Access to support has not only become extremely insecure, but is increasingly fought over by means of fear and force. Chapter 6 discusses social security networks anchored outside the household sphere, including religious, ethnic and regional associations and NGOs, specifically micro saving and credit schemes. These organisations offer an important communal space for migrants in town, as they provide a source of belonging and identity and potential network partners. We shall see that overall support constraints are transforming these networks increasingly into important direct providers of support that are faced with a growing number of needs and needy.

The analysis of trans-local relations in Chapter 7 shows that trans-local support cannot be confined to the exchange of material resources, but should encompass a wide range of different resources, ideas, values and skills that move back and forth. I shall argue that this trans-local social security economy is highly dynamic, expanding and contracting over time, and is characterised by different

degrees of mobility. Notwithstanding the strong obligations and expectations of mutual support existent both in town and in the village, we shall see that trans-local support is increasingly stratified and situational, and is largely activated in severe crisis situations only, such as family issues or hunger. At the same time, the chapter shows that socio-economic constraints and HIV/AIDS have led to a re-activation of trans-local support strategies, thus re-connecting town and the village. This has also changed mobility patterns. While the social and economic decline has immobilised a number of especially poorer people, who are no longer able to draw on trans-local strategies, it has also made more people move between village and town in order to make a living. Social and economic tensions have also changed access modalities to existing social security arrangements. Whereas land and labour shortages in the village restrict return options for the urban migrants, urban female migrants in particular are becoming victims of rapacious and violent inheritance practices, such as property grabbing.

Finally, in the last chapter of the book, the main results are summarised and discussed against the theoretical assumptions raised in the introductory chapter. This also includes a short discussion of my findings against the current political and analytical debate on social policy in developing countries that has been an important source of inspiration for this book.

Chapter 1

Contextualising Social Security: Some Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

1.1 Introduction

If one examines the current international debate on social policy and social security in developing countries and the policy approaches underway within international organisations and NGOs, it seems that the welfarist notion of social security that presented one of the great modernist narratives of the post-war period has become a thing of the past.

While for a long time it was assumed that social support relations based on the extended family and communal relations would break away with economic growth and modernisation, to be substituted by public institutions that would provide for a different, modern type of social support, the new social security concepts (for example Holzmann et al. 2003; World Bank 2003; ILO 2000; Van Ginneken 2005) in developing countries seem to be taking another turn. Contrary to the purely growth-oriented, modernist approach, that saw economic growth as a pre-condition for social development, the new approaches not only emphasise the importance of social investment and development as a complementary set of measures that should help to engender growth and through its re-distributive function, sustain and balance it (for example DAC 2005; OECD 2005; World Development Report 2006), they also seem to take a different institutional approach, trying to integrate both state and non-state arrangements into comprehensive social security schemes. The 'new consensus on social security'

adopted by the ILO (2000) aims for the extension of social security to cover people employed in informal labour relations, too. Via a wide range of partly locally organised small-scale arrangements, people are to be linked up and integrated into a 'multi-faceted' welfare scheme, within which the state is just one provider among many others (ibid; Van Ginneken 2005). The 'social risk management framework' developed by the World Bank takes an even more residual approach away from the state, one that largely focuses on the promotion and expansion of individual economic capacity, which is understood as the core instrument in coping with economic and social risks. Aiming at "*providing instruments that allow the poor or vulnerable to minimize the impact of exposure to risk and change their behaviour in a way that helps them exit poverty and lower their vulnerability*" (World Bank 2003), social security is largely understood as an individual responsibility, to be taken care of on a private, partly commercial basis. The role of the state is largely reduced to that of a crisis manager that is only to come to the assistance of the so-called 'critically vulnerable' who are unable to manage their risks on an individual basis, and to intervene in case of major covariate risks, such as natural disasters, hunger, or war (Holzmann & Jørgensen 2000).

The growing importance attributed to the social dimension of development and the new approaches taken are not just a matter of fashion. The widespread failure of the Structural Adjustment that the International Finance Institutions introduced in many developing countries during the 1980s put an end to the modernist dream of development in most countries. The realisation that macro-economic measures alone did not automatically lead to a trickle-down of economic and social development, but instead contributed to rising poverty rates, also challenged concepts of social policy and social security. The concept of the "*incremental welfare state*", (Midgley 1997: 98) that would slowly expand at the same pace as the economy grew, had actually been reversed: while until the 1970s and mid-1980s, public social security has been steadily rising in many developing countries, the number of people employed in the formal sector economy and covered by statutory social security has been decreasing in most developing countries since this time, and currently covers less than 5% of the labour force worldwide, with Sub-Sahara Africa having the lowest coverage rates of between 5% and 10% (Van Ginneken 1999: 1). By the same token, the number of people working and living in the so-called 'informal' sector and being dependent on 'informal' social security has been rising dramatically, and has become normality for most people in developing countries today, also for those integrated in the 'formal' sector economy and covered by only marginally developed public welfare schemes.

It would thus seem that policy makers have finally realised the importance of taking account of the complex social and economic conditions in which most

people in developing countries live and manage their social security. However, this chapter argues that, despite major policy changes, the assumptions on which these new approaches are based largely remain the same. This becomes especially apparent when one looks at social security in the context of urbanisation and migration – both phenomena closely identified with modernisation. In this chapter, I will continue to develop the theoretical assumptions laid out in the introduction to this book. Trying to dissociate social security from its narrow modernist concept, I shall argue for a notion of social security as a dynamic and trans-local phenomenon intrinsic to migration, urbanisation and social change. I will argue that only a broad, functional approach to social security allows us to take account of the complex and fragmented social and economic realities in which people in Malawi live and which, as we shall see throughout the book, are a long way away from modernist or traditionalist assumptions of the state, market, household, social security and finally, the city. In a second part of the chapter, I will discuss some of the methodological aspects and implications of the study.

1.2 Social Security Beyond Modernity

At first glance, the new policy approaches that are discussed for developing countries seem to indicate that social security has finally escaped the “*narrow horizon of time and space*” (Partsch 1983: 18) to which modernist notions of economic and social development, including industrialisation and the development of a social welfare state had confined it. Indeed, the new means and mechanisms proposed finally seem to take account of the complex social and economic realities in developing countries, including the growing informalisation of living and working conditions and the different needs and insecurities resulting from these developments.

Yet, upon closer examination of these new concepts, one realises that this is not necessarily the case. While the new concepts have broadened the classical state-centred welfarist approach, major assumptions related to social security as a concept of modernity remain largely unchanged. They not only imply a highly static, divisionary notion of ‘formal’ institutes and ‘informal’ institutions, they also assume a strong hierarchical structure as regards their functioning, including their efficiency and effectiveness, their organisational degree, and their qualitative and quantitative coverage. Indeed, four major contradictions can be discerned: (1) the continuous focus on the state as having a primary role in the provision of social security; (2) the legal dimension, stressing the role of statutory law in regulating access to social security; (3) the ‘definitional’ dimension, assuming a specific set of (in)securities and needs; and finally (4) the

socio-economic dimension, relating social security to a specific mode of production (see F. von Benda-Beckmann 1994; Leliveld 1994).

Despite the fact that the new policy approaches have reduced the role of the state, the latter is still attributed a key function in the provision of social support which is closely related to a modernist notion of the (welfare) state. The new ILO approach promotes the development of other mechanisms that are more appropriate for dealing with different socio-economic realities and insecurities. But these new mechanisms and forms of social security or insurance are largely perceived as mere transitory, auxiliary measures, which sooner or later will have to be linked up and integrated into a comprehensive welfare state scheme (ILO 2000). Thus, the state retains an important role as regards the provision and administration of social security. This holds as well for the World Bank, which takes an even more residual approach, reducing the state's role to a risk and crisis manager that under 'normal' circumstances exists merely to guarantee an institutionally efficient framework, the so-called 'enabling' environment necessary for non-state providers of social support to function well (see Holzmann & Jørgensen 2000).

However, even this new reduced role attributed to the state as a manager and administrator of social security heavily contradicts the reality in most developing countries, where the state consists of a highly fragmented set of institutions with a similarly fragmented authority (see for example Anders 2005; Bayart 1993; Chazan 1994). The shape, geographic extension, efficiency and effectiveness of a state's institutions are not homogeneously distributed. In most countries, the presence of the state shows a strong urban bias, which makes it difficult to adequately fulfil its tasks as a crisis manager or administrator of a multi-faceted scheme. This urban bias also concerns its role as a provider of social security mechanisms, where it retains an important role, as is the case for health, education or its employer's liability. In Malawi, for example, state social security continues to show a strong urban bias, which makes it difficult for those in rural areas to gain access to support and care, for example, to hospitals or schools, or simply to be in the position to cash a monthly pension.

The role of the state as creator of an enabling environment strongly ties in with the second dimension; attributing state law a primary role in regulating support relations. Although the new welfare mix recognises other entities aside from the state as social security providers, this does not include other legal frameworks. On the contrary, in the course of the Good Governance reform, the 'rule of law' – here being understood as an effective legal and judicial regulatory framework – has even gained more importance, being attributed a key role in creating efficient and sustainable economic development. Through private law, such as family, inheritance or property law, it is also to provide the basic regulatory

framework for non-state social support mechanisms, among individuals, commercial organisations or other private institutions, or NGOs taking care of social support.

Whereas in most countries a quite extensive legal framework on private matters, such as inheritance or property, has come into existence, it is hardly effective. The introduction of inheritance law in Malawi has been celebrated as an enormous achievement, especially as regards the position of women. However, we shall see that most women hardly have the knowledge and the resources to gain access to a court of justice, which are in any case usually too overcrowded and overworked to reach an agreement in time. At the same time, we shall see that in Malawi, as in many other developing countries, extensive legal pluralism exists. While state law is claimed to have a primary position over other legal frameworks, this is not necessarily the case. State law is usually just one legal framework amongst many others anchored in customary law or 'informal' rules and regulations, which under certain circumstance may gain much more relevance than state law. These non-state social security arrangements may show a high degree of institutionalisation, such as can be found in customary or religious law, or in the rules and regulations concerning access to development projects (see for example K. von Benda-Beckmann 1988). Land rights represent another highly institutionalised form of social support, similar to inheritance law or the rights and obligations concerning kinship.

The co-existence of these different regulatory systems anchored in 'formal', 'traditional' and 'informal' spheres is of specific relevance in relations to social security mechanisms, which are often regulated by more than one legal framework. In many developing countries, land rights are, for example, regulated by both state and customary law, the content of which may diverge substantially (for example Toulmin & Quan 2000). Another example might be the legal framework provided by the state for NGOs or commercial insurance companies, which in turn have their own, sometimes contradictory, regulatory frameworks. The existence of various legal frameworks may make it easier to gain access to resources in different environments and circumstances – but it may also cause substantial conflict. We shall see that people are actually "*forum shoppers*" (F. & K. von Benda-Beckmann 1994: 22), shifting between different regulatory frameworks in order to manipulate and gain access to support and care.

The emphasis on state-law as central for gaining access to and controlling social security relates yet to another 'functional' contradiction. State-regulated social security systems are not only assumed to function much better, but to guarantee universal, continuous and 'just' access to social support resistant to fraud, corruption and economic shortfalls, as opposed to the highly particularistic, subjective and manipulative rules and regulations surrounding 'informal' support

relations, such as family relations or informal labour relations (*ibid.*). We shall see that 'informal' labour relations may encompass strong obligations to provide social support on part of the employer. Moreover, these may in many ways be as efficient and effective as social services in the 'formal-sector-economy', which often lack the resources necessary for their realisation as an effective social security arrangement.

The existence of different social and economic realities in which people are living strongly relates to yet another point: the definition of social security. Social security approaches usually depart from a notion of social security that is strongly based on risks and insecurities related to the capitalist way of production. The focus on risks arising from productive cash labour is also reflected in the still widely used 'minimum standard definition' of the ILO, no.102 of 1952, that defines social security as "(...) *the protection which society provides for its members, through a series of public measures, against the economic and social distress that otherwise would be caused by the stoppage or substantial reduction of earnings resulting from sickness, maternity, employment injury, unemployment, invalidity, old age and death; the provision of medical care; and the provision of subsidies for families with children.*" (ILO 1984: 2-3) The recent shift of the ILO towards its decent work strategy and the Basic Social Security Approach (ILO 2000) implies a broadening of its definition, at least on an administrative level, including risks other than those related to cash labour, such as adequate nutrition, housing, etc. (Van Ginneken 2005).¹

However, the definition remains highly problematic. We shall see that many people in Malawi live mainly in the subsistence economy. Very many more, most urban migrants among them, live in-between the subsistence and the market economy, and only a few employed in the 'formal sector' are able to live solely on their monetary income. These different normalities of working relationships and types of income not only create different needs, but also risks and insecurities other than those related to the loss of monetary income. More importantly, as Woodman (1988: 72) states, the ILO-definition only includes those who "*lose an income-producing activity*" but not those who – due to mental or physical handicaps – are "*unable to begin any*". In this context, Keebet von Benda-Beckmann (1995) also refers to the importance of looking at the overall societal framework: what is regarded as a 'decent life', what responsibilities an indi-

¹ Recently, international agencies have increasingly come to use the concept of 'vulnerability' instead of (in)securities (see for example Holzmann & Jørgensen 2000; OECD 2001; for a critique see Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler 2004). Although the historical development of the social security discourse and the use of different social policy and social security concepts in development politics at different points in time would be a highly interesting point of discussion, it would go beyond the scope of this book, which closely adheres to its focus on and indeed evolves around the concept of social security.

vidual has, how need and social risks are defined, and under which conditions and through which mechanisms social support is provided, is not only subject to the socio-economic framework, but also the social order of a society, its cultural principles, and the political decision-making process (1995:5). In fact, I shall argue that the demographic collapse as a result of HIV/AIDS has truncated many of the migration and urbanisation trajectories migrants usually had available to them, which in turn, has also meant a substantial reduction of social security arrangements 'typical' within a wider trans-local political economy. Furthermore, we shall see that HIV/AIDS has also had a profound impact on the social order of Malawian society as a whole, re-shuffling notions of (in)security, risk and perceptions of past, present and future.

Ultimately, the reduction of social security to one, single normality refers to the economic dimension, relating social security exclusively to the capitalist mode of production. This assumption has also strong geographical connotations, as it is assumed that the cash economy is a predominantly urban phenomenon, while subsistence and agriculture are confined to rural areas only (Mouton 1975). We shall see that urban migrants depend on a variety of income sources, modes of production, and ways of living that criss-cross 'formal and informal' labour relations, including agricultural production, and urban-rural and national boundaries (see for example, Baker & Claseon 1990; Baker et al. 1992). Moreover, I shall show that this 'occupational mix' is not a strategy used by the poorer 'informalised' population to deal with insecurities here and there, but that it is actually a constitutive part of the urban economy for both rich and poor.

1.3 Mobile Migrants

The fact that social security is a mix of different state and non-state institutions and relations scattered over a wider geographical area also challenges the conceptual framework within which it is analysed. Social security is a patchwork of a variety of mechanisms and actors embedded in different interlocking social, economic, political, cultural and moral orders. This 'multi-sidedness' is also spatially defined. We shall see that the social security economy of urban migrants is anchored in a variety of localities that encompass both town and the village and may even extend beyond national and continental boundaries. It is within this wider geographical framework of different social, economic, political and cultural conditions and constellations that migrants live, work and manage their social security. In the wake of those trans-national migration studies that analyse migrants' behaviour and strategies as embedded in a wider trans-national framework of different social, economic, cultural and political conditions and environments rather than alongside regional, national or urban-rural geographic

and conceptual boundaries,² I will also take a trans-local perspective. Understanding the rural and the urban as a trans-local space sheds a different light on social security practices in town and the way they operate. We will see that migrants live and move within a trans-local economy which also structures their social security capacities in gaining and providing access to support, as they are dependent on the availability of resources, and the actual social and economic conditions at hand.

Analysing social security as a trans-local phenomenon also requires a re-appraisal of migration in general, and as a social security strategy in particular. Especially rural-urban migration has for a long time been considered a specific feature of modernity and development that only came into existence with colonialism, capitalism and modernity.³ Urban migration was perceived of as an indispensable pre-requisite of modernity, an inescapable force to which people would react almost automatically. Being uprooted from their sedentary, static rural way of life, they would join the steady stream of labour force flowing into the city in order to become a member of the urban “*labour aristocracy*” (Potts 1997: 449). It went without saying that this move into modernity was an irreversible and unique one, as people – once in the city – would also remain there and become permanently urbanised (Kearny 1986).

Although the process intensified with the onset of modernity, it is now a common understanding that Africans had been on the move long before colonialism and capitalism penetrated the continent, as a reaction to territorial disputes or climatic changes.⁴ Moreover, most people remain mobile throughout their lives. Contrary to a modernist understanding that views migration as a deviation and ‘pathology’ to the ‘normal’ sedentary way of life, we shall see that in countries like Malawi it is migration which actually represents ‘normality’, being an integral part of social life and organisation (for example Baker & Aina 1995; De Bruijn et al. 2001; De Haan 1999; Andersson 2001; Simone 2005). People always seem to be on the move, moving behind spouses, land, labour or care. This does not mean that people necessarily break with their former social environments, as many follow a ‘circular’ migration pattern (Chapman & Prothero 1983; De Haan 1997). People tend to move back and forth between different places, remaining in close contact with their home of origin, or other places they have lived in along their migration itinerary. This also encompasses inner-urban movements: we shall see that urban migrants are exposed to a high degree of inner-urban

² See Glick-Schiller et al. (1992); Glick-Schiller and Fouron (2001); Basch et al. (1994); Appadurai (1995); Nuijten (1998); Bryceson & Vuorela (2002); Kearny (1986);

³ See Todaro (1971); for an overview and critique De Haan (1999); Baker et al. (1990); Coquery-Vidrovitch (1991); Kearny (1986); Simon (1992), Ferguson (1999).

⁴ For an overview of the early history of Central Africa see Wills (2001) and Birmingham & Martin (1992).

mobility, which is also discernible in their network relations, which may stretch over different residential areas of town.

This circular migration pattern was for a long time associated with an incomplete modernisation process that would not allow people to permanently settle in one place.⁵ We shall see that this is not necessarily the case. Migration is not only a response to poor living conditions in the village that force people to move in order to survive: contrary to conventional assumptions, migration is central to the livelihoods of both rich and poor and may also assume an income- or welfare-enhancing function (De Haan 1999). Furthermore, migration is not solely based on economic considerations, as migration models, such as the widely discussed push-pull-model by Todaro (1971), have for a long time assumed. Whereas economic considerations are central to the decision to migrate, migration decisions are much more complex, encompassing social, psychological or political aspects that may be equally, or in some cases even more important, than economic considerations (see for example Gugler & Flanagan 1978; Baker & Aina 1995).⁶

The importance of non-material considerations in determining migration decisions is especially discernible when migration is examined as a social security strategy. We shall see that considerations concerning the availability of care labour, medical treatment or psychological support often play an important role in migration decisions. The breakdown of family structures and social networks, and the resulting scarcity of care labour due to HIV/AIDS has, for example, led to an enormous upsurge of urban migration for social support.

The understanding of migration "*not as a passing phenomenon of transition but a durable feature of the regional political economy*" (Ferguson 1999: 91) reveals that urban-rural resources encompass a variety of non-human and non-material things on the move, such as ideas, values and skills (for example Adepoju 1977; De Bruijn et al. 2001). Rural relatives often come to acquire specific skills from

⁵ While modernisation theorists saw this continuous dependence of urban migrants upon their rural homestead as a transitional phase of a modernity not yet completed that sooner or later would come to an end (for example Jones 1953; Gavrilova 1975), world system theorists saw it as a deeply rooted structural condition of capitalism itself. The merely partial incorporation of the urban migrant into the global capitalist system would not allow him to permanently settle in town and forced him into a 'dual economy' (Gugler 1971), having to diversify income sources and production types over spatial distance by combining both urban cash and rural subsistence economies in order to make a living (for example Gugler & Flanagan 1978; Gugler 1991; Amin 1972; 1995).

⁶ The strength of the economic bias is also discernible in the analysis of rural-urban network relations, the resilience of which is largely assessed by measuring the frequency with which cash remittances or other material goods are sent back and forth (for an overview on the literature on remittances see De Haan 1999). This also pre-supposes an urban bias, as it is assumed to be the urban migrant who is exclusively on the cash-provider side of social support, whereas the villager on the other side of the chain is reduced to a person who waits, merely fulfilling the role of a recipient.

their urban relatives that may allow them to earn some cash income upon their return in the village. Apart from funerals and marriages that are usually held in the village, urban migrants return home in case of marriage problems to be counselled by their *ankoswe*.⁷ The same holds for disputes over family matters or land issues, which are usually discussed in the village. Finally, many migrants in town also call upon their female rural relatives as traditional birth attendants.

Migration therefore also extends the 'social security radius' of those left behind in the village. Apart from remittances sent back and forth, the urban kin in town also provide 'long-distance-access' to resources and social security mechanisms more easily accessible in town, such as health care or development organisations. The migration of one person also has an important bridging function for those migrating in the future (Grieco 1995). Potential migrants hardly move without having any contact in town. As we shall see, they usually have a fairly large rural-urban network at their disposal before they even start moving, and thus also have access to information on working opportunities and the money for the transport fare. Urban kin also have an important sluice function, providing newly arrived migrants with shelter, support in seeking employment, education, health services or other assistance (see for example Makuka 1995; Rohregger 2000; K. von Benda-Beckmann 2004).

1.4 The City as an Open Space

Discussing migration as relational, i.e. embedded in a wider social, economic, cultural and geographical trans-local framework, also challenges the perspective on urbanisation and the city as yet another notion and locus intrinsically related to modernity and development. Looking at African and Latin American cities and their partly breathtaking architectural representations that appear totally out of place when compared to the impoverished urban and rural surroundings, the city does indeed seem to represent *the* embodiment of modernity par excellence. Although it has lost much of its original splendour, tall buildings and shopping malls can also be found in the tiny urban core of Lilongwe city. This spatial expression of a global corporate capitalist culture (Sassen 1996) refers not only to a specific mode of capitalist production, but also epitomises an 'economisation' of modes of organisation, types of relations, behaviour, and thinking. As Wirth (1938) in his famous article '*Urbanism as a way of life*' described, the transformation of a 'tribesman' into a 'townsman' (Mayer 1963) was supposed to lead to a dissolution of 'traditional' multiplex relations, to be replaced by a homogeneous mass society bound by a highly individualised and institutionalised, sim-

⁷ *Ankhoswe* (pl.)/ *Nkoswe* (sgl.) 'traditional' marriage advisor.

plex type of social relations. Urbanism would thus also give birth to a modern rational and efficient individual who would strive for economic competition and profit maximisation (Laurenço-Lindell 2001).

This process of *'Vergesellschaftung'* would also include a 'social securitisation'. It was assumed to be the city where the migrant, in the course of the capitalist incorporation and the breakdown of traditional solidarity structures based on the family and the community, would become incorporated within the welfare state, which, in the course of the capitalist expansion, would eventually reach the rural hinterland. This process also included access to infrastructure, housing and other social services, which were discussed as specifically urban problems exclusively related to the *'making of the city'* (for example Gugler 1997; Gilbert 1994; Rakodi 1997).

The teleological perspective on migration and urbanisation as a continuous forward movement along an urban-rural continuum was also assumed to underlie a specific spatial order. Based on Burgess' organic city model, a centre-periphery model developed, which assumed that the city would develop in concentric circles around an urban core, relocating groups and individuals according to their position within the overall social and spatial hierarchy (Burgess 1967). The existence of a vast urban fringe springing up at the margins of the city and modernity, where the rural migrant would initially arrive and which was associated with poverty and informal working and living conditions, was thereby put in stark contrast to a small, but spatially, socially and economically fully modernised and highly dynamic urban core that would also provide a link and nodal point with the world 'outside' (Simon 1992).⁸

Many writers, such as Sassen (1991; 1996) and Harvey (1990a; 1990b), have pointed out since then that urbanisation processes and inner-city movements, both in developing and industrial countries, are far too complex and contradictory as to follow mechanical patterns of spatial and economic order that would make people move almost automatically from the poor 'rural' periphery into the rich urban core at the same pace as the economy would grow. This is especially the case in developing countries, where the areas along the city boundaries and the marginal fringe areas within the city centres represent highly dynamic and vibrant parts of the city. We shall see that it is in these marginal areas where

⁸ World system and dependency theorists (for example Frank 1970; Amin 1972; Wallerstein 1986) interpreted changing economic, social and political dynamics of the world system as a series of dynamics that evolve between the economic centres and core areas and the peripheral world zones, which were largely situated in the developing countries. It was the unequal distribution of economic and political power which also led to unequal development, from which profited especially the countries in the core who could extract resources for their development at low cost from the periphery. The cities which were partly incorporated in the world system was thereby ascribed a satellite function between the rural hinterland and the global markets (Simon 1992; Sassen 1991).

the city largely seems to take place and which, despite their weak economic and political power, have become “powerful space(s)” (Hall cited in Sassen 1996: 196).

In this respect, the city is understood as a multiply divided, de-centred terrain with a myriad of hierarchical spatial relations, which are in a continuous process of re-assertion and re-definition (Krätke 1990; Sassen 1996; Harvey 1990a). The understanding of the city “as a strategic terrain of a whole series of conflicts and contradictions” (Sassen 2002: 18) that require continuous ‘place-making’ over one’s social, physical, economic and symbolic environment also challenges conceptual notions of urbanisation. Urban place-making processes do not evolve along a clear-cut line of social, economic, spatial or cultural division drawn between the city margins, its rural hinterland, and its centre that corresponds to the conceptual dualisms of urban/rural, formal/informal or modern and traditional, as suggested by theories of modernisation and change. Rather, urbanisation processes are to be understood as a whole range of conflicts over practical, symbolic and imagined spaces and places that follow their own specific lines of conflict, among which the classical modernisation process between the capitalist core and the underdeveloped periphery is just one amongst many others (*ibid.*). These processes are taking place simultaneously in many different sites and places in the city. They are not static, nor do they follow a specific hierarchy in the city’s social and economic space, but rather follow their own logics. We shall see that ‘illegal’ or ‘informal’ place-making strategies in town, including access to housing, infrastructure and other social services, such as policing or dispute settlement, are not only a desperate attempt of the ‘excluded’ and ‘marginalised’, who, in the absence of adequate public infrastructure, find their own ways into the city. The construction of what I shall call ‘counter-legality’⁹ in order to gain, maintain and defend their access to the city also involves the still powerful centres and their inhabitants who are increasingly gentrifying the marginal city. In their struggle for permanence, people thus continuously transcend and subvert the very boundaries and lines of division they have created in their efforts to gain access to town, thereby constantly re-defining the city and the city’s spaces.

Following Massey (1994: 121), who defines spaces and places not as bounded areas, but as open and porous networks of social relations whose “‘identities’ are constructed through the specificity of their interaction with other places rather than by counter position to them,” I understand urbanisation as a range of social processes that – similar to migration – are embedded in social organisation and change. Urbanisation processes, therefore, also transcend geographic boundaries, taking place far beyond the city limits and having repercussions upon all members in a trans-local network, including those ‘left behind in the village’. At the same time, the definition of space as relational also allows for an open and unbound

⁹ See Chapter 4.

definition of the city. The notion of the city, not as a contained space within which urbanisation follows spatially-, socially- and economically-grounded linear processes, but instead as an open space of social and economic relations involved in continuous boundary-setting processes, also allows for a shift in the focus of attention towards the edges and margins of the city. These borderlands between modernity and tradition and the city and the countryside not only provide the geographic and analytical focus of this study: as we shall see, it is in marginal areas like Sector 7 where these boundary-setting processes are especially pronounced.

1.5 The Urban-Rural Borderland as a Trans-local Space

Understanding the city as an open space with no clear-cut boundaries but as a whole range of 'analytic borderlands' (Sassen 1996) challenges spatial conceptions of town and countryside at the same time. In addition, the understanding of the city as "*a work in progress*" (Simone 1997: 56) also challenges its symbolic and conceptual boundaries. The debate about the definition of the city as a spatial, social, cultural and economic field as opposed to its rural hinterland is a long one. There are as many definitions of the city as there are cities in the world, ranging from demographic and behavioural, cultural, social or economic issues to functional concerns (for an overview see Coquery-Vidrovitch 1990; Simon 1992; King 1996; Southall 1998). Especially in the East- and Southern African context of fast-growing industrial centres which attracted large streams of labour migration, the cultural dualism between the 'urban' and the 'rural', 'tradition' and 'modernity' formed a core debate of the regional anthropology. The persistent tribalism among urban migrants discernible in the maintenance of strong rural-urban relations, the creation of ethnically-based associations and the vivid presence of 'traditional' customs and dances in urban areas was the subject of intense research and heated debates (Mitchell 1956; for a critique see Kapferer 1995; Ferguson 1999; Englund 2001).¹⁰

¹⁰ Whereas functionalists interpreted the persisting tribalism as a transitional phase in the 'divine' plan to urbanity and modernity yet to be completed, urban anthropologists working in the great industrial areas argued that it was the modernisation process in the colonies itself which did not allow the urban migrants to get fully settled in town and reach full 'urban involvement' (Mitchell 1956; 1966; 1973; Gluckmann 1961; Southall 1961; Cohen 1969; 1974). However, while ethnicity was understood as an essentially modern feature brought about by mass-industrialisation, the cultural dualism implicit in urbanisation theories persisted. The assumption of a 'cultural breakdown' as a necessary pre-condition to urbanisation was perceived as inescapable. It was only a question of time, depending merely on the 'urban involvement' of the migrant and on their ability to become independent of the social, economic and cultural relations which still tied them to the village (Mitchell 1956; for a critique see Ferguson 1999).

The definition of rural-urban boundaries is of special relevance in the context of this study. Contrary to modernist assumptions of the urban fringe as the place of the poor and the not yet urbanised, a place from which populations would slowly gain access to the city and modernity, we shall see that in Sector 7, different, partly contradictory urban tendencies and trajectories exist side-by-side. While a few migrants have realised their urban dream, having gained access to a better job and better housing over the years, most inhabitants have remained in the area and will probably not succeed in leaving it in the future. On the contrary, many have been marginalised still further, having been pushed off the area, either back to rural areas or to other marginal areas of town by better-off migrants, mainly civil servants who have been forced to move to marginal and cheaper areas as a result of retrenchment in employment and social services due to Structural Adjustment and Good Governance.

At the same time, we shall see that the appropriation of the city, both in geographic and symbolic space, involves both rural and urban resources. Everyday practices in the city show that people continuously mix different identities, sources of income, means of power and representation, and ways of living, in order to manage town life. This concerns both urban place making strategies, such as access to housing or infrastructure, and individual network relations. Rural network relations are not only of intrinsic importance for urban migrants' security networks. Urban/rural dualisms provide also an important resource set that migrants use in their daily social security discourse and practice to negotiate and manipulate their social support rights and obligations by trying to gain access to support or, as a provider, justify its denial.

Against the background of this incessant intermingling of rural and urban resources, strategies and lifestyles, it has been argued that rural-urban differences are increasingly dissolving. Whereas informal living and working conditions and the strong rural-urban links have been interpreted as a ruralisation of the city (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1991; Bakari 1988; for a critique see Simone 1997), others have argued that an analytical differentiation between rural and urban areas has totally outlived its utility. Rather than between two distinct areas, people move behind gradually different social and economic conditions evolving within a wider regional political economy (for a critique see Cordell et al. 1996). We shall see that changing social and economic conditions brought about by Structural Adjustment and a growing monetisation have indeed blurred empirical and analytical boundaries between 'rural' and 'urban' life worlds, as people are increasingly drawing upon both life worlds to make a living, transgressing functional, administrative and physical boundaries related to the city and its rural hinterland.

I shall argue that a rural-urban differentiation remains important nevertheless. Firstly, it remains crucial for the people themselves, providing a powerful

place-maker and boundary marker within town and over distance. Thus, the civil servants forced to move into cheaper Sector 7 from higher income residential areas view Sector 7 with its tight social structure as a well-equipped village with a well-developed infrastructure. On the other hand, for many migrants, especially those who have only recently come to town, Sector 7 is *the* embodiment of the urban jungle. Listening to their accounts of Sector 7 as a socially totally anonymous place, full of crime and prostitution, it seems as if they were living in the most dangerous neighbourhoods of London, New York or Paris. At the same time, questions of 'belonging' wrapped up in discourses on identity, community and culture are of intrinsic importance in trans-local social (security) relations in order to gain or deny access to support and care. Secondly, a differentiating view is also of importance on an analytical level. It is in town where processes of social and economic change are particularly pronounced and intense, which in turn also engender particular dynamics and distinct developments (Low 1996). These differences remain crucial for the understanding of the trans-local social security economy and the strategies deployed, including migration. Rather than two clearly defined and opposed domains, I therefore understand the urban and the rural domains as closely articulated social, economic and cultural spheres (Cordell et al. 1996; Simone 2005; Englund 2002a). While they may coincide in specific practices and strategies, showing complex and dense social and economic links, they may provide completely opposite domains in others, responding to overall changing social and economic conditions or life-cycle events taking place both within the village or town.

In fact, we shall see that village and town provide a highly complex and dynamic field of relations that is exposed to a continuous process of re-organisation, expanding and contracting accordingly. Contrary to what they claim, most migrants' trans-local relations to the village or beyond the city boundaries are far from providing a stable and regular support network. While for some issues support relations continue to function quite well, such as family issues or skill training, harsh social and economic conditions have severely reduced most material support, such as cash remittances or agricultural inputs.

However, trans-local relations continue to play an important role in town. As highly localised relations¹¹ in the form of a common ethnic or regional background, a common language or a common religious, they provide an important background for the creation of new identit(ies), communit(ies) and social security networks in town. The construction of community, identity and culture as a virtual, 'imagined' reality and not necessarily a space-bound community is an

¹¹ See also Gupta and Ferguson (1997), Anderson (1991) or Appadurai (1995; 2000), who have extensively discussed culture, identity and community in relation to space, challenging the stipulated isomorphic structure of culture, space and place.

important and powerful focal point of identification and belonging, engendering feelings of duty and obligation (Anderson 1991; Amit 2002).

This is of intrinsic importance to the study. The construction or idealisation of a – historically or geographically – distant or non-existent culture or community as a source of a new identity in the absence of an old identity that has been left behind, or as a means to distance oneself from the ‘dominant’ communities and identities in the actual place of residence is common practice among many migrants living abroad or in town. Based on ‘traditional’ ethnic, regional or kinship identities, we shall see that these communities and identities are actually very modern, urban inventions that have little to do with rural lifestyle, tradition and culture (see Hobbesbawm & Ranger 1983). Moreover, they do not only provide important powerful lines of in- and exclusion in town; they are also an important resource in defining and negotiating social security practices and strategies over distance (see for example Englund 2001). Especially in the case of trans-local networks, images of the ‘rural’ and the ‘urban’ and related social, moral, economic or political values and norms often have an important discursive power and may become very concrete social realities anchored and taking place in specific spatial localities when it comes to converting them into properly functioning social security arrangements (see also Massey 1994; Ferguson 1999).¹²

The extent to which people are able to convert their cultural capitals embedded in identities, morals and traditions, rules and obligations to gain access to support and care is not necessarily only a question of being exposed to other ‘cultures’, or one’s capacity and flexibility to learn from it. We shall see that the extent to which people are able to participate in and learn different cultural expressions is largely related to and stratified by economic and political power, gender, age, or quite simply, time. All of these aspects have an enormous impact in altering one’s leverage in struggles over meaning, entitlements and rights, and obligations.

The struggle over meaning in terms of rural-urban borders and boundaries is also of importance in the struggle over space and place in town. As we shall see, cultural capital and imagined communities play a crucial role in town when it becomes necessary to defend or invade geographic boundaries. Whereas the differences in lifestyle between the inhabitants of Sector 7 and those migrants living beyond the city boundaries is actually negligible, cultural capitals, tradition and imagined communities and identities related to the urban and the rural constituted an important source of leverage in the battle over land and housing.

¹² In his study of migrants on the Copperbelt, Ferguson (1999) discusses at length the importance of what he terms ‘cultural styles’ of ‘cosmopolitanism’ and ‘localism’ that people use as a resource in urban-rural living strategies.

1.6 Shifting Boundaries of Support: The Functional Approach

Understanding the urban and the rural as a dynamic trans-local economic, social and cultural space in which social networks are anchored is also of intrinsic importance for social security. Social security practices are usually far removed from the urban/rural, modern/traditional and formal/informal order or logic of things (De Certeau 1984; Bryceson & Varuela 2002). We shall see that social security is a highly dynamic concept, the meaning, content and function of which is undergoing a continuous re-negotiation process. In their efforts to gain access to social security, people continuously transgress, dissolve and re-create institutional, legal, political, ideological, functional and conceptual boundaries or 'organisational principles' (Long 1990, 1996) of social support embodied in questions of kinship, solidarity and reciprocity, re-distribution, rights and entitlements, or 'target' processes of public social policies or development projects.

Trying to get a hold on the dynamics of these shifting boundaries or "*shifting circles of support*" (Palriwala & Risseeuw 1996) that evolve in these analytical and empirical borderlands, I shall take an unbound and de-centred view of social security that dissociates the concept from its narrow modernist understanding. I will discuss my empirical findings along the lines of the so-called 'functional approach' developed by Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann (1994). Originating from the tradition of legal anthropology that understands law as being embedded in the wider context of social, economic, cultural or legal relationships, the approach understands social security as an intrinsic aspect of social life and social organisation. Rather than along clearly delineated sets of notions, concepts, institutions and mechanisms, social security is understood as a social phenomenon embedded in and evolving out of a variety of different layers of social organisation and change.

How these different layers are defined is described in the following paragraphs (for more details, see F. & K. von Benda-Beckmann 1994). The first layer is the *layer of cultural and religious ideas and ideologies*, which indicates the whole range of abstract general ideas and ideals of social security existent in religion, political ideologies or culture. These include the various 'welfare ideologies', ranging from the institutional welfare approach dominant in Western Europe to the 'residual', more neo-liberal model dominant in the Anglo-Saxon welfare economies. Equally important are the various 'development ideologies' of the international development regime, such as poverty alleviation, the agenda on the social dimension of development or the newly developed concepts on social security for developing countries briefly mentioned in the introduction. Notions of social security are also captured in religious ideas found in almost all world religions and partly represent general societal or cultural values, such as mercy,

solidarity, or altruism. Political, ideological and cultural values and ideologies on social security are far from being homogeneous, but define different needs, insecurities and means to deal with them. Especially against the background of the increasingly wide range of social security providers upon which people depend – both in Western Europe and Africa – these ‘support ideologies’ need to be taken into account if an adequate understanding of social security practices and their guiding principles is to be achieved.

The second layer refers to the *layer of institutional provision*, dealing with specified ideas of social security embodied in institutes and institutions of society. These refer on the one hand to institutional provisions by state agencies or NGOs with their clearly defined access criteria and on the other, to institutionalised rights and obligations concerning social security provisions embodied in kinship relations, inheritance or property law. They all encompass very specific ideas about the ‘normality’ of a situation, neediness, risk, and ways of dealing with them. They usually vary according to gender, age, or social and economic status. Yet they may not necessarily correspond to notions of insecurity, risk and vulnerability of the people they are actually targeted at, and who are often living in different and more complex realities and situations of neediness. Classical examples are development projects or social policies that – while aiming to increase social security and minimise risk – may turn out to be very counterproductive. Development projects may miss their actual ‘target’ group, improving the situation of people who do not necessarily need it, but are in a better position to take advantage (see for example K. von Benda-Beckmann 1988). As we will see, micro-credit schemes may undermine the already precarious situation of the very poor. Being forced to divert resources that were meant to be invested in collective social security arrangements in order to serve loans for money borrowed, many poor people faced with an unforeseen calamity find themselves not only highly indebted but also without a social network to cope with the crisis situation.

Furthermore, the *layer of actual social relationships* between recipient and provider of social security provides yet another important organising principle of social security which should be examined. The roles and the behaviour attributed to providers and recipients of social support are usually not as clear-cut as institutionally prescribed. This holds both for specified institutions of social support and ‘multifunctional relationships’ in which social security is one function amongst many others, such as kinship or patron-client relationships. Contrary to the assumption of the conventional institutional approach, that tends to reduce the citizen to his/her receptive role as a social welfare client or beneficiary (Culpitt 1999), people are usually both providers and recipients of social support. This role allocation is not static, but may change substantially, depending on the

actual contingency at hand and the flow of major lifecycle events, such as birth, death, or old age. Moreover, social security relations are not one-dimensional, as the institutional perspective suggests, but usually overlap with other relations. Institutional relationships may also be defined by kinship, membership in the same party, or a common origin: a fact that may substantially influence access to social security provisions, both in quantitative and qualitative terms.

Finally, the functional approach draws attention to the *layer of actual social practices*. This layer refers to the actual fulfilment of normatively or institutionally prescribed social security functions, i.e. the conversion of resources into actual working social security arrangements. These have to be regarded separately, since they tend to differ from the general rules about social security practices, as normatively prescribed rights and obligations do not necessarily imply their actual fulfilment. Keebet von Benda-Beckmann (1994: 10) reminds us to differentiate carefully between the “*conditions under which mechanisms operate*” and their “*actual allocation and distribution*”. The availability of material, social or symbolic resources for social security does not automatically imply that social actors are able or willing to convert them into functioning social security arrangements (F. & K. von Benda-Beckmann 1994; Dréze & Sen 1991). Furthermore, looking at actual social practice permits a better assessment of social security. Existing social security mechanisms may very well function according to prescribed rules and regulations, but they may “*not necessarily prevent destitution*”, if provisions are too small for survival (F. & K. von Benda-Beckmann 1994). By the same token, it is important to take into consideration the actual social and economic context within which these mechanisms are operating. Social security provisions may undermine, as well as exceed, actual needs and as such, have an intrinsic importance when analysing social security. Taking into consideration the social and economic consequences of social security practices is therefore of intrinsic importance (ibid.).

Taking a functional approach to social security also implies a broad definition of social security. Social security is understood as “*all collective measures and efforts that on a preventive and reactive basis allow people who are not able to take care of themselves to live a decent and acceptable life (F. and K. von Benda-Beckmann: 2001)*”.¹³

Whereas to some this unbound view of social security might appear to be too broad and too inclusive, I argue that this ‘societal’ view of social security, as also suggested by Partsch (1983) or Kaufmann (1977), is of high analytical value. This view allows for a comparative and dynamic analysis of social security, a fact that is of special importance for this study, both as a study of social security in developing countries and a study in a rural-urban borderland. Both contexts display a variety of collective and individual normalities, lifestyles, modes of production, social (in)securities and mechanisms to cope with them in a more pronounced

¹³ Own translation.

way than in most industrial countries. Understanding social security as relational (Moore 1996) makes these manifold linkages visible. Allowing for a broad perspective on social security also provides a higher analytical value in terms of its functioning: rather than starting off from narrowly defined, abstract categories of prescribed roles and functions as regards providers and recipients, services, access criteria, etc., an embedded view of social security asks how social security is *actually* functioning, thus allowing for a better assessment and evaluation. Moreover, it enables one to take account of those social security relations and institutions that appear 'invisible' to the conventional view (Zacher 1988: 23). These encompass those social security functions that are internal to 'common' or ordinary social relations, such as kinship or friendship, as opposed to the functionally and institutionally highly differentiated social support mechanisms or institutes exemplified by the welfare state or friendly societies (ibid.).

Analysing social security as a field of struggle over material, social or symbolic resources in which various social actors are involved (see Bourdieu 1990), also draws attention to the role that social actors play as brokers, translators and transformers of different types of knowledge, organisational principles, values and ideas into the local context (see also Long 1990; Acre & Long 1992; Long 1996). Individual perceptions of needs and contingencies may not always coincide with collective ones embodied in institutions, rules and obligations: they influence and shape each other, but are not necessarily congruent. On the contrary, rather than being followed on a one-to-one scale, we shall see that collectively prescribed notions, rules and regulations are subject to continuous subversion and re-negotiation. Social actors usually create interface situations where different, often contradicting notions and ideas, values and behaviour, interests and power constellations embodied in social security institutions and discourse pertaining to different "*social domains*" (Long 1996: 55) intersect, are re-worked and re-negotiated and thereby translated and interwoven into the actual social context and its social security order (ibid.). It is in this "*space between*" (De Certeau 1984: 127), at the dynamic and ambiguous edges and boundaries of social security institutions and practices, where I argue most social security is actually taking place: Social actors not only mix 'formal', 'informal' and 'traditional' social security systems, they also create new systems by mixing material and symbolic structures and resources anchored in 'formal' and 'informal' / 'traditional' systems. Ascribing fictional kinship ties upon close friends and workmates is, for example, widespread in urban areas. Other examples are provided by the many urban burial associations that re-invent 'traditional' and 'ethnic' 'rural' traditions for burial ceremonies in town (Matsuda 1998).

The degree to which people are able to shift and manipulate normative, material, social or spatial boundaries is, however, not unlimited. The "*bargaining*

space" (Ghannam 2002: 174) may vary greatly as age, gender, social and economic status, politics, ethnicity or places of origin create powerful lines of social differentiation and in- and exclusion. The "*art of being in-between or dwelling in the order of 'the other'*", as de Certeau (1984: 30) has most elegantly described most societal practice, thus implies considerable power differentials. In fact, as Nuijten (1998) points out, it is important to be cautious about a too optimistic assessment of the multiple forms of tactics and strategies coming into existence between cultural, economic, social or legal institutions and practices, a discourse that, especially in relation to culture and 'cultural styles', has become so popular in the post-modern tradition of ethnographic research and in the discussion on cultural, economic and social globalisation processes in recent years (for example Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 1980, 1987, 1992; Ferguson 1999). The availability of tactics and strategies of social security is very limited for most people in developing countries. For example, most people in Sector 7, Area 25 are facing severe insecurity and poverty, a situation that considerably limits their "*full-house*" of (social security) strategies (Ferguson 1999: 78). This concerns their material situation, but increasingly also touches upon their social relationships: the continuously rising AIDS death-toll in Malawi is creating a huge number of social paupers, i.e. people who lack social relationships to be taken care of materially, and in terms of productive or care labour (F. von Benda-Beckmann 1988). Moreover, we shall see that tightening social and economic conditions may further challenge access to tactics and strategies of social support, as criteria of access and denial are becoming subject to intensified negotiation or 'ambiguitisation' processes (Simone 1997) and may become more permeable and open to transgressions, or subject to stricter interpretations and boundary setting processes as a consequence.

Analysing social security as embedded allows us to have a 'bifocal' (Gupta & Ferguson 1997) or 'multi-local' (Marcus 1995) perspective on social security, which permits the simultaneous analysis of both local perceptions and living conditions and the wider trans-local, national and global socio-economic context. This does not solely refer to social security as a trans-local phenomenon: we shall see that Structural Adjustment and the continuous re-invention of an ever-changing political agenda, with which the donor community is exerting considerable pressure on developing countries, are highly influential in terms of social security. The impact of 'Good Governance', social risk management policies, decentralisation, community-based development strategies or the focus on women – just to mention a few – is strongly visible when one examines the social security situation and strategies of urban migrants. Whereas the civil service reform, which has been taking place in state social security schemes over the last years, and the continuing liberalisation of the Malawian economy have led to

overall worsening social and economic conditions, we shall see that the ‘project-law’¹⁴ of donors and NGOs active in Sector 7, as well as overall changing development ideologies, influence ‘informal’ personal support relations, changing needs, perceptions, and rules and regulations of mutual support.

The functional approach allows for a trans-local perspective on social security both geographically and symbolically and for a dynamic historical view of social security. Notions, ideas, practices and tactics of social (in)security are not static, but are underpinned by permanent changes. The sharp increase in terrorist attacks is becoming a major source of collective worldwide insecurity today, an issue that was believed to have lost its threatening potential over the last 20 years. By the same token, HIV/AIDS, and the lack of land and food have considerably challenged perceptions of (in)security in Malawi. These changes concern the (in)securities of everyday life and challenges to lifecycle arrangements (Freiberg-Strauss & Jung 1988). Childhood, youth, adult life and old age all have their specific (in)securities concerning the well-being of a person, but are particularly strong in the transitional periods from one phase to the other. In order to cope with upcoming insecurities, these “*deficit and surplus phases*” (ibid. 231) should ideally intersect in such a way as to be able to provide support mechanisms for those insecure from those in a phase of relative security. We shall see that especially HIV/AIDS has severely disturbed life-cyclical crisis situations and their coping strategies. This also includes changing perspectives on past, present and future. As reciprocal arrangements, social security mechanisms are always based on past experiences and – hidden or overt – future expectations. These “*promises encapsulated in existing mechanisms*” (F. & K. von Benda-Beckmann 1994: 17) are never totally foreseeable and as such, provide a major source of insecurity. Expectations might not be fulfilled, or estimations of future developments might turn out to be wrong. Especially within a trans-local social security economy, these discontinuities and ruptures in relations to support expectations are clearly visible.

1.7 Methodological Considerations

In this second part of the chapter I will discuss some methodological considerations. I present the research design, including the methods and tools used during the fieldwork. In so-doing, I also discuss methodological problems that arose during the preparation for the fieldwork, as well as during the fieldwork itself in Malawi. Especially the use of a broad analytical approach to social security and the focus on town has posed methodological challenges.

¹⁴ See Chapter 4.

1.7.1 Methodology and Tools

The research is based on semi-structured interviews that were concentrated on previously structured research areas capturing different aspects of the central research questions. However, the list of keywords which we usually prepared before going to an interview often presented a mere point of departure for open-ended interviews that usually led into completely different aspects and questions. Against the background of my research questions focusing on changes of social security in the context of urbanisation and migration processes, we also conducted a series of narrative interviews in order to capture migrants' and urban-dwellers' life histories (Krüger & Marotzki 1994, Hermans 1991; see also Flick 1996). Life histories and interviews on temporarily or thematically limited periods of peoples' bibliographies provided important insights into social security processes in the context of migration and urbanisation. Most of the interviews we conducted were with individuals. We also conducted some group interviews, although not as many as we had planned, as peoples' workloads and time-pressure often made it difficult to bring them together. Time pressure even turned out to be a problem with our individual interview partners. Faced with the difficult economic situation and the approaching hunger period, people were too taken up with the business of survival to have time for 'chatting'.

Interviews with persons involved in community matters, such as the village headman, the local City Council officer or members of the development committee, and activists and representatives of religious or other associations, clubs and NGOs, formed yet another important part of the research. The nature of the research also made it necessary to plunge into the field of policy. In addition to an extensive literature study on relevant policy documents, we conducted a series of interviews with representatives of relevant institutions, ministries and departments, donors and NGOs, concerned – amongst others – with the provision of plots, housing, and infrastructure, as well as social policies and development projects.

The fact that we were living in the area allowed us to participate in everyday life of Sector 7. The daily routine of fetching water or going to the market, the participation in social, cultural or political events of the Sector and finally, the extensive chatting, brought valuable insights and observations that would not have been possible otherwise. This was especially relevant in terms of perceptions or claims of social support that hardly complied with reality, i.e. what people told us they would do and actual social practices turned out to differ quite substantially.

These ethnographic methods were sustained by visual techniques taken from the so-called 'RRA-toolbox' (Rapid Rural Appraisal) and partly adapted for our

purposes: transect walk, seasonal calendar and institutional or Venn diagram (Chambers 1997). These tools, such as the Venn diagram, proved to be very useful, particularly because they allowed for the visualisation of support relations, which made it easier to discuss them. This network analysis (Mitchell 1969) made together with the people concerned helped us to get an idea of the “*structural morphology*” (Keupp 1987: 26) of the social security networks, including the relational closeness, the multiplexity and the quality of interaction with which people considered certain support relations in contrast to others. In addition, it also enabled us to get an idea of and discuss power relations and difficulties in relation to access to social support inherent in these relations.

The quantity of policy and statistical data on conditions and poverty in Malawi available has increased significantly over the last decade. For urban areas, existing material is still not very plentiful. The Malawian political and economic ideology that focused on the ‘rural’ as the central sphere of economic development, and as a basic model of the political and social order, together with the low rates of urbanisation, have strongly influenced the research focus in the past, which for a long time focused on the ‘rural’, and – one must add – still does. This also concerns ethnographic studies. The most valuable materials on urban studies on Malawi still remain the studies by Deborah Potts (1986) Gillian Roe (1992a; 1992b; 1992c), Francois Lodh (1994; 1996) and Stephen Devereux (1999). In recent years, the works of Chilowa et al. (2000), Anders (2005), Van der Borne (2005) and especially Englund (2001; 2002b) have provided important contributions to different aspects of urbanisation in Malawi.

1.7.2 The Selection of the Research Site

The selection of Sector 7 as a research site was largely determined by the way this study came into being. In 1998, I was hired by the German Technical Corporation (GTZ) to carry out research on social security in an urban area as part of a Malawian-wide research project on social security.¹⁵ Sector 7, the area chosen by the GTZ, was one of many marginal areas that had been recently occupied by the urban population since the transition to democracy in 1994. The occupants had formed a strong local initiative in order to gain access to urban infrastructure on a self-help basis. This was also the reason why the area was chosen. It was

¹⁵ This study is based on data collected in a Malawi-wide research project the Social Policy Advisory Services to the National Economic Council at the Office of the President and Cabinet (SPAS-Project) conducted from May to September 1998 to provide base line information on social security in Malawi. The information gathered in five different sites chosen for their special social, economic and ecological conditions was to be used to develop a social policy framework for Malawi which particularly addresses the needs of the vulnerable members of the society. Four Dutch students, myself, and five Malawian graduates in social science conducted the field research.

hoped that this local initiative would provide an important institutional entry point for the establishment of a local community self-help project.¹⁶ When I had to select a research site for my own research, I decided to continue researching in Sector 7. Apart from the fact that Sector 7 provided the 'ideal' site for my research purposes, the fact I had already made contact with the people there was an important selection criteria.

In 1998, during my first field stay, my by then research colleague Maggie Chipasula and me had created 'artificial boundaries' by concentrating on a specific neighbourhood comprising of a number of rows of housing and covering around 40 households which provided the basis for our sample. The mixed social structure of the area had not yet been transformed to result in a spatial division of the area. As such, the sample encompassed people from all sorts of social, economic and regional backgrounds that, it was hoped, would provide a broad range of different ways of life and modes of social security strategies. Interview partners were selected randomly, but in such a way as to guarantee a wide heterogeneity of aspects that supposedly influence social security strategies, such as gender, age, class, status, origin, type of employment, and length and type of migration. This neighbourhood, which provided the core of Sector 7 and was in the first corner of the area to be occupied, with most of its inhabitants being newcomers, also provided the core of my fieldwork in 2001, as my primary aim was to examine the extent to which urbanisation processes had changed social security strategies.

However, the changes that had taken place by 2001 led my new research assistant Nellie Chipwanya and me to transgress our field boundaries. People within the area and Lilongwe in general tend to be very mobile – and many, in fact, had moved to other places, forcing us to work trans-locally. At the same time, the shift in geographical focus was also a consequence of the new developments that had taken place during the fieldwork and which we wanted to follow up on. This included the issue of AIDS-orphans, grandparent-headed households, property grabbing, and witchcraft. In order to compare and get to know more people with similar experiences, we would often visit people and places in other sections of Sector 7. By then, this had also become necessary, as a certain spatial hierarchy had developed following the inward migration of higher income people.

¹⁶ For a discussion on the development initiatives in Sector 7 and the conflicts evolving around them see Chapter 4.

1.7.3 The Town as an Ethnographic Field

Ferguson (1999) unmasks much of the methodological quagmire related to the city as yet another aspect of a modernist dualism that juxtaposes a socially highly heterogeneous and incomprehensible city structure against the 'social whole' of a socially, economically and geographically bounded village structure. Notwithstanding, fieldwork in urban areas causes much methodological anxiety. Questions of which neighbourhood to choose and whom to ask caused much concern in the beginning of the research. The size of the area, with around 8,000 inhabitants, and its social heterogeneity encompassing people from completely different backgrounds, pertaining to different social and economic classes, and living very different lifestyles made it even more difficult to get an 'idea' of the social (in)security of its inhabitants. The methodological insecurity was nurtured further by the fact that some of the reviewers of the research project had voiced considerable doubt about the study being representative, as I had planned to look into one area only. They wanted me to look into other areas in Lilongwe as well. Yet the aim of the field research in Sector 7/Area 25, in which I spent a total of 12 months between May 1998 and December 2001, was not to provide a possibly comprehensive overview of common social security strategies of migrants in the urban fringe of Lilongwe. In the face of Simone's observation that most urbanisation strategies are actually highly volatile and provisional (1990: 162), and within my timeframe, this would have been in any case an impossible task to fulfil. Rather than aiming at providing a comprehensive picture of social security in urban areas, the central concern of this study was to seek out the 'logics of practice' (Bourdieu 1990) underlying the everyday practices often not looked at or left unattended in conventional approaches. Focusing on what Jane Finch (1989: 178) has called, the processes of '*working it out*', the study aims to unravel the way in which urban migrants manage, produce and negotiate their social security and which structural, social and economic or other constraints they face in gaining access to social support and in making these arrangements work.

This was also the reason for returning to the same area after three years. Whereas the stay in the field in 1998 provided a snapshot of the urbanisation dynamics of the area and of social security mechanisms in particular, the return in 2001 enabled me to embed the developments taking place within a longer time frame of urbanisation processes taking place in Lilongwe. The return to the same area over a three-year period also made visible the particular role of these urban borderlands as focal points of urbanisation dynamics typical for many third world cities today.

1.7.4 Multi-sited Ethnography

The geographic focus of the study in town on the one hand, and the subject of the study itself, dealing with social security of urban migrants on the other, ties in strongly with a theoretical and methodological debate that has profoundly challenged the anthropological discussion, i.e. globalisation and mobility. The deconstruction of culture and place as an isomorphic unity against social, economic and cultural processes of globalisation in anthropology (see Hannerz 1986; 1992; Fardon 1995; Appadurai 2000; Gupta & Ferguson 1997) has also led to a reconsideration of methodological questions concerning the ethnographic field. Whereas stationary, long-term fieldwork in a small, localised community through participatory observation maintains its paradigmatic character even against the global multi-sited processes, the fields themselves are increasingly perceived as mobile and multi-local. This mobile notion of the field also requires a different methodological approach that Marcus (1995) has subsumed under the term of a “*multi-sited ethnography*”. According to Marcus (1995: 105), “*multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography*”. Depending on the research context, the tracing down of or following up on people, things, a metaphor, a plot, story or allegory, a life or biography and finally, a conflict (ibid.), is seen as a *sine qua non* for an adequate understanding of both trans-local and local processes. In fact, in recent years, researchers have increasingly started to investigate consequences of migration in both the place of origin as well as the place(s) they were moving to (Hahn 2004). It is even argued that the ‘culture of migration’ (Lambert 2002) can only be adequately understood by starting to investigate the local culture in the place of origin, which would provide the pre-condition and points of departure for migration motives and flows, rather than by concentrating on trans-local movements.

Whereas my initial intention was to follow people and social security flows back to their places of origin or wherever they were anchored, I soon decided to remain in town and concentrate on the migrant networks there. One reason for this was related to my basic thesis, which concentrated primarily on town and the urbanisation of the migrants and their social security networks in Sector 7. This is not to say that the village and other trans-local sites were not present, and as we shall see, they play a very important role in the migrant’s social security considerations. The village also became very present through the visits and written interventions of village people who came to town to visit, to ask for support, or sent letters in order to do so. The voices of these villagers are also in-

corporated in the study, providing valuable insights, especially in relation to the nature of and the stark difference between claims and reality concerning urban-rural support. These aspects are always analysed from the urban perspective as well. Ultimately, however, the decision to confine the study to town was based on the fact that rural-urban exchange largely did not take place. While most people had trans-local relations beyond the city boundaries, only a few moved up and down on a regular basis. Most migrants were too poor to provide for regular support, not to mention the transport money for regular visits. As we shall see, it was largely the rural kin that came to town in order to ask for support.

Multi-sited ethnography also has, however, an important second connotation in the context of the study. Following social security strategies and processes also leads one into different social, economic, political and cultural fields, among which for this study the policy field is of specific importance. Social and economic policies, as well as the institutions that prepare and implement them on a national and global level, including Good Governance, Structural Adjustment, national ministries, NGOs and international organisations, are thereby important fields that need to be studied. Shore and Wright (1997: 4) argue that, "(...) *policy has become an increasingly central concept and instrument in the organization of contemporary societies. Like the modern state (to which its growth it can be linked), policy now impinges on all areas of life so that it is virtually impossible to ignore or escape its influence.*" In this respect, the social policy arena of Malawi with its relevant ministries, institutions, non-governmental organisations, provision and legal regulations provided an important arena for this study. Apart from literature studies and the review of statistical data, we conducted several interviews with representatives of international donor organisations, ministries, the City Council, trade unions, and several NGOs present in Sector 7. Beyond that, the global debate on social security and social policy within the international donor community forms another arena and 'ethnographic site' of the study. The international debate provides the overall framework within which this study is embedded and from whence it came. At the same time, however, this global debate has already had a local impact, influencing as it does the everyday lives of the people in Malawi and Sector 7. They are affected by overall changing political frameworks and changing policy premises, such as poverty alleviation; or in a more local context, the shifting emphasis of many NGO-projects aiming at also incorporating social aspects in their small-scale credit schemes, as is also the case in Sector 7. This shift in politics towards more a poverty- and socially-oriented policy approach has also found entrance in the language and the vocabulary of the people, who discuss specific issues in different terms than they would have a few years ago. This is especially visible with those working in organisation and those people in the community that are directly involved in community development and work hand in hand with NGOs and international donor organisations.

Chapter 2

The Political Economy of Malawi

2.1 Introduction

Examining social security as an intrinsic aspect of societal order cannot be adequately understood and 'placed' without taking into account the wider historical social, economic and political context shaping and influencing it. This is all the more the case in Malawi, where the British colonial period has left deep imprints in the different spheres of society that continue to dominate Malawian economics, politics and society today.

In contrast to the booklets of the Malawian tourism industry, which promote the country as the warm heart of Africa, the British colonial authorities always considered Nyasaland to be in a marginal position. The "*imperial slum*" or "*Ireland of Central Africa – poor, scenic and with a ready supply of exportable labour*" (Pryor 1990: 39), as Malawi was described when compared to its neighbouring colonies rich in natural resources, had indeed little else to offer its colonisers. The lack of notable mineral resources¹ and its specific geographical position also set the natural framework for its economic development, which is mainly based on agriculture.² The long north-south extension of the country, stretching some 800 km along the southern extension of the African rift valley, provides for a variety of climatic and soil conditions that make Malawi the country with the most fertile soils in Africa. Its landlocked position hindered, however, the development of large-scale agriculture as envisaged by the British when they 'discovered' the

¹ The country possesses some mineral deposits, including bauxite, limestone, coal, and uranium, but only a few, notably coal and limestone, are exploited due to the high cost of exploitation and transport (Africa South of the Sahara 1996).

² Malawi covers an area of 11.85 million hectares, of which Lake Malawi covers almost a quarter (2.43 million hectares).

country in 1859. The high transportation costs in linking Malawi to the outside world soon put an end to the British endeavours. The strong dependence on reliable lines of communication across the southern part of the continent, especially to the Pacific coast, remains one of the main features and constraints of the Malawian economy today.

With a current population of 11.9 million and an average density of 110 persons per square kilometre, Malawi is one of the most densely populated countries in Africa. This is exacerbated by the population's very uneven distribution: 11% of the population live in the Northern Region, 39% in the centre and 50% in the South, a distribution in stark contrast to the proportions of arable land available, amounting to 38%, 34% and 29% respectively (Palamuleni 2000: 5). Malawi's population is also growing at a rapid rate, amounting to an annual growth rate of 3.1%. This population explosion is largely attributed to the high incidence of poverty.³ Though the annual growth rate is predicted to slow down to 2.2% in the next 15 years – a fact also attributed to rising mortality due to HIV/AIDS – the population will have reached 15.7 million in 2015 (UNDP 2002).

This rapidly rising population is having a serious impact on food security. As we shall see in the course of this study, pressure on arable land is already high and is likely to increase further. The liberalisation of the economy made agricultural inputs to boost agricultural production unaffordable for most Malawians, forcing people to start cultivating new and often less fertile land. The neglect of fallow periods in order to meet rising food requirements is already common practice in most regions, leading to further erosion and soil-degradation. While most of the total arable land in Malawi is already in use, one of the most significant problems is decreasing farm size, which has an enormous impact on land management and soil fertility. Most farmers in Malawi are smallholders cultivating on less than 1 hectare, a size considered insufficient to meet even basic food requirements (Palamuleni 2000). This number has always been high. Over the years, however, it has considerably increased, from 43% in 1968 to 68% in 1991, jeopardising further the country's food security (ibid).

Malawi has around 25 different ethno-linguistic groups. The most important ones are the *Chewa*, predominant on the lakeshore and in the centre of the country; the *Tumbuka*, *Ngoni* and *Tonga* of the North; and the *Yao*, *Nyanja*, *Lomwe* and *Sena*, who settle predominantly in the South (Chirwa 1998).⁴ In contrast to other

³ On average, poor households in Malawi have 1.5 more persons than non-poor households. This is the same both in rural and urban areas. The inverse relationship between the wealth status of the women and the level of fertility indicators is the same at all levels of education (Chilowa et al. 2000).

⁴ According to the population census in 1966, the *Chewa* constitute 28.3% of the population, the *Nyanja* 15.3%, *Lomwe* 11.8%, *Yao* 11.2%, *Ngoni* 9%, *Tumbuka* 7.4%, *Sena* 2.8%, *Tonga* 2% and other smaller groups amounting to 12.2% (Pryor 1990: 25).

Southern African countries, Malawi has only a tiny percentage of European population, i.e. 0.2%.⁵ Another minority is the Asian community, which amounts to 0.3% of the total population (Bouzek 1992; Pryor 1990).

While most of the white and Asian minorities live in urban areas, the greater part of the Malawian population is rural. Although Malawians are very mobile, urban migration in Malawi represents a rather recent phenomenon when compared to other African countries.⁶ Although urbanisation rates have increased over the last decade by 68% (NSO 2000), rates of urbanisation are still very low, lying currently at 16.3%. It is estimated that they will have reached 22.2% by the year 2015 (UDNP 2005).

With the exception of the *Tumbuka*, *Tonga* and *Ngoni* who are patrilineal, most ethnic groups in Malawi have a matrilineal descent system. The definition of social identity and kinship relations – either through the paternal or maternal line – also encompasses rules and regulations concerning succession and inheritance which are all intricately intertwined (see for example Peters 2002; F. von Benda-Beckmann 1970). Historical anthropological studies have shown that marriage, inheritance and residence patterns of the respective kinship systems have always been subject to modification and change, being exposed to conflicting interests and changing economic, social or demographic conditions (see for example Van Velsen 1964; Phirie 1983). Yet the changes Malawian society has been going through since the 1980s, including migration, land scarcity, HIV/AIDS and growing monetisation, have led to a profound social transformation process that has enormously influenced inheritance patterns and rules and regulations concerning access to land and other goods acquired: Peters (2002: pp. 160) argues, in fact, that land scarcity in Malawi and the growing number of disputes over access to it have to be understood in the context of class-formation and stratification, rather than in the context of ‘common’ fissions and modifications of rules and regulations taking place over a historical period within kinship systems. The severity of the disputes involving witchcraft accusations and the conversion of kin into stranger indicates a profound economic – and by the same token, social and cultural – transformation from an economy where land is considered a resource, also in terms of belonging and home, to an economy where land is considered an individual commodity that may be possessed by anyone. We shall see that this has also had consequences on social security arrangements.

Together with the ethnic line of division, regional identity plays an important role in Malawian identity formation. The tripartition of the country into North-

⁵ The low economic attractions of Malawi reduced the number of white settlers in the colony considerably. The low economic and social investment of the British crown in Malawi is also attributed to the fact that Malawi lacked a significantly large white settler community (Pryor 1990).

⁶ While in Malawi current urbanisation stands at 16%, in Zimbabwe the current urban population amounts to 35%, in Zambia 35.9%, Tanzania 35.4% and Mozambique 35.6% (UNDP 2005).

ern, Central and Southern Regions by the British colonial administration in the 1920s soon became identified with the dominant ethnic groups in the respective areas, i.e. the *Tumbuka*, the *Chewa* and the *Yao*. This strong identification with certain ethnic groups was fostered further through the creation of written forms of ChiChewa and Chitumbuka by the missionaries and their subsequent use by the colonial administration. The creation of a *Yao* and *Timbuka* intelligentsia in the missionary schools of the North and South was yet another important element that forged a strong group consciousness along regional lines.

Another important strand of Malawian identity is religion. Currently, 57% of the population belong to Christian communities, 16% are Muslims, mostly of them Yao from the South, while 11% practice 'natural religions' (*Naturreligionen*) (Bouzek 1992: 29). Recent statistical data indicate that roughly 7.9 million or 80% of Malawians are Christians and 1.3 million or 13% Moslems (NSO 2000). Most of the Christians live in the North, where they amount to 96% of the population, compared to 84% in the Central Region and 73% in the South. In terms of the Muslim population, the distribution is exactly the other way around, being highest in the South with 21%, 7% in the Centre and 1% in the North (NSO 2000). Among the Christian churches, the biggest communities are the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), the Church of Central African Presbyterian (CCAP) and the Anglican Church. Among the Evangelical churches, the Seventh Day Adventist Society is the biggest, constituting the third largest denomination in Malawi as a whole, followed by the Assemblies of God and other smaller churches. Similar to many other countries in Africa, Malawi has experienced an upsurge of a number of Charismatic Churches or New African Independent Churches (NAICs) in recent years that enjoy a growing appeal among many Malawians. Many scholars attribute their rising popularity to the social, economic and political transformation processes that Malawi and other countries are currently going through. Their strong spirituality and healing aspect render many of these churches especially appealing in order to cope with increasingly difficult living situations due to rising poverty and HIV/AIDS and a wider political environment that is increasingly corrupt and authoritarian. The strong appeal they enjoy in many developing countries has provoked a great deal of anthropological research in recent years, which among others also looks at the influence of Pentecostalism on social value and norms and their alleged contribution to increasing individualistic and liberal values and attitudes, which is closely related to our research subject of social security and well-being (for example Van Dijk 1998; De Bruijn, Van Dijk & Van Dijk 2001, Gifford 1991; Fiedler 2000). I will come back to this subject when discussing religious organisations and related support structures, which have indeed undergone substantial changes over the last years. These changes are, however, not confined to Charismatic Churches only.

The coincidence of ethnic, regional and – though to a lesser extent – religious identity is a salient feature of Malawian identity and society that also left its mark on the economic and political development of the country. Since the colonial period, it has provided a valuable asset in gaining access to political, administrative and economic power (Kaspin 1995; Vail & White 1989; Chirwa 1989). Likewise, regional and ethnic identities are a key issue in understanding the very uneven and stratified social development of the country.

2.2 Political Development

The independence that Malawi gained from Britain on July 6th 1964 under its nationalist leader Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda who also was to become the first prime minister, was twofold. On the one hand, Malawi became independent from the British crown, which had taken formal control of the 'Protectorate Nyasaland' in 1891. On the other, and almost more important, Malawi gained independence from the so-deeply resented British Central African Federation with Northern and Southern Rhodesia, which had lasted from 1953 to 1964, and the formation of which had provided the final spark for the political independence struggle. The creation of the federation had nourished strong fears in the protectorate, and especially among the numerous labour migrants with their long standing experience with the apartheid system in Southern Rhodesia, that the British would sooner or later introduce similar harsh racial policies in the country that would complete the strong economic discrimination and inequalities systematically established by the British since their arrival and that had impeded the development of a domestic economy. The huge stream of labour migration to the estates in the South of the country and further south to the mines of Southern Rhodesia, which the British kept afloat due to a 'hut tax' system,⁷ resulted in an extreme drain on the country's labour force and economic development. Furthermore, due to the specific structure of the agricultural sector (see 3.3), labour migration also provided one of the few opportunities of making a living in Malawi, whose economy was otherwise exclusively oriented towards outside demand, confining systematically the possibilities for a domestic economy and its stakeholders to develop. This concerned both the Malawian peasantry and the tiny African middle-class and estate owners that had started to evolve during the 1940s and 1950s. The introduction of an export-oriented estate sector in the Southern Region had caused serious land-shortages in the southern part of the country and had led to severe unrest, eventually forcing the colonial

⁷ Governor Johnston, the first governor to Malawi, introduced the taxation programme as early as 1892 in order to secure a constant labour stream to the newly established estates in the South (Africa Today 1996).

administration to repurchase land from the estates in order to re-settle African peasants (Thomas 1975). Rigid agricultural regulations, including set planting and harvesting dates and the forced plantation of cassava as a crop insurance in the aftermath of the great famine of 1949, together with rural pricing policies that created considerable disincentives for the local production of cash-crops, further hampered the development of a domestic economy and put an end to the aspirations of the African estate owners who had accumulated land from their white masters (McCracken 1983; 1989).

Against this background, it seems no coincidence that an outsider was sought who would be able to forge these highly antagonistic political and economic interests and grievances into a united nationalist movement. It was the 'returnee' Dr. Kamuzu Banda, a Chewa by origin, who had left Malawi 40 years earlier in order to study medicine in the United States and who had worked as a practitioner in Britain and Ghana for many years who took over this unifying role, leading Malawi into a relatively peaceful independence.

It became quickly clear, however, that politics under Banda would not really change. On the contrary, the conservative-autocratic style with which Banda ruled both politics and economics was by and large a continuation of the British policy of 'indirect rule'. While many African countries, including Malawi's neighbouring countries Tanzania and Zambia, took a socialist-oriented development strategy inspired by the pan-African movement, Banda's 'conservative pragmatism' (Thomas 1975) was conspicuously anti-ideological. Convinced that only economic development would ensure Malawi's political independence in the long run, he left the economic and administrative structures put in place by the British largely unaltered (Pryor 1990). The 'dual economy' divided into an export-oriented estate-sector and a vast smallholder sector to secure domestic consumption was maintained and fostered in the post-colonial period, providing the main basis of the Malawian economy. The Africanisation of the largely white colonial administration so typical of many young African states was only gradually realised, leaving many positions in the hands of European expatriates until late into the 1970s (Baker 2001).

2.2.1 The African Discourse

Banda's clear opposition to pan-Africanist ideas became fully overt with the so-called 'cabinet crisis' in 1964, during which he removed all his political opponents once for all and anchored his autocratic regime based on growth-oriented capitalism, which stood in stark contrast to the more re-distributive economic development strategy claimed by some of his ministers. Apart from the nationalisation of the core industries and higher investment in social services, they had

also proposed an accelerated Africanisation of public services, all policies very typical of the socialist pan-African movement of the time (Baker 2001).⁸

While Banda openly opposed the pan-African movement, 'Africanism' and 'Traditionalism' played an important role in the nationalist discourse and identity formation. The 'traditional' African way of life embodied in the image of the rural Chewa village-community with its tight hierarchical social structure and its traditional authority as its political leader, to which Banda continuously referred, became the basis of Malawi's "imagined community" (Anderson 1988) and provided the ideological, rhetorical and ritual framework for much of Banda's highly pragmatic and 'modern' social and economic policies (Forster 1994; Harrigan 2001). As the Nkhoswe No. 1⁹ he portrayed himself as the austere, but benign of the young Malawian nation, which was to owe him 'Unity, Loyalty, Obedience and Discipline' (Bouzek 1992).¹⁰

The rural focus of Banda's politics, which also guaranteed him a stable rural power basis, did not remain on a discursive level only. The rural areas became the political and economic focus for fostering his authoritarian one-man regime that he had established since the cabinet crises,¹¹ having declared himself party leader, prime minister and president for life. This highly centralised decision-making structure, which practically meant that Banda took all relevant political and economic decisions himself,¹² was sustained by strong local power structures on the ground. By boosting the political power of the Chiefs through their incorporation into the political system and the re-introduction of the 'traditional' local court system, he created important political allies that allowed him to extend his power to the grassroots level (Forster 1994; Power 1992). This was sus-

⁸ The opposition of the ministers, who all leaned towards the left wing of the Malawian Congress Party (MCP) and had their power base mainly among the better-educated critical and urban-based civil servants and intellectuals, was not only based on fundamental differences regarding Malawi's future development. It was also a political opposition movement against Banda's increasingly autocratic political style. While they also argued in terms of an African polity based on African values and tradition, they saw its virtues in its egalitarian, communitarian style, as emphasised by the socialist oriented pan-African movement, rather than in its hierarchical structure, as emphasised by Banda himself (Forster 1994; Baker 2001; Anders 2005).

⁹ *Nkhoswe* (singular) / *Anskoswe* (plural): *Chewa* for marriage advisor, usually the maternal uncle in the matrilineal clan.

¹⁰ In this context see also Sandbrook (1985) for the intertwinement of 'traditional' authoritarian leadership as a central element for the functioning of the domestic political economy and for its ability to adapt to the changing international economic environment.

¹¹ Baker refers in this context also to the political impact of the cabinet crisis. The exile and imprisonment of six of his cabinet ministers and closest comrades to Banda in the independence struggle meant a major political, economic, and cultural rupture in Malawian political history (Baker 2000).

¹² "The Malawian system, the Malawian style is what Kamuzu says it's just that, and then it is finished. Whether anyone likes it or not, that is how it is going to be here; no nonsense, no nonsense! You can't everybody decide what to do." (Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda cited in Braun & Weiland 1982: 355).

tained by a rural-oriented development strategy, which was to become the focus of Malawi's economic policy after independence.

The economic, political and rhetorical emphasis on the countryside as the site where the real Malawi was said to exist also implied a strong anti-urbanism, which put the image of the traditional and organic countryside in stark contrast to the dangerous and amoral town life. We shall see that the images, fears and prejudices that this anti-urban discourse had created are still deeply rooted in the rural-urban discourse and practices of urban migrants and rural dependents today.

2.2.2 Divide and Rule: Identity as a Political and Economic Asset

However, Banda's policy measures stood in stark opposition to his political rhetoric, largely based on fear and force. While he strongly emphasised the unity and one-ness of the Malawian nation and its people,¹³ regionalism and ethnicity were to become the most important pillars of Banda's power. Being a *Chewa* himself, he promoted the Central Region disproportionately at the expense of the other regions, especially the North. Hosting the educated elite of the country, the northerners were the group which was politically terrorised and harassed the most, being accused of tribalism and of punitive acts against the state (Kaspin 1995; Anders 2005).¹⁴ The regional and ethnic bias towards the Central *Chewa* Region also became overt in terms of the regional allocation of resources. Little effort was made to fuel development in the Northern and Southern Regions, whereas the centre became the focus of development spending, most obviously with the shift of the capital from Zomba to Lilongwe City in the 1970s (Chirwa 1998).

On the political level, the omnipresence of the 'one-man-state' was secured through a vast party-machinery that, via a system of forced party membership, soon penetrated all aspects of life. Access to most public services, including buses and hospitals, was only possible with the party membership card that became the most valuable asset in everyday life. Public order and control was largely maintained by the Malawian Young Pioneers (MYP). Originally the youth organisation of the MCP, they soon developed into a militant organisation that became Banda's closest ally in imposing and maintaining his authoritarian rule.

¹³ "We must no longer think in terms of individual tribes (...) we must not think in terms of our regions or provinces: 'Oh, you are from the North, you are from the South, you are from the centre, no! (...) We are one people, one country.'" (Address by His Excellency the Life President, Ngwazi Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda to the wives of civil servants and female civil servants, Lilongwe Community Centre, 4 April 1975 cited in Chirwa 1998: 59).

¹⁴ The North was the first region to be evangelised and in due course, also the first to receive education (Africa Today 1996; Pryor 1990).

Trained as a paramilitary force to fulfil 'special security tasks', they killed and detained anyone who was suspected of wanting to usurp Banda's power (see for example Bouzek 1993).¹⁵

Whereas traditionalism provided the ideological 'glue' to reinforce national unity and loyalty, economic and political favours granted to his closest entourage and civil servants were to become the main means through which Banda would foster political alliances and ensure political stability (Thomas 1975). The overlap of commercial and political interests that turned Malawi's political elite into its economic one remains a conspicuous feature of Malawi's political economy up until today, having outlived even the democratic transition.

The relatively peaceful transition to democracy in 1993 in line with many other African states that was followed by the first democratic elections in 1994 could hardly conceal the actual strength of regionalism and ethnicity in Malawian political culture. In the first democratic elections, all the parties were regionally and ethnically dominated and won their votes precisely along those lines.¹⁶ Bakili Muluzi of the United Democratic Front (UDF), a Yao from the South and Muslim by religion, became prime minister. His government faced strong opposition from the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD) from the North and the Malawian Congress Party (MCP), but was able to remain in power.¹⁷ Despite Muluzi's attempt to intimidate the political opposition and even buy their votes, parliament narrowly defeated the amendment to the constitution that would have allowed him to run for a third term in 2002. Instead, Bingu Wa Mutharika, the minister of economic affairs and a former World Bank economist, was nominated as presidential candidate for the elections in 2004, which he won by a narrow margin.¹⁸ Having been handpicked by Muluzi as his predecessor, Mutharika was seen as a puppet, with Muluzi still in control behind the scenes. However, with his partly very unpopular policies, especially his anti-corruption measures involving many of Muluzi's allies¹⁹, he has shown considerable stamina.

¹⁵ For a detailed description of this sad chapter of Malawian history see Phiri/Ross (eds.) (1998) *Democratisation in Malawi. A Stocktaking*. Blantyre; Africa Watch (1990) *Where Silence Rules: The Suppression of Dissent in Malawi*. London.

¹⁶ Bakili Muluzi's United Democratic Front (UDF) won most of the seats in the Southern Region (47.3%), while Banda's Malawian Congress Party (MCP) was mostly supported in the Central Region (33.6%) and Chakufwa Chihana of the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD) got all seats in the North (18.6%) (Africa. South of the Sahara. 1996: 573).

¹⁷ By the end of the year, Muluzi added three new portfolios to his cabinet, all of which went to AFORD, which by then had broken with the MCP. In making Chihana, the leader of AFORD, a second vice prime minister, he was at least able to retain a working majority in parliament (Africa Today 1996).

¹⁸ Bingu wa Mutharika (UDF) 35.9%, John Tembo (MCP) 27.1%, Gwandaguluwe Chakuamba (MC) 25.7%, Brown Mpinganjira (NDA) 8.7%, Justin Malewezi (independent) 2.5% [www.exunn.com, 03.08.2005].

¹⁹ The dismissal of high ranking civil servants and politicians in key positions who were close allies

2.2.3 After Democratisation: Political Continuities and Discontinuities

A decade after the transition to democracy, the Malawian political system appears to be relapsing into authoritarianism. Despite the fact that Malawi successfully held its third democratic multi-party elections in 2004, many observers argue that the democratic transition has remained superficial, consisting solely of democratic institutionalism and rhetoric. Behind the institutional façade of democracy and multi-party elections, the authoritarian structures so deeply entrenched in Malawian political culture strongly persist and continue to dominate Malawian politics (Phiri 1998; Englund 2001). While this has partly been explained by the strong personal continuities of the major political figures, most prominently Bakili Muluzi himself,²⁰ recent political developments, including rampant corruption and the increased use of violence to silence peaceful protest,²¹ sadly seem to confirm this observation.

Rather than having developed a 'new' democratic political culture, politicians in Malawi seem to have simply adapted their "*chameleon politics*" (Englund 2002a:18) to the changing institutional circumstances. This expression, which refers to the frequent shift in political alliances forged by Malawian politicians to best fit individual political or economic interests, did not change at all with the rise of a multi-party system and the introduction of popular elections. Over the past five years, several notable politicians have shifted their party affiliations back and forth between several parties and coalitions, without their anti-democratic behaviour being seriously questioned, leaving little room for democratic principles to take root (Dzimbiri 1998).

Democratisation, human rights and poverty alleviation only seem to have been incorporated within the political discourse as a means to gain access to international donor money and political and economic favours in Muluzi's new democratic Malawi. Allegations of nepotism and corruption, including the buying-off of politicians, judges or other political key figures in favour of UDF politics, are numerous and have increased over the years.²² Although political and economic circumstances have changed, personal self-enrichment on the part of people in power, government officials and their relatives through public monies and industries remains widespread, strongly echoing Banda's politics of granting economic favours to his closest entourage for political loyalty and stabil-

of Muluzi by Mutharika resulted in speculation that Muluzi was going to canvass for support with members of the parliamentary opposition in order to impeach the president Mutharika and get rid of him [www.afrol.com/articles/15463, 03.08.2005].

²⁰ Before moving into opposition, Bakili Muluzi had been the MCP-secretary (Englund 2002a).

²¹ During the demonstrations against the proposed government reform that foresaw the introduction of tuition fees for university education, a student was shot dead in 2001.

²² See Anders (2005).

ity (Chirwa 2000; Anders 2005).²³ Ethnicity, regionalism and increasingly also religion continue to shape political spaces and boundaries: while the influential Christian churches twice supported the election of the Muslim Bakili Muluzi, their fierce opposition against a third term in 2002 and the election of the UDF in 2004 clearly had anti-Muslim connotations. This was not so much based on political considerations, as on fear of losing the absolute monopoly Christian churches enjoy in Malawi: they fear that the construction of mosques and the increasing role Muslim institutions play in the provision of education and health services might decrease their religious, social and political power within the country (Meinhardt 2004).

The regional voting pattern was also of overriding importance in the second and third democratic elections.²⁴ Ethnic and regional origin retained their significance as assets with regard to access to economic and political capital on both national and local levels, although this time it was the South, being the home of presidents Muluzi and Mutharika, that was disproportionately favoured to other regions (Chirwa 1998).

Notwithstanding the local government structures finally put in place in 2000, the centralist tendencies as regards decision-making and resource allocation continue. It appears that the enthusiastically put forward decentralisation process, through which it was hoped to increase democratisation by the stronger redistribution of financial resources, decision-making power and planning capacity on regional and local levels, has fostered party nepotism and corruption. Instead of empowerment and an increase of control by the people over the state and its resources, the decentralisation policy in Malawi has led to a stronger degree of control of the people by the state, which in many places means total control on the part of the UDF and the de-facto resurrection of a single-party-state. Its influence in formulating and implementing the Local Government Act, including the timing of the process, allowed the UDF to gain control of almost all local government structures by the time the Act was finally put in place.²⁵

Prospects are thus not particularly encouraging for Malawi's democratisation process. With reforms apparently not taking root, the political system has been

²³ Chirwa notes that the allocation of sugar distribution quotas of one of the sugar producing companies belonging to the president himself may even be interpreted as a reflection of major political events in Malawi, as the quota for Chakufwa Chihana, the leader of the opposition party AFORD, was significantly reduced after he resigned from the coalition government (Chirwa 2000).

²⁴ In 1999, AFORD gained 28 of 33 seats in the North, MCP 54 out of 71 in the Central Region and the UDF 76 out of 84 in the South (Patel 2000: 46). In 2004, Mutharika and the UDF took almost all the seats in the South. The MCP got all its seats exclusively in the Central Region, while the North was divided among the many small opposition parties and their northern leaders (Meinhardt 2004; [www.afrol.com/articles/12431, 03.08.2005]).

²⁵ The UDF holds 610 out of a total of 810 seats (Mönikes 2001).

left with a very weak basis. In fact, political frustration and indifference seem to be on the increase. The low participation rates in local government elections in 2000 and the presidential elections in 2004, which fell from 94% in 1999 to 59.4% four years later, are a strong indication of rising political apathy. Despite the fact that democratic political culture, with the guarantee of human rights, freedom of speech and freedom of the press, was embraced enthusiastically and evoked a wave of strong critical potential all over Malawi, room for civil and political opposition and protest is narrowing down once more, while authoritarian tendencies and political violence in society and among the political elite are flaring up. Democracy seemed to have led to institutional and rhetorical changes, but political practices remain, however, largely unchanged. Despite efforts by the new president Mutharika to take corruption in hand and stabilise the economy by distributing land and enforcing food security policies, the results are very modest thus far. It appears that in the face of a continuous economic decline and a political culture mainly preoccupied by self-enrichment rather than the improvement of the living conditions of the poor, the appeal for democracy will continue to remain weak, both with the populace and the politicians themselves.

2.3 Economic Policy

The economic growth of the Malawian economy after independence was to a large part based on the continuation and expansion of the colonial economic structure put in place by the British. By enlarging and fostering the dual structure of the agricultural sector, divided into large-scale estate farming producing cash crops for exportation and smallholder agriculture to secure the domestic food supply, Malawi achieved remarkable growth rates during the 1970s and 1980s.²⁶ The agrarian policies put in place largely maintained the colonial economic order, from which the estate-sector profited most (McCracken 1983; Simon 1975). This also concerned the new land policy, which was largely a continuation of British colonial land policy. Similar to the notion of “crown” land, the Land Act passed in 1965 foresaw the transfer of all customary land into the hands of government and the president. While this arrangement was promoted by Banda as a means to individualise land ownership through leasehold arrangements to private individuals, in practice it facilitated enormously the transfer of large parts of uncultivated arable land to the estate sector. Between 1967 and

²⁶ Between 1970 and 1980, the average growth rate was estimated at 6% per annum, while the volume of exports rose from US\$ 48 to US\$ 285 million in the same period (Chinsinga 2001). Annual growth rates of tobacco production averaged 11.2% from 1960 to 1969, a figure that rose to an average of 20% from 1970-1980. The production of tea doubled from 3.7% to 6.6% in the same period (Kydd & Christiansen 1982: 361).

1994, more than 1 million hectares of customary land had been 'lost' in this way from customary arrangements (GoM 1999/Vol. 1: 66). At the same time, the area of arable land occupied by estates rose continuously from 2% in 1970 to 13% in 1978 and 16% in 1984 (Hirschmann 1990), exacerbating further overall land-shortages and the horrendous inequality of land distribution, which, as we will see, constitutes one of the major social and economic constraints the country is facing today. The colonial policy of assigning the production of high value flue cured and burley tobacco, tea and sugar exclusively to the estates, while allowing the smallholders only to produce the less profitable dark-fired and air-cured varieties, was maintained. The high demand of the estate sector for a stable and cheap labour force was secured via a highly exploitative 'visiting tenant system', which was basically a variation of the colonial *thangata*-system (Kydd & Christiansen 1982).²⁷

The smallholders, on the other hand, were to ensure the country's food self-sufficiency, mainly through the production of maize. Through a myriad of pricing policies that forced peasants to sell their products at fixed commodity prices far below world market levels to the Agricultural and Development Marketing Board (ADMARC), huge financial gains could be made. They provided the financial resources for investment in the Malawian economy, which was mainly in the estate sector. The sizeable profits made from the estates and the industries went almost entirely into the private pockets of Banda himself and the 'Press Corporation Ltd.', a huge conglomerate of estates and industries. This provided the economic basis for political power, dominated by Banda himself: by distributing estates and shares among high-ranking party functionaries, senior civil servants, chiefs or high-ranking employees in the industries and parastatals, Banda was able to secure and buy off political loyalty (Harrigan 2001; Chinsinga 2001; Anders 2005).

2.3.1 Labour Migration – An Institutional Pattern of the Malawian Economy

The policy of securing domestic consumption was also pursued in the industrial sector, which largely consisted of import-substituting production, mainly

²⁷ During the colonial period, the *thangata*-system was a quasi-feudal arrangement under which peasants had to supply labour to the estates in exchange for the use of a plot of land. This highly exploitative system, a major source of unrest in 1915 and the independence struggle in the 1950s, was abolished at the end of the colonial period. The so-called 'visiting tenant scheme' developed at the same time as *thangata* remained. This equally exploitative share-cropping arrangement, under which families obtained land from the estates on the condition that they grew cash-crops which they were then obliged sell to the estates at a usually very low price, provided the basis for the success of the rural economic development strategy of post-colonial Malawi until the 1980s (Kydd & Christiansen 1982).

food processing and consumer goods industries, mostly clothes, sugar and tobacco. Due to a small domestic market and the limited opportunities for export attributable to its landlocked position, Malawi's industrial sector never achieved substantial growth rates.

The lack of industrial development is also the result of a rigid minimum wage policy that kept rural-urban income differentials low and – by making large-scale rural-urban migration unattractive – guaranteed the availability of a large and stable workforce for agricultural production, especially for the estate-sector (Simon 1975). However, it also prevented the development of a stable industrial labour force needed to increase and diversify industrial production. The focus in labour market policy on the availability of a huge flexible labour force that could be channelled where needed is still apparent today. Most of the industrial labourers in Sector 7 who work in the tobacco processing industries are employed on a seasonal basis, which does not allow most of them to establish themselves in town on a permanent basis, as they are forced to return to the rural areas for cultivation. This trans-local pattern of making a living, actually enforced and institutionalised by the Malawian government, explains to a certain extent the continuing and intrinsic importance of labour migration as a trans-local, rural-rural and urban-rural practice as a means for economic survival up until today.

The same holds for labour migration abroad, which remained a salient feature of Malawi's post-colonial economy. The remittances sent back to Malawi from the labour migrants working in the mines in Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa provided the second pillar of the national income. At its culmination in the early 1970s, around 487,932 persons – or 10.3% of the Malawian population, most of them young men – were working abroad, providing 10% of the national export income (Bouzek 1992). In the late 1970s a strong return migration set in, which was mainly fuelled by the rising demand in the rapidly expanding estate sector, but was also heralding the rising economic difficulties in the receiving countries starting at the beginning of the 1980s (Christiansen & Kydd 1983).²⁸ Since then, Malawian labour migration has steadily decreased and today has more or less ceased, at least officially.²⁹ The fact that labour migration has virtually come to a halt has also induced a demographic change in Malawi, especially in relation to urbanisation. Continuing poor economic performance and high unemployment rates in Zambia, Zimbabwe or South Africa forced many migrants

²⁸ Between 1988 and 1992, the South African government repatriated Malawian migrant workers and refused further recruitment, arguing that they would contribute to a further spread of HIV/AIDS in the country. While the incident caused not only considerable diplomatic turmoil, but also divided the two populations, evidence suggests that HIV/AIDS was used as a smoke-screen to get rid of the foreign labour force (for a detailed discussion see Chirwa 1998).

²⁹ There is evidence of clandestine migration to South Africa and Botswana. We have, however, no reliable data to confirm this.

and their families to return to Malawi. Whereas before they would have stayed in their home villages for a few months before departing again, the returnees now largely settle in town. In addition, most people who before would have gone abroad now settle in the city. Rural-rural labour migration, mainly to the estates or increasingly often in search of arable land remains high nevertheless.

2.3.2 Structural Adjustment

The economic growth and expansion of the Malawian economy came to an abrupt halt in 1978 when the sharp fall in commodity prices plunged the economy into a deep recession. The narrow focus on the export of only a few agricultural products, the low productivity of the smallholder sector caused by the rigid pricing and wage policy, and an increasing budget deficit, led to serious balance of payments problems (Mwanza 1999; Harrigan 2001). The situation was further aggravated by the disruption of the rail route to the port of *Beira-Nacala* as a result of the intensified civil war in Mozambique. Being Malawi's only means of access to the Indian Ocean and carrying about 90% of exports, this dealt a serious blow to the Malawian economy (Hirschmann 1990; Chinsinga 2001).

The economic crisis led Malawi to be the first country to adopt a Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1981, which was followed by series of stabilisation programmes and loan facilities in the following years. Measures included, amongst others, the removal of subsidies and guaranteed prices, including the liberalisation of Burley-tobacco-production for smallholders, the privatisation of public enterprises, retrenchments in public services, and diversification of investment. In the financial sector, the rationalisation of public expenditure through the introduction of a cash flow budget system³⁰, a revision of the tax system, and the flotation of the Kwacha in 1994 to boost Malawi's export competitiveness, were the most important measures (Mwanza 1999; Chirwa & Chilowa 1997; Anders 2005).

However, while these measures all aimed at stabilising the Malawian economy, the effects were rather counterproductive: although GDP per capita increased substantially, real capita growth was on average lower than in the pre-adjustment period, amounting to 1.7% and 3% respectively (Mwanza 1999). While overall statutory nominal wages had increased significantly, high inflation rates that reached 83% between 1991 and 1995 and the subsequent increase in prices led to a decline in real wages and purchasing power, which particularly hit the poorest sections of the population and contributed to a further widening

³⁰ The cash-flow budget system, which is based on monthly allocations in order to reduce and control public expenditure and make the spending process more transparent, was introduced in 1998 (Harrigan 2001).

of the income gap, which by then was already one of the most unequal in the world (Chilowa & Chirwa 1997; Mwanza 1999).

Although industrial production did increase slightly, the impact on the overall structure of economic production in terms of a stronger diversification remains marginal. Agricultural production continues to be the mainstay of the Malawian economy, employing about 85% of Malawi's labour force and contributing to about 35% of the annual GDP (Chinsinga 2001). The decrease in world prices for Malawi's main export products in the 1990s further deepened the crisis by substantially reducing the export earnings of tea, sugar and tobacco, the major foreign exchange earner.³¹ As a consequence, estates are increasingly trying to diversify their cash-crop production by investing in other high-value crops, such as chilli and paprika, pulses, cut flowers and the organic production of spices (GoM 2000). Apart from pulses, which have overtaken cotton as one of the major export commodities, their export volume is not yet very significant.

The fall in commodity prices and production of Malawi's primary cash crops in the 1990s also affected industrial production, which is largely based on food processing. Production fell by 52% from 1998 to 1999 alone (!). In terms of percentage of GDP, this meant a further decline of 4% from 16% in 1994 to 12% in 1999. Tightening competition due to the trade and exchange rate liberalisation that took place in the course of Structural Adjustment in recent years has also forced some of the largest firms, such as Lever Brothers or the British American Tobacco Company, to close down their production in Malawi (Harrigan 2001).

Government aims to diversify its domestic production by shifting industrial production to the manufacturing industry (GoM 2000). Despite a cheap and abundant labour force, the dependence on the import of production inputs, such as machines and raw materials, together with a general scarcity of foreign exchange, renders production costs high.

2.3.3 Poverty Alleviation

The systematic neglect of welfare issues and social spending in Structural Adjustment policies resulted in the further decline of the social status of the Malawian population, especially as regards health and education. In order to cushion the most adverse effects of the adjustment policy, Malawi embarked on a new programme that came to be known as the Social Dimension of Adjustment at the

³¹ Tobacco constitutes over 60% of all export commodities. The low prices achieved at the auction floors are attributable to the decreasing quality of tobacco processing, the liberalisation of the tobacco market which allows Malawian merchant companies to buy cheap tobacco abroad and mix it with their own tobacco and finally, the negative impacts of anti-smoking campaigns that saw large amounts of tobacco left on auction floors (GoM 2000).

beginning of the 1990s and which became the predecessor of the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP). Shifting its focus from a purely growth-oriented policy towards a policy that tries to integrate poverty and social policy-related issues into the development process, poverty alleviation was to become the official political and economic doctrine of the new democratic Malawi (Chinsinga 2001; Harrigan 2001).

The Poverty Alleviation Programme, also referred to as the Malawian 'new deal policy' with regard to the similarities of measures taken (Banda et al. 1998), implied a shift in the economic focus of the economy from agriculture towards commerce as the new motor of development. Measures focus mainly on the enhancement of employment opportunities in the informal sector of the economy and the smallholder sector via improved access to credit-facilities, technical skill training and better marketing measures, with which it was hoped to boost both the economic and financial sector (Chinsinga 2001). The country experienced an enormous upsurge in credit-initiatives for small- and medium-scale enterprises. However, most of these very ambitious credit initiatives have failed. Many of the funds designed to operate as revolving funds dried up, as many of the beneficiaries defaulted or simply did not pay, because most initiatives were strongly politicised and were used by politicians and voters to exchange economic favours for political ones and vice versa (Chinsinga 2001; Harrigan 2001).

The strong intertwinement of political and economic interests thus remains a salient feature, even after the transition to democracy, with the only difference lying in the economic framework. While Banda used to secure political alliances via the donation of large estates to loyal politicians and civil servants, Muluzi, as a businessman, has been granting economic favours and production shares in commerce and industry to his political allies. This policy not only hampers democratic development, but also major economic reforms, such as the new Land Act put in place in 2002 that foresaw major land redistribution. Although recognising the importance of the re-distribution of estate-land to smallholders in order to address the problem of land inequality in the country, the interest of many politicians and businessmen in retaining the status quo has been a major obstacle to any policy being put into action so far (Chinsinga 2001).

Another salient feature of Malawi's political economy that remained and even increased with democratisation is the strong degree of donor dependency. Banda's pragmatic growth-oriented development approach and the largely corruption-free and very efficient administrative system gave Malawi a lot of credits with aid agencies, which Banda readily used (Simon 1975). The country's high dependence on donor money became fully overt in 1992/93, when the freezing of donor aid caused by Malawi's poor performance as regards human rights and Good Governance provided a major reason for triggering democratic re-

forms. The share of donor assistance is especially high in development, where in 2001/2002 alone donor assistance accounted for 74% of total development expenditure. Furthermore, donors also finance a considerable share of Malawi's balance of payments sheet: in 2000/2001, external sources financed nearly 75% of the budget deficit (GoM 2001).

2.3.4 The Neo-liberal Consequences

Despite the poverty-oriented rhetoric of the PAP and the international finance institutions, the reforms and measures imposed by the latter remain largely growth-oriented, gearing the vulnerable Malawian economy towards further liberalisation and deregulation, and have consistently undermined any poverty-alleviating impact. In fact, poverty rates have increased since 1994, currently amounting to 65.3% of the population living with less than MK 10.47 – or roughly a third of a dollar per day (MPRSP 2002: 23). In relation to the proportion of income that households spend on food, poverty rates are even worse, amounting to 89.9%, which translates into 49% of the rural and 93.4% of the urban population living in poverty (Chilowa and Chirwa 1997). This is even more remarkable in the light of Malawi having been food secure until the mid-1980s.

Whereas unfavourable weather conditions leading to periodic droughts and hunger, such as in 2001 and 2002, and the low productivity of the smallholder sector, are usually cited as the major reasons for the decrease in food security, the underlying causes are mainly structural. In addition to the rising lack of land and the small sizes of plots that do not allow for a diversification of production, HIV/AIDS puts an enormous strain on the much-needed labour force.³² While less labour is available due to the high death toll, much labour is also needed to take care of the sick (Devereux 2002). The success of the so-called 'starter pack initiative' that involved the free distribution of suitable cereal and legume seeds and fertiliser packages and produced a record harvest in 1998³³ showed that difficult access to farming inputs is yet another major bottleneck. Economic liberalisation, including the removal of subsidies for fertiliser and seeds, has made access to much-needed agricultural inputs costly for most Malawian farmers.

Although its problems are well known, Malawi's food situation has reached

³² One would tend to assume that the high death toll due to HIV/AIDS would at least ease pressure in terms of food scarcity. However, at the time of the research, there was no indication to confirm this tendency. Moreover, considering the decreasing productivity of land in general and the fact that HIV/AIDS also destroys the much-needed labour force for food production, it remains to be seen to what extent the stress on land and food security may be eased.

³³ In 1998 the small-scale sector grew by 18.9%, which was followed by a growth of 13.4% in 1999, which slumped to 1.7% in 2000 (GoM 2000; 2001).

an alarming low since then. The delayed distribution of the starter packs, delayed rains in the Central Region and floods in the South of the country in 2001 led to the worst famines Malawi had ever experienced since the great famine of 1949 (Devereux 2002; Anders 2005). The famine, that caused the deaths of at least 500-1,000 people, was exacerbated by the fact that the government sold off all the Strategic Food Reserves. The resulting maize shortage led to an outrageous pricing policy at local markets, rendering maize unaffordable for most people.³⁴ Although harvests were good in 2003, food production slumped to 37% of the volume needed to keep the country food secure in 2004/2005, which means that large parts of the country are facing another famine that – according to the international community – will be worse than the one in 2001.³⁵ In his analysis of the famine in 2001, Devereux points at yet another aspect that is of major significance for social security. He argues that the severity of the famine was also due to the falling ability of the population to cope with production shocks and food scarcity (Devereux 2002). We shall see that the same can be said of many risks and insecurities with which existing social security mechanisms and actors have increasing difficulty to cope.

Projections for macro-economic development given by the Malawian government and the IMF within the framework of the MPRSP are very positive, talking about an average GDP growth of at least 5% during the next decade and an inflation rate exceeding not more than 5% (MPRSP 2002). The 10% annual growth of GDP this would require stands in sharp contrast to overall economic conditions and current growth rates. The growth of GDP fell from 3.6% in 1999 to 2.1% in 2000 (GoM 2001). In 2001, growth of GDP slumped to -1.5%, further reducing per capita income from US\$ 160 in 2000 and US\$ 156 in 2002 (UNDP 2005). Against a backdrop of continuing famine and decreasing prices for Malawi's main export products, prospects for a recovery of the economy seem to be rather bleak.

2.4 Social Policy and Social Development

Rising poverty rates and decreasing food security are also discernible in deteriorating social indicators. Though having slowed down over the years to 2%

³⁴ Whereas ADMARC was selling a 50 kg bag of maize at 850 Malawian Kwacha, a price that in itself was already unaffordable for many Malawians, the prices with the local vendors were usually much higher (Devereux 2002).

³⁵ In response, the government has finally announced it is embarking on a programme of reform, including a tax reform for smallholders and subsidies for agricultural inputs. In addition, the government has started re-buying land in the South of the country from non-Malawian estate owners to be distributed among landless farmers [www.sadocc.at/Malawi News, 04.05.2005].

per year, which corresponds to a fertility rate of 6.1 births per woman, annual population growth is still very high in Malawi. Early marriages, early first pregnancies and a lack of family planning mechanisms are the main causes attributed to the high fertility rate. Around 30% of women have an unmet need for family planning, i.e. they are not using contraceptives or practicing child spacing, although they do not want to have more children or have children so quickly (MDHS 2000, UNDP 2004). Under-five child mortality has declined since the early 1990s, falling from 234 deaths per 1,000 live births during 1988-1992 to 189 per 1,000 between 1996-2000. Although this does signify important progress, the rate of the downward trend is modest and remains very high compared to other Sub-Saharan countries. What is more, due to HIV/AIDS, it is even expected to rise again (MoHP Planning Department 2001). During the same period, maternal mortality has increased from 620 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births to 1,120 (MDHS 2000).

Malaria is still the most widespread lethal disease in Malawi. However, the rapid expansion of HIV/AIDS represents a major challenge to the country, affecting mostly the economically active part of the population: 14.92% of the population between 15 and 49 is infected with HIV or suffering from the disease. The HIV seroprevalence rate is generally lower in rural than in urban areas. On average, the rural figures are around 11.2%, in semi-urban areas around 20.9% and in urban areas at 25.3% (MDHS 2000).³⁶ It is estimated that around 70% of the population are not expected to survive the age of 65 (UNDP 2004).

Apart from HIV/AIDS, low nutritional standards and a high incidence of easily preventable and curable diseases, such as Malaria, malnutrition, anaemia, diarrhoeal diseases or pneumonia are the major causes for a steadily declining life expectancy from 41 years to 37.5 over the last decade alone (UNDP 2004). Only 20% of the population have access to health services, including child vaccination, which has steadily decreased from 82% to 70% during the last ten years (MDHS 2000). Chronic poverty is also evident in high rates of under-nutrition (49%) with 25% of the children under five being underweight and 49% stunted (MDHS 2000; UNDP 2004).

The adult illiteracy rate has slightly improved currently lying at 52.4%, although female illiteracy is still very high at 39%. Educational standards have improved significantly over the last decade due to the introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) in 1994, leading to an enormous increase of net enrolment ratios in primary and secondary schools. The low level of educational standards

³⁶ The regional distribution in the same age group shows that the HIV/AIDS prevalence is lowest in the Northern Region (9%), followed by the Central Region (11%) and the Southern Region (18%). High incidences of migration, urbanisation and transportation are seen as the major factors that contribute to high AIDS-prevalence in the South (GoM 2000).

due to massive influx of students and a mushrooming of low quality private schools has cast the enormous success of FPE in a more critical light.

Whereas rising poverty rates over the last decade, including the emergence of HIV/AIDS, have contributed significantly to deteriorating social conditions, social indicators have always been at a very low level in Malawi. In line with Banda's modernistic and growth-oriented development strategy, development efforts and funds were concentrated heavily on economic investment, while social policy as a genuine field of state policy intervention was consistently neglected.³⁷ Investment in human capital was only justified to the extent that it accelerated economic growth; social sector expenditure was solely valued in terms of what it did in order to boost or sustain Malawian labour productivity (Pryor 1990; Kishindo 1997; Mwanza 1999). Here again, the British colonial legacy is much in evidence. As in many other colonies, colonial welfare policy in Malawi was confined to civil servants and their families, while social spending for the wider black population was considered a drain on public spending, especially in colonies that yielded as little economic return as did *Nyasaland* (Havinden & Meredith 1993).³⁸

2.4.1 The Welfare State as State Welfare

The colonial pattern of the welfare state as state welfare, i.e. exclusively confined to those working for the state, still dominates Malawian social policy today. Whereas the racial discrimination that prevented black people from entering the civil service was lifted and black civil servants took over from their white predecessors, the "*caste-like divisions of the colonial society*" (Midgley 1984: 181) remained by-and-large the same, confining welfare services to civil servants, the military and the police.

Banda's "*FCR*" doctrine (sufficient Food, adequate Clothing and a Roof for all) stipulating a basic needs-oriented development approach, operated largely on a rhetorical level and mainly served as a justification for the subordination of social policy concerns in favour of a purely growth-oriented development strategy and investments. In contrast to the 'low-triangle-policy' (Pryor 1990: 180) of colonial government that only provided education on a primary level, it was

³⁷ Between 1968 and 1983 the economic sectors consistently accounted for over 50% of the development expenditures (Harrigan 2001).

³⁸ The Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1945 put more emphasis on social spending, after a committee on post-war reconstruction had heavily criticised the high incidence of poverty and lack of rudimentary welfare in most British colonies. However, the colonial administration heavily criticised those countries that really took advantage of these measures, arguing that social spending would increase recurrent costs, whereas it was more important to invest in economic growth (Havinden & Meredith 1993).

the secondary and tertiary educational sector that received major attention in the post-colonial era in an attempt to remedy Malawi's chronic shortage of skilled manpower in both the public and private sectors. Budgetary spending on basic education or adult literacy programmes, which became the first priority of development efforts of so many post-colonial regimes, was more or less non-existent. The same policy was by and large pursued in the health sector, where the development of health care facilities beyond the existing – mostly missionary – ones did not receive much attention, unless it was to sustain the Malawian labour force.

Banda's residual welfare approach is also discernible as regards the civil service, which continues to enjoy the most comprehensive social security scheme of the Malawian labour force. Instead of a contributory scheme, he introduced a much cheaper provident fund based scheme. This mandatory saving system, in which civil servants pay a certain share of their salary that they receive at the end of their working life or which – in case of their premature death – goes to their heirs in form of a lump sum, is still in place today. Civil servants are also entitled to a variety of benefits, including institutional housing and travel allowances, which as Anders points out may exceed their relatively low salaries considerably (2005).³⁹ They may also apply for salary advances, so-called 'emergency loans' for the rental and purchase of housing, furniture, motor vehicles or other consumer goods at very low interest rates and generous repayment conditions (GoM 1991). Health insurance was not foreseen, as access to health services was free of charge for all Malawians and was financed entirely by the state, rendering additional health insurance unnecessary.

With the Civil Service Reform Programme put in place under the guidance of the World Bank, a drastic restructuring of the civil service sector has taken place, including massive retrenchments and cutbacks and modifications in the social services (Anders 2005). One of these measures included the change of housing policy (see Chapter 4), which made high-rent houses paid for by government unaffordable for many civil servants, forcing them to move into low income areas, such as Sector 7, where the number of state employees and – in due course – the prices for rents and social services have gone up dramatically. The new financing mode introduced by the World Bank, that allows government departments to spend money on a fortnightly basis only, makes access to salary advances and emergency loans virtually impossible. In addition, death benefits, travel warrants for employees and their families to visit their home villages, and the provision of coffins and vehicles in case of death of an employee have been

³⁹ Junior grade employees, such as gardeners or messengers, earn around US\$ 25 per month; primary school teachers' salaries reach between US\$ 30 and US\$ 45. The highest grades earn around US\$ 250 per month (Anders 2005: 20).

reduced or modified, and in some cases they simply cannot be provided, due to resource constraints (*ibid.*).

2.4.2 Labour Market Policy and Pension Schemes

Other major public social policy measures in Malawi concern the Workmen's Compensation Act (WCA). Put in place by the British in 1946, it foresees the compensation of workers in case of fatal or disabling accidents or diseases contracted in the course of employment. The act was revised in 2000 and converted into an employer-financed social insurance fund that will ensure that claims are easily and automatically effectuated and compensations paid in a quick and unbureaucratic manner (Interview No. 156; ILO/SAMAT 1998). There are plans to convert the lump sum scheme into a pension scheme, which will provide the basis for the latter to extend into a more comprehensive public social insurance scheme, encompassing other eventualities as well, such as maternity, sickness and death (*ibid.*). However, the fund, which is to be controlled on an autonomous tripartite basis, was still not active when I left in 2002. Major conflicts with regard to the assessment of contributions to be paid on part of the employers have impeded the working of the fund so far (*ibid.*; GoM 2000).

The restrained wage policy put in place by Banda in 1969 was lifted in 1993. Wage policy nevertheless continues to provide an important regulatory framework for improving labour conditions and social security within the very heterogeneous Malawian labour force and against the background of the almost total absence of any other public welfare institutions. In 2000, the Tenant Act was put in place to improve the labour conditions of tenant workers at estate farms, including the provision of a fixed minimum wage, prohibition of forced and child labour, and the entitlement to basic social security provisions, such as paid maternity and sick leave (Malawi Government, Act No.6 of 2000). Since democratisation, a Wages Advisory Board based on a tripartite arrangement has been installed which monitors and adjusts statutory minimum wages on a regular basis. The high inflation rate and price increases have led to several upward adjustments of urban and rural minimum wages within just a few years, but wages remain very low.⁴⁰ Furthermore, their significance is largely symbolic, as hardly any enforcement mechanisms exist. This is especially the case in the 'unorganised' and 'informal' sector, where labourers often earn much less.

Since democratisation, trade unions have been re-emerging in Malawi. Yet while they have achieved some progress concerning labour conditions, their power is very limited, rendering any substantial reform process that would re-

⁴⁰ In 2001, they stood at MK 50/day and MK 37/day in urban and rural areas respectively (GoM 2001).

ally improve workers' conditions an impossible endeavour. The limited importance of trade unions as political stakeholders lies not only in an overpowering government, but also in the specific structure of the Malawian labour force, which is organised to a minimal degree. In 2001, Malawi's labour force encompassed around 4.5 million people, of whom 90% were working in the agricultural sector (GoM 2001). More than 90% of Malawians work in the 'informal' sector, being either self-employed or working in scarcely regulated and very insecure labour relations that usually do not provide any form of social protection. Only around 10% of the Malawian population work in the mostly urban-based 'formal' sector of the economy, of which only around 30,000 workers, or 28% of the Malawian labour force, are organised in trade unions.⁴¹ With the financial assistance of an international NGO, the Malawian Congress of Trade Unions (MCTU) has initiated a project to sensitise and organise 'informal sector' workers. However, as most workers simply lack the resources to pay membership fees, the MCTU will be unable to sustain this effort in the long run (Interview No. 148, Trade Unionist).

The plans for a Malawian-wide social insurance scheme based on the extension of the Workers' Compensation funds to include all workers and employees also foresees that the system is contracted out and administered by one of the big private insurance companies of the country. This policy, in line with the new social policy framework of the World Bank, foresees the stronger incorporation of the private insurance sector and is not new in Malawi. Due to the narrowly confined structure of the welfare system, private companies and industries had developed their own in-house pension and health insurance schemes, which were partly administered by private insurance companies. With the privatisation policies pursued in course of Structural Adjustment, a lot of these company schemes were contracted out or closed down, as they were no longer considered affordable (Interview No. 150). The withdrawal and sale of insurance policies due to economic difficulties is also discernible on an individual level. The economic difficulties, coupled with a high inflation rate and increasing price levels, have prompted many people to cancel their insurance policies, especially the urban low and middle-income class (Interview No. 150; MASM 2002, Interview No. 149). Against this background, the government's and donors' ambition towards the stronger incorporation of the private insurance market into the social security economy of Malawi remains rather questionable.

⁴¹ At the moment, there are 17 unions united in the Malawian Congress of Trade Unions (tea, industry, building, hotel industry, civil service, etc.) (Interview No. 148, Trade Unionist).

2.4.3 Social Welfare

The extent of public social assistance in Malawi is very small both in quantity and quality. The type of services provided have remained by and large the same since independence, and include family welfare, children services, a reform programme for juvenile offenders, and specially targeted direct transfers to specifically vulnerable groups, such as the Malawi Council for the Handicapped (MACOHA), and to victims of natural disasters (MoFYCS 2001; GoM 2000). With the introduction of the PRSP, social welfare services have gained increasing importance, both in terms of amplification of services and funding in order to maintain and improve the standard of living of the most vulnerable groups in society (MPRSP 2002). Similar to the economic measures, the 'social safety net programme' follows a two-pronged approach, consisting on the one hand of productivity-enhancing interventions especially designed for land-poor farmers and the urban and rural poor with no alternative possible sources of income, such as the aforementioned starter pack programme or public works programmes (PWP). On the other hand, the programme also involves direct-targeted transfers in cash and kind, so-called welfare support interventions. These include targeted nutrition interventions for malnourished children and vulnerable pregnant and lactating mothers, and direct welfare interventions for those who are not able to take care of themselves, such as the elderly, chronically ill and orphans, in the forms of direct money transfers or vouchers (MPRSP 2002; MoFYCS 2001).

The sharp increase in the number of orphans due to HIV/AIDS⁴² and constraints as regards the question of their care has given special weight to family welfare in recent years. Programmes to strengthen the capacity of local social support networks in assisting orphans are the centre of attention (MPRSP 2002). The latter include the family, religious institutions or other so-called 'community based organisations' such as foster care parents, volunteer counsellors, home-based carers and community-based childcare centres. Measures aim at improving the status of the orphans and the potential foster parents at the same time, to ensure that orphans are able to stay within their community while receiving adequate help at the same time. They include early nutrition programmes and vocational training for older orphans, as well as the provision of child maintenance allowances and special loans to increase the income capacity of the foster parents (GoM 2000). The programmes also target disabled and elderly people who also find themselves in an increasingly precarious position due to rising poverty rates and HIV/AIDS (MoFYCS 2001).

⁴² In 1999, 390 000 children had been orphaned due to HIV/AIDS according to UNAIDS (Chirwa 2002).

All in all, welfare services provided by the state remain very erratic and lack any coherent policy approach. As such, they have also little substantial impact on the well-being of the population. Most services in this sector are provided by NGOs, which, especially on a local level, provide an enormous amount of social assistance both in terms of material and care labour. With regard to HIV/AIDS, it is estimated that 60% to 70% of relevant social services are provided by NGOs.⁴³ Although the government does plan to increase direct transfers within the PRSP, it is reasonable to assume that this will not alter the conspicuous importance of NGOs as regards social welfare services.

2.4.4 Health Services

Health provision in Malawi involves a wide range of health care providers, with the state being just one among many others. Within the modern health care sector, the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP), together with other smaller government departments, is the most important provider, running around 50% of all healthcare facilities in the country. The Christian Hospitals Association of Malawi (CHAM), a non-profit association of mission hospitals which is partly government funded, provides around 20% of health care, while the remaining 32.4% are run by private non-profit and private for profit organisations, such as private practitioners, large firms or estates, and groceries or shops (through the sale of drugs) (MoHP 1998; Tsoka 1998). The latter category also includes national and international NGOs, which provide a substantial proportion of health care delivery in Malawi, accounting for around 18.4% of total health care expenditure⁴⁴, and working mainly in community-based health care programmes.

Apart from a chronic lack of drugs and facilities, the most pressing problem of the health sector in Malawi is the uneven distribution of services, resources and personnel: although most of the Malawian population lives in rural areas, health care facilities are disproportionately focussed on the urban centres.⁴⁵ To counter this imbalance, a substantial shift in resource allocation has taken place in recent years from central to district level, with special emphasis on local and commu-

⁴³ Despite the importance of supporting initiatives related to HIV/AIDS, the Council of NGOs in Malawi (CONGOMA) also criticises the heavy presence of NGOs in this sector as not being just a genuine concern, but also as being demand driven (Interview No. 151). While donors now spend a lot of money on HIV/AIDS, which is indeed an important issue, equally important issues, such as water or agriculture, receive very little attention and projects.

⁴⁴ CONGOMA estimates that NGO involvement in the health sector is much greater. As has already been noted, this especially concerns programmes related to HIV/AIDS (Interview No. 151).

⁴⁵ This heavy urban bias of health services is also evident in the health of the Malawian population: *"Rural dwellers who are ill are much more likely to see a nurse than a doctor, whereas residents in the cities are more likely to see doctors. This mirrors the situation on the ground in Malawi. Doctors are found in the urban centres and not in the countryside."* (Chilowa et al. 2000: 22).

nal levels. Notwithstanding this shift, secondary and tertiary health care, which together account for 15% of the total health care facilities and are supposed to provide specialised health care services only, continue to carry the major burden of health care services in Malawi, consuming over two thirds of the ministry's financial resources. The major reason for this enormous resource inequality lies in the fact that provision is primarily made for primary healthcare services. As resources and personnel are scarce at the local level, many people tend to bypass local and communal health care facilities and turn directly to district or central hospitals in order to obtain adequate treatment. To counter this problem, 'bypass fees' were introduced in central and district hospitals, in order to prevent people from using higher health care services for primary health care needs. However, the continuing low quality of primary health care services at local level has hampered changes in peoples' behaviour thus far. HIV/AIDS exacerbates the situation further, as health care facilities are overwhelmed with the increased need for care. It is estimated that 70% of hospital beds in Malawi are occupied by patients with HIV/AIDS-related conditions (GoM 2000).

The situation is slightly different for NGOs that are largely concentrated in rural areas.⁴⁶ The development focus of the government on rural areas and the focus on rural poverty have encouraged many NGOs to follow the same route. While they take over a substantial proportion of healthcare services in rural areas, they are not able to make up for the imbalance in public services.

The low quality of healthcare services, especially in rural areas⁴⁷, forces many people to seek the support of private medical service providers, where payment is required for almost all services (Tsoka 1998). This includes the so-called 'traditional' health care sector, which is of enormous importance in Malawi. Traditional healers and birth attendants play for example a crucial role in health care delivery, and are used simultaneously or consecutively to 'conventional' medicine.⁴⁸

The importance of private health care is also discernible when examining the major financial sources of medical care in Malawi. Government expendi-

⁴⁶ Most NGOs are concentrated in the Southern and Central Regions, while in the North there are only a few.

⁴⁷ Officially, 80% of the population live within an 8 km radius of a health care unit. However, this percentage decreases rapidly to 46% when applied to a geographical radius of 5 km (MoHP 1998; MoHP 1999). In practice, most of the services show an even higher unequal distribution. In addition, most of these dispensaries are often in very poor condition.

⁴⁸ As of 1998, there were an estimated 13 000 so-called 'traditional healers' active in Malawi, who are consulted in all kind of physical and spiritual matters, and 18 000 traditional birth attendants. The latter play an important role in health care delivery, as around 25% of women giving birth use TBAs (MoHP 2001). Since 1992, they have been trained by the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP), in an attempt to increase access and quality of primary health care on the local level (Mwase 1998).

ture, meanwhile, accounts for about only 25.2% of the sector's finances, or 7% of GDP. Apart from donors that provide 30% of all health expenditure⁴⁹, the private sector is the largest provider, accounting for 45%. Moreover, 26% of the total amount, which is more than the government's share, is provided by private household's out-of-pocket health expenditure (MoHP 2001).⁵⁰ Most of these expenditures are made by poor and rural households, who are large purchasers of health care goods and services, mainly drugs.⁵¹ The purchase of drugs is usually the only medical treatment people can afford, as most people do not have the money to seek medical care and advice in health facilities, thus rendering adequate treatment often impossible.

There has been a lengthy discussion over the years in Malawi about the introduction of user fees in hospitals and health facilities. With regard to the high private expenditure on health care, proponents argue that it would simply make a common practice obligatory. However, there are also concerns that user fees will mean that people have even less access to medical services, especially as most expenditure is purely reactive and is largely directed towards the purchase of drugs.

The enormous drain of health care expenditure on household income has led to plans to introduce a health insurance system (MoHP 1999). The schemes envisaged are commercially-based private-for-profit, or private-non-profit schemes (MoHP 2001). Such schemes partly already exist in Malawi, mainly with private companies and international organisations, which wanted to provide their staff with additional health insurance.⁵² For people working in the 'informal' economic sector, community based small-scale or micro-insurance schemes could be a viable solution (MoHP 2001).

2.4.5 Education

The urgent need for an educated class of Malawian civil servants has made education one of the few social policy areas to have been considered a priority in

⁴⁹ According to the MoHP, there are 20 donors involved in the provision of health care in Malawi, both multilateral and bilateral. They mainly provide technical assistance and know-how, usually using government structures for their programmes. Recently, donors have invested a substantial share of their resources in administrative efforts, i.e. the decentralisation of health services, as well as the management of preventive healthcare services (MoHP 2001; MoHP 1999; GoM 2000).

⁵⁰ 19% are provided by employers, either within dispensaries of public and private firms, or as part of private insurance schemes.

⁵¹ Between 1999-2000, the poorest 60% of the population spend MK 881million on healthcare services, while the richest 40% only MK 822 million. Expenditure on health services per household per year constitutes around 10% of the total annual consumption (MoHP 2001).

⁵² The Medical Aid Society of Malawi (MASM), a private non-profit organisation, is the major provider in this sector.

Malawian development policy. Whereas in the immediate post-independence period policy focused on the extension and improvement of secondary- and tertiary-level education in order to fill the gap in skilled labourers left by the British, the 1980s saw a re-orientation of the educational sector towards all levels of formal education, particularly the primary level and the long-neglected functional literacy leading to the establishment of a National Adult Literacy Programme (NALP).

With the establishment of the Poverty Alleviation Programme in 1995, Free Primary Education (FPE) became the centrepiece of education policy. As a consequence, enrolment rates increased substantially from 1.9 million in 1994 to 2.9 million in 1995. At the same time, quality of education fell considerably, however. As well, dropout and repetition rates shot up significantly (GoM 2000) and it is estimated that only 30% of the children starting primary school will also finish complete their primary education (MPRSP 2002). There is also a serious shortage of teaching and learning materials. Of the 45,788 primary school teachers, only slightly more than half are fully qualified, which means that the pupil-qualified teacher ratio is at 114:1. The low quality of education is further aggravated by a lack of adequate infrastructure. The pupil-class ratio is 69:1, while 10,000 classes are without a classroom, and 5,000 only have a temporary one (GoM 2000; MPRSP 2002).

Furthermore, the suspension of school fees on primary level could not alter structural inequalities in access to education, especially in relation to socio-economic and gender disparities. While net enrolment rates for males and females are almost equal at primary level, dropout rates are significantly higher among girls. This is even more pronounced at the secondary level, where females account for only 37% of total enrolment (MPRSP 2002). Early marriage patterns and a high incidence of teenage pregnancies are the major obstacles preventing girls from continuing their education. Moreover, highly unequal access to education in relation to socio-economic disparities widely persists and has only been shifted, as indirect costs for schooling have increased substantially. Parents are increasingly asked to contribute to the maintenance of school buildings or to the purchase of teaching and learning materials. In addition, poverty forces children to contribute to the household income, which usually delays their entry to school and also requires that they leave early (Castro-Leal 1996).

Deteriorating educational facilities have led to a mushrooming of private schools, especially in urban areas. Quality of education in most schools is, however, disastrous, as many people who have a basic education perceive the establishment of a school merely as a lucrative business opportunity. This is also the reason why the government plans to integrate private schools into an overall national scheme in order to ensure equal standards of teaching and an adequate

curriculum, as provided in state schools. Facing an enormous lack of teaching facilities, the government is also considering the possibility of partially funding private and urgently needed education facilities (Interview MoE 2001).

2.4.6 The Scattered Landscape of Social Support

A distinct feature of the Malawian social economy is the fact that social services are provided by a wide range of service providers, including the state, non-governmental national and international organisations, and both the profit and non-profit sector. While actors and providers have partly changed, the pattern is an old and, again, colonial one. Education and health services in colonial Malawi were largely provided by missionary stations and the private sector. Banda maintained this strong incorporation of the non-governmental sector in social services. Favouring his anti-social pro-capitalist development approach, missions, NGOs, international donor organisations and increasingly also the private profit sector became important stakeholders in the provision of social services, acting as “*government’s filler gaps*” (Kilembe 1994: 275).⁵³ The enormous importance of non-state social security mechanisms is also discernible in the confidence people display towards these institutions. We shall see that people perceive local NGOs and religious associations as much more reliable and accessible in terms of social support than the state institutions or public programmes of which they have heard only on the radio.

The fact that the social sector is institutionally and financially highly dependent on non-governmental stakeholders renders the development of a coherent social policy rather difficult. In order to increase the efficiency, equity and poverty alleviation impact of social services, the government has embarked on a new policy: the so-called ‘Sector Wide Approaches’ (SWAPs) aim at better coordinating and integrating the different providers and funds. By bringing together the various stakeholders in order to discuss financing, management, planning and service delivery, a better outcome of service provision, especially in health care and education, should be achieved (Office of the Vice President 1999).

Although all stakeholders have welcomed this initiative, its realisation has met with a great deal of resistance, including from donors and NGOs. Many

⁵³ The NGO-sector alone provides 30% to 40% of all social services (Kalemba 1997; CONGOMA 1998). The largest sectors are (1) agriculture and food security, (2) health, and (3) education. Economic activities such as credit facilities, management and trade associations have increased enormously over the last years. According to estimations, NGOs run 70-80% of the sector’s activity. Human rights issues and environment and forestry have also gained importance (Interview CONGOMA 1998; 2001).

donors prefer to finance their own projects rather than contributing to a 'common basket fund'. Shared coordination would also mean that planning priorities would have to be coordinated and tuned with the national ministries and other stakeholders, increasing the probability of colliding with the NGOs' or donors' own interests. A 'basket funding' scheme would also include the financing of infrastructure, management and administrative structures. It is rather unlikely that these measures, that in contrast to project work yield little 'visibility', will attract much enthusiasm within the highly competitive donor environment (MoHP 2001). The fact that donor programmes and projects are often based on an integrated approach that encompasses also non-health or non-educational components makes the coordination task even more difficult.

2.4.7 Adjusting Social Support: Privatisation and Collectivisation of Social Services

The economic crisis at the beginning of the 1980s made the consistent neglect of social policy since independence and its disastrous consequences visible. While the economy had been growing at an extraordinary pace, Malawi's public expenditure on health, education and welfare had risen only slowly to an average of 5.9% during the 1960s and had fallen again to only 5.3 % in the 1970s (Pryor 1990). Health conditions in Malawi were appalling, lagging far behind any other African state and forcing Malawi, despite the economic crisis, to increase its social spending.

In the following years, social expenditure rose to an average of 7%. A special health care plan was adopted that focused on the construction of and improved access to primary healthcare facilities (Pryor 1990). In education, basic primary education and adult literacy received increasing political and financial attention. However, the slight increase in social spending at the beginning of the 1980s fell considerably with the start of Structural Adjustment, whose public expenditure reduction policy mainly hit the social sector. Recurrent expenditure in health and education fell dramatically from 10% and 15.5% to 3.17% and 6.53% respectively (Chinsinga 2001: 30).

It was only with the transition to democracy and the adoption of the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) that social policy was attributed a new role in Malawian politics, underlining its importance as an integral and complementary part of economic development and poverty alleviation. Expenditure on social and community services, including health, education and other social services, increased substantially from 12.2% of total development expenditures in 1993/94 to 28.3% in 1994/95, increasing further to 37.1% in 1996/1997 and 51.4% in 1997/98 (GoM 1996; 1997). Yet here as well the strong politicisation of the

PAP is discernible. Political interests rather than incidences of poverty and need appear to be the basis for targeting processes and the allocation of funds and projects: *“Political labels have invariably assumed precedence in lieu of the real poverty situation of the beneficiaries”* (Chinsinga 2001: 41).⁵⁴

Improved access to social services and the development of community self-help capacity in order to manage and improve their economic and social development are core issues of the PAP initiative (GoM 1995). This includes especially the development of infrastructure and housing, both of special relevance in urban areas. Through the provision of technical and managerial skills, so-called community capacity building programmes are to empower local initiatives to seek direct support with the donors or international NGOs in order to gain access to infrastructure and – especially important in town – housing (see GoM 2000). The policy has met with considerable success, especially in urban areas. With the assistance of the Malawian Social Action Fund (MASAF), a fund established by the World Bank in close cooperation with the Malawian government, up to now around 1,534 so-called community sub-projects have been finalised, including schools, boreholes, tap water, electricity, clinics, roads, bridges, toilets and other social infrastructure (ibid.).

While social spending is on the increase once more following a slump at the end of the 1990s,⁵⁵ overall economic conditions and the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), with its continuing liberalisation and privatisation policies, including the cutback in social services for civil servants or the removal of subsidies for fertiliser and seeds, continue to undermine much of the progress made. It appears that the new social policy agenda of the international donor community, promoting the further liberalisation and individualisation of social security responsibilities, will further undermine the social situation in Malawi and contribute to increased insecurity rather than reducing it. In addition, it will further increase the already high financial and institutional dependence of Malawian society on donors and NGOs. Regarding the frequently changing agendas of NGOs and international donors, whose programmes are usually confined to a few years only, the provision of social services in Malawi risks being even more erratic than it has been thus far, making the establishment of a coherent and sustainable social policy even more difficult. It appears that social policy in developing countries and in Malawi is regressing into a residual welfare policy approach that does not much differ from previous colonial patterns, where much social security was left to the individual or the family, while social services were mainly managed by non-state private non-profit and profit organisations.

⁵⁴ See the assessment report on the functioning of the Malawian Social Action Fund 1996-2001 by Bloom, Chilowa et al. (2005).

⁵⁵ In 2000, 58.26% of the development budget was allocated to social services; in 2001 this figure was 60.57% (GoM 2000; 2001).

2.5 Conclusions

The social, economic and political development of Malawi is thus largely a continuation of colonial patterns which have only experienced slight changes. This also concerns the high financial and political dependence on external actors whose colonial predecessors have meanwhile been replaced by international finance institutions, donors and NGOs. In this respect, Malawi has also always been a highly globalised and internationalised economy that – despite different political systems and development strategies – has never been able to loosen its dependency.

Despite democratisation and poverty alleviation, the main beneficiaries of economic growth remain, however, largely the same – the political and economic elite of the country. This is also true for social policy. State welfare was always largely confined to those working directly for the state. In fact, it is non-state informal and traditional mechanisms that remain the main source and main actors in the social security economy of most Malawians, including those in the urban areas. Being often defined as a by-product or an additional layer of given social arrangements and relationships in the literature (Leliveld 1994), we shall see that they are actually central to the social security of most urban migrants. Urbanisation and migration change notions of risk and insecurity as well as the social security mix in terms of which – traditional, formal and informal – mechanisms people use in-between village and town. However, they continue to take place in a trans-local and multiple social security space.

Chapter 3

Borderland Urbanisation: Uncertainty, Insecurity and Poverty in Town

3.1 Introduction

The academic debate on migration in developing countries has long been dominated by an understanding of migration as an exclusively modern phenomenon that only began with capitalist penetration and colonial domination. Based on Todaro's famous push-and-pull-model (1971), most early migration studies concentrated almost exclusively on economic factors as an explanatory framework for migration flows and projections. These migration flows were assumed to be entirely rural-urban, as it was the city as the centre of economic growth and modernity that would stand at the end of each migrant's journey that – yet another assumption – had started in the village. Migration into the city would only stop when the 'urban bias' (Lipton 1977), characterised by a significant urban-rural income differential, would be out-balanced and an urban-rural economic and demographic equilibrium achieved (for a critique, see Jamal & Weeks 1993).

Economic considerations also dominated the discussion around the city. In its role as a moderniser that would expand at the same pace as the economy would grow, the city epitomised the grand modernisation trajectory that was expected to happen in more or less the same way everywhere in the colonised world (Southall 1998; Freund 2000; Simon 1992). The notion of the city as a black box of modernity was thereby not only related to its role as the economic motor of growth and capitalist development: The city was also the place where the so-

cial and cultural transformation of the African '*homo ruralis*' (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1991: 44) into a modern urbanite would take place. This modernisation process was considered irreversible, as the move from a predominantly sedentary life within a small community based on kinship structures and dominated by conservatism and tradition into a highly mobile and individualised modernity dominated by utility and rationality would imply a total break with the rural past in geographic, economic, social and behavioural terms (for a critique see Silver 1990; Coquery-Vidrovitch 1991; Southall 1998; Ferguson 1999; Freund 2000).

Looking at the historical and current developments of migration and urbanisation processes in Malawi and Sector 7 specifically, this chapter argues that they hardly fit a modernist and dualist explanatory framework. While economic considerations do indeed play an important role in migration, we shall see that the economic factor is just one amongst many others that make people move. Moreover, when people move they do not exchange one social, economic and political reality for another. In contrast to modernisation theories, which perceived of migration as a one-way process between two completely different societies (for a critique, see Jackson 1986), migration represents a pattern of exchange and dependency between different social and economic environments, linking rather than dividing them (see for example, Van Dijk et al. 2001). Rather than two separate geographic, social, or economic entities, we shall see that town and village are tightly interwoven life-worlds within which and across which people move and organise their lives and livings. This is also reflected in migration decisions, which, far from being individualistic, are largely driven by trans-local considerations that also involve social and economic conditions and insecurities in the village.

These multi-local lives people are living (Glick-Schiller et al. 1992) also shed a different light on urbanisation processes and the city. Urbanisation processes are not isolated and confined to the city boundaries, but are linked to the wider social, economic and geographic environment, which in turn influences its shape and content. This encompasses both national and global levels, as has been emphasised by world system theorists (for example Wallerstein 1986), yet also involves 'the village' or more generally, the rural hinterland. I shall argue that this mutual influence and exchange that shapes the city is especially pronounced in rural-urban borderlands, like Sector 7. It is in these fringe areas where a multitude of lifestyles and living conditions within and across rural-urban boundaries exist side-by-side, mixing and combining different geographic, social, economic and cultural ways of living, and among which the modernist way of life represents just one amongst many others. I shall argue that this highly vibrant 'broken' or 'marginal' urbanisation and city taking place at the fringes of town not only represents growing normality for a rising number of people: the social, eco-

conomic, cultural processes taking place in such marginal cities are also central for the understanding of current urbanisation and migration processes in Malawi and, as far as the literature allows to conclude, also other bigger cities of the continent (for example Simone 2005; Simone 1997; Ferguson 1999; Ghannam 2002)

3.2 Migration and Urbanisation in Malawi

Migration constituted an important aspect of Malawi's social, economic, political and historical development long before colonialist and European traders settled in the area. Changing ecological conditions and particularly military disputes over territories, which were often induced by the migration of different groups in another area of the continent, have long been forcing people to give up their living and move into other territories (see for example Wills 2001).

The arrival of organised trade and later, colonialism and capitalism, did have a considerable impact on migration in Malawi nonetheless, substantially changing spatial relations and settlement patterns in the area. Especially the large labour migration induced by the British, who used Malawi as a labour pool for the economic growth centres in the South of the Federation, brought about large population movements far beyond colonial and then post-colonial boundaries. A rigid British tax system requiring access to cash money forced hundreds and thousands of young male Malawians into labour migration, mostly into the mines of the *Copperbelt* in Northern Rhodesia and *Witwatersrand* in South Africa. While many simply left the country in order to look for a job, a highly organised recruitment system also existed, which, via large agencies, directly contracted thousands of workers in Malawi for the mines in South Africa and Southern Rhodesia.¹ In the 1930s, around 25% of able-bodied Malawian men were working abroad (Fetter 1982: 90), a figure that rose to 30% in the post-war period (Potts 1986: 95). In the 1960s and 1970s, the growth of the large-scale agricultural sector in need of a rising labour force resulted in a decrease in international labour migration, as migration flows were redirected towards the estates in the South and centre of the country.

Both these migration flows had a considerable impact on Malawi's economic development, as we saw in the previous chapter. Migration as a deeply en-

¹ One of the most important ones was WENELA (Witwatersrand Native Labour Association), which contracted thousands of workers for the mines in South Africa. In 1951, Malawians accounted for 30% of the able-bodied male labour force in Southern Rhodesia, a number that increased to 40% in 1958. For South Africa the number was much lower, amounting to less than 10%; a fact that is generally attributed to a greater reluctance to migrate to South Africa: this was probably due to the long distance, the need to for a contract, and apartheid (Potts 1986: Appendix 2.2).

trenched pattern of the Malawian economy has also strongly altered its demographic structure and most notably, its urbanisation. However, in contrast to many other African countries that experienced an upsurge of urbanisation during colonialism, colonial urbanisation remained conspicuously absent in Malawi. Apart from Blantyre in the South of the country, which had already been established as an economic and administrative outpost against the rival interests of the Portuguese long before the British officially took over, urban colonial development practically did not exist. The administrative reorganisation of the colony that had included the establishment of regional administrative and growth centres, the so-called '*boma*', and the shift from the colonial capital from Blantyre to Zomba in 1886, had all led to a slight increase in the urban population, which had been attracted by new job opportunities (see Fetter 1982; Potts 1986). It did not really alter the situation, however: Blantyre remained the only and biggest urban colonial centre in Malawi, the centre of European settlement and commerce, and the first town to have access to the Malawian railway line.

Most of Malawi's economic and urban development took place outside the country, mainly within the geographic and economic orbit of the Federation. Whereas inner-Malawian urban growth and city development remained marginal, Malawians who had migrated to the urban centres in the South of the continent contributed to their rapid growth. By 1945, as many Malawians were living in Salisbury in Southern Rhodesia and Johannesburg in South Africa as in Blantyre, which at the time was the only Malawian city with over 10,000 inhabitants (Fetter 1982: 93).

“(...) Nyasaland's involvement in the Southern African migratory labour system meant that some of the urbanisation which might have occurred within her boundaries in the absence of this involvement, in fact occurred in, for instance, Salisbury or Bulawayo, on the Rand in South Africa, and in the Copperbelt towns of Northern Rhodesia” (Potts 1986: 102).

In contrast to this trans-local urbanisation, rural-urban migration within Malawi was insignificant, and was even lower than rural-rural migration, which experienced a significant increase with the establishment of the big tobacco and tea estates in the South and centre of the country after independence (Fetter 1982; Christiansen 1984: 147). In 1966, Malawi had an extremely low urbanisation rate, with 5% of the population living in urban areas; of which more than half was living in Blantyre. The three biggest towns after Blantyre were Lilongwe, Mzuzu and Zomba, each accounting for not more than 5,000 persons. Together, these four cities accounted for 78% of the total urban population (Potts 1986: 106).

The low level of urbanisation and the concentration of urban growth in a few urban centres are still valid features of the Malawian urban landscape today. Though having increased over the years from 8.5% in 1977 to 10.7 % in 1987 and 14% in 1998, the urban population of the country is still very low when compared to other African countries (Potts 1986: 106; National Statistical Office 1993. Vol. II; National Statistical Office 2000a: xiv).² The only significant shift in urbanisation was the establishment of Lilongwe as the new capital of Malawi in 1975, which made it the fastest-growing town in Malawi, with annual growth rates of between 7% and 16% (ibid). Lilongwe's growth rates slowed down in the 1990s, but remain very high nevertheless. In the period between 1987 and 1998, Lilongwe had the second highest population increase after Mzuzu, amounting to 95% or an annual growth rate of 6.1%. This meant that the population almost doubled from 223,000 in 1987 to 440,000 in 1998 (National Statistical Office 2000a: xiv).

Lilongwe's spectacular growth rates are, however, only partly based on rural-urban migration flows. As Potts has pointed out, much of Lilongwe's exorbitant growth rates in the 1970s were due to urban-rural boundary changes in the course of its establishment during which large rural areas were assigned for the further extension of the city (Potts 1986). The growth rates also have to be dealt with cautiously when compared to the overall migration behaviour in Malawi. Migration patterns are very volatile and mainly circulatory, which in turn would suggest volatile, fluctuating urbanisation. This is to a certain extent confirmed by Potts in her study of Lilongwe in the 1980s. Whereas gross rural-urban migration was high, most of the migration movements into town and within rural areas were short term, i.e. seasonal or temporary, rather than for lifetimes or for longer periods (Potts 1986). Chirwa's more recent study (2000) also points in this direction. He suggests that the general overall pattern of internal migration, both within rural areas and between town and village, is largely short-term and mainly oriented towards rural areas (see also Englund 2001).³ This would mean that, for a large part of the population, rural areas, with their larger working opportunities both in subsistence agriculture and on the estates, remain on the whole more attractive than towns, where employment opportunities are generally lacking. Whereas an overall trend in the southern part of the continent suggests an increase in rural return migration and de-urbanisation as a consequence

² In Zimbabwe, the current urbanisation rate amounts to 35%, in Zambia 35.9%, Tanzania 35.4% and Mozambique 35.6% (UNDP 2005).

³ Most of the respondents in his rural sample who were about to migrate moved either to rural areas or to town. In contrast to the rural population, most of the urban population considered going to the rural areas and only a few to other urban areas (Chirwa 2000: 113). This is also confirmed by the 1987 census, which suggests that over 60% of the population did not leave their home district (NSO 1993: xxxi).

of the economic decline over the last decades (see for example Potts 1995; 1997; Ferguson 1999; Tacoli 2001), one may thus conclude that in Malawi, the focus on rural areas for migration never really shifted.

However, looking at the migration patterns from an urban perspective, a more varied picture appears. We shall see that the adaptation and reconsideration of urban-rural strategies has also taken place in Malawi, and many urban migrants are indeed considering a rural return. At the same time, there are also a considerable number of short-term migrants in Sector 7 who only come to town for a few weeks or months in order to supplement their agricultural income. Yet my data also suggests some counter-tendencies. Firstly, overall economic and social constraints give the impression that rural-urban migration has increased considerably over the years. The lack of land and labour, HIV/AIDS and the hunger are forcing more people to move, towards the city as well as elsewhere. Secondly, overall land scarcity suggests that for most of them, the return to the village on a circulatory basis as it has been largely practiced so far will not be possible any more. We shall see that this concerns migrants who have just come to town, as well as those who have been in town for years. Unfortunately, the lack of reliable statistical data does not enable further details to be established.

This also concerns inner-urban growth rates, which – in the context of overall growth rates in Malawi – can only be considerable. This assumption is sustained by an observation made by Englund (2001), who suggests that the rapid expansion of the city, especially the growth of peri-urban areas in Lilongwe, has to be largely viewed as a consequence of inner-urban congestion caused by an almost complete absence of urban development, rather than by rural-urban migration. This finding is also sustained by my own research. The spectacular growth rates of Sector 7 from around 3,000 to over 8,000 over the last three years is largely a result of inner-urban movements.

3.3 The Making of Lilongwe

Although economic and administrative considerations were put forward as central arguments for a change in capital, the decision taken by Banda shortly after independence in 1965 to create Lilongwe City as the new capital of Malawi was neither a consequence of heavy urban growth rates nor of a specific economic and administrative necessity. The establishment of a number of tobacco estates during the colonial period had made Lilongwe an important growth centre and indeed, had also induced a certain level of rural-urban migration: By the time Malawi became independent, it was the third largest town, with a population of

around 19,000.⁴ A shift of the capital from the South to the centre, it was argued, would provide an important incentive for more even regional economic development, from which not only the Central Region would benefit, but also the poorly developed North. Finally, its central position would also make it easier to administer the country.

However, these arguments – though they had a certain weight – could not conceal that the decision was mainly a political one taken solely by Banda himself. While some observers argue that his close emotional and ethnic ties to the *Chewa* played the most important role in the decision to move the capital to the Central Region, the decision was also strongly politically motivated. The relocation of Lilongwe to the heart of the country represented a symbol of national unity and an important political move in trying to overcome ethnic antagonisms and potential future conflicts; but Lilongwe was also a truly anti-colonial African project *par excellence*, very typical of many independent nations at that time. Representing the symbolic spearhead of a modern, dynamic and prospering Malawian nation yet to come, Lilongwe has always also been a project of modernity. It was not only a new, but also a modern town that should be created. Lilongwe should thereby provide the core of a larger national urban system that also encompassed various smaller towns on district level. This national urban system was to help in dealing with the threat of rapid future urbanisation that was expected with expanding economic growth and contribute to more even urban and economic national development (Potts 1986; Mabogunje 1990).

This “master plan” approach, which suggests the considerable controllability and predictability of migration and urbanisation processes, is also discernible in the outline of the city: The so-called ‘Lilongwe Master-plan’, which provided the architectural, social, economic and political outline of the city, is based on a strict land-use zoning scheme (Gerke & Viljoen 1968)⁵. The scheme divides the city into functionally differentiated zones assigned to specific politico-administrative, industrial, commercial, cultural and leisure purposes. This zoning was also extended to the residential areas, the strict spatial segregation of which followed the social and economic status of its future inhabitants; low-density – high-income areas, medium-density – medium-income areas, and finally, high-density – low-income areas (Chilowa 1996). The strict residential segregation policy, which also foresaw the creation of a large un-built area – a so-called ‘*cordon sanitaire*’ – between the low income areas at the periphery and the centrally located high

⁴ At independence Blantyre had a population of 109,461, followed by Zomba with 19,666 inhabitants and Lilongwe 19,425. The difference to Mzuzu with a population of only 8,490 inhabitants as the biggest city next to Lilongwe is substantial (Potts 1986: 111).

⁵ For a discussion of the role of urban planning as a concept and expression of modernity and its relevance for colonial and post-colonial urban planning in developing countries, see Mabogunje 1990.

income areas and command structures, largely resembles the morphology of the apartheid city. Indeed, the segregationist and racist character of the city has for a long time been attributed to the fact that its town planners were from South Africa. However, in her research on Lilongwe, Potts (1986) unmasks the concept as a British colonial heritage that existed long before Lilongwe came into being and South African town planners had arrived in Malawi. She shows that the segregated city actually originates in the so-called '*Garden city concept*' that the British developed in the 19th century in order to counter and control the growing contradictions between the industrial city and the countryside in the course of the industrialisation process within their own country. The segregated city concept was designed to allow for gradual and controlled urbanisation, taking the channelling of massive streams of labour migrants into account, and dealing with their social, political and economic problems (ibid.). The equation of the spatial order to the social and economic status of a particular area's inhabitants represented the modernist hierarchy, through which a migrant had to work his/her way up from the poor periphery to the modern city centre in order to become a fully urbanised and modernised towns(wo)man (see Burgess' organic city concept 1996 [1925]).

This modernist notion of a gradual and controlled urbanisation process is also discernible in the suggested plot sizes and types of housing. Thus, the master plan suggested large plot sizes and spacious one-storey houses for high-density areas. In this way, the African Africans who were used to agricultural production and open spaces could continue their rural way of life while slowly adapting to the city:

"Traditionally, people in Africa have had plenty of space, and this tradition is not likely to be surrendered in the foreseeable future. Moreover, gardening is from any point of view an important activity in Malawi, and it is desirable that most families should have a reasonably sized patch of ground for cultivation. (...) The people in Malawi are individualists, accustomed to open space; and set great store by privacy. They do not yet for the most part accept the high density and congested living conditions, which are normal in other parts of the world. In spite of this, the layout allocates sites for multi-storey development, which may become more acceptable as the population become more urbanized, in the future." (Gerke& Viljoen 1968: 44; 51)

This modernist 'social-engineering' character of the layout that reduced people to mere chess figures who were to move in an orderly fashion between the different zones of the city and modernity, had a strong political background. Banda's idealisation of Malawi as an essentially rural country and the focus of

his development strategies on the agricultural sector were not only based on economic considerations, but also political calculus. While he considered urbanisation an inevitable consequence of modernity, he perceived rapid and uncontrolled urbanisation and the rise of an urban proto-proletariat as a major source of political and social instability. In this respect, the Garden City concept provided an important technical framework that would allow the urbanisation process to be controlled (see also Gerke & Viljoen 1968).

It was the urban migration process itself that was discouraged, however. Although no formal policy directly controlled rural-urban migration, a range of policies had been put in place that helped to reduce the incentive to migrate significantly. Price controls on agricultural products, the subsidising of basic agricultural products and the restrained urban wage policy that deliberately suppressed urban wages in order to keep people in the countryside provided a very effective de-facto control of urban-rural flows (Potts 1986; Chilhowa 2000; England 2001).⁶

The effectiveness of these policies was amplified by a climate of fear that helped to create a strong social auto-control mechanism among the population. Every newcomer in town who had no regular employment or place to stay would be met with great suspicion as a person who could possibly get you into trouble with the authorities if you helped them. It was common for people unable to produce evidence of employment and a place to stay to be arrested and – at best – sent back to the rural areas (Interview No. 47, City Council Officer).

This “*keeping-the-town-clean-attitude*” (Potts 1986: 127) was also integrated in the town-planning scheme. Low levels of investment in infrastructure and social amenities, and the virtual non-existence of subsidised low cost housing were not only the result of lacking funds; the choice of the so-called ‘sites and services scheme’, which left the construction of housing to the owners and required the city to put only a very basic infrastructure in place (Chilowa 1996), was also a deliberate decision to keep people from migrating into Lilongwe (Potts 1986).

“Since the urban population growth is already quite high, any policy in the urban context should avoid making towns too attractive (sic)... it should not be possible to raise one’s standard of living markedly by simply moving from a rural to an urban area. This would be undoubtedly the case if access to most of the urban amenities... were substantially subsidized (TCPD, 1980a in Potts 1986: 21)”

⁶ The creation of so-called rural growth centres in each ‘*boma*’ or administrative district was also part of a strategy to keep people out of the big cities and to avoid the creation of huge single cities (Potts 1986). The lack of financial resources in order to develop most of these small towns and the lack of income opportunities did not make them valuable alternatives to the big towns Blantyre and Lilongwe (ibid.).

To say whether this attitude has also impinged on the low priority given to city development in general would be pure speculation – but the initial demand projections for low-income housing areas, the so-called Planned Traditional Housing Areas (THAs), already lagged far behind actual needs at the end of the 1970s. As early as 1977, the Capital City Development Committee (CCDC) stated that over 10,000 plots would be needed, while only slightly more than 1,400 had actually been laid out (CDDC 1977). Although plot allocation increased over the following years, the development could not keep pace with the growth of Lilongwe. So-called “squatter” or “spontaneous settlements” began to emerge. In fact, these squatter-areas, which largely looked like traditional villages and which were situated just at the edge or outside the city boundaries, had been part of the city’s development almost since its inauguration, and hosted an estimated 7,000 - 12,000 people in 1980 (Potts 1986: 276). Many of these ‘villagers’ that had settled in these rural-urban borderlands had actually been part of the massive re-settlement that had taken place in the course of the construction of Lilongwe City. Inhabitants of the villages lying within the future city boundaries, of which many had actually been ‘urban’ migrants who had come to Lilongwe for work⁷, were resettled within the city. Others were moved to rural areas, such as Michinji, Ndowa or Kasungu, though many later returned to Lilongwe. Although they had been living in villages, they were used to town life and its social amenities. Returning from their largely involuntary re-migration to the countryside, many re-settled just outside the city boundaries in these migrant villages.

Although they had already been assigned for the future extension of the city in the 1970s, these areas had remained under customary law, underlying the jurisdiction of the Traditional Authority. Nevertheless, their inhabitants can hardly be considered rural. This was also the case with the villages just outside Sector 7. Most of these villagers were engaged in the informal sector economy. While they continued to cultivate for their own food needs and/or were engaged in commercial agriculture, producing vegetables for the urban markets, many also leased their land to urban migrants for cultivation purposes. This provided an attractive additional source of income: Prices for a piece of land so close to the city could reach up to MK 1,000 per acre per season. There was more money to be made by leasing the land and resorting to buying food than by producing food themselves, as most of them did.

While this land is formally under customary jurisdiction, the proximity to town and the strong commercialisation of land and housing has strongly influenced structures of authority. In most of these peri-urban areas, the Traditional Authorities act as owners rather than trustees of the customary land, thus having

⁷ Already before its creation as a capital, Lilongwe City used to be a small, but important centre for tobacco trading (Potts 1986)

considerable authority in deciding how and to whom land is allocated or – more commonly – leased (Interview No. 157, Paul Kishindo). In some areas this has led to the establishment of a dual authority, in which the Traditional Authorities continue to have authority over the allocation of plots (see also Englund 2001).⁸

At the end of the 1980s, inner-urban squatter settlements began to spring up as well. Driven off by cramped living conditions and the increasing commercialisation of housing in the planned THAs, people and local authorities took matters into their own hands and started to allocate plots themselves. According to Chilowa, these unplanned THAs make up the biggest single housing category in Malawian cities today, accommodating around 78% of the population in Lilongwe City (Chilowa 1996: 8).

While land invasions were met with strong resistance on part of the City Authority during the Banda era, the democratisation process that began in 1993 and the growing *laissez-faire* approach of the state triggered off an enormous wave of urban land invasions. In the fight for votes and faced with enormous resource constraints in relation to city development, the strict enforcement mechanisms regarding illegal housing were relaxed by the UDF-government. In the name of democracy, people started constructing houses everywhere in the city, as well as invading new areas without having to fear sanctions. This also included invading areas not foreseen for settlement, but rather for public buildings or infrastructure. These new settlements were termed ‘multi-party-plots’ in order to distinguish them from the Banda era, during which most illegal constructions were demolished immediately, especially in inner-city areas. People were usually resettled in rural areas or allocated plots in other areas of town, and usually provided with some sort of compensation.

The lack of economic and personal resources that could not keep pace with the scale of urban growth and the enormous backlog of plot applications made the City Council change its policy in the early 1990s. The ‘site and service scheme’⁹ that had provided the basis for low-income housing areas was abandoned. Instead, a policy of ‘settlement upgrading’ was implemented. Most of the occupied

⁸ As we shall see in the next chapter, the power of the Traditional Authorities is also revealed by the fact that land occupations are not always successful. The land invasion taking place in Sector 7 has also been a success, because the Village Headmen and the Traditional Authority let it happen, applying their authority in return for plots and money.

⁹ In contrast to housing provision schemes, the ‘sites and services scheme’ required the city to provide inexpensive land, security of tenure and the provision of a very basic infrastructure, i.e. access to roads and water, while construction of housing was left to the owners (Chilowa 1996). While the sites and services scheme had been promoted by international donors and organisations since the 1960s in order to deal with rapid urban growth and the demand of housing and plots, some scholars argue that the introduction of sites and services in Malawi already at the beginning of the 1960s was a decision made to reduce costs and to ensure that towns did not become too attractive (Potts 1986).

areas were 'legalised' and incorporated into the city outline, which included the registration of land titles. Where possible, the City Council surveyed the plots in hindsight in order to fit them into the urban planning scheme. Whereas the City Council admitted its responsibility for the provision of urban infrastructure, "(Initially the THA layout will rely heavily on the residents' self-help spirit to improve the access to roads, drainage and pit latrines" (Lilongwe City Council 1993: 4). So-called Community Development Committees (CDCs) were put in place that – in cooperation with the City Council – were to identify potential donors for the realisation of infrastructure projects and – as the local counterpart – also play an important role in the projects' implementation (ibid.). As a reaction to the ongoing land occupations and due to a further decrease in financial and personal resources during the 1990s, the City Council has modified its practice further, authorising private persons and groups involved in land occupations to act on their behalf to survey the area under occupation. As such, they want to make sure that the allocation and survey of plots is done in accordance with the city layout and is compatible with the addition of infrastructure in the future.

3.4 Sector 7: A Urban-Rural Borderland

One of the 'unplanned THAs' to spring up in Lilongwe over the last decade is Sector 7/Area 25A. Occupied in 1994 as a reaction to cramped living conditions and high rents in the neighbouring areas, Sector 7 was one of the first 'illegal areas' to be 'upgraded' by the City Council in 1995. The area was surveyed and a Community Development Committee (CDC) was put in place, which was responsible for taking care of the lacking infrastructure.

Since then, the area has undergone considerable changes. When I came there for the first time in 1998 most of the plots were undeveloped and, except for a borehole that had been put in place by the Member of Parliament (MP) of the United Democratic Front (UDF) from the area during the first election campaign, and some dirt roads, no infrastructure existed. The long north-south extension of the area and the largely dispersed houses formed a strong contrast to the densely populated neighbouring Area 25/A, giving one the impression of being in rural Lilongwe rather than in the Malawian capital. Upon my return in 2001, the population had more than tripled, amounting to more than 8,000 people, and almost all of the plots had been occupied, changing the appearance of the place from one where there "*was just bush and they (people, B.R.) were hunting beasts*" (Interview No. 54, Young poor man) to a very 'urban' place. Not only were there more people and more houses - the area had completely changed its architectural landscape. The tiny houses made of adobe and covered with plastic sheets and tyres that had dominated the area three years before had largely given way to

bigger houses, mostly made of burnt bricks and covered with iron sheets. While many of them were private houses, many of the houses were also constructions by 'Habitat for Humanity',¹⁰ an American NGO that had been allocated more than 200 plots in order to provide cheap housing for poor people. The most conspicuous change was, however, the fact that a number of huge constructions were under way, that with their stylish design and the high protective fences around them resembled houses normally found only in the richer residential areas of the city close to the centre. The infrastructure that the local community development had managed to build in the area with the support of a number of donors had apparently attracted not only a lot of new but also richer inhabitants.

While Sector 7 was one among many that had been occupied and upgraded shortly after democratisation, the very active CDC in the area, consisting mainly of retired civil servants and educated businessmen, had succeeded in attracting donors' interest in Sector 7, perhaps as a result of having been exposed to the Malawian bureaucracy and the international donor community. As a result, the project was incorporated in an urban poverty programme financed by the GTZ (German Technical Cooperation) in cooperation with the Malawian Christian Service Committee (CSC), a large national NGO, in 1998. With the assistance of the project, which aimed at fostering the self-help spirit by supporting a number of CDCs in Lilongwe through the provision of technical assistance and know-how in preparing project proposals, the CDC was able to obtain funding for major infrastructure development. In 2000, water kiosks funded by the Malawian Social Action Fund (MASAF) were put in place. Since 2001, the area has also had access to electricity financed by the European Union (EU), which also made the connection to the telephone network possible.

The strong performance of Sector 7 also generated some extra donor money from the GTZ for the construction of a school block for a primary school in 2002. Plans were also made to seek further funding for an extension of the school, including more classrooms and a the construction of a secondary school, to enable children to avoid the long and – due to increased motorcycle traffic – dangerous walking distances. Most people were actually using the schools in the neighbouring areas 25A and 25B, as well as the Protestant Dzenza Mission's large boarding school, which lies a few kilometres south of the area and hosts a secondary school. As we shall see in the next chapter, the project has encountered major difficulties. When we left the area, neither the primary school was in use, nor were there any hopeful signs for a realisation of a further extension. The introduction of free primary education in 1994 and the lack of school facilities

¹⁰ The organisation had rented a considerable part of the area in 1995 in order to provide low cost housing for low-income people on a long-term loan basis. I will come back to this organisation later in the chapter.

have also led to an upsurge of private primary and secondary schools in Sector 7, including pre-schools. Their quality differs substantially, however. While some schools provide a proper teaching infrastructure and qualified teachers, most schools in the area are initiatives by housewives or unemployed people, whose education does often not go beyond a primary school leaving certificate. This means that the quality of the classes usually held in private houses or half-finished buildings all around the area is extremely low, and one cannot avoid the impression that for many, the income-generating effect rather than teaching quality is the central motivating factor.

Plans for a health care centre within the area also existed. While most of the poorer people walk long distances to the central hospital to get free assistance, others attend private health care centres in other areas, which are largely catered for by NGOs or churches, such as the health care station of the Mission Station. In 2001, the area allocated for the construction of a clinic was sold – illegally – to the Kingdom of God Church, which should have included a school and a health care centre accessible to all the inhabitants of the area. When we left the field, however, only the church was in place. One major problem is posed by the road system, which consists entirely of dirt roads put in place by the people using them. They are of very poor quality, and make access during the rainy season impossible. This is also one reason why the private minibuses which provide for inner urban transport have not extended their services into the area, meaning that people have to walk at least 30 minutes to get to the closest bus station and into town. During my field stay, a funding proposal with the European Union (EU) was under discussion, but it was rejected due to high costs.

Provision of infrastructure meant an improvement in living conditions for most inhabitants of the areas. However, this did not mean that everybody was able to access it. The inhabitants of the ‘habitat-houses’ were not allowed to connect to the electricity unless they had fully repaid their loans, in order to avoid further repayment problems for their housing loans. In most cases, however, it was simply high connection charges and consumption fees that stratified access to electricity.¹¹ Nonetheless, illegal hook-ups to electricity by poorer households were in fact very common.

Economic constraints also structured access to tap water from the newly installed kiosks. The privatisation of the Lilongwe Water Board in the course of the new Structural Adjustment Programme led to a substantial rise in water prices. The increased price of water from 50 Tambala to 70 Tambala¹² per bucket made water unaffordable for the poor majority of the population. The approaching hunger made matters worse, as water was one of the first things to economise

¹¹ The connection fee of MK 1,300 was more or less what poor people would earn in a month.

¹² One Malawian Kwacha has 10 Tambala. In 2001, around MK 40 were equivalent to US\$ 1.

on. People started to use water from the borehole again, and the mostly unprotected open wells that richer plot owners had drilled at their plots to be used for household purposes. As a consequence, water-related diseases such as diarrhoea increased once more, exacerbating the already weak health conditions due to the precarious food situation, especially among the poor and the children.

3.5 The Social Structure

The increase in infrastructure over a period of three years described in the previous section was also accompanied by a change in the social structure of the area. Sector 7 has not only experienced an urbanisation in terms of its quantitative expansion, but also a qualitative urbanisation, in terms of a deepening stratification of its social structure.

In 1998, many of the people living in the area were poor migrants who had only come for the season to work as construction workers within the area or as seasonal labourers in the close-by tobacco processing industry of *Kanengo*, many of them from the surrounding villages and districts. They were renting the tiny constructions put in place by the plot owners who had bought or occupied a plot, but who had no money to develop it properly, most of them lower rank civil servants or other low-income persons,¹³ who planned to develop it later in life, when they retired or had more money. In the meantime, they had built tiny, largely very shabby constructions that allowed them to keep the plot, while at the same time providing some additional revenue.¹⁴ Another common arrangement that usually ran within families concerned relatives who were asked to look after the houses of, or survey ongoing construction activities for, their absent kin, often migrants working abroad or in other Malawian towns. In exchange, they were allowed to stay rent-free in the mostly unfinished houses. People occupying their own plots were very few, most of them employees in *Kanengo* or in other private or state companies in the city centre. Some were retired civil servants who had acquired a plot with the money from their final lump sum payment upon retirement.

In 2001, this had changed considerably. Most of the plots had been occupied in the meantime. A lot of those people who had still been constructing their houses in 1998 had moved into the area, many of them into one of the 'habitat houses', the number of which had increased significantly since 1998. At the same time, a considerable number of higher income people, many higher rank civil

¹³ For a categorisation of civil servants in Malawi see Anders (2005).

¹⁴ If the plot was not developed within six months from the purchase date, the City Council had the right to evict the owners from their plot and assign it to somebody else. This regulation was to ensure that the already low number of plots was used efficiently (Interview No. 68/1998).

servants or people having their own private companies, had come to the area. They had bought a plot in the area and/or developed their own plot, which they had bought when Sector 7 was occupied, in order to develop it upon retirement. Most of the poorer people I had interviewed in 1998 had left the area fleeing high rents, or had been forced to sell their plots. They either rented out their houses or sold them to higher-income people, moving to close-by 'villages' in the rural-urban borderlands. Many were becoming tenants on their own plot, renting the servant's quarters in the backyard of the plot they had sold, or – while renting out their houses – were squatting in Sector 7 or other areas in order to generate some additional income.

The changes occurring in Sector 7 had not only been caused by the increase in infrastructure that had in turn made the area unaffordable for many poor people due to rising rents. Especially the 'sudden' inpouring of civil servants, many of whom belonged to the higher income class, had mainly been a consequence of a major policy reform of the civil service as part of the conditionality set by Structural Adjustment and the Good Governance policy of World Bank and IMF (see Anders 2005). The reform of the civil service, aiming to create a more efficient and effective state bureaucracy, included, amongst other things, a major social policy reform, which also foresaw changes in the housing allowance scheme. While previously most civil servants lived in houses provided or paid for by the government, the new scheme foresaw that government would withdraw from the costly lease of houses and instead pay housing allowances that would make up a certain percentage of the salary and would be differentiated according to grade. The introduction of this policy met with strong resistance, especially on the part of low rank civil servants whose salaries were so low that they would have received almost nothing as a housing allowance.¹⁵ The introduction of monetary allowances meant that most civil servants, even those getting a high housing allowance, were forced to move into cheaper areas, as they could no longer afford to pay the high rents in higher quality areas in other parts of town that had been formerly heavily subsidised by the government (*ibid.*). The availability of basic infrastructure, together with comparatively cheap rents and prices for plots and houses, rendered Sector 7 a very attractive alternative. For many, the move into Sector 7 was merely the early fulfilment of what they had planned to do in any case upon retirement, when they would have been forced to leave their government houses, especially for those who had already bought their plot in the area.

Yet the big new houses that had appeared in the area, together with their stylish rich and very urban inhabitants, could not conceal the overall deteriora-

¹⁵ For a more detailed discussion of the civil service reform and the conflicts around its introduction see Anders 2005.

tion in social and economic conditions: especially as a result of the high inflation rates and the rising price levels that had hit both richer and poorer parts of the population. While their big houses still expressed a great deal of wealth when compared to the average low-income inhabitant of Sector 7, we shall see that these houses hosted an increasingly impoverished civil service also struggling to maintain a certain standard of living. Many of the low-income people who in 1998 could not afford special consumer goods, but did not particularly struggle to make ends meet, now found themselves in an increasingly precarious position. The poor people who had managed to stay in the area, mostly in small or unfinished houses made of unburned bricks, could only do this thanks to the specific tenant arrangements mentioned above that enabled them to spend nothing on rent. The only 'winners' of this development were a small middle-class that had developed over the years, and which had succeeded in extending its wealth via a variety of 'formal' and 'informal' sources of income.

The social structure of Sector 7 had also experienced a significant change on the 'horizontal' level. Whereas in 1998 most people did not know each other or only knew each other from their time in Sector 7, by 2001 a certain degree of gentrification had evolved. Friends, workmates or ex-neighbours from other areas who had heard about plots or houses for rent or sale in Sector 7 were moving in, creating clusters of social relations and support networks in immediate geographic proximity. Some of the families established in Sector 7 for a longer period of time had succeeded in finding houses or plots for their relatives, who migrated from other places in Malawi. In addition, many children of people living in Sector 7 who had married off in the meantime had also established themselves in the area, often in close proximity to their parents' homes, with a lively exchange of children, food, gossip, information and labour taking place.

3.6 Income and Occupational Structure

The social stratification of the area is closely interrelated to income and occupational structure. Most people in the area were working in so-called 'informal working arrangements'. This also included most people engaged in permanent employment, which was the main source of income for the majority of the people in our sample. Permanent employment here thus indicates not only occupations in the 'formal' sector economy, ranging from low income jobs in the public and private sector, such as watchman or cleaner in schools and hospitals or chain worker or in one of the big production companies, but also more highly skilled and higher paid jobs, such as civil servant, technician, and accountant in the nearby schools or the para-statal and companies in the commercial centre of Lilongwe. Furthermore, it also encompasses occupations in the 'informal sector

economy' on a permanent basis, such as those employed as carpenters or panel beaters in big garages and workshops in Sector 7 or the neighbouring areas, or the drivers of private minibus or transport companies. Apart from some high rank civil servants or people employed in high-skills jobs in private industry, most of the employees belonged to the low-income group, earning around MK 2,000 to MK 4,000 – equivalent to US\$ 50 to US\$ 100 per month. Most of these people had to travel for their work. Employment opportunities in close spatial proximity, especially outside the informal economy, were rare. The industrial complex of *Kanengo*, about 4 km from Sector 7, where mainly tobacco processing industries are found, was closest, although employment opportunities there were mostly seasonal. They usually started in May and finished in October or November, depending on the tobacco yield.

Another major source of income was business and trading activities, ranging from the petty trading visible everywhere to large-scale businesses. Business activities were highly stratified along social and gender lines. While large scale business activities, such as car garages, minibus ventures or transport services, were confined to the richest income strata, a business and trading class had emerged over the years, which made up the tiny middle-class of the area, together with the lower-rank civil servants. They had succeeded in establishing solid business activities, either having their own workshops, for example welding, carpentry, panel beating or building, or being involved in trading, for example selling second-hand clothes or food items on a large scale, such as chicken, maize, cassava or Irish potatoes. Usually people rented a kiosk at one of two main markets in Area 25A or 25C for this purpose. This tiny middle class, for whom the business activity was usually one among a variety of sources of income, had in part become considerably richer over the last years. Most of these businesses were family ventures and involved the whole family being engaged in the preparation and the selling of the items. This also held for petty trade, mainly in food and firewood, and for larger scale business, which often involves the poorer strata of the population.

Business activities were also gendered: men usually engaged in larger scale trade, while petty trade was mainly carried out by women and children, often as an additional source of household income. In this case, they either moved around within the area, or found a corner at the market, where they sold doughnuts, cooked potatoes or vegetables. Some women also had a small kiosk in front of their houses, selling directly from their plot. The introduction of micro-credit-schemes in recent years has led to changes in the gender structure of business, and more women are now engaged in larger scale business. However, economic stratification has remained basically the same, as it was mainly the richer or better-off – and often married – women who were able to provide the

security and collateral for a loan. We shall see that deteriorating social and economic conditions had also forced many unemployed men into the otherwise exclusively female domain of small-scale business and petty trading (see Chapter 6).

Apart from petty trade, it was *Ganyu* – casual labour or piecework based on a day-to-day basis – that provided the main important source of income. Whereas it rarely provides the only household source of income, it is an important additional source that is done in seasonal alternation to other income activities or by different household members. Thus, many women were engaged in *Ganyu* activities, while men were engaged in trading or permanent employment. Many men employed in business increased their income with additional *Ganyu* activities. Due to high levels of construction activity in Sector 7, many opportunities for *Ganyu* were available within the area; brick moulding, drawing water and building were the main activities people were engaged in. As construction activities were mainly confined to the dry season from March until October, employment opportunities underwent considerable fluctuation. The high supply of labour, especially in the dry season when a lot of seasonal migrants from the surrounding villages would come into the area – often only on a day to day basis – resulted in a highly competitive labour market that added an additional insecurity to an already fragile income source. Being paid on a day-to-day basis, or in instalments that depended on the completion of a certain part of the construction, *Ganyu* workers were paid very irregularly: not only did they often get their money late, but often had to struggle hard to get their money at all, or to get the amount they had agreed upon beforehand. Many of these working conflicts ended up in front of the Chief (see Chapter 4). This was especially the case with women: most of them complained that landlords, or the foreman of their working colony, would often pay women last, and that women would have to wait and quarrel for their money the most. Together with business and trade, the deteriorating economic conditions had especially hit this already extremely volatile income sector and therefore, had hit the poorest people the most. The increase in prices, especially for imported building materials, had resulted in significantly less building activity in the area and by the same token, diminished working opportunities and lower salaries.

Pensions and social allowances made up another important part of the income structure. This group consisted almost exclusively of retired civil servants or their widows, as they are the only people in Malawi entitled to publicly-provided old-age-allowances. One man got a soldier's pension in compensation for his service in the British Army during the Second World War; but the amount was negligible. Another specific case was our landlady Mrs. Gomonda, who received a widow's pension from the provident fund of the United Nations, as her

husband had worked as a driver for the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

Another important income-generating activity that had gained increased importance over the last years was subletting houses. The commercialisation of the land and housing market in Lilongwe made the subletting of houses an attractive economic activity, providing a steady, fairly stable cash source of income for a considerable number of people in Sector 7, also for the low-income group. Those who had been in town for a longer time had often already acquired a second or more plots in town, often in other recently occupied areas in Lilongwe. Likewise, there were people in Sector 7 who had a house in another area in Lilongwe where they had lived before moving into Sector 7 either to occupy another plot or for renting purposes. The decision regarding where people would move to usually depended on the differences in rents in the various areas.

3.6.1 Urban Agriculture

Agricultural production played an important role in the economic activities of Sector 7. Just over half the families we interviewed were involved in cultivation. Many had leased land in nearby villages or commuted to their villages to continue cultivation. Some had the opportunity to use the land of relatives within the Lilongwe Area, or had illegally occupied a piece of land along the road to the airport, where they cultivated some ridges of maize or potatoes. Richer households who had rented land in the nearby village often also hired labourers from these villages to cultivate their land. In most cases, however, the women and children took care of the fields. For those cultivating in their home villages, seasonal migration of women and children for the cultivation period was frequent. Often, it was also relatives in the village who – in exchange for salt and sugar or a share of the harvest – were hired to cultivate the migrant's fields. Most migrants, especially those from far away, left their maize in the villages anyway, arguing that transport costs were too high to bring the maize to town. Instead, maize was sold in the village when prices reached their peak, and the money raised was brought to town. More often, however, the maize was left in the village to be consumed or sold by the rural kin as a form of in-kind support. While these cultivation arrangements provided an important source of food insurance for the rural kin, they also constituted an important place-making strategy for the urban kin. The continuation of cultivation in one's absence was not only an important symbolic action for confirming one's membership in the lineage and the village, it was also of enormous importance in securing and maintaining one's entitlement to the land.

Due to the high rents for cultivation in town¹⁶ and the enormous land pressure in the rural areas – the latter being a major reason for urban migration – it is not surprising that the poor and very poor cultivated the least. They usually have a small kitchen garden on their plot and/or “illegally” cultivated some ridges here and there along the road or in public spaces, such as empty plots allocated for the further extension of the school, the clinic, the market, etc. This phenomenon was not new, but we could observe that it was particularly strong in 2001, when food was scarce and hunger was spreading. Generally, a lot of people, both rich and poor, who had not cultivated for years expressed their intention to lease land in town or migrate back home in order to cultivate again. The high food prices and more importantly, the scarcity of food becoming increasingly overt during the second half of 2001, made cultivation an important alternative once more for rich and poor alike: *“Renting land in town for cultivation is not necessarily cheaper since one has to have money for rent, seeds, fertiliser and labour but it is more convenient and more secure, since you have your own maize and do not depend on buying”* (Interview No.10a, Mr. Chincanda).

Between 1998 and 2001, kitchen gardens and the keeping of animals, such as chickens, guinea fowl or ducks markedly increased. Whereas chickens were raised for commercial reasons, most of the other animals were kept for private consumption or served as food insurance for the hunger period: most people would not eat the animals themselves, but rather sell them at the market and in exchange, buy cheaper but more abundant food, such as *Nsima*¹⁷ or beans. Most crops grown in the kitchen garden were vegetables, such as turnips, cabbage or green maize and potatoes: food that was particularly nutritious and could be consumed during the rainy season when the maize was still to mature. Although some richer people sold some of their vegetables at the market, produce from kitchen gardens was almost exclusively used for the grower’s private consumption, especially for the children (Interview No. 13, Mr. Phiri).

Urban agriculture did have a clearly commercial aspect for some people, however. Cultivation enabled some to speculate on the maize prices, i.e., people bought maize when it was still cheap and kept their own maize for the rainy season, when maize was scarce and prices extremely high. Many sold their overproduction to their neighbours or at the market as an attractive additional source of income. Some women also rented land for the cultivation of vegetables in the very fertile swamp area (*dambo*) south of Sector 7 in order to sell them at the market.

¹⁶ A piece of land could cost around MK 1,000 to 1,500, equivalent to US\$ 25 to US\$ 30 per season, depending on size and proximity to town.

¹⁷ *Nsima* – the staple food of Malawi – is a thick, rather tasteless porridge made of boiled maize flour – *Ufa*. It is accompanied with relish, i.e. all kinds of vegetables or meat.

3.6.2 Occupational Mix

The most conspicuous feature of the occupational structure was that most households depended on a variety of sources of income, a characteristic I shall call the 'occupational mix'.

This trend ran through both the rich and poor income strata. While the mixing of diverse sources of income had already been a strong feature in 1998, especially among poorer households, it had also increasingly spread to the richer households over the years, largely as a reaction to the overall economic decline. This mix usually involved various members of the household. It was very common to find that a person engaged in permanent employment was also involved in other business activities, which were usually being taken care of by his or her spouse, the children, or distant relatives deliberately called from the village for this purpose. These businesses ranged from large-scale ventures, such as the selling of second hand clothes or bricks, to petty trading of foodstuffs or vegetables or *freezers*, small pieces of frozen soft drinks that were popular refreshments, especially with children.

Case 3.1: Trans-local Income Mix – The Chalira Family The Chaliras have lived in the area since 1998 and were one of the first families to move in. In 1998, the small family, which included two children at that time, depended entirely on Mr. Chalira's income (Mr Chalira was working at the para-statal ESCOM, the Malawian Electricity Company as an employee). Later, they had developed a veritable income economy over the years that included the whole family and extended beyond the city boundaries. With a small loan from some school friends, Mr. Chalira had started rearing chickens in the backyard of his plot, which turned out to be a very good business for a while. In the same backyard, his wife was cultivating vegetables and bananas, mostly for their own use, but which – when she had produce in abundance – she would occasionally sell at the market, or to neighbours. Since the beginning of 2000, they had also brought the son of a distant kin to town. He helped Mrs. Chalira with household chores and the poultry business. In the afternoons, he was usually found at the market selling freezers or drop scones that Mr. Chalira fried in the morning. Both Mr. and Mrs. Chalira were also cultivating maize in their home villages. They had assigned relatives to take care of the cultivation and provided fertiliser and seeds. Mrs. Chalira usually migrated for a month or two during the rainy season to oversee the cultivation, but the maize was usually left in the village. Due to food scarcity and high maize prices, they had also thought about

starting cultivation in town for their own consumption. Mr. Chalira also planned to send his children to the village during school holidays in order for them to learn about village life. Although he was not sure that he would go back to his home village upon retirement and hoped that his children would achieve a higher level of education and better paid jobs, he considered farming an essential part of their education. Even if they remained in town, they should learn to be self-reliant, which also implied an apprenticeship in cultivation skills.

While for richer people like the Chalira family, the income mix usually meant an economic expansion that also implied a rise in income, for the poorer part of the population, having a variety of sources of income was merely a means of survival. This is also revealed in the type of income sources they were involved in, which – in contrast to the richer households – mainly consisted of largely volatile and short-term sources, such as *Ganyu* or small-scale business. The insecurity and low profit of these sources of income not only implied that more people within the household were forced to be economically active in order to make ends meet, including the children, it usually also forced one person to be engaged in various sources of income at the same time or in sequence, depending on seasonally fluctuating working opportunities and incomes. For example, people engaged in petty trading often alternated with *Ganyu* in the construction sector during the dry season, which provided a more profitable source of income during this period. Often the division of labour ran within households, as men would do their small-scale business at the market while women engaged in construction activities.

The case study also shows that income diversification involves a trans-local aspect. Whereas in many households the woman with the children would migrate back to the village for the season in order to cultivate, others came to town for the season, migrating back to the families they had left behind in the villages at other times. This involved many of the seasonal labourers working in the tobacco industry in *Kanengo*, who, unless they remained in town in the off-season, usually working in small-scale business, went back to the rural areas for cultivation. Others again, especially those living closer, i.e. within Lilongwe District or Dedza, commuted on a regular basis between rural and urban areas, switching between and combining both rural and urban economic opportunities.

Case 4.2: Trans-local Economics Mai Johnny comes from a village in Dowa. She and her husband arrived in town only recently. They came here in order to expand their business. They had had a grocery in the village for ten years, and with the profits they made, had man-

aged to build two houses with iron sheets. Then they decided to try doing business in town. They closed the grocery and used the capital to get to town. At the moment, Mai Johnny is selling vegetables and other small items, like charcoal and soap. Her husband has established a bicycle spare part business. They have sublet the grocery in the village. Mai Johnny only goes back for the cultivation period, as they have enough land in her husband's home village. In the future, they plan to take over the village grocery again. In fact, they plan to live off both town and village: they want to bring their agricultural products into town and use the profits to buy urban consumer goods to be sold in their village grocery. They know that this will involve a lot of moving, but they want to base themselves in town.

The combination of rural and urban economic activities does not automatically entail rural agricultural versus urban cash labour production, and this is also true for those who live in town. Many urban business women, in particular, had expanded their economic space into the rural areas, commuting on a day-to-day basis into the surrounding villages on specific market days in order to sell *Chitenjes* or second hand clothes.

These multi-local economics also challenges notions of rural-urban migration patterns. The case shows that trans-local living strategies involve a series of different migration trajectories that may run within one household. As we shall see in Chapter 5, this does not only concern economic considerations and insecurities. People mix different migration patterns, alternating between long-term and short-term migration, according to economic and social needs and opportunities both (with)in town and the village.

3.7 Politics between Chieftainship, City Administration and Party Leadership

Looking at the politico-administrative structure of Sector 7 one finds that various systems of governance exist side-by-side, encompassing both customary and state structures. The mix of different legal and administrative systems is very typical for marginal townships in Lilongwe, especially those that have grown out of spontaneous settlement structures, mostly at the periphery of town. Although formally they were all under the jurisdiction of the Lilongwe City Council, the somewhat artificial creation and expansion of Lilongwe, including the arbitrary incorporation of traditional *Chewa* villages, has favoured the development of parallel systems of governance. In specific policy fields, customary law continues to have even more legal relevance and enforcement authority than state

regulations. For example, Englund (2001) shows that in Chinsapo, a marginal area in the North of Lilongwe City close to *Old Town*, the land and housing market continues to be controlled by the Traditional Authority.

This was not the case in Sector 7, where land and housing were regulated by the City Council. In fact, we shall see that the 'upgrading' of the area by the City Council meant important legal security for the migrants who had 'illegally' invaded the area and occupied the plots under the leadership of a few local party officials of the newly elected United Democratic Front (UDF) and private businessmen.

The village headman played a central role in the area nevertheless. First of all, as the local authority figure, he had an important representational and coordinating function. He played a central role in the organisation of funerals: He was usually called on to testify the death of a person, and was the main organiser of the event, which would involve hundreds of people. He would divide the different tasks among the friends, neighbours, religious associations, and the various burial associations, such as the cooking, the praying, and the transport to the graveyard. He usually also held a speech, in which he announced the amount of money or material support people had contributed to the funeral ceremony. On these occasions, he addressed wider issues as well, such as current problems within the community or wider subjects, such as democracy or HIV/AIDS. We shall see in the next chapter that he also played a central role in the local development processes, especially as regards the infrastructure projects. Being well educated and having many years of experience working with foreign companies, he was very versed in dealing with donors and international NGOs and became one of their most important counterparts. He also played an important role in organising and motivating the community to participate in development projects, which all required the financial and material assistance of the inhabitants of Sector 7. Despite the urban bias of many state institutions, including the public court system that would allow people to have easier access to these structures, the Chief played a central role in local dispute settlement. He usually held court once a week. The cases dealt with were family issues, labour disputes, and minor cases of theft, domestic violence and witchcraft. In fact, most of the disputes were dealt with within the local area. On the one hand, this was a matter of convenience. As we shall see later in the book, most disputes evolving around labour issues concerned *Ganyu*, which were dealt with in immediate vicinity. Mostly, however, people simply did not have the knowledge and still less, the money, to appeal to state courts. This was usually only done in specific cases when a great deal was at stake, or where, as in the case of property grabbing, people had also gained the knowledge and the courage to appeal to

the state authorities through public campaigning.¹⁸ The Chief also retained an important function in case people wanted to appeal to the state courts. As the major authority in the area, he kept the major data of people, giving testimony of identity, residence, and a person's legal record, all of which needed if one wished to marry or bring an issue before the court or the police. These data were also required by many NGOs for people to access support. Most micro-credit projects asked for proof of local residence and the legal record of their loan applicants.

As a reaction to the growth of Sector 7 and in order to be able to fulfil his tasks, the current village headman had reorganised the administration of the area. The area had been divided into two areas, both with their own village headman. He further subdivided each area into 'sub-chiefdoms' equivalent to one row of houses, each with its own female or male sub-head(wo)man. These sub-chiefdoms represented an intermediate structure to which people could report in case anything required the presence of the Chief.

Other important stakeholders in the community were the local party branches, spearheaded by the UDF, which represented the strongest party within the area and also provided the local councillor elected in 2000. Whereas the power of the UDF party had already been strong in 1998, the actual implementation of local government, which had been suspended since 1994, considerably increased its influence on the local level. As we shall see in a later chapter of the book, this led to enormous conflicts within the community. The village headman and the community's local self-help initiative had filled the administrative and functional vacuum left by lacking local state structures, only to see their power and achievements 'hijacked' by a highly politicised local structure dominated by an increasingly authoritarian UDF.¹⁹ Apart from changing administrative structures, we shall see that local power structures in Sector 7 were far from providing a static and stable power structure. As I shall discuss later on, the urbanisation of the area has also considerably changed political power constellations and both customary and state legalities.

¹⁸ As regards the discussion on property grabbing see Chapter 7.

¹⁹ Whereas under Banda the Traditional Authorities had been totally under the control of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), acting as its political satellites of power and coercion (Magolowondo 2001: 10), the new Local Government Act foresaw a diminished role for the Chiefs. The new local government structures, the so-called District Assemblies, have both political and administrative authority, and are composed of elected members, the so-called Members of the Assembly or Councillors, representing the various district or city wards. Traditional Authorities are ex-officio non-voting members and only have a consultative function. The major responsibility and function of the City Assemblies lies in the formulation of policies and decisions on local governance and development: These are the consolidation and promotion of local democratic institutions and democratic participation; the promotion of infrastructure and social services; and economic development within the wards/districts (The Programme Manager Decentralisation Secretariat 2000: 4).

3.8 Mobile Migrants: Motivations and Experiences

The majority of the migrants in our sample came from the Central Region (52.4%), while 22.3% came from the Southern provinces and 7.9% from the North. There were a substantial number of so-called 'international migrants' (12.7%), who had been working abroad as labour migrants in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s and had returned to Malawi in due course, most of them after the transition to democracy in 1994. These labour migrants also accounted for 3.2% of foreigners in the area; Zambians and Zimbabweans who married Malawians in the migration and had come to Malawi with them.²⁰

Most of the adult population in Sector 7 were first generation migrants, i.e. people who had been born and had grown up in the rural areas. Whereas most of the children were born in town, the share of second-generation migrants was very small, which confirms the very volatile migration trends in Malawi. These second-generation migrants were exclusively the offspring of a generation of civil servants who had decided to remain in town after their retirement at the end of the 1980s and 1990s. Apart from a few relatives who had come directly from the rural areas, most of the current inhabitants of Sector 7 had come from other – mostly neighbouring – urban areas. One family came from within the area, having lived before in one of the many villages scattered along the city boundaries.

Looking at the migration trajectories of the people reveals that Malawians are extremely mobile. For most Malawians, migration is an intrinsic part of their lives, often from a very young age. Following the migration itineraries of individual migrants one is able to trace a continuous movement within rural areas, between rural and urban areas, between and within cities, and even between different countries. Migration to town is thus usually only one movement amongst many others. In this respect, even for those who had bought or constructed a house in the area, Sector 7 was simply one place among many others on their migration itinerary; for some only for weeks and months, for others for years.

For most migrants, the migration to Sector 7 was not their first time in town. Some had already been in the city for education purposes. Others had been forced to leave town and return to the village for a while, because they had lost their work or fallen ill. There were also a considerable number of inter-urban migrants who had lived in other Malawian or foreign towns before coming to Lilongwe. They had either been transferred from work, or had changed town,

²⁰ It is interesting to note that from the eight international migrants, five come from eastern provinces in the North and three from the eastern provinces in the Central Region. An explanation may be the closeness to the borders of Zambia and Zimbabwe, which might have made international labour migration easier.

expecting better working and living conditions in Lilongwe than Mzuzu or Blantyre.

As diverse as the places people were going to or coming from were the reasons and motivations for people to migrate. While the decision to migrate usually involved a whole bundle of different aspects and motivations, economic considerations often played a central role. For most migrants, rural land and income scarcity provided the major reason for their migration into town. These economic considerations were, however, not always as simplistic as modernist assumptions of a rural-urban income differential caused by a predominantly rural subsistence economy versus an exclusively urban cash economy, or as the migrants themselves tended to suggest (see for a critique Jamal & Weeks 1993). With economic liberalisation and incoming consumer goods and new technologies, money also gained importance in village economies (Loiske 1995). At the same time, growing land scarcity due to ecological changes and demographic pressure made cash income-generating activities an important alternative to agricultural production and a means of survival in the rural areas. Although cash income-generating activities in the village existed, they were few. Moreover, most of these working opportunities were within agriculture, which meant that they were highly volatile and insecure, as they were dependent on the agricultural calendar and good weather conditions.

In this situation, town simply represented an important alternative where income-generating activities could, in contrast to the village, be found more easily. While for educated migrants the move to town continued to be related to 'expectations of modernity' (Ferguson 1999), including permanent employment, a career, and a modern lifestyle, most migrants simply expected to find a broad range of cash labour opportunities that would allow them to make money more easily than in the village. The wide range of working opportunities, ranging from casual labour to large-scale business, was also perceived as the major advantage of town over the village and the major reason for migration. It was also what defined town: "*Town life is when you are working and when you are able to provide yourself with the basic necessities*" (Interview No. 59, Mr. Namutwa).

The ample working opportunities that town offered were not only linked to individual dreams for oneself or one's core family; expectations towards town almost always had a trans-local dimension. Most peoples' expectations of prospering and getting rich in town also involved the idea that they would then be able to support their rural kin they had left in the village.

"In my life, I have achieved to buy the things I wanted for me and my family. I also had the goal to support my parents so that they have a better life, e.g. building a house for them and making sure that they have better food and food throughout the whole year, but I

failed. They still stay in their own house. I am the only son and my parents expect me to do this, also because I stay in town." (Interview No. 45, Mr. Msmba)

The quotation shows that expectations in this regard went far beyond regular support and were an integral part of migrants' urban lives and plans, also reaching far into the future: most migrants had the dream of building or buying their own house in Sector 7. At the same time, they dreamed about building a house in the village for their parents and close kin, to which they might eventually be able to move, too, if they wanted, or to which they might be forced to return in old age.

Trans-local expectations were thus not necessarily confined to the rural kin left behind, but also implied future social security considerations on the part of the urban migrants. However, although many migrants had left the village because of lacking employment opportunities, high expectations were also in evidence on the part of their parents and siblings that they would do so. The latter had usually invested a lot of money and undergone major economic sacrifices in view of the prospect that at least one of their family would be able to migrate and attain a well paid job which in turn, would also allow the rural household to prosper, or finance the education of the next sibling or cousin.

"In 1983 after having finished school I went to Lilongwe to look for a job. My parents did not tell me to go, but after secondary school I could not find a job in the village, and I somehow saw that I had to go. Parents do not educate children in order to be paid back, but that children are able to support themselves. Yet they were very happy that there were fewer dependents to feed when I left." (Interview No. 50, Mr. Gondwe)

"I was not worried when my children went to town, because I knew that they are only here in town to work and afterwards they will come back to me. When your children are leaving and go to town you are not worried, because if this child is a good child, it will support you and you have less children at home who you have to support. I encouraged my children to go to town (...), and I encouraged also others to go, like my son in Botswana and the one in Mwanza (Southern Region). At the moment I think that all my children should stay in town, because in the village there is not enough food. But if they are tired of town life they should come back." (Interview No. 49, Mr. Pindani, mother of a female migrant who was visiting her daughter in town)

While the educated ones largely left the village in order to achieve something in town, many young children also migrated for education purposes. Education facilities in town were usually considered to be of a better quality in town than in the villages, especially where secondary school education was concerned. Moreover, schools in rural areas were often difficult to reach, forcing pupils to walk long distances on a daily basis. Education purposes were, however, not only confined to schooling. We shall see that skills-training, such as carpentry or welding, often in the workshops of some distant relative with the aim of opening up a workshop in the village after one had finished the apprenticeship and had returned to the rural areas, provided an important resource transfer between village and town.

Additionally, social and emotional reasons for migration had always played an important role. Economic decline and the consequences of HIV/AIDS suggest that they have gained increased prominence as regards the decision to migrate over the years. Disputes with relatives or witchcraft accusations were often mentioned as reasons that had made people leave. Clearly, many of these conflicts had socio-economic roots, being related to disputes over land, inheritance or rising income inequality, all of which had increased enormously with rising land scarcity and the general economic decline. However, in all these migration histories, the social and emotional aspect played an important role, as it was social alienation and psychological pressure that had made it impossible for the migrants to remain in the village, even if they had an economic basis. Some of our respondents, who had set up well-run businesses in the village, had to leave the village because of witchcraft accusations, fearing for their lives and those of their family. To display one's 'otherness' by having more money, an iron sheet on one's roof, eating different food or being economically successful was considered by many to be much easier in town.

"In the village, despite of witchcraft and problems with relatives, it is better. You have your land and you can employ people to do the work for you. Everything is cheaper. But it is still better to stay in town, although you have to pay for everything. In town you live as a free person. But in the village, you cannot do anything to develop yourself. People would start talking and you can even lose your life."
(Interview No. 35, Mrs. Makwanda)

Although witchcraft and gossiping also occurred in town and had increased over the years, it was considered to be much more effective in the village context where the social structure was more close-knit and where social control was much higher. In fact, the kin was considered the most dangerous '*mmfiti*', since "*they can influence you more*" (Interview No. 22, Mrs. Mateju). In town, where the

social structure was more loose and where relatives were only a few and usually did not live too close, witchcraft was considered less of a danger.

Migration motives may also change over time and differ in importance in the course of the individual life cycle. The first migration move usually took place at a very young age for education purposes to other villages or into towns or boarding schools. At a later stage, people usually migrated for work and/or because of marriage. This migration pattern usually also shows a gender bias. While individual labour migration is still largely skewed towards young men, migration for marriage to town is a female migration pattern. However, the marriage itself was hardly the only motive that women had when moving to town: especially for young women, marriage was often perceived as a means to be able to leave the village and get into town. Unless they had relatives in town with whom they could stay, they usually did not have the economic means and social relations to go on their own. Most of these trans-local marriages were arranged. It is common that migrants in town marry a woman from their home village or home district, which is usually arranged by the kin in the village. Most of these young women had high hopes that they might be able to continue or finish their education or do some business in order to support themselves and their relatives in the village. This was also the case with migrant women who were already married and who came to town together with their husbands or more often, joined them after they had established themselves firmly in town. Some of them, indeed, had dreamed the modernist dream of the urban housewife who did 'nothing' all day long apart from doing the household chores and cooking while their spouses worked. Many, however, had their own business aspirations that they wanted to realise in town. Women migrants were thus far from being mere "associates" (Adepoju 1995: 94) to their husbands, as migration theories have for a long time suggested. My data suggest that with rising economic difficulties and HIV/AIDS, individual female labour migration has increased over the years. Many villagers reported that young women, many of them orphans, would migrate to town on their own in search of work or a husband; many of them, however, would end up in prostitution.²¹ My data is not sufficient to establish the extent of these individual female migration streams.

²¹ In her study on female sex workers in Malawi, Van de Borne (2005) shows that sex work is a blurred issue that cannot be reduced to prostitution as an income-generating activity. Although for most of the young women who come to town this does not materialise, she shows that sex work is first and foremost a way to find a man prepared to regularly support them, either as a husband or as a 'sugar daddy'.

3.8.1 Migration for Social Security

Migration is an important social security strategy. This aspect is not always obvious, but often implicit or secondary to other – economic – considerations to migrate, such as the fact that urban migration may enable the support of the rural kin left in the village.

Migration to town may, however, also involve very concrete social security considerations, such as access to urban social services or the search for material support or social care. The economic decline due to Structural Adjustment and the consequences of HIV/AIDS have, in fact, significantly increased migration for social support in Sector 7. The increasingly tight economic situation, together with chronic food insecurity in the village due to rising land shortages and lack of agricultural inputs had already led to an increase in migration over the past few years. Despite the fact that most people in town could not afford to cultivate, town was, in fact, considered more food secure. Options for coping with food insecurity and hunger, which were discussed with specific intensity in the upcoming hunger period, were considered to be broader and more varied in town. These ranged from more possibilities of doing *Ganyu* to begging, stealing or prostitution; all strategies that in the face of an overall lack of money and a certain degree of purchasing power were not considered viable in the village. In addition, one's social network, encompassing close-by relatives or employees who could be asked for money or food, was perceived to be more reliable and accessible than people in the village, who would be in a similar situation.

“In town death of malnutrition happens not very often, because three quarters of the people have food. If they see someone without food, they share the little they have. In the village it is very hard for people to assist each other, because they do not have enough themselves.” (Interview No. 37, Mrs. Chizale)

“In the village when you lack food you can stay without food for three days or even four, until you find some *Ganyu* with somebody, such as gardening, and he will give you food in exchange. And then it is not sure if he gives you the food. In town you stay without food for a maximum of one day, because the next day you can go to your company and ask to borrow money in order to buy food.” (Interview No. 45, Mr. Msopa)

The rising wave of people continuously pouring into town in the course of the intensification of the hunger crisis seemed to confirm these observations. The loss of the harvest had not only made them food insecure, but also led to

a breakdown of social support networks, as it had hit almost everybody. Many of these 'hunger migrants' engaged in *Ganyu* for food or simply begged in the streets. Even the empty maize husks that people left outside the maize mills and which were usually considered garbage become a highly appreciated resource over which starving people would fight.

The major reason for so many people moving in the search for support was HIV/AIDS. A new stratum of migrant children, most of them orphans, had started to emerge over the years, moving in-between town and village, in both directions. On the one hand, a large number of orphans were sent to the village to be taken care of by their rural relatives after the death of their parents in town. On the other, there were a lot of orphans from the villages who had come to town on their own, or had been sent to town by their rural relatives to be taken care of by their urban relatives. HIV/AIDS has also set in motion many old people, turning upside-down the migration dictum that one has to leave town and go back to the village having reached retirement age. However, we shall see that, together with the children, HIV/AIDS had also left many of the old people in the village 'orphaned'. Instead of being properly taken care of by their children, many of them had been left without any adequate support. In addition, many have also inherited a number of orphaned grandchildren to look after. While rurally-based grandparent-headed households were financially supported by their urban-based children, other old people have moved into town with their orphaned grandchildren. They were financially taken care of by their rural kin, while they took over the care-labour. There were a considerable number of old people in Sector 7 who had explicitly been called on by their urban kin for this kind of arrangement. In this way, their urban-based orphaned grandchildren could remain in town, where they had grown up, and where they could continue their education, which would provide them with better chances for their future than they would have had in the village. Apart from HIV/AIDS, rural-urban migration streams of elderly people were also related to changing rural re-migration patterns in old age. Because many of their children would remain in town, and against the background of a generally declining support structure in the village, many old people decided to migrate into town to stay close to their children.

HIV/AIDS also increased the number of migrants that came to town in search of medical care. It was common for older people and the seriously sick to come to town for medical care, to be taken care of in better-equipped urban hospitals (see also Chapter 2). However, the high number of people with severe and mostly HIV/AIDS related diseases had generated an enormous stream of sick people that overstretched not only the capacity of the urban health centres, but also of the medical expenses of the urban kin. In fact, most of the sick people who had

come to town for medical care were often simply taken care of at home, as the urban kin lacked the resources for further medical expenses.

3.8.2 International and Inner-Urban Migration

A considerable number of the migrants in Sector 7 were international migrants, both Malawians who went abroad and foreigners who had migrated to Malawi. Most of them can actually be described as returnee migrants. The return to Malawi had mostly not been on a voluntary basis, but had largely been induced by changing political and economic conditions in their host countries, where they had spent more than 30 or 40 years of their lives, or had been born as second-generation migrants. Although in most countries the economic and social position of Malawian guest workers had been worsening since the 1980s, many had migrated back to Malawi only following the transition to democracy in 1994. Used to a more liberal political climate and better living conditions, many of them had not wanted to return to Banda's authoritarian Malawi. The urban literature of Lilongwe suggests that most international migrants returned to the rural areas (see for example, Chirwa 2000; Englund 2001), yet my data from town provides a more differentiated picture. Looking at the migration histories that the international migrants in Sector 7 had experienced, it appears that the fact that they had re-migrated into town is largely related to their economic capacity to do so. Some of them had indeed tried to migrate back to the villages. The difficult social and economic climate, including massive threats of witchcraft had, however, induced many of them to re-migrate to Lilongwe. At the same time, many international migrants came directly to town. Although they maintained a close relationship to the village, they had not wanted to go back there. Many of them came from a foreign city and – used to town life – could not imagine taking up a rural lifestyle again, including agricultural activities. This was especially the case for those whose children had been born and raised elsewhere, and who did not experience Malawi as their home.

Especially in the context of urbanisation, migration is usually only discussed and analysed as mobility between the village and town or vice versa, assuming this move is the most significant one in terms of social or economic differences or in terms of adjustment. However, my research has shown that inner-urban moves are highly significant as regards migration. Asking migrants for their migration history, many experienced their inner or intra-urban moves in the search for work, cheaper rents, having run off or having been chased away by difficult landlords to be an integral part of their migration itineraries. These changes had implied social and economic changes that some people experienced as difficult as the supposedly so significant move from the village into town. This is espe-

cially visible in the context of the rich newcomers, the civil servants. For many, the move into Sector 7 meant de-urbanisation and de-modernisation in terms of housing and infrastructure, as well as socially and politically, thus requiring a considerable degree of adaptation. While for many in Sector 7, the area was perceived urban as urban can be, they often described their move into the area as a migration into a village structure which they perceived as totally alien to their previous living conditions.

3.9 In Town, Everything is Money: Food, Poverty and Insecurity in Sector 7

The motivations that set people in motion and the migration patterns they follow are thus much more complex and diverse than push and pull models solely related to economic considerations or any other modernist stereotype related to the city. Moreover, taking a mobile view reveals that town and village overlap significantly as regards economic and social considerations and responsibilities. At the same time, migration to town provides a whole range of new insecurities and uncertainties migrants have to cope with. These insecurities often reflect disappointed migration motives and expectations. The all pervasive poverty made matters worse, even to the extent that, in terms of insecurity, many migrants no longer saw the difference between town and village.

Case 4.3 “Mr. Klaver”: There is no difference between village and town Joe Klaver is the second-born son of Mrs. Klaver, a widow I had met in 1998. She had meanwhile been forced to go back to the village with three of her youngest children. She had been surviving on the income of her small-scale business and the generous support the husband of one of her daughters in town had provided. But since the daughter had divorced things had got worse, and she had decided to go back.

Joe and three other brothers remained in town. Their mother wanted them to follow her, but they did not want to go to the village. They were born in town and used to a different lifestyle. Although the mother still had land in the village, Joe did not want to become a farmer. He wanted to stay in town where the economic opportunities were much broader and also less exhausting than farming. Due to the economic difficulties, he and his brothers had been forced to leave secondary school. But he still had hopes that with his small-scale business he might earn enough money to send at least one of his brothers to school and provide him with a good education.

Since his mother departed, he had moved to a smaller house on an adjacent plot that his father had bought when he was still alive. With the help of some friends and his brothers, Joe had managed to build a small house there, which he moved into with his wife, their baby daughter and his brothers. The bigger house, a beautiful construction with a colourful kitchen garden, he had rented to friends from church. The rent provided an important regular cash income in addition to the highly volatile profits from his fish and rice selling business in which the whole family was involved. While he usually went to Dedza or Salima to purchase the fish he then sold at the central market in Lilongwe Town, his siblings and wife took over the local market in Sector 7 and also engaged in door-to-door selling. This was especially done with rice, which provided the basis for the rice porridge, which was usually taken in the mornings. If business was low and during the dry season when labour opportunities were high, Joe and his younger brothers were also engaged in *Ganyu*, mainly moulding bricks for the construction of houses within the area.

During my field stay it became increasingly obvious that Mr. Klaver was sick, apparently suffering from AIDS. He had been ill for quite a long time, which made the economic situation of the family worse. His sickness, and the fact that he was not able to pay for medical treatment that would have allowed him to feel better, prevented him from working. He was neither able to go to the market to sell nor to coordinate business activities, such as getting the cheaper fish from the village. Moreover, the food shortage rendered business very difficult. Fish and daily rice porridge in the mornings were the first things people would economise on. While the monthly rent was supposed to be sent to the mother in the village, providing a trans-local cash income source for her, most of the time it got stuck in town, where it was needed to feed the family. *"My relatives are just surviving. Today when they come back, they will be surprised to find lunch. I cannot support them the way I want."*

While insecurities differ, Joe Klaver's story reflects well the major insecurity that all people in town, no matter how rich or poor, perceive the same, i.e. the all-pervasive monetisation of town life. While people came to town in order to make money, the fact that money is the basic resource needed in order to access almost all basic needs was experienced as a major constraint. *"Without money you do not buy Ufa, water, fertiliser or relish"* (Interview, No. 26, Mai Chincunda). These were also the items people spent most of their money on. Unless one cultivated in the

village or had money enough to rent a field for cultivation in the neighbouring villages just across the urban border, food always had to be purchased either at the ADMARC (Agricultural Development and Market Association), the public marketing board for agricultural products, or from private vendors at the market. Food expenditure made up the biggest share of all household expenditure, followed by housing rents, drinking water and fuels for burning, such the widely used firewood or charcoal (see also Chilowa et al. 2000; Roe 1990; Chilowa & Roe 1989²²).

Structural Adjustment has made matters worse. The skyrocketing price levels of basic consumer goods and food items as a result of price decontrols and the flotation of the currency in 1994, which has led to enormous periodic devaluations of the Malawian currency since, have eaten up a large share of peoples' incomes, making it increasingly difficult to satisfy even the most basic needs (Anders 2005; Chilowa et al. 2000). Alone the 80% (!) depreciation in August 1998 led to an enormous increase in maize prices. The price for a 50kg bag of maize, which is considered enough to feed a family of four for a month, shot up from 80 MK to 250 MK. While the tripling of the maize price had already led to heightened food insecurity in urban areas, the food crisis in 2001 made matters worse. Although ADMARC finally decided to freeze the maize price at MK 850 (!) to make maize affordable for even the poorest of the population, for most Malawians this was still much too high. Many were forced to buy small amounts of maize at much higher prices from private market vendors, where prices were usually much higher.²³

While hunger made food a central concern for the people in Sector 7 in this particular year, for most migrants, food insecurity was a chronic problem. Most households did not have enough money to provide for an adequate food transfer for the whole family, not to mention extra expenses, such as the rent for land for cultivation, health care expenses, school items, or school fees for the children. This was particularly apparent towards the middle of the month, when the monthly income was already spent. The expenses for daily consumption were then met by the daily profits made from petty trading, which usually amounted to a few Kwacha only. Other strategies included a change to cheaper and lower quality food, different eating habits, and drastic reduction of food intake: The first meal to be left out would usually be breakfast, and then lunch. It was common for parents and older children to not eat in favour of younger and weaker

²² Already at the beginning of the 1990s, Roe showed in her study that food expenditure took up more than 60% of household expenditures (Roe 1990, see also Chilowa et al. 2000). This percentage rises, the poorer households are and the lower their income (Chilowa et al. 2000).

²³ This also explains why most of the people who were getting maize from the villages or from their own urban cultivation were partly selling it at the market. The high prices made it more profitable to sell the maize and buy cheaper maize at the – still cheaper because fixed – ADMARC level.

persons within the household. While the reduction to one meal per day for many poorer people was almost daily normality, it also became common among people who did not account for the poorest part of the population with rising prices and the ongoing hunger season. People would also change to cheaper *ndiwo* or relish, such as cheap vegetables, beans, chickpeas, pumpkin leaves or turnips. However, for the majority of the people, this so-called 'poor relish' used to be common throughout the year. The consumption of meat or cheaper dried fish – if affordable at all – was for most people a monthly or weekly occasion. Snacks, such as fruit (bananas or sugar cane) or nuts (groundnuts) were hardly affordable for the poorer people. Fruit in particular was extremely expensive and rarely eaten.

While the hunger crisis had made almost everybody food insecure, it was poorer people, and especially children, who were faced with chronic malnutrition (see Roe 1990; Chilowa et al. 2000). It was also perceived as a major insecurity, which would hit the old, children, and the sick; those who were strongly dependent on others for their support and who would suffer the most. It not only drained energy, but accelerated sickness and death.

Food insecurity in town was also related to the volatile nature and low salaries of most urban incomes, which was seen as a major source of insecurity. This was especially the case for those who had come to town with the expectation of finding a permanent job. Although it was no guarantee of a high salary, people who had a permanent job were nevertheless considered better off: at least they had a regular, monthly income upon which they could rely and which allowed them to plan a future. *Ganyu* was regarded as a coping strategy that one would consider if any attempts to get a permanent job had failed:

“*Ganyu* is not work. You do it if you do not have any other way to go or any other possibility. I have just finished school and I want to use my education. I want a permanent job. If I stay without work for a long time, I can always resort to *Ganyu*, just like moulding bricks or gardening.” (Interview No. 28, Patson Kagama)

Nevertheless, many of these educated young Malawians, to a large extent men, were forced to live on insecure sources of income. Employment was increasingly difficult to find, and those who had a job lived in a constant fear of losing it. At the same time, the scarcity of employment opportunities also made access to new job opportunities more difficult. This was not only due to the increased competition: Job-hunting had also become a highly profitable field of corruption. Gaining access to employment with private companies or state agencies had always needed good personal relations that were often bound by common tribal or regional origins. Whereas these tribal access criteria continued

to play a vital role, in 2001, many jobs were only accessible after having paid bribery, which seemed to provide an attractive additional income source. This not only concerned 'formal' working relationships but was also common practice in the informal sector economy, such as making people pay in order to learn a craft or a trade in one of the workshops.

Trans-local economics as envisaged by many migrants also turned out to be much more difficult to realise than expected. In fact, many migrants simply had to give up on the idea, facing high transport costs and lacking the money to buy agricultural inputs or pay relatives to work in the fields in their absence. This insecurity was mainly mentioned by women who had come to town with the expectation of engaging in business while continuing agriculture in the village. This resulted in immediate insecurity, which was keenly felt in the hunger period. However, we shall see in one of the following chapters that the fact that they were not able to cultivate might have far-reaching, serious consequences in the future and might significantly reduce their trans-local social security options. The importance of the continuation of cultivation in the village is also revealed by the fact that the insecurities and anxieties people mentioned in town were strongly related to village realities. The hope for good rains or concerns that one's house may burn down during the clearance of land just before cultivation in the village far away were mentioned alongside insecurities and anxieties related to the immediate urban reality.

We have seen that the social structure was seen as a major advantage of town life, allowing for more social, personal, and material freedom. However, the looser social structure in town was also the source of many anxieties and uncertainties. This concerned personal relationships, which were perceived as much more volatile and short-lived than in the village; this made the provision of and access to support a major uncertainty, as trust relations were considered to be much more difficult to establish:

"In town it is difficult to make friends, because you cannot trust them. Today they say they are friends and you chat, and tomorrow you find them not being so friendly anymore (...)" (Interview No. 5, Mr. Mangona)

Yet, as we shall also see in the following chapters, support relations in town are not to be squeezed into a simplistic urban-rural dichotomy of a reliable rural kin versus unreliable urban non-kin. Gaining access to support was also perceived as being more difficult with the proper kin. This was especially the case for social security migrants who had come to town with the expectation of finding relatives who would be able to support them and who – instead – were often facing tremendous difficulties. We shall see that it was not the lack of material

care alone that was at stake. Especially in the case of old and sick people, the aspect of care labour had become increasingly important, as the high death toll due to HIV/AIDS had made it a central and increasingly scarce resource. The difficulties related to support relations with kin in town were also related to town itself, however. People complained that town changed kinship relations – the more liberal and loose social climate in town, it was claimed, allowed for more deviant kin behaviour, which also resulted in more difficult access to support.

Town life had also changed marriage practices, which was a major concern for women, especially for those who had not undergone the customary village marriage ceremonies:

“If you are married in town and your husband wants to divorce you, he may just dump you if your relatives do not know anything about your marriage. If you are married in the village, the relatives back home know about the marriage and you can go there if you have problems. You can discuss with the *ankoswes* in the village and they can send you back to your husband and he has to take you back. (...) It is always more difficult if *ankoswes* are not around, but sometimes relatives in town may assist you and can act upon instead of *ankoswes*.” (Interview No. 27, Mrs. Msimba)

The quotation also reveals another insecurity that women were experiencing more strongly than men, i.e. the absence of proper kin as an important social environment. The lack of presence of the wider kin group that would allow them to control the behaviour and income of their husbands better, and help maintain their own social and economic power position, was especially mentioned by women who had experienced their move into town as a major decline in their economic and social status. This was especially true of women from matrilineal societies, who traditionally have more control over economic resources than their patrilineal counterparts. HIV/AIDS has further challenged marriage as a social security institution. The loss of the spouse has become a major anxiety for many women, especially against the background of the widespread practice of property grabbing. We shall see that many women tried to secure their legal entitlements through marriage with additional securities, such as legal titles on land and houses, in order to counter the attempts of their husbands' kin to steal their property, in case of their husband's death.

Finally, insecurities related to town also concerned the urban lifestyle. On the one hand, town enabled one to display one's lifestyle without fearing major sanctions, such as dressing and eating habits, haircuts, and ways of talking and walking. On the other hand, the urban lifestyle was also perceived as a source of insecurity, especially if one was not able to adapt to the most basic conventions

or dress codes, such as not wearing the same clothes every day or wearing dirty clothes:

“In the village you go without shoes and just in shorts. But here in town you always have to dress like a gentleman, clean and with shoes. I prefer in a way the village life. The differences between rich and poor exist, but they do not show-off and rather hide their wealth, dress like the poor, because they fear witchcraft. In the village you do not think so much about difference. Here in town, people with more money are enjoying life. They show off and it makes me feel bad and it is even worse, when I know that they have the same level of education than I have.” (Interview No.5, Mr. Mangona).

Dressing well was, however, not only an important asset for being able to show off or display one's wealth: it was also perceived an important aspect of social life itself. Being dressed properly meant that one could attend school, go to work and participate in social life, because “(...) *if you do not have proper clothes, you cannot go anywhere. You do not feel comfortable in the presence of friends, if you do not have nice clothes, and you become shy*” (Interview No. 29, Mr. Machizo). This aspect was especially felt by those who otherwise found themselves at the bottom of the social ladder, such as the poor or the orphaned. Clothes made these ‘defects’ invisible to a certain extent, providing an important aspect of belonging and a ‘normality’ that made other social differentiations less important or visible.

3.10 Conclusions: Expectations of Modernity Reconsidered

Migrants in Sector 7 usually have great expectations when they arrive from the countryside. Many of them dream the typical migrant's dream that Ferguson (1999) has poignantly referred to as ‘expectations of modernity’. These expectations are usually expressed in terms of achieving economic well-being in order to care for one's family and being able to live a modern life with all its amenities and consumer goods. For most migrants, these expectations will most probably not come true, and their dreams will be shattered by a harsh social and economic urban reality. However, this modernist dream tells only half of the story. People usually also bring an alternative, more realistic version of town with them when they move, having been nourished by previous visits, or by urban kin who had come to the village and told them about life in town. This is also evident in the different expectations that people have. While people continue to expect to earn money in town, for many this expectation is not necessarily related to ‘formal’ sector employment or the typical modernist dream of the poor migrant who ‘has

made it', but simply to the existence of a wide range of largely 'informal' cash income generating activities.

Taking a trans-local perspective reveals that this realistic version of town also encompasses the close interrelation of town and village. Most migrants in town are living multi-local lives, maintaining strong social, economic, cultural and geographic links with their place of origin. This multi-local lifestyle considerably influences social and economic behaviour, including the migration patterns of urban migrants, such as we have seen in the case of trans-local economics. Whereas migrants chose an urban-rural life in order to enhance their economic possibilities, urban migration is also related to strong expectations on the part of the relatives and kin left behind. This is also discernible in the insecurities and uncertainties urban migrants have. As we have seen, town and village are in this respect closely interrelated, their needs and insecurities reaching far into each other and providing a constant presence and often a burden in the migrants' lives.

However, even these highly realistic expectations of town are largely not fulfilled. The consequences of Structural Adjustment policies and HIV/AIDS have led to an overall decline in the social and economic situation. The decline in living conditions is extremely pronounced in town. And as more people migrate to town in search for labour, support, or care, more of them are faced with an extremely difficult situation. Although town is still considered more food secure, malnutrition is extremely widespread. At the same time, social support and care networks are becoming increasingly overburdened by a rising number of support seekers who are being displaced from rural areas by hunger and increasingly perforated kinship networks due to HIV/AIDS.

A multi-local approach also challenges the notion of the city. Modernisation theorists have for a long time considered the marginal areas of the big cities to be 'learning areas' for future migrants, who will eventually move out of these areas to be incorporated into the real city lying at the geographical core of town. While most people in these areas are, indeed, economically marginalised and impoverished, these borderlands differ substantially from these simplistic modernist notions. Looking at the dynamics of urbanisation processes taking place in these borderlands and the number of people they encompass, it seems that this urbanity and modernity increasingly provides the normality of the city. This new urbanity not only includes rural newcomers, but also increasingly people from within the city that are drifting back to the margins, being de-urbanised and de-modernised by Structural Adjustment and Good Governance. Overall, social and economic conditions appear to render the modern, urban way of life increasingly difficult, even for the few who had made it, reducing modernity to an increasingly marginal strategy that only a few can afford.

This does not mean that rural-urban differences, uncertainties and coping strategies are disappearing or dissolving into a range of hybrids that have taken root in the absence of a proper urbanisation or modernisation process. However, the analysis has shown that the 'rural' and the 'urban' as the defining and confining elements of the city are far removed from a dualist understanding, but are much more ambiguous and blurred. Urban-rural boundaries are highly volatile, as people have started to fall back on different strategies, mixing strategies, tactics and resources anchored in both rural and urban social, economic, cultural or legal sites in order to cope with insecurities both in the village and in town. While these strategies and tactics partly produce close trans-local linkages and spaces within which rural and urban spheres almost coincide, rural-urban relations also show clear lines of division where rural and urban social, economic, cultural and legal domains are strictly separated. The extent to which people are able to shift rural and urban boundaries is of enormous importance for social security, being a central means in negotiating rights and obligations of support in a trans-local social security economy. While social and economic conditions in both the village and town influence this boundary-setting process, it differs according to gender, age, the social and economic status and the issue at stake.

Chapter 4

Constructing Legalities, or Urbanisation Redefined: Place-Making Strategies in a Rural-Urban Borderland

4.1 Introduction

In the last chapter we saw that urban migration encompasses a wide range of different expectations that only partly correspond to modernist notions related to the city. These different expectations also encompass different migration trajectories. The way and frequency with which people move between town and village or other places reveal that the city is far from providing a place of permanence for most migrants. Rather, the city should be repositioned within a wider trans-local economy that encompasses both the city and the countryside, and within which and across which people move.

The trans-local perspective has, however, also revealed that town has gained new significance, as ever-changing social, economic and demographic conditions have also challenged the notion of the city. From being a transitory residence and working exile for a growing number of people, the city has turned into a 'place of permanence', even though this does not mean the end of moving. Whereas the return migration to the village is increasingly difficult to realise for many and is viewed with considerable ambivalence by others, many people are forced or choose to remain in town. This shift in the meaning of the city also involves intensified place-making strategies on the part of the migrants, such as buying plots or building houses.

This chapter focuses on these urban place-making strategies, looking into how people are gaining access to social amenities, housing and plots, and other public institutions and services, such as policing and judicial services. In this chapter, these urbanisation processes are specifically looked at from a legal perspective. Juxtaposing formal and legal means and institutions of gaining access to the city with the informal, illegal ones, the chapter argues that urbanisation processes develop their own legalities that lie far beyond formal/informal, legal/illegal or permanent/transitory dichotomies and notions of town. This is especially visible at the urban margins, such as Sector 7, where the struggle over the city is a highly dynamic and contested one. In the absence of functioning formal mechanisms that would permit people to gain access to town and its social amenities, we shall see that people resort to their own means of accessing and developing the city. The legalities that they create, here understood as a series of more or less institutionalised rules and regulations in order to gain access to the city or deal with situations of conflict and dispute, mix customary village law, formal state law and new 'informal' rules and regulations that develop out of the daily context. These legalities may be perceived as highly illegal and deviant behaviour when viewed from a state and a customary law perspective: yet this is not necessarily the case. We shall see that for the local population, these legalities actually represent highly efficient and effective arrangements and provide an important organising framework for daily life in town (see also De Sousa 1977; Perdomo & Bolivar 1998). These legalities are far from being static, but represent everyday, often very specific, situational constructions and practices of 'legality' 'formality' and even 'justice' (see for example Simone 1997, Fernandes & Varley 1998; Ghannam 2002).

The analysis of these processes of "*management and control*" (Simone 1997: 3) also refers to a second point I want to make. The literature discusses strategies in the city and strategies of gaining access to the city as largely separate issues. Literature on the 'making of the city' (Castells 1972), or on how people are gaining access to land and housing in the absence of public resources, have for a long time been at the core of urbanisation studies (see for example Gilbert 1994; Gugler 1997; Rakodi 1997; Lomnitz 1997, Knauder 2000).¹ At the same time, another strand of literature has evolved that – seeking to challenge modernist notions of urbanisation and migration – discusses the continuing importance of rural-urban network relations, including the period of re-migration to rural areas and the continuous efforts of urban migrants to maintain access to the village.

¹ Much has also been devoted to the political dimension of these processes. Especially in civil society, the debate of the potential of these 'new social movements' as regards their role in the transition and the sustainability of democratisation processes has gained prominence (for example Rakodi 1997; Fernandes & Varley 1998; Mukumbe 1998; Rondinelli 1990).

However, urbanisation processes are hardly discussed as intrinsic aspects of a trans-local social security economy. We shall see that gaining access to the city is not only an act of urbanisation, but also represents a series of social security strategies and as such, is a reaction to the insecurities in town. While this may be an obvious truth, we shall see how strongly these strategies are intertwined and embedded in a wider trans-local economic and social context. As such, they are not isolated urban processes, but also influence wider network relations, the allocation of resources within the city and eventually, changing perceptions of needs and (in)securities.

4.2 Constructing Legality I: 'Illegal' Plot Allocation

We have seen that the fact of migrating to town does not alter the crucial importance that urban migrants attribute to their land in the village. Although people are engaged in wage labour and may never return to cultivate, land maintains its value as a productive asset. To a certain extent, this is also the case in town. We have seen that in the context of urban agriculture, land remains an important productive asset in town as well, representing an integral part of the urban income portfolio.

The main function of land in town is its exchange value; i.e. that it is something that can be leased, sold or bought (Simon 1992). We shall see that the commoditisation of land is also spreading in rural areas— but in town, the land market and land speculation, especially in relation to housing, is significant. This holds especially for cities like Lilongwe, where public housing schemes have never existed and where an inadequate supply of plots on the part of the public administration (see Chapter 3) have created a highly profitable and contested housing and land market over the years. This has been exacerbated by rising urban mobility and an increase in desire for ownership and permanence, which has been discernible all over Sub-Saharan Africa over the last two decades (see Simon 1992). Whereas for many the possession of land and housing is a basic necessity, it is increasingly used as a form of security that may provide a permanent source of income when rented out and is an asset that may be sold when necessary.

The growing demand for a house or a plot of one's own, and the resulting increase in land speculation, has also become apparent in Sector 7. In 2001, more houses and plots than ever had changed ownership in the area, representing the climax of a movement that had already started in 1998 and indicative of a tendency visible all over the marginal and cheaper areas of Lilongwe (Interview No. 47, Civil Servant at the Lilongwe City Council). In 2001, Sector 7 also became the scene of a new land invasion, which took place in the west of the area. The prod-

uct of a previous land invasion itself, it now became a battleground in which 'formal', 'informal' and 'traditional' actors and institutions fiercely contested access to plots and housing in the newly-invaded neighbouring area commonly referred to as 'down there'. At the same time, plot allocation became a site of contestation over the meaning of the city itself. It not only revealed the dynamism and ambiguity of the geographic boundaries between 'town' and 'village', but also the notions of identity and legality spanned between rural and urban life worlds and formal and informal processes of urbanisation.

4.2.1 Illegal Land Invasion or "The Democratisation of Appropriation"²

While in 1998 the area was just emerging, filling with inhabitants and struggling for a basic infrastructure, upon my return in 2001, Sector 7 had developed considerably. A basic infrastructure had been established successfully with the assistance of international donors and local NGOs.³ Many of the tiny houses made of unburnt bricks and covered with plastic sheets and tyres which had characterised the neighbourhood had disappeared, giving way to big concrete constructions with iron sheets and sometimes, high protective fences.

Yet there was hardly any time to reflect on the many achievements and changes that had been taking place: a few days after I had established myself with my research assistant Nellie in the area, a land occupation started at the western end of the area that was to continue throughout our stay. The land invasion started on a weekday at the beginning of the dry season. As we found out in the course of the event, this was a strategic moment, as it is only during the dry season that construction activities, including the moulding of bricks, are met with favourable weather conditions – an important pre-condition for a successful land invasion.

A large crowd of around 100 people, headed by a so-called 'plot allocation committee', flooded the land beyond the western boundary of Sector 7, which demarcates Lilongwe Urban from Lilongwe Rural West. Members of the committee started measuring plots according to the 'conventional size' of 12 × 26 used by the City Assembly, demarcating them with sticks and stones, and dividing them among the people. This was done according to a list on which people had to register beforehand. Already days before the actual allocation started, committee-members were moving around in Sector 7 and Area 25 telling people that the City Council was going to allocate plots in this area. Those interested had to register on a list and were told to participate in the 'allocation' when it started in order to receive their plot. Plots were not free, but sold at prices rang-

² Anders 2005: 204.

³ See 4.4

ing from MK 1,500 to MK 3,000. These prices were slightly lower than those usually charged by the City Council,⁴ a fact that mobilised many people to register. Most people were also given a form, for which they had to pay extra (between MK 50 to MK 200), which confirmed their ownership of their plot. It was a simple copy of a plot application form in use at the City Council. People were told to clear the land and start building as soon as possible in order to prevent eviction by the police. When the houses were finished, the City Council would come and give them a plot number, which they would then be able to put in the form and which would finally confirm and 'legalise' their ownership.

Most people knew that the forms were fake. There were lengthy discussions about whether these forms were 'real' and had 'legal' value or were simply a worthless piece of paper that the plot allocation committee sold in order to make more money. However, most people had bought one nevertheless. And although the forms were fake, they did indeed provide some security. Apart from the psychological effect on the plot 'owners' of possessing an 'official' document with the coat of arms of the Republic of Malawi that documented their ownership of the land, the form had also practical value: when confronted with this official document, the mostly illiterate villagers on the other side of the boundary who tried to chase the urbanites from 'their' land usually retreated from taking further action when they saw the official form. As it turned out, it could also prove to be decisive when defending one's land rights against other occupants who claimed the ownership for the same plot. As it was common practice for plot committee members to sell the same plot several times, the form represented an important asset in the struggle to keep one's plot, or at least force the committee members who had issued the form to look for an alternative one.

The form was, of course, not sufficient. One had to be present at the plot for days and weeks, and it was only when foundations were laid and bricks moulded that one could be sure of having created an effective ownership. Yet the form could provide a decisive additional weapon in the battle for the plot. Finally, many plot owners hoped that the City Council would sooner or later give in and legalise or 'upgrade' the area once faced with the rapidly growing piles of bricks and foundations being laid out within days of the invasion, as had happened so often before during the last years. In this case, the form could then finally reveal its 'true' legal value.

The chances were indeed high that this might occur. Beforehand, information had seeped through from within the City Council that the City had plans to survey the area sooner or later in order to counter land pressure. The change in policy by the City Council, that did not foresee any significant financial or ma-

⁴ According to the Chief, people pay MK 3,920, or around US\$ 80, for a new plot when they apply to the City Council (as of June 2001).

terial compensation for the villagers' land any more, guaranteed that resistance from the villagers to the 'illegal' land invasion would probably be rather weak.

The plot committee, which consisted of some rather sombre local 'businessmen' and was headed by the local chairman of the United Democratic Front (UDF) to give the whole enterprise an official and 'legal' status, played an important role in organising the land invasion and in mobilising the people. The land invasion was, however, also the product of a broad political coalition of institutions and authorities that together guaranteed for its success. Apart from the Traditional Authorities (TA) from the villages and the police, it included the local party structures of the United Democratic Front (UDF), the local UDF-councillor, and the City Council, which was dominated by the same party and in which the councillor for Sector 7 held the position of the vice-mayor of Lilongwe. The local City Council branch office and employees of the City Council living in Sector 7 and Area 25A had organised the forms and fed the local committee with information on where the City Council planned to survey areas in the future, and thus, where chances were high that the City Council would legalise the 'illegal' occupations sooner or later. They also provided daily information on which action the City Council was going to take in order to deal with the plot allocation during the weeks and months of the occupation. There were rumours that the local ward councillor had been promised a number of plots in exchange for non-interference with the occupation. In addition, the traditional authorities played a decisive role. This included the Group Village Headman of the area, who at the same time was an employee of the City Council. This dual role as Traditional Authority and City Council employee gave him a special position of power. While his institutional role enabled him to have free access to special information on the City Council's future plans and projects, he used his role as a Traditional Authority to break the resistance of the local village chiefs. Last but not least, the plot allocation also involved the local police branch. Promises of some plots in case of a successful and smooth invasion muted the rather slow and shallow resistance of the police officers, who were for the majority residents of Sector 7 and thus, had a strong personal interest in gaining access to plots.

Although according to state law the people in these borderlands had no formal right to the land and would not even get compensation, this did not mean that they had no vested interest in it. On the contrary, the fact that they have lived in the area for many years, including having cultivated the land, made them powerful stakeholders in the land invasion with a clearly defined economic interest.⁵

⁵ In fact, before invading this area, the plot committee had already made attempts to invade an area further north along the urban-rural boundaries, but had encountered fierce resistance from the police, the Traditional Authority and – last but not least – the villagers themselves, who had no

These various stakeholders provided the institutional and political landscape within which the land invasion took place. When the invasion started, the villagers' first reaction was to go to the police. But after having talked to the City Council, the police refused to interfere. They argued that they could only interfere upon an instruction by the City Council. The ward-councillor was very sympathetic to their cause, but also said that she could not do anything, as the City Council had no official knowledge of the incident. She promised to use her influence as the deputy mayor to pressurise the City Council into taking action. At the same time, it was clear that she would not interfere. The leading figures in the plot allocation were the same local UDF-politicians and activists who had helped to vote her into power, and it was clear that she would not stop them from continuing with the allocation, nor would she have them arrested by the police. She even invited plot occupants to her house, encouraging them to continue the invasion and promising them her support.

This support consisted in deferring official action indefinitely: When the City Council finally took action and a letter of intent arrived at the police, giving them the authority to chase away and arrest people and warning them that their houses would be demolished if they continued building, two busy months of building activities 'down there' had passed. By that time, most of the plots in the area were already cleared; piles of bricks had popped up like mushrooms, and some houses were already half-finished. The councillor arrived with some officials from the City Council and warned people that they would be arrested. The police tried to chase people away and some were even arrested, but were soon released again. The whole incident resembled a performance to satisfy the official rules of the game, rather than an event with serious consequences. The battle had been won.

And it seems everybody was satisfied with the outcome, even the villagers. The fact that the land occupation was a 'fait accompli' did not really seem to bother most of them. Although they were still complaining that they had lost all their agricultural land and that they were not able to cultivate anymore, most of them seemed to be satisfied with the outcome nevertheless. Many had anticipated it in any case. As we found out later, they had participated in the negotiation process with the plot committee on the division of the plots almost since the beginning of the land invasion, and had been promised some extra plots for sale in exchange for their cooperation and as compensation for their income losses.

Although the villagers continued to portray themselves as the rural victims of the whole affair, it soon became clear that their resistance to sell the land and to give in to the urbanites had been a strategy to increase their leverage in the negotiation process, rather than an expression of simply wanting their land back

interest at all in getting rid of their land.

in order to continue their 'rural' way of life. Rather than being driven by the fear that they would not be in the position to cultivate any more and would have to face starvation⁶, their fight for their land, including their appeal to the City Council, the police and the Traditional Authorities, was a strategy to ensure they were adequately compensated and 'got the best out of it'. This also sheds a different light on the violent confrontation between the villagers and the town people at the very beginning of the occupation, when town people started to invade and measure out the area in order to designate building plots. A few hours after the invasion, around 200 villagers wearing *Nyau* masks⁷ came into the area and attacked the town people with stones and sticks, trying to chase them off their land and 'back into the city'. The whole incident, in which one man was injured, lasted about an hour, and it was soon clear that the occupants had 'won'. Although *Nyau* masks are usually not in use for defence purposes, the incident brought considerable turmoil and fear among the occupants. Talking about *Nyau* to people in Lilongwe town, especially those from other regions, one can sense that there is a strong respect and mistrust towards this secret society in town, with which at least everybody who tried to lease some land in the neighbouring villages had been in contact or knows horrible stories about. The strategy of the villagers seemed to work. Many occupants started to doubt their decision and it took a lot of effort on the part of the committee to keep the people in place and continue with the land invasion. Talking to the villagers afterwards, they confirmed that this action had nothing to do with performing *Nyau* in the traditional sense. They said that they had merely 'borrowed' the masks in order to instil fear and respect among the urbanites and in order to increase their leverage in the division of land by establishing a symbolic claim on it.

Whereas the villagers' strategy seemed to prove them right, the strategy of the urban occupants also seemed to work out in the end. Although the houses had not yet received official recognition on the part of the City Council, the houses were growing fast as the rainy season approached and people were confident that in the end they would win and that the City Council would sooner or later upgrade the area.

The struggle over the city thus involves a series of strategies and material

⁶ For their own consumption, many had already found other solutions. Apart from buying food, many cultivated the land bordering their villages to the other – rural – side of Lilongwe. Others had resorted to using relatives' land lying further out in rural Lilongwe or they had leased land, just as the urbanites did.

⁷ *Nyau* (also known as *gule wamkulu*, the big dance) is a male secret society in which Chewa boys are customarily initiated and which parades its masked dancers, especially during funerals and Chewa girls' initiation ceremonies (see Englund 2001). While *Nyau* is condemned as pagan by Christian churches, it represents an authority distinct from these churches and local politics at the same time (ibid.).

and symbolic resources anchored in different economic, social, political, cultural, and finally, legal orders and domains. These different legalities do not necessarily correspond to 'formal', 'informal' or 'traditional' spheres of law. Rather, the process of gaining access to land involves an intense 'forum shopping process' (K. von Benda-Beckmann 1994) during which people recur to different legal forums, institutions and mechanisms. While people 'shop' between different legal forums, they are also involved in an intense re-negotiation and re-creation process of law. By mixing and recycling notions of law and legality pertaining to the different legal domains, they create new legalities and re-fill them with new or additional meaning(s), as became apparent in the case of the application forms for plot allocation, which developed a series of different legal meanings in the course of the allocation process; or as regards the exchange of land for plots for the villagers, which from a state law perspective would not have been necessary. The extent to which people are able to appropriate different legal forums is, however, not unlimited. The case study shows that social status, economic resources, political, physical and symbolic power are decisive in gaining access to different legalities as well as in imposing them (*ibid.*).

Moreover, the case study clearly shows that the construction of a different legality or illegality, widely perceived from a state law perspective as a means to gain access or control over urbanisation processes, is not only related to the poor and marginalised informal city and city dwellers. The image of the poor, marginalised and powerless, who in the absence of the state take matters into their own hands and work their way through to the city by-passing or opposing state law, has for a long time dominated the view of the 'informal' city. This has also included the so-called 'street level law', which was understood as a parallel set of law that had largely developed in the absence of or as a substitute for a malfunctioning and authoritarian state law (see de Sousa Santos 1977; for a critique Perry 1998; Ghannam 2002).

Although this informal law has been widely interpreted as an act of resistance and emancipation against an authoritarian or absent state, the case study shows that the land invasion 'down there' has favoured other interests than those of the landless urban poor. In fact, it seems that the 'illegal' and 'informal' urbanisation processes from below have been colonised by other, much more powerful public and private stakeholders and interests. Looking at the events and series of interventions, one could not get rid of the impression that the land invasion somehow resembled a carefully staged and timed performance in which both 'official' institutions and 'illegal' perpetrators were following their respective official roles and rules, while other issues were actually at stake. Though the lack of resistance on part of the City Council was largely explained by a lack of public resources, the lack of resistance to the land invasion seems to suggest that the

invasion was also largely in the City Council's interest. Lacking resources and effective enforcement strategies to make an extension of the city work, the illegal invasion of an area that would anyway be legalised thereafter and incorporated into the city seemed to be the lesser evil. At the same time, the land invasion simply meant big business. As much as it has been an important means for the poor to gain access to a plot, it has also been a great commercial and political success that has largely favoured the local party elite. In this context, Nientied and van der Linden conclude in their research on Karachi that, "*to many politicians and government officers, the illegal subdivisions constitute an arena, where they can operate and get their votes and profits from without ever having to challenge the system or to make functional demand. Since the whole operation is illegal, demands by definition are always for favours, rather than for rights. And because all actors depend on each other, they are careful not to disturb the balance in the system.*" (Nientied & van der Linden cited in McAuslan 1998: 28)

The manifold legal constellations to which people recurred in the course of the process, shifting skilfully between customary and state law, the use of *Nyau* masks and the police force in their attempts to enforce or defend their claim on land, shows that urbanisation processes are constituted by different legal orders that exist side by side, with state law embodied in the City Council regulations being no more than one legal system amongst others. The use people make of these legal orders thereby does not necessarily correspond to the specific legality: The fact that the villagers had a legitimate claim on their land based on customary law provided, for example, important leverage as regards their bargaining space in the course of the land invasion. At the same time, the central position of power that the United Democratic Front (UDF) has achieved on the local level can be considered to be yet another legal order in itself, one which is strongly based on its power as de-facto the only political party and its own particular interpretation of democracy.

The question of gaining access to land played a crucial role in the land invasion and indeed, signified that many poor urbanites would finally get their own plot and housing in a cheap and quick un-bureaucratic manner.⁸ The case shows that the land invasion was also a response to wider changing material and social conditions taking place in other areas of Lilongwe, which engendered a spatial re-organisation of the town. The civil service reform had triggered off considerable movement of the urban population within Lilongwe City. The introduction of the new housing allowance scheme and the abolition of the government policy of providing housing for civil servants meant for many a further decrease in liv-

⁸ Following usual procedures and having no means to bribe or exchange favours with an influential person in order to gain access to a plot, we were told that people may have to wait up to 15 years (!) before getting a plot via the City Council.

ing and housing standards.⁹ This particularly concerned the middle and higher income civil servants for whom government had leased houses in the typical middle-class areas, such as Area 47, 18 or 15 on favourable lease terms that were terminated with the new scheme. Although housing allowances in general are high, most civil servants were not able to afford the new – significantly higher – market rents that the house owners introduced. Many of them were forced to move to cheaper and poorer neighbourhoods, largely situated at the margins of town, where rents were still cheap and a basic infrastructure in place, such as was the case in Sector 7.

In fact, in Sector 7 a massive change of ownership has taken place since 1998. I have already mentioned that many low-income civil servants had already bought a plot at the time the area was invaded. They planned to move there when they retired, investing their lump sum payment upon retirement in the construction of a small house, as many inhabitants of Sector 7 had done before them. Many civil servants now simply brought forward their move to Sector 7, leading to hectic building activity in the area. Most of the higher income people that had settled in the sector had, however, only discovered the area in the course of the housing reform, and decided to take advantage of low rents and land prices and the existing infrastructure within the area.

Notwithstanding this, most civil servants perceived the move to Sector 7 as an economic and social decline. Finding themselves in the midst of an urban area in the making with no access to plumbed water in the houses and no flushing toilets not only meant a decrease in material living standards; the relatively close-knit social structure in Sector 7, the way people behaved and dressed, which was perceived as rural and traditional by most newcomers from richer areas, also signified for many a decline in their modernity and urbanity of their way of living.

For the poor, on the other hand, who had contributed significantly to the urbanisation of the area by gaining access to basic urban infrastructure, the urbanisation of their area by the rich eventually turned against them. For many of them it meant social, economic, and further spatial marginalisation. Many had not succeeded in developing their plots and shelter since the land invasion in 1998. For a long time, this had not been a problem. It was usually enough to put a pile of bricks on the plot in order to be considered developed by the City Council, which in turn was the precondition for not getting evicted. The rising pressure on land in the course of the housing reform and rising urbanisation has, however, led to stricter enforcement of the eviction rules¹⁰ by the local

⁹ For a detailed discussion on the housing allowance and Good Governance reform in Malawi see Anders (2005).

¹⁰ If a plot owner is not able to start constructing a shelter on his/her plot within six months from

City Council office, which has forced many of the poorer people to leave, selling their plots to people who were in search of a place to stay. Apart from those who had succeeded in getting a plot 'down there' where they could remain for a little while, some returned to the rural areas. Others again moved to other poorer neighbourhoods, which were usually less developed and where rents were still cheap, or where they could move in with relatives. This also included the many tenants who were no longer able to pay the rising rents in Sector 7 or who were forced to leave because the plot owners wanted to sell their land. From the really poor people in Sector 7, only those who had managed to acquire a plot when they were still better off and those who had special tenant arrangements¹¹ managed to remain.

Looking at the development of the land invasion and the gentrification of Sector 7, it seems that history has come full circle: It was once again the very poor who were forced to move and to start again from scratch, fighting over land and infrastructure, and who were expropriated from an urban development process that they themselves had largely initiated. While development projects and international donors declare the poor to be the target and agents of their own development process, it appears that they have little bargaining space to defend their city against richer and more powerful interests that, in the face of a crumbling modernity, are increasingly usurping these urban development processes targeted and carried out by the poor.

At the same time, the marginalisation process that led to the land invasion was also motivated by land speculation following rising prices for land and housing triggered off by government reform. While many people only sold their plots when they were forced to, rising land prices motivated many inhabitants to re-sell their plots and houses hoping for a considerable profit to be invested in a business venture or in a house in the village upon their return.¹² Apart from the plot allocation committee, whose major interest was money and for whom the plot allocation was primarily an attractive source of income, most occupants saw the land occupation as an opportunity for quick money in an environment in which 'formal' and 'informal' labour opportunities were becoming increasingly scarce, thus endangering the urban income portfolio. They planned to re-sell their plots as soon as possible, as most of them did not have the money to develop the plots anyway. In fact, the better off among them already owned houses and wanted to have additional plots in order to re-sell them and profit from civil

the day the plot is acquired, the City Council has the right to withdraw the plot and re-sell it to somebody else.

¹¹ Special tenant arrangements include, for example, agreements in which tenants look after houses for absent urban migrants. In exchange, they do not have to pay rent.

¹² According to the City Council Site Officer in 2001, the year that the new housing allowance scheme was introduced, more plots than ever were sold within Sector 7.

servants' need for housing. Others planned to build a small house on the newly acquired plot. They wanted to move there, while renting out their houses in Sector 7, which were much better equipped, had a basic infrastructure and were closer to town.¹³

4.3 Constructing Legality II: Infrastructure and Social Services

*"With development there are also more social problems."
(Interview No. 71, Local Development Activist)*

Similar dynamics are discernible when looking at the conflicts evolving around access to infrastructure and social services. In contrast to the land invasion, which was largely directed against an absent and truncated state that was neither willing nor able to provide an adequate infrastructure for its urban inhabitants, the struggle over infrastructure and local development was actually taking place because of the sudden strong presence of the state that challenged existing power constellations and access criteria to social services. In this struggle, donors and local NGOs played an important role.

NGOs had taken up a leading role in local communal development over the last years. The lack of financial resources from the state for the development of local infrastructure (Aina 1997), and a changing development doctrine on the part of donors and NGOs in favour of small-scale local community development projects, had given them a particularly prominent position over the last two decades (see for a critique and discussion Craig & Mayo 1995; Abbott 1996; Azevedo 1998). This corporatist approach to local development, which is believed to be more sustainable and easier to manage, not only implies the bypassing or only marginal involvement of state agencies and close cooperation with local grass-roots organisations and indigenous NGOs, it also means that donors are more directly involved and more visible as local players. Apart from the material and social resources they provide, their presence at the local level also refers to the additional institutional framework they provide, i.e. the policy principles, rules and regulations which define criteria of access to support, infrastructure or otherwise. The latter is also referred to as 'development law' or 'project law' by some authors (for example, Weilemann 2005, K. von Benda-Beckmann 2001). In the first place, this refers to the concrete project level, such

¹³ Many of the houses they constructed resemble the enormous houses found in the residential areas from which most of these civil servants came, and are separated from the rest of the area with high fences. In fact, one could observe that plot owners and tenants often changed roles: while they constructed large houses with iron sheets and high fences in the front of the plot, they themselves planned to live in a small house in the backyard, usually referred to as the 'boys squatter', a colonial term which denotes the shelter for the servants.

as the rules and regulations defining access criteria for the implementation of projects. For example, many small-scale projects on local level require that the recipients contribute at least 25% of the whole project costs in money or kind in order to ensure the 'ownership' of the project.¹⁴ On a more general level, it refers to the range of policy principles and paradigms underlying development cooperation, the most recent ones being poverty reduction, the focus on gender, or participation, ownership and empowerment.

As we shall see, this 'project law' became an important additional legal arena in the conflict surrounding access to infrastructure that evolved within the community upon the arrival of the higher income strata. Moreover, this conflict became particularly pronounced with the establishment of the new local administrative structure, which completely re-shuffled the local balance of power and by the same token, ownership and access to public services.

4.3.1 'Development and Politics do not go Together'

The development of the infrastructure in Sector 7 was mainly the result of the people who had first come into the area during or shortly after the invasion. Soon after the area had been 'legalised' and upgraded by the City Council, a handful of mostly educated low rank civil servants and businessmen had formed a so-called 'Community Development Committee' (CDC) as the organisational base from which they wanted to organise and lobby for the development of the area. These CDCs, which also developed in other 'illegally' occupied areas in Lilongwe, should not be understood as autonomous and informal structures that came into being as spontaneous movements. They formed part of the new urban policy of 'upgrading', which had been adopted by the City Council at the beginning of the 1990s and which foresaw that the development of infrastructure should be largely left in the hands of these local 'self-help groups'. In the absence of any public financial resources to provide community infrastructure, the CDCs were to provide a new institutional framework to facilitate community-initiated development by approaching donors and NGOs directly. The City Council's role was to provide credible institutional back-up for the local CDCs towards international donors and NGOs and the specific know-how needed for the establishment of urban infrastructure, for example, the urban planning framework or technical data on water or sewage.

Although the locals in Sector 7 were very active and motivated, first attempts to approach donors and NGOs yielded little success. Only after Sector 7 was included within the so-called Urban Poverty Alleviation Programme (UPAP) in

¹⁴ See for example for the Malawi Social Action Fund Bloom, Chilowa et al. (2005).

1997 did things start to move. The project had been put in place by the German Technical Co-operation (GTZ), but was largely handled by its local counterpart, the Christian Service Committee (CSC), a large and very popular Malawian NGO. Trying to combat rising urban poverty in Malawi, the project aimed at enhancing the capacity of urban communities to obtain access to non-governmental funding for the financing of community based projects, mainly infrastructure and small-scale enterprises. So-called community facilitators were trained on needs assessment, proposal writing and project management and implementation. The CDCs were adopted as the central operational structures of the project.

Since the involvement with the UPAP-project, the development of the area sped up significantly. Since 1998, major achievements have been made. Electricity has been put in place in most of the area, funded by the European Union. The eight water kiosks that finally allowed for direct access to tap water were financed by the Malawian Social Action Funds (MASAF), The World Bank financed funds for small-scale projects for social development. In 2000, the German Embassy provided funding for the construction of a school block, which should eventually develop into a complete primary school.

While in the beginning the project proceeded well and community participation was high, the implementation of the Local Government Act and the first local government elections in November 2000 brought the whole project – and in due course, local development efforts – to a standstill. Contrary to its purpose, i.e. to facilitate communal development, the introduction of local government and the election of the ward councillor became a major challenge to local development efforts. The project and community development as a whole became a fierce battleground for political influence and personal favours, in which the major purpose of the development efforts, namely to provide access to social services, was completely pushed into the background.

Local politics and political influence has always played an important role in development work within Lilongwe, where the political structure has traditionally been more heterogeneous than in the South and North of the country.¹⁵ This political heterogeneity was also reflected in the CDC, in which members of all-important political parties and other – traditional and religious authorities – were represented. This was not just coincidence. The incorporation of all

¹⁵ While the Southern Region of Malawi is a stronghold of the UDF, the MCP dominates the Central Region and Afford the North. Lilongwe – although it is in the Central Region – has a special position. This is related to (1) the fact that the UDF has a traditionally stronger position in urban areas, (2) the capital of Malawi hosting the political centre; thus one can assume that the UDF finds strong support among the political and administrative elite, (3) Lilongwe having a very heterogeneous structure in terms of its migrants, who generally come from all over Malawi, whereas towns like Zomba or Blantyre appear to be more homogenous in terms of their regional and tribal composition (Ott et al. 2000: Appendices).

major political stakeholders was also enforced by the project, because it guaranteed that *'talking development'* – as one of our respondents put it – was always at the centre of interest, although major political controversies existed among the members.

However, local government structures and the victory of the UDF-candidate in the first local elections severely worsened the fragile balance of power. Despite informal agreements that foresaw a certain transition period in order to maintain a personal continuity with projects already started, most CDCs in Lilongwe were immediately dissolved by the new – mainly UDF – councillors and substituted by local UDF-activists.

This was also the case in Sector 7. The Christian Service Committee refused to work with the new UDF-CDC, arguing that it was too politicised and politically imbalanced and fearing a loss of credibility within the community. More than about the politicisation of the process, the Christian Service Committee was worried about the fact that the newly-elected committee had no know-how in community mobilisation and project management, both required in order to work for community development. The fact that the old CDC consistently denied assisting the new CDC in performing their tasks made matters worse. Most of the old CDC-members felt that the personal effort, time and energy they had hitherto invested in the projects had been betrayed by the new CDC, who instead claimed that they had been achieved by the UDF-councillor, the party and President Muluzi himself.

This held as well for the Christian Service Committee (CSC) and the international donor community, which both felt that their development efforts were being expropriated and misused for political reasons. While organisations such as the CSC acted as the missing link created by the abolition of the old local government structures in 1994, acting as a 'place-maker' for the new structures to come, their achievements, experience and guidelines with which they were running the projects were not considered at all. On the contrary, the introduction of the local government process has turned out to be counterproductive in running projects, completely turning upside-down their aims, principles and target groups. For instance, a local leader of the 'business-peoples' party' UDF encouraged the community to share the money 'earned' at the water points¹⁶, which was meant for the payment of the water bills and for the maintenance of the water point, as an additional source of income among the users, which in turn almost led to a closure of the water kiosk.

The Christian Service Committee has now started to re-train the new CDC. Apart from community mobilisation and skills training, major emphasis is put on training in transformation and civic education. The target group includes

¹⁶ Tap water is sold at a current rate of 50 Tambala per bucket.

all the key stakeholders in development, i.e. the old CDC, facilitators, the community, the Chief, the ward councillor and local politicians. Apart from some new CDC members, the old development committee members never attended the meetings and neither did the councillor: personal rivalries, serious political divisions, and most notably the low interest on the part of the councillor and the UDF-establishment in the community development process, are believed to be the major reasons. It seems that most of the new CDC members view their election into the new CDC as being only marginally related to the fact that they are now in charge of community development. Instead, they view their new position as a starting point to kick-off their career within the local and national UDF party hierarchy: Asked about his future plans for Sector 7, by which we meant future development plans, the new chairman of the CDC told us that he was planning to run in the next elections as an MP for the UDF-party.

Many inhabitants of Sector 7 view the decreasing importance and growing politicisation of community development very critically. Especially those who have been living in the area since 1998 and have invested a lot of time and money in communal development, attending meetings and paying their share for the projects, feel that their efforts in making development work are being spoiled and retarded by the political power struggle. At the same time, the ownership that local party leaders and the councillor claim for the community projects has also led to a shift in expectations away from donors and NGOs and towards government. Increasingly, people are refusing to participate and pay for development, claiming that it should be actually the task of government to provide for local infrastructure: *"Why should we participate and contribute to build a school, when it is the duty of our government to do that?"* (Interview No. 16, Mr. and Mrs. Mseu)

The rapidly vanishing self-help spirit within the community had already had an impact on current projects. The school project, which should have been extended into a complete primary school encompassing all grades, has come to a complete halt and no new projects have yet been submitted. Some old CDC members are now trying to push for communal development efforts on their own, using their skills, know-how and good personal relations with donor organisations to realise some projects, such as the roads project or the individual tap water pipes. Motives for these strong individual efforts to improve common infrastructure were not altogether altruistic. Many of them pertained to the middle-class, who had meanwhile constructed additional houses they intended to rent out to higher income people – mostly civil servants who, in turn, also expected better social services. Whereas this group of people tried to push for infrastructure in order to satisfy their new clients, they also hoped that the civil servants, with their special channels to government and the donor community,

would further facilitate access to infrastructure in a quick and 'unbureaucratic' fashion, which would no longer need to depend on this communal, participatory donor approach. And in fact, it seems that this will also be the policy in future: when we left the area, there were rumours that some richer civil servants were getting individual tap water installed on their plots together with some community development experts, who had helped them by giving their written consent, needed for the City Council to take action.

In order to counteract these developments, the Christian Service Committee and the GTZ had plans to broaden the development structure by giving more consideration to other communal, more 'neutral' and 'natural' power structures, such as the Traditional Authority and the religious associations. However, it appeared that the steadily rising political influence of the UDF, fostered still more by the implementation of the Local Government Act, would sooner or later also succeed in co-opting the Chief. The stalwart, self-declared non-partisan developmentalist¹⁷ became increasingly challenged within the community. The fact that he had been offered the chance to become the new Group-Village Headman of this part of Lilongwe, a position that is assigned by the President of the Republic, met with a very mixed reaction within the community. Especially his opponents in the local development committees perceived this new position of power very critically, arguing that it was simply an attempt to silence the hitherto so-critical and active Chief. Although the latter denied this, his refusal to take action in the conflict around infrastructure as well as in the 'illegal' land allocation for many confirmed the fact that he had already changed sides.

With the new wave of democratisation in many countries in Africa and elsewhere at the beginning of the 1990s, decentralisation programmes have experienced a renaissance on the international development agenda. Especially in the context of the civil society debate, they were viewed as an institutional and administrative guarantee to enhance and strengthen political participation and empowerment. Only the successful participation and incorporation of local movements and initiatives would ultimately guarantee successful democratisation in developing countries, enhance political equity and ultimately further state legitimacy (Wunsch 2000; Rondinelli 1990; Mukumbe 1998; Aina 1997).

At the same time, effective decentralised state structures were also considered necessary structural elements of economic development and by the same token, poverty reduction. Through their political and fiscal autonomy, local government structures were perceived as being more efficient and effective in delivering services and tackling local needs, which in turn would enhance local welfare. Their presence at the local level would also make them more responsive to peoples' needs and more able to adapt to local circumstances and conditions. Finally,

¹⁷ He called himself "*Mfumu ya chitukuko*" – a Chief who is development-oriented.

greater direct accountability on local level would control corruption more effectively and as such, would enhance Good Governance (Steineich 2000; Manor 1995).

However, looking at the struggles over access to public services in Sector 7, the opposite seems to be the case. Similar to experiences in many other countries (see Mukumbe 1998 for Zimbabwe and Samoff 1990 for South Africa), the implementation of the Local Government Act in Sector 7 actually led to a centralisation of local power structures. The fact that the UDF won almost all seats in the local government elections led to the establishment of a de-facto single party state which – similar to Banda's MCP – has its power base firmly rooted in the local grass-roots level. By hijacking the relatively autonomous and vibrant local community structure of the CDC, they were able to convert it into a major political propaganda instrument of the party that claimed development efforts thus far achieved were achievements of the party and the state. Taking over the CDC enabled the UDF to control other important local forces, like the Chief and the NGOs, whose influence over community development was curtailed significantly. At the same time, the CDC became the major political springboard for aspiring local political forces. Rather than as an asset to further communal development, its new members saw the CDC as the first step in their party political career.

This change in power structure also led to changing expectations towards the political establishment. After a short period of liberalism and democratic self-determination, the decentralisation process and the strong presence of the UDF at the local level have led to the resurrection of clientelism as a typical political behavioural pattern; a means of gaining access to state resources and infrastructure. The worsening social and economic conditions on the one hand, which made it socially and financially increasingly difficult for people to engage in their own development, and on the other, the arrival of a higher income strata, which at the same time also represented a political class, i.e. the civil servants, seem to have reinforced this development, stratifying urban development further. Some community members, including the Chief, had hoped that the presence of civil servants would indeed facilitate their efforts towards a further improvement of the public infrastructure for the well-being of the whole community. Instead, the case suggests that urban development became more and more individualised, favouring richer and more politically influential community members. Whereas the community development project had started out as broad community-based project that would allow especially poorer people to gain access to infrastructure, the project became increasingly driven by the interests of a few, who, through their political and economic power, were controlling and channelling the development process. Instead of a participatory and

locally-driven development process, the democratisation and localisation of governance had favoured corruption and particularism, further marginalising those who should actually have been the major beneficiaries, i.e. the poor and less influential.

This also concerns the role of NGOs and donors. The case shows their importance and power, as well as their limits, in shaping and controlling local conflicts and urbanisation processes. Contrary to their largely 'a-political' or 'non-partisan' image, the case reveals how closely they are interwoven as actors within local power and legal structures. Their know-how and financial resources have given them enormous power in shaping local development and local power constellations, rendering the members of the CDC highly recognised local authorities. At the same time, the implementation of the new local power structure has severely challenged their existence as local actors as well as their project law and principles. The conflict over who owns the development and controls access to it has shown how politicised these concepts actually are. On the one hand, the development arena has become a fierce battleground over political influence that has had little to do with development at all. On the other, we have seen how deeply development processes and principles may be transformed in actual social practice, being subverted and expropriated from their original meanings and re-defined by different social actors and contexts. Principles of ownership and self-initiative that were targeted towards the whole, largely poor community, became highly stratified with the implementation of the Local Government Act and worsening social and economic conditions. The self-help initiative became a highly individualised effort that largely ran between party-members and rich inhabitants of the area, who solely aimed to increase the value of their houses and in due course, their rents. NGOs and donors have reacted to this development, re-defining their projects, project laws and procedures by retiring to more 'neutral' and less political grounds. However, in the face of generally rising political influence, it seems that rather than a retirement to neutral ground, the adequate incorporation of the political class into a participatory approach is what is actually required.

4.4 Constructing Legality III: Jurisdiction Between Chief and State

A third major field within which the dynamics, contradictions and stratification of urbanisation processes are clearly evident is the field of jurisdiction or dispute settlement. As shown above, urbanisation processes are based upon a mix of different legalities – and the same holds for other legal institutions, such as dispute settlement mechanisms. Non-state laws and dispute settlement systems

also play an important role in many 'proper' urban areas, where they exist side by side with state law. In some fields of intervention, such as plot allocation, they may even have more legal relevance and enforcement authority than 'formal' state regulations (see for Lilongwe Englund 2002b).

However, it is especially in these 'upgraded' and not-yet or only marginally urbanised areas, where the presence of the state is generally weak and the Chief's position as judicial, political and administrative authority still strong, that the co-existence of different legal systems develops particular dynamics. The social, economic and political structure of these areas still in the making, and the changes and turmoil they are facing in the course of urbanisation, is reflected in the construction of different legalities, as well as the shift in importance of different domains. This urbanisation of legality is also reflected in the changing role of the Chief: and we shall see that rather than disappearing, his judicial, administrative and political function and authority are changing.

4.4.1 'The urbanisation of the Traditional Authority'¹⁸

When I started planning my research in Sector 7 in 1998, I collected a research permit from the University of Malawi and was planning to go to the Lilongwe City Authorities to inform them of my stay in Sector 7. Thus, I was surprised when my Malawian colleague suggested that we would also have to consult the Chief of the area. It was a local NGO involved in the development of infrastructure, with which we had already made contact, that eventually presented us to the Chief. We informed him of our intentions and asked for permission to stay in the area for the next six months. He found us a house to stay in close to his own place, for safety reasons, as he said. He organised a watchman and a girl to carry the water. Finally, we also had to present ourselves to interested community members whom he had summoned one afternoon, urging the people to collaborate with us and participate in the interviews.

It seemed that his status within the community did not really differ from the village context. He was highly appreciated within the community, as well as by the town officials, the NGOs, religious associations and the local party branches of the UDF and MCP, which were still relatively weak at that time. There were rumours that he had been put in power by the UDF party leadership, who had organised the land invasion of Sector 7. However, little importance was attributed to this fact. Since Banda, and even before, people had become used to the fact that the Chief would be under the influence of the ruling party, and democracy was not expected to change this.¹⁹

¹⁸ Interview No. 115, Chief Mpande.

¹⁹ The principle of indirect rule that the British introduced in Malawi and that incorporated the

Apart from the administrative and organisational tasks already mentioned in the last chapter, the Chief's major responsibility was dispute settlement. Issues discussed concerned labour disputes, especially those involving casual labourers working in the building sector. Disputes usually evolved around claims concerning unfulfilled payments for moulded bricks or constructed houses, to be paid by the employer or the future owners of the house. Many among the claimants were women working as water carriers, who, usually faced more difficulties getting paid than their male colleagues. Family disputes, such as domestic violence or maintenance claims for extra-conjugal wives and children, also made up a large proportion of court cases. Finally, he also dealt with 'petty crimes', such as theft or fraud.

Most of his verdicts, which especially in the case of labour disputes usually involved the payment of considerable sums of money, were executed and people abided by his ruling. It seems that his authority was largely based on the same principles as in the village context. On the one hand, the lack of another judicial force within the area, and the fact that many migrants had not been in town for long, provided a quasi-urban environment in which his power as a village headman remained largely intact. On the other hand, the tight social structure and the strong social cohesion in Sector 7, especially discernible among its 'autochthon' inhabitants, provided an important basis for his authority. This was also the case for the builder and brick moulder community, which – although most of their members came from outside – knew each other very well, having worked together at different building sites and which almost represented a community apart. In this respect, the physical presence of the Chief in the immediate vicinity of the working environment was not only a spatial convenience for employers and employees – it was also important in terms of generating the social pressure needed to reach and settle agreements. Non-compliance with an agreement or – worse – not showing up at the Chief's court would have challenged one's social status within the community severely. By the same token, it would have endangered one's position as an employer or worker. Especially those employers who did not treat their workers well and were often found in front of the court faced difficulties recruiting good and motivated workers for the future.

The spatial and social cohesion of his community also played an important role in the argumentation of the Chief in dispute settlements. Especially in cases of theft, or family and neighbour disputes, the Chief strongly emphasised their social and communal dimension. They were not only illicit acts, for which solution, punishment and compensation needed to be sought; they also violated the social structure of the community and its moral values. The concluding remarks of the Chief and the Chief's council always emphasised the importance of

Traditional Authorities was maintained by Banda's MCP (see Chapter 2).

a functioning social structure and good communal and – in case of family disputes – conjugal relationships. The punishment or the agreement reached was always also interpreted as a step towards the healing of both the individual and the communal structure.

Yet the Chief could not do without the state authority. While he urged people to comply with his ruling, he also warned them that – if they intended to ignore his verdict – he would have to inform the police and the lower state courts in order for them to take the matter further. In case of crime and violence, this meant that the police were informed and people arrested. At the same time, he told those who were not satisfied with his ruling that they were free to appeal against his judgement before higher state authorities. The subtle threat that he would appeal to the very same state court system, which people were, however, free to use if not satisfied, usually worked well: in most cases people complied, even if they were not happy with the outcome of a dispute. This was especially true for those people who had little or no knowledge at all of how to gain access to the state courts in the city. They did not usually have sufficient economic resources at their disposal to pay for the issuing of necessary documents and lawyers. But even if they did have the resources, many decided against it. The prospect of being involved in a dispute for an endless period of time, as was often the case with state courts, made many refrain from this option.

The extent to which people complied and refrained from taking matters further also depended strongly upon the issue at stake. In case of property grabbing, for example, most people simply by-passed the Chief and went straight to the district commissioner and the magistrates' courts. In such cases, there was usually too much at stake for both victims and perpetrators to accept the verdict of the Chief. The reason for the loss of his authority in this realm was also due to the fact that considerable awareness in Malawi about the possibilities of seeking 'outside' legal support had grown up over the last decade (see Chapter 7). The modification of the Malawian inheritance law that strengthened the position of the women, together with a large public awareness campaign by the Malawian government and NGOs, encouraged women, especially in the urban areas, to seek legal advice in order to defend their property, and made state courts more easily accessible both in terms of resources, know-how, and awareness. Although most women still went to the Chief first in order to urge him to bear witness to the actual property-grabbing act and convince the relatives to have mercy in the face of the already difficult situation of the women, this did not usually work. The Chief's role in these disputes was usually confined to giving evidence and bearing testimony if the women decided to appeal to the state court.

Another area in which the Chief had lost much of his authority was petty crime. The introduction of the 'community policing force', which aimed to con-

struct a local civilian police force to work together closely with the local police, changed his role profoundly. This initiative had already started in 1998 and aimed at increasing security in urban areas by using local security guards, also called “neighbourhood watch” or “local crime prevention panel”, in order to fight the rising crime rate and make up for the lack and inadequacy of the local police force. This local volunteer crime prevention force, or “*Ndatopa Nanu crime Prevention*”²⁰, had the task of patrolling the area, especially during the night. If thieves or other criminals were caught, they were responsible for handing them over to the local police station.²¹ In former times, many of these cases used to be discussed in front of the Chief’s court, such as cases involving thieves or perpetrators of domestic violence. Now, most of these cases are handed over directly to the police and enter the state court system, thus curtailing the Chief’s power in legal matters further.

However, the major impact on his decreasing authority within the area was rooted in the changing political structures and the rising influence of the UDF. While he claimed to be independent, in the conflicts around the land invasion and especially community development, the Chief was very careful not to sympathise too much with the old CDC in which he had been the leading figure before becoming Chief. He argued that now with the change in the local administrative structure, it was the state administration that was to decide. He saw himself in the passive role of a coordinator and mediator in communal issues, trying to bring people together in order to solve their conflicts, and counselling them as to where to go and whom to ask in certain affairs. As regards the formal administrative and legal structures, the Chief was of course right, as the Local Government Act attributed the Traditional Authorities a mere consultative role.

Yet it seems that his strong non-partisanship and respect for the state authorities also derived from the growing influence of the UDF upon his position and his person. Amongst others, the UDF had also put him on the list of potential candidates for the vacant position of the Traditional Authority of Lilongwe Area. Chances were high that he would be elected to this office, which is entirely at the discretion of the president. Although he denied any influence upon his attitudes by this offer, a growing number of the ‘autochthon’ community in Sector 7, especially those that had been involved in community development, criticised his close collaboration with the local councillor and accused him of being co-opted by the new authority.

²⁰ “I am tired of you – Crime Prevention”.

²¹ Claims that the local force misused its power by indulging in self-justice, such as beating thieves to death, or that its members took advantage of their position to commit crime themselves, such as theft or rape, have increased over the last years. However, an investigation of this very important security and power aspect goes well beyond the scope of this book.

His authority was not only challenged by the new administrative and political forces from above; changing social, economic and demographic conditions in the community also had an impact on his fleeting authority. The area had been growing rapidly and anonymity among its inhabitants had been increasing at the same pace. The communal structure was becoming more and more fragile and differentiated, reducing the Chief's authority and grip on the areas as a whole. In addition, the in-migration of a different social, economic and more 'urbanised' class perceived his role as the Traditional Authority in a more critical light. They were not only richer, but also more educated and as such, could draw on other social, political, institutional and economic resources, such as the state, the police, courts, and political parties, to mention only a few. Especially for the newly marginalised civil servants, the powerful position of the Chief in Sector 7 was perceived as a major backward step into an urban 'rurality', an anachronism in the midst of a modernity to which they had been forced to adapt again. Although most of the civil servants viewed the role of the Chief very critically, there were also some who re-discovered him as an additional arena for dispute settlement, which they would choose depending on the nature of the dispute and their particular interests. This was especially the case with more minor conflicts, such as problems within the family or the neighbourhood. Thus, many rich people came to the Chief to discuss their marriage problems before appealing to the state courts.

By and large, however, the Chief's political, administrative and judicial authority seemed to dwindle considerably in the urbanisation process. In order to regain control over the area, he re-organised the community by electing sub-chiefs in order to make the area more manageable and to retain his grip on society. But it appears that his authority only remained unchallenged among the poorer majority of the population, who did not have the resources and the know-how to appeal to 'outside' dispute settlement mechanisms, and who also had had a different urban experience, one that did not create the need to challenge the notion of the Chief as an authority in general.

The urbanisation processes Sector 7 had been experiencing since 1998 also had an enormous impact on the Traditional Authority and his role as a judicial, political, administrative, and moral authority. The new local political structures, the presence and activities of NGOs, and the rising importance of public institutions, especially the state courts – that via the in-migration of the civil servants and a stronger awareness due to democratisation in general had entered the public consciousness – have challenged the role of the Traditional Authority profoundly. Contrary to conventional urbanisation theory, the Traditional Authority did not disappear, to be substituted by public administrative and judicial institutions, but rather, his function was 'urbanised'. Although his power has

been narrowed down considerably due to the emergence of other powers within the community, the Chief has remained an important figure in dispute settlement, and is an integral part of the urban life world. Whereas urbanisation has led to the pluralisation of legal arenas, the case shows that these arenas are at the same time highly segregated: it appears that a kind of two-pronged jurisdiction has developed. Poorer inhabitants, and those who have no know-how and financial resources in order to access the state courts, seem to continue to go to the Chief. Richer inhabitants, on the other hand, may choose from a wider legal arena. They may seek the legal assistance of the Chief to settle disputes, to save on costs, time and energy. Or they may go to the state courts, as they have the financial opportunities and the know-how to enter 'outside' state law.

The modification of inheritance law and the awareness raised among mostly women to take legal action in cases of property grabbing has opened a wider range of legal options for the poorer part of the population. Nonetheless, for other issues where less legal know-how and assistance exists, the poor continue to choose the traditional court, while state justice remains largely confined to richer and more educated persons.

This urbanising role and function of the Chief also seems to challenge notions of participatory approaches advocated by donors and NGOs. This particularly concerns the new strategy envisaged by the NGO in Sector 7 to re-establish a movement for development with so-called non-partisan and 'natural' powers within the community, as described in the last paragraph. Bearing in mind the rising influence of the UDF on a local level, it seems that the Chief is far from providing a natural and neutral power force. It remains to be seen whether the new approach to reach the 'marginalised locals' will work out or whether it will be – via the strong influence on the Chief – equally absorbed by the state and the party.

4.5 Conclusions: The Struggle for Permanence

In this chapter I have tried to show that the 'making of the city' provides yet another important aspect of social (in)securities of urban migrants in town. (In)securities related to the city, such as housing or access to other infrastructure, are not alleviated once the migrant has firmly established himself in town. Rather, it seems that most migrants are involved in a continuous struggle over the city. These place-making processes hardly correspond to a modernist and organic notion of the city in which urban mobility is exclusively identified with social upward mobility. Rather than providing the waiting room for modernity, from where the poor and not yet urbanised slowly gain access to better jobs, housing and infrastructure closer to the centre of town, the 'marginal city' increasingly

seems to represent an urban 'normality', from which fewer and fewer people seem able to escape. Indeed, we have seen that to an increasingly large extent the marginal city also involves those no longer fully urbanised who, having been expelled by modernity, are being swept into these rural-urban borderlands.

Whereas peoples' urbanity seems to remain confined to these areas, this does not imply that they dispose of their permanent, albeit rather marginalised, access to town. Quite the reverse, the city seems to be in a constant flux of social, economic, symbolic and spatial re-structuring processes, which involves its inhabitants in a continuous struggle in order to gain access to or maintain their grip on the city (Sassen 1996; Harvey 1995). These struggles are especially intense in the rural-urban borderlands, where a new urbanity seems to be developing, characterised by a series of different lifestyles, resources, institutions, strategies, and tactics, all existing side by side.

The dynamics that develop out of the co-existence of these different urbanities is especially visible in the legal domain. In their attempts to appropriate the city, people incessantly mix and combine different legal orders, thereby creating new ones – as we have seen with the 'illegal' land invasion, where customary entitlements – though being officially superseded by state-law – were recognised and compensated for with a number of plots; or the recycling of *Nyao* practices as a deterrent and means of enforcement to defend 'customary' entitlements. Apart from 'formal' and 'traditional' law, this also involves the different procedures, concepts and ideologies of NGOs, donors and political parties. Following Arce & Long (2000), who describe the transformations of development interventions in the local context into 'new' local forms of development and modernity as 'counter-developments', I shall call these new legal orders 'counter-legalities'.

Contrary to a conventional understanding of the 'informal' city, these 'counter-legalities' are not used by poor and powerless urban dwellers on the one hand and the criminal and lawless on the other. They are also important mechanisms in gaining access used by the rich and powerful and by an impoverished state structure that has no means to impose its orders and where personal political and financial gains often mix with public interests. In this respect, they are not only to be understood as counter-legalities in the sense of resistance-strategies by the poor and marginalised aiming at opposing or changing fundamental power relations. Rather, they appear to be adaptation strategies within specific local social, economic, political and legal power constellations that are more based on favours than rights (Simone 1997).

Most of the urban migrants in Sector 7 who had come to town will hardly ever leave these marginalised areas, thus remaining in a perpetual borderland situation. While Structural Adjustment has largely immobilised people as regards their social and economic mobility, the harsh social and economic condi-

tions have forced them to increase their physical mobility. Social and economic constraints have made the struggle over the city increasingly harsh. This especially concerns the poor and already marginalised, who find themselves trapped within a continuous urbanisation process. While they make an enormous effort to gain access to the city, being involved in land invasion processes and the development of infrastructure, they are not able to maintain their access to the city. Economic and social changes taking place in other areas of town and higher up the economic ladder seem to deprive them of their city again and again, as it is usurped by the richer and more powerful urbanites. Although most of them are also moving downward in economic terms, they are still in a better position to counter, defend and control their urbanisation processes. Decentralisation processes and the political changes that have taken place over time have further accelerated this 'tragic of the boundaries'. Whereas decentralisation aimed at broadening and democratising access to the city, the process, together with the social and economic constraints, has actually stratified it further. Instead of supporting people in establishing some kind of permanence, the evidence from Sector 7 suggests that the development triggered off by the Local Government Act had the opposite effect. In their struggle for permanence, people have been increasingly forced to be permanently on the move.

Chapter 5

Shifting Boundaries: Kinship, Friendship and Neighbourhood in Town

5.1 Introduction

In his famous essay '*Urbanism as a way of life*', Wirth (1938) describes the changes taking place in social relations through urbanisation as the most significant change and parameter of modernity that would take place in more or less the same way everywhere on the globe. Urbanism would unravel the complex multi-functional rural kinship structure into a myriad of highly segmental and functionally-divided relations, which would – amongst others – also encompass the development of a welfare state. This shift from a multiplex into a simplex societal structure with its highly differentiated social, economic, cultural, political or administrative functions would also encompass a different rationality. The collective, highly emotional and morally loaded *Gemeinschaft* would give way to a highly individualised *Gesellschaft* driven by utility, rationality and self-interest only (Wirth 1938; Simmel 1999; for a critique see Silver 1990). By the same token, friendship would develop as a new, specifically modern phenomenon and type of relationship, providing a private residue for emotional and affective matters and interests which by definition excluded any utilitarian or self-interested aspect (Giddens 1992; for a critique see Silver 1990; Grätz et al. 2003).

Looking into the urban end of network relations, this chapter argues that this is not necessarily the case. Taking a more open approach that understands urbanisation processes as "*a whole series of conflicts and contradictions*" (Sassen

2002: 18) over social, economic, spatial and symbolic resources of the city (see also Harvey 1990; Krätke 1990) also profoundly challenges classical sociological paradigms of the structure of urban society. The exploration of how migrants are weaving, maintaining and managing their network relations in town, trying to cope with 'old' and 'new' insecurities and needs, reveals that urban networks provide a complex web of relations and institutions. Urban network relations hardly fit into static, mutually exclusive relational concepts of modernity and tradition, ascribing specific functions, meaning and content to different types of relationships. Rather, they criss-cross between the formal and the informal, the modern and the traditional and the urban and the rural, mixing different material, social and symbolic resources, identities and skills.

The notion of the city as an unbound and contested space also allows for a dynamic view on urban network relations. We shall see that their social, economic and spatial boundaries and identities are in a continuous process of renegotiation, being continuously transcended and subverted by people in their efforts to gain access to the city. This also implies that the character of relationships may change. Different types of relationships may overlap and even coincide, providing shifting circles of support whose character and relationship shift over time and space and with changing social and economic needs and overall situations. This concerns kinship and friendship relations, as well as urban household and family structures.

Modernist notions of a highly segmental and institutionalised society had also assumed a change in household relations that would reduce the extended family structures of the rural household to the urban core family (see for example Fraser 1989; Moore 1994; Lund & Srinivas 2000; Nabeer 1994; Moore & Vaughan 1994). We shall see that urban household relations provide important nodal points of support in town; they constitute highly stratified arrangements within which relations of power and support are fiercely contested. I shall argue that the demographic consequences of HIV/AIDS have further accelerated these dynamics. This is especially discernible in households headed by single parents, grandparents or children.

The ability to access and maintain network relations and institutions differs significantly according to gender, age, economic and 'migration' status, i.e. the time that one has spent in one place. However, we shall see that the stratification of network relations is an overall phenomenon that renders network relations increasingly fragile. In the face of deteriorating socio-economic conditions and HIV/AIDS, social networking has become an increasingly desperate and insecure endeavour. Although people are skilfully shifting between their different network relations, their 'bargaining space' (Ghannam 2002) or ability 'of working it out' (Finch 1989) is increasingly narrowing down. These changes in gaining access to support are not transitory ones that might return to 'normal' once so-

cial and economic conditions improve. We shall see that the continuous strain on support relations has also had an impact on their rules and regulations, profoundly challenging notions of solidarity and reciprocity.

5.2 The Household as a Site of Social Support: Relations of Power and Support

Looking at the size and nature of household structures in Sector 7, one finds that they hardly fit into notions of family and household relations associated with the modern, urban-based *nuclear family*. The household or '*banja lathu*', which literally means 'our family' and which is usually used to refer to those living in one house, is much larger than the biological core family, which, as a household type, provides the exception rather than the rule. Extended family members, such as unmarried siblings or nieces and nephews, the families of brothers and sisters and finally, one's old aged parents, usually make up an integral part of each household in town. Sometimes, the household may also include family members who are no longer living within it, or at least not on a permanent basis, but who are part of the household re-distributive circle and for whom support is budgeted, such as married children living in close spatial proximity. The expression also encompasses children, nieces and nephews who are living at their aunty's, uncle's or grandparent's in other areas of town or in the village, and who may only come from time to time to get a warm meal or spend a period within the household.

The volatility of household relations in town is also caused by the high frequency of in- and out-migration. It is common for families to have a number of visitors who may stay for a few weeks or months until they have found their own place or return back home. The number is seasonally dependent, shifting with employment opportunities and food security. While during the dry season, when building activity and tobacco processing offer many working possibilities to generate cash income, households fill with kin from the village, the chronic food insecurity and lack of land also makes town an increasingly important target to migrate to during the hunger period.

The shifting size of households is, however, only one aspect that contradicts the modernist nuclear family model. Especially in 'modern' social policy thinking and planning, the notion of the core family perceived as a closed and steady support unit in which every individual derives equal benefits according to their needs is strongly present (see for a critique Fraser 1989; Culpitt 1999; Finch 1989).¹ This usually also implies a highly gendered notion of decision-making

¹ The discussion of the household as a modernist patriarchal model is an old one, vividly discussed

power, division of labour and distribution of resources closely related to the nuclear family model (Moore & Vaughan 1994; Ferguson 1999).

Household relations in Sector 7 reveal that this is not necessarily the case. For many, the household in town does indeed provide the central and most inclusive site of support, where the most basic needs, such as food, shelter, clothes and other daily necessities, are satisfied. Support relations are much more complex and ambivalent, however, as the following support diagrams of a married couple reveal.² Especially men and women have a highly different view of their household relations and support entitlements and obligations, which in turn reflects their different positions of power as well as their bargaining space as regards access to or denial of support.

In Mr. Jameson's diagram (Fig. 5.1), the household as a site of support is hardly present. Whereas he is an important provider for many people in town and over distance, the only person within his household mentioned as a beneficiary of support is the daughter of his younger father, who he takes care of together with his wife. The same holds for his role as a beneficiary of support, where he only mentions external household relations. The help he receives from his wife and children and the support he gives to them, he perceives as an exchange apart, as integral to the household economy and marriage, which has little to do with other support relations and thus, is not worth mentioning. "To support somebody means that you have already supported the core family."³(Interview

especially in the feminist literature. A powerful gendered insight into this subject in relation to notions of social security, needs and insecurity is given by Fraser (1989; see also Culpitt 1999, Finch 1989). For the discussion of this subject in developing countries, see for example Moore (1994; Lund & Srinivas 2000; Nabeer 1994; Moore & Vaughan 1994).

² These diagrams, which were produced by the people in Sector 7, formed an important tool during the fieldwork in order to get an idea of support relations and served as a basis to discuss them. People were provided with five different sizes of circles (extra-small, small, middle, large, extra-large) from which they should choose in order of the significance of support which they provided, or which was provided to them by different actors, institutions and organisations. The size did not only indicate quantity, but more often was related to the quality or specific type of support that was received or given. Emotional support, for example, was usually perceived as very large and as difficult to get in town. At the same time, also the distance in which the circles were arranged around the network owners was of importance, indicating accessibility of the support provided. This did not imply physical distance alone, which influenced access to support relations, such as the distance to the village, but was also an indication of the quality of the support relation concerned. Distance also represented a critique at the same time, such as arbitrariness in support or a slow reaction to requests for support, or the weakness of a relation in terms of support in general, such as with workmates, who were usually arranged at the outer reaches of the support circles.

³ In Chichewa, "to support" or "to help" is usually referred to as "kuthandiza" or "kusamalira"; "to care for". The specific connotations and characteristics of the support relationship or the support provided is usually explained out of the context in which the word is used. However, Englund (2001) refers in this context to different connotations of supporting as the sharing of one's wealth: while among social equals this is referred to as "kugawira", the sharing of wealth with people of an inferior social status is referred to as "kugawa". "Kusamalira" and "kuthandiza" seem to emphasise

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Looking at Mrs. Jameson's network (Fig. 5.2), we can see that for her, this is completely different. The household seems to be central to her network relations, both as providers and recipients of support. For her, her husband is the most important source of support, providing a highly inclusive set of support covering the most important basic needs, such as money for food, shelter, clothes and other daily necessities. In addition, he is also considered an important support in terms of decision-making related to business activities or family matters, and an important source of emotional support and caring. The support from her husband is perceived as a permanent source of support, to which she feels entitled as his spouse and the mother of his children. Their reproductive role and responsibility is also reflected in her perceptions of herself as a beneficiary. The support she receives from her husband not only includes support for herself, but also for her children and the other dependents in the household.

These completely different perceptions and assessments of household (support) relations are common to most household networks. Unless it concerns dependents not considered part of the immediate family, such as the niece in Mr. Jameson's case, men rarely mention the household as a site of exchange within individual social network relations. In female networks, the husband is, however, always present, mostly as the central and most important source of assistance. These different perceptions of marriage as a social security institution clearly reflect different relations of dependence and power. Although most women are economically active, they mostly depend on their spouses for their support and that of their children. At the same time, the central role that the spouse takes up in most female support diagrams is also an indication of the difficulties that women face in gaining access to this support. Although husbands are mentioned by most married women as an important source of support that is permanently present and at hand and where a strong entitlement exists, institutional rights and entitlements are hardly fulfilled. Many women – both rich and poor – complain about the insufficient support provided by their spouse. Most complain that their husbands do not give them enough money and food to be able to provide for themselves, their children and other dependents in the household on a regular basis, which renders the provision of food and other necessities a daily struggle.

This lacking or insufficient support has also consequences for female support networks outside the household, especially for those over long distances. Women expect their husbands to assist them in maintaining their trans-local relations. In Mrs. Jameson's case, her husband takes care of her parents in the village, providing them with regular support; but this is the exception rather than

the motive rather than the activity (Anders 2005: 155) (see also Chapter 7).

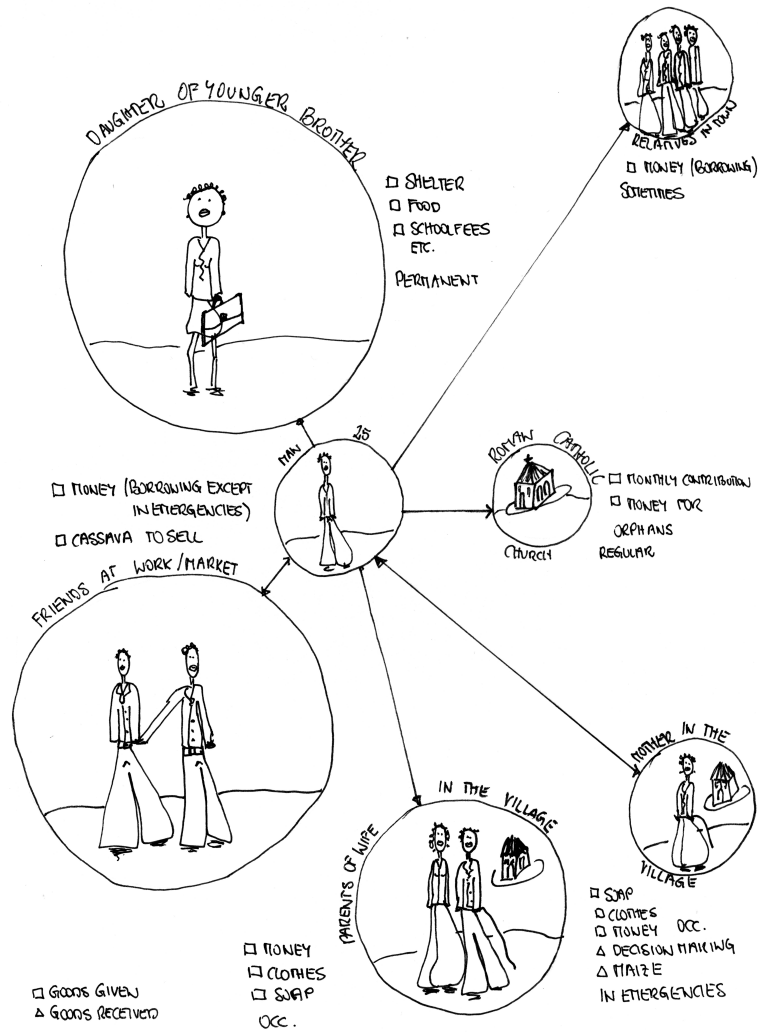


Figure 5.1: Mr. Jameson's Support Diagram

the rule. Many women complain that their spouses do not assist them in supporting their own families in the village and that their spouses use part of their income urgently needed for the maintenance of their family in town to support their own networks and kin in the village.