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WOMEN, DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL CHANGE:
THE WOMEN OF RURAL MALAŴI
- A CASE STUDY

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in
The Department
of Sociology and Anthropology

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ABSTRACT

Women, Development and Social Change:
The Women of Rural Malaŵi - A Case Study

by Doug Miller

This study explores the contradictions which arise between global market driven development and the lived reality of Malaŵi's rural women with respect to the critical elements of peasant life which are usually defined as land, labour and social regime. Policy makers and planners design programmes and projects to integrate the peasantry into the free market economy which emphasizes productivity, technology and cash returns. On the other hand, peasant farmers, particularly women, with their primordial responsibility for domestic reproduction, are faced with the need to feed their families and provide social supports not available through the market system. Poor women have little or no influence over the impact of the application of administrative policies which produce strain on the subsistence system, with which the population must cope by calling on the social regime which sustains them, albeit inadequately in the face of a restructured economy.

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Introduction

Mrs Phiri¹ is a widow in her fifties. She is a mother of nine children and herself the daughter of a village headman. She appears healthy, well-fed and when she works in her fields, she dresses in a clean *chilundu*, cloth wrap, and store-bought blouse. She is considered a successful farmer, with substantial land-holdings, a tractor, and a large house with electricity, tin roof, sofas and armchairs. From her income she is able to send her children to school. Most of them are living in town with an older daughter. One daughter is boarding at a fee-paying secondary school. The household's outbuildings include tool sheds, a tobacco drying shed, and a sizeable granary, one-quarter full of maize from the previous year's crop. Her house and compound is completely surrounded by a high grass fence and is about five hundred metres from the foundation, which is all that remains of her late father's solid brick house, razed after his death.

Her neighbour, Mrs Banda, is a divorcee also in her fifties and a mother of five grown children. She lives in much poorer circumstances. Her clothing is old and she usually wears the same faded *chilundu* everywhere. Her house is a small two room mud-walled, thatched structure. The rooms are unfurnished except for mats. The outbuildings consist of a small roughly thatched cooking shelter and two *nkokwe* or grain storage bins. One is empty and the roof has

¹ Generic clan names have been used, although the observations are directly from field notes.

been removed while the other has some cobs of corn remaining and is covered. Most of the utensils she uses are made of local materials except for the hoe, the bucket and several cooking pots. Her doorway faces the crumbling walls of her deceased mother's house only three or four metres away. Nearby, in the village live her sons, daughters, grandchildren and her brother. Most of her children have four or five years of primary schooling, but only one son reached the final year of primary school.

The two women live in close proximity, in the same village near Bunda College, and are female heads of household or FHH in the terminology of the development industry. Mrs Phiri has been successful as a commercial farmer. Mrs. Banda barely survives. Malaŵi's population is still 85% rural and all the evidence indicates that Mrs. Banda represents the largest part of the rural population, and that the status and condition of the majority of rural women is seriously degenerating (UNDP, 1992). In fact, globally, women are bearing an inequitable share of the failure to achieve development. In their everyday lives, women find themselves dealing with forces which are operating on another ideological playing field - one that since precolonial times has been slowly and inexorably drawing Malaŵi's rural society into the free market orbit and the ideology which underpins it.

In an ideal world, a number of alternative paths to development should have appeared, given the multiple starting points, divergent resource bases, as well as varied social, political and cultural frameworks that exist in the world. However, the liberal, free-market growth model, identified here as the dominant development paradigm, has been particularly successful and persistent to the point where it has become the prevailing global model. The poor bear the burden of the interface between how local societies determine their mode of existence and the apparently inexorable expansion of global capitalism. The crisis of poverty facing the poor is rooted in both the local social, economic and political conditions as well as international political and economic relationships. In this articulation of the global and the local, women's poverty is determined not just by their class but it is also influenced by their gender.

It is with this background that the focus of this study came to be on the women of the poorest sector of Malaŵi's rural population in the Central Region. The study aims to examine the organization of social and gender relations to understand how women have come to face a diminution in their status and a deterioration in their material condition. It must be emphasized from the beginning that poverty affects both men and women. Men also face the reality of low wages, short life-expectancy, poor working conditions, and the multiple other consequences of poverty. However, Leena Kirjavainen, the Director of the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Division of Women and People's

Participation makes it clear that "...The most disadvantaged population in the world today are poor rural women, who have been the last to benefit - or have even been harmed - by economic growth, technological changes and development processes...." In agricultural societies, loss of land and the destruction of natural and water resources are making women's jobs doubly difficult, whether it be fetching water or firewood or gathering food. At home, women are more likely to spend more of the money they make on food and children's nutrition, in many cases eating least and last when money or food runs short (Bertini, 1995).

The three major elements affecting the quality of peasant women's lives are access to resources, labour and the social regime (Hesselberg, 1985). Of resources, land is the most crucial, but water, and fuel are absolute necessities while credit, technological inputs, education, and health services are also very significant. Rural production, whether for cash or domestic purposes, is critically dependent on women's labour. The social regime provides an ideological framework for values, logic, approach to life, economic purpose and priorities. It provides the basis for the organization of everyday life, and determines rights and responsibilities in relationships. The focus, throughout the rest of this paper, is on these three elements as they are influenced by the push / pull of the articulation of local society with the free market development paradigm.

Rural women do not live in hermetically sealed social entities. Rather, like any human creation their reality is in constant change as they are buffeted by outside forces and subject to stress from the internal contradictions of their own social order. The degree to which people are integrated into the cash economy influences the way they apply local customs and respect traditions which may or may not serve their needs. By reifying the fabric of their lives into a system or regime, a picture of stasis is created which codifies and makes a permanent one-size-fits-all description. The reality, in the case of Malaŵi, is that matriliney represents many different things to the people who live with it as a social ideology. The evidence from this study would indicate that, for the poor of the Central Region of Malaŵi, matriliney currently remains a viable ideological framework providing access to their extremely limited resource and labour allocation and provides a framework for social support. At the same time, the male dominated, internal dynamics of rural society in combination with free market competition for access to the same resources and labour contributes to undermining women's overall situation.

The qualitative methodology of the study draws on several strategies to build a descriptive picture of rural women's situation. In the second chapter an attempt has been made to establish an historical socioeconomic context. This involves an introduction to the Bunda - Mitundu area, an overview of the matrilineal social regime of the Cheŵa people of Malaŵi's Central Region and a

summary review of women's situation in precolonial times, under the colonial regime and since Malaŵi's independence from Britain in 1964. The "Literature Review and Theoretical Overview" traces how different writers have treated the relative effect of the articulation of global free market forces with the people's local ideology. The chapter on the study's methodological approach, in addition to outlining various research considerations, also points out how the approach in the field transformed itself in the face of the on-the-ground realities. A number of men and women seeking *ganyu* (piecework) were interviewed and visits to several areas allowed first-hand observation of rural life. The responses were supplemented by the very significant research already undertaken, primarily by Malaŵian academics, which examines in detail many aspects of the reality of everyday village life. In presenting the data, an effort has been made to give voice to the respondents to communicate their concerns and interests. With such a cursory methodology and sampling of people, this can only be considered a limited case study and the conclusions would be greatly enhanced with more thorough, long term research.

This study is based on the belief that there is an underlying morality at work. As a committed activist, I consider that our role as social scientists is to study and understand the nature of unequal relationships and to make an honest attempt to objectively use our knowledge to change, not simply explain the

world. Giving voice to the concerns of poor women is a small way of helping change occur.

Chapter 2 Historical and socioeconomic background

All social environments evolve out of the multiple strands which overlay their history. The everyday lived reality of the people of the Bunda - Mitundu area and their current condition is deeply rooted in its historical context. Even before the advent of formal European colonialism, the structure of Chew̄a society was subject to stresses from its own internal conflicts and larger forces around it (Mandala). The advent of the British Protectorate committed the country to integration into the world economy and gave men economic, political, and social advantages over women. The period following political independence has witnessed heightened economic dependency, as the country has continued to be a major exporter of unprocessed agricultural produce. The alienation of land and the commercialization of agriculture creates even more serious conditions for women, as a burgeoning population must survive on a diminishing land base.

Bunda is in the Central Region of Malaŵi about 30 kilometres south-east of Lilongwe, the capital city of the country. The city provides a pull that influences many of the economic activities of households even further away than Mitundu. However, Malaŵi's population is less than 15 per cent urbanized, and despite Bunda's proximity to the capital, it is still very much rural in appearance, social organization and economy. When Livingstone passed through the area in

the middle of the nineteenth century he noted how populated the area was and how close the villages were together. In 1977, the population density was estimated at 114 people per square kilometre and it had risen to 160 in 1987 (National Statistical Office - 1991a). Despite this population / land squeeze, the birth rate remains high at 4.7% and women give birth to an average of 7.6¹ children during their child bearing years (UNDP 1992).

In the area between Bunda Mountain and Mitundu Trading Centre (see map - Appendix II) there are two large tobacco estates. The Catholics had built a mission church, hospital and two schools at Mlale, and the CCAP church and manse are on a small piece of land near the secondary school about two hundred metres from the Lilongwe - Mitundu road. In 1968, the Malaŵi Government, The World Bank and several other donor countries embarked on The Lilongwe Land Development Programme, a major integrated rural development scheme. At about the same time, Bunda College of Agriculture, a constituent college of the University of Malaŵi had been built on a large former estate. The students, as part of their studies, often undertake work within local communities to promote improved agricultural practices. The region has been a transitional area with the local economy based on subsistence agriculture heavily influenced by the cash economy.

¹ See "Malaŵi Demographic Information" Appendix I for more demographic details compared with Zimbabwe and Canada to provide a point of reference.

Farming is the principal occupation of the people of the Bunda area.

There is limited employment on the tobacco estates and at Bunda College, while a few people are employed in Lilongwe. Rural unemployment is so high that the cost of labour is low enough to allow many smallholders to employ others to help with the more labourious tasks of the fieldwork. Many others make money by producing food and goods for sale in town. Near the bus stages on the road from Mitundu to Lilongwe, men and women sell produce including firewood. By far the major smallholder crop is maize with tobacco the next largest. Maize is grown both for domestic consumption and for sale as either green cobs or processed into flour. Other crops include groundnuts (peanuts), soya, beans and vegetables for market.

Rural agriculture survives or falls with the rainy season. The seasonal cycle starts with the work of clearing the brush out of the fields beginning in August or September during the dry season. As the first rains fall in November or December, the soil becomes soft enough to work. In technological terms, the hand hoe is the only agricultural implement available to the vast majority of the rural peasantry. Only the farmers with larger holdings can afford to have their fields plowed by oxen or tractor. With the arrival of the first rains, the work becomes very intense and all available labour is mobilized to turn the soil and ridge the earth into long rows for planting. It is essential to get the fields tilled and the crop planted as fast as possible, since the rains can be capricious. To

maximize the chances of the crop growing, the seeds should be in the ground and growing in December. By mid January, the farmer should have hoed out the weeds competing for soil nutrients with the crop and added the recommended fertilizer for this all important growth period. Maize is left on the stalk until the rains stop and the dry season begins again in March or April at which point the rains have tapered off to nothing. When the stalk has dried, the cobs are collected and stored in an elevated *nkokwe* or storage bin made of woven sticks until the kernels are needed for processing into the flour from which the basic meal is prepared.

Tobacco is the most widespread commercial crop in the Central Region. It requires even more attention than maize, in order to keep the leaf in prime shape for the best prices and is, consequently, more labour intensive. The crop has to be monitored daily and usually requires the application of pesticides and must be well weeded. As the leaves become ready in February they are hung to dry under thatch roofed shelters. After the rains end, a limited amount of dambo agriculture continues in the moist lowlands. These crops are mostly vegetables for sale in town and to supplement the domestic diet.

Rural Malaŵians consume very little meat of any sort. With the high population density, land is at a premium for direct food production. As a consequence, there is very little land dedicated to pasture for large livestock.

Small herds of cattle were much more visible in the sixties and seventies.

Several informants mentioned that many people who used to keep cattle have stopped doing so because of rustling, which occurs because of the demand for beef in the more prosperous urban areas. Goats have become the dominant livestock because they are so adaptable. During the growing season they are tied with leg leashes and left to forage the grass along the road and in places where they cannot damage the food crops. Men can often be seen carrying two to four goats bound to planks on the back of bicycles for sale in town. However, chickens are the major local source of meat protein. They are used for domestic food consumption, gift giving and for cash returns, but the poorest households can only afford chicken as a meal on a very infrequent basis.

The road to Lilongwe is paved only to the secondary school and then into Bunda College. From the Bunda turn off to Mitundu it is a poorly maintained dirt road which becomes almost impassable in the rainy season. Well-tread paths provide access to the villages further from the main road. An infrastructure of secondary roads had been constructed in the early seventies as part of a World Bank sponsored, comprehensive rural development project, but many of these have become so bad through lack of maintenance that motor vehicles are unable to reach many homesteads. The poor state of village roads means that bicycles are a key mode of transporting produce. From early morning until late afternoon, large numbers of bicycles precariously loaded with firewood, large bags of

produce or live animals labour along the road to Lilongwe. Bicycle transport is an exclusive male domain. At several centres, typically a bus stage and a few stores, men have set themselves up as repairmen to fix flats and carry out other bicycle repairs. Women's role in transport is to head load bags of produce to the main road where they wait for lifts on the overloaded buses or minibuses or they sell their produce along the road and at the small centres around the bus stages. Women also tote large bundles of brush and firewood home for the cooking fire. Children of both sexes help women carry water home in large pails balanced on their heads.

The division of labour by gender and age is established within the local ideological system which is predominantly matrilineal. The matrilineal social regime which frames the life of the rural poor of the Lilongwe District is not an isolated anthropological phenomenon. Audrey Richards (1956) refers to a matrilineal belt throughout large parts of Zambia, Malaŵi, Tanzania and Mozambique (see also Poewe, 1981; Holy, 1986). Matriliney provided the ideological underpinning of the precolonial social economic system and still guides rural life in the area (Butler, 1976; K. Phiri, 1983; Khaila, 1992; Mandala, 1990). It has been described as subsistence, communal and tributary. Precolonial subsistence production provided for the basic needs of the extended household and a surplus to accommodate trade or tribute demands. Division of labour according to gender existed in the subsistence economy, but there was

no distinction between social and domestic production. Asymmetry of gender relations most certainly existed but both men and women contributed to filling the needs of the family and village. Parallelism of gender roles, nonetheless, ensured that women exercised authority, particularly within the gender group and that they could acquire increased status within the village grouping depending on their age and number of children and grandchildren.

Among the Chewa of the Central Region of Malaŵi, the *banja*, or family structure, determines access to land and labour (K. Phiri, 1983; Khaila, 1992; Mandala, 1990). Relatives trace their roots to an ancestress who is the common *bele* or “breast”. The *nkhoswe* is the custodian and guardian of the female members and their offspring in a family grouping. The *nkhoswe* is usually the senior brother or maternal uncle and he is expected to ensure that all the people for whom he is responsible have access to the land they need and that the women get married to providers who can support them properly. His responsibility extends to his sisters’ children, his nieces and nephews. It is his duty to instruct them; they inherit his land, livestock, tools, food, etc... (Khaila, 1992, p.34). His own children are not his responsibility. They are part of the *mbumba* of his wife’s family line and the responsibility of the wife’s *nkhoswe*. The *mbumba* owe their *nkhoswe* respect and contribute to his status by being numerous and augmenting his wealth by providing labour in his fields or tending his livestock.

The practice of *chikamwini* is a common feature of matrilineal groups in Malaŵi. Its original intent seems to have been to introduce a dependent male labourer into the family unit (Mandala, 1990; K. Phiri, 1983). Typically, a prospective suitor moves to the village of his bride where he builds a house for his wife and is known as *amwini*. In the case of marital breakdown he returns to the village of his kinfolk. For the *amwini*, access to land is through his wife's family. In order to acquire land, the *amwini* must show himself respectful of the wife's *nkhoswe* and render service as required to his in-laws. Their dependence on the wife's male family members for access to land and a place of residence provides an element of social control to secure the power of the male elders (Mandala, 1990, p. 30). This land ownership system tends to be conservative in that it encourages individuals to be loyal and obedient to the elder leadership that control the land. "Individuals, whose usufructuary rights to land depended on membership in a village, were eager to do what was necessary to maintain their membership in that village" (Khaila, 1992, p. 37). Many *amwini*, are permanently treated as second class citizens in the village of marriage and are often not respected by the male in-laws (I. Phiri, 1983, p. 79). According to Mandala (1990), they become alienated labourers in the economic process whose work is less valued than the work of their elders. This amounted to a form of exploitation, especially after the arrival of cash cropping (p. 30).

Virilocality or *chitengwa* occurs when the wife moves to her husband's

village. In the past, *chitengwa* seems to have been related to the status of the husband's family. If he was destined to become a headman at his own village, or if his family was well to do, then the woman's family could agree to the relocation of their daughter to the village of the husband's matrikin. *Chitengwa* can also take place many years after a couple have become established and their children have grown and become thoroughly committed to their matrikin.

There is some debate as to the status of women in the precolonial period. Using Mandala as an example of a number of writers, there is a current which claims that there was considerable equity between men and women. Role differentiation certainly created asymmetry in the status of the sexes but everyone shared in the work and produce. Kings Phiri (1983) maintains that the matrilineal system accords considerable importance to women as the reproducers of the lineage (p. 259). In his view, mother-right ensures for women the right as mothers, even in marriage, to remain united with her own kinsmen, and to control with their help, the offspring of her marriage.

Isabelle Apawo Phiri (1992) shares Kings Phiri's (1983) view of how matriliney served women and adds to his list of advantages the protection of her *nkhoswe*; the right to remarry after the death of or divorce from a spouse; and perhaps most significantly the right to inherit land from her mother. Women were able to gain considerable influence as priestesses and retainers of the religious

sites which was a “core feature of the Chewā religion” (I. Phiri, 1992, p. 49). Women’s influence and status was strongest within the peer group of women (Butler, 1976; Mandala, 1990). This parallelism meant that women could exercise considerable authority within their community. Older women and the sister’s of chiefs often held influential functions as *anakungwi*. These women elders were responsible for ensuring that young women were instructed on their roles and duties as they passed through the various initiation rights as they grew from girls to becoming wives and mothers.

The paradox in the position and role of Chewā women, according to Isabelle Phiri (1992, p. 50), is that while some women held important positions with respect to religious and initiation rites, the society was, nonetheless, very much controlled by the male matrikin to the disadvantage of women. These disadvantages manifest themselves, most particularly, in the various Chewā initiation rites. These include ritual intercourse; early marriage; a cultural fear of menstrual blood; polygamy; and obedience to husbands and elders. Young women were not allowed to stay single after puberty, although single older women were not usually subject to the same pressure. There was considerable stigmatization of bareness (I. Phiri, 1992, p. 50). The corollary of this stigmatization is that women, even today, are expected to produce many children. Even in precolonial society, women’s status had begun to decline with the arrival of commercial slavery and Islam from the East African coast and the

patrilineal imposition of the Angoni who often demanded women as tribute to be integrated into their society (Ibid., p. 51).

There should be no illusions that Chewā matriliney produced an ideal, egalitarian society. In fact, it was a male dominated system which traced lineage through the female kin and enforced land and labour rights and obligations on that basis. Asymmetry in the power and sharing relationships were reinforced by strict adherence to elder respect and the authority of the senior matrikin. Mobility of status was much easier for men than for women, who on the other hand, rarely shared larger wealth or status (cf. Linden, 1974; Mandala, 1990; Marwick, 1965). There are also indications that, even in precolonial times, men profited from women's labour. "... Apparently salt-making was dominated by women even though male political authorities controlled and taxed salt production (Khaila, 1992, p. 32). "Trade was elitist in the sense that the chiefs and their immediate subordinates controlled the transactions and exercised a monopoly over it" (K.Phiri, 1983, p. 19). An in-marrying man could gain status in a village by fathering many children; by being a hard and productive worker; and participating in the secretive Nyau² society which reinforced male dominance in the structure of society (Butler, 1976; Marwick, 1965; I. Phiri, 1992). On the other

² The *Nyau* was an all male secret society which was open to men in the community and was central to male initiation and participation in religious observances. I. Phiri (1992) or Butler (1976) sees it as a way of reducing the sense of alienation of the in-marrying males and providing them with a forum to gain social status.

hand, differentiation on an age, status and gender basis ensured that the majority of women remained fixed with their secondary status.

Nonetheless, the subsistence economy ran effectively and provided food, which most evidence would seem to indicate, was distributed so that all had a share (Marwick, 1965). In precolonial times, literally all labour was social and evidence indicates that women were ensured a part of the produce to which they contributed labour (Henn, 1988; Mandala, 1990; Mbilinyi, 1985; Mullings, 1976). It also provided a surplus for the tributary demands of the elders and of warlike neighbours. The surplus also served as gifts to create and reinforce social links within a community (Butler, 1976). In addition, the surplus supported the precolonial religious communities of shrine priestesses and their retainers (I. Phiri, 1992). Production was both social for the community and domestic for family consumption and no distinction was drawn between the two forms.

The articulation of precolonial and colonial economic and social structures resulted in three significant modifications to the fabric of Cheŵa society and historically laid the groundwork for the dilemmas facing rural women in the 1990s. First, the introduction of the cash economy contributed to the differentiation of rural labour into social (commercial) versus domestic (food) production. African men were needed to labour in colonial enterprises leaving women to shoulder the burden of food production. Secondly, the European /

British colonial land holding practices challenged women's rights to land as provided for in matriliney. As land was privatised it was deeded to male titleholders following the European practice. The third major effect on social relations came with the colonial ideological system including laws, religion and cultural mores which were male oriented and disrupted previous gender balances within Chewa society. There may be other ways of explaining the historical roots of women's poverty in Malaŵi, but these three interlinked factors are particularly significant.

Colonialism irrevocably changed the precapitalist socioeconomic structure and made men economically and politically more powerful than the women (Woods, 1996). The domestic work of reproduction and providing food was devalued as the cash economy gave young men freedom from irksome unpaid chores expected in the tributary system under the avunculate. Tony Woods' research into rural accumulation in the 1920s found that some investment had begun to occur in bicycles, building trades, canteens, stores and sewing machines. These investments required considerable capital to purchase but allowed the owners to generate future revenue. Woods points out that almost without exception the investment areas were exclusively male. According to him, matriliney favoured male mobility and that the "... investments accommodated matriliney, but reinforced the patriarchal character of society." The nature of pre-existing class and gender relations was modified as rural credit

and accumulation led to client-patron relations and created a contest between the old tributary ways of rural distribution and the private, individual accumulation introduced under colonialism. The business and work opportunities open to young men eroded the age hierarchy and gender relations of the pre-colonial period.

From the earliest contacts, the missionaries' reports are clouded with considerable European bias and reflect considerable disrespect for indigenous values which ran counter to the patriarchal traditions of Europe. The missions were hostile to practices such as matriliney, polygamy, initiations, (Peters, 1997; I. Phiri, 1992) and many of the "... essential mechanisms that bound individuals' productive activities into a broader network of precapitalist control and redistribution" (Martin, 1992, p. 238). Very quickly their activities contributed to new forms of differentiation. In many instances, missions threw up alternate household organizations for production and reproduction and encouraged converts to abandon adherence to matrilineal practices which did not resemble the patriarchal European model. This hostility was shared by the colonial administrators and explored by Peters in her article, "The Matrilineal Puzzle." She concludes that even as late as the 1980s serious researchers continued to operate within Eurocentric biases when framing their research questions. She demonstrates, in her article, how matriliney was consistently regarded as an aberration set against the "norm" of patrilineal, and patriarchal social formations.

On the other hand, British Victorian attitudes towards women as vassals of men coincided with men's dominance in precolonial society to reinforce the asymmetry in gender relations (Henn, 1988; I. Phiri, 1992). The male elders limited the negative impact on their material welfare by using their class power and passing on the burden of producing rural surplus to women and the remaining dependent children (Vock, 1988, p. 51). In addition, as men were obliged to migrate from the conjugal home in order to earn money to fulfill the colonial tax obligations, they gained new experiences which reduced their commitment to matrilineal values. This left women maintaining the old values in the subsistence economy while the more mobile men moved relatively easily into the male dominated cash economy. Men were, thus, more likely to begin living hybrid cultural lives while women tended to remain committed to values which gave them rights to land and social support in the rural villages.

Migrancy adversely affected the structure and functioning of the family. Young wives, lacking husbands, suffered from economic and emotional insecurity. Children grew up lacking parental father authority figures and role models as marital infidelity became commonplace. This led to frequent dissolution of marriages. More seriously, the agricultural productivity of the household was negatively affected (R.B. Boeder in K. Phiri, 1983; see also Papademetriou, 1991). Inevitably, the negative effects on the families of migrants had an impact on the social regime of matriliney within which family life

was structured. Quite apart from the economic costs of lost labour in rural communities, there was an enormous social cost to pay for this continued migrant labour. Family bonds and solidarity were eroded as the long separation led to new relationships replacing absent family members. Marital relationships became more transitory. This had a subsequent impact on social norms related to child rearing, decision-making and control, sex-differentiated economic roles, and social obligations (Papademetriou, 1991).

The loss of male labour from the rural areas had considerable social impact on village life. In terms of integration into the cash economy, migrancy marginalised women's roles as food and domestic producers. The dependence on the meagre remittances of their spouses, forced them to concentrate on food production to ensure the reproduction of the next generation of semiproletarianized peasant workers. Thereafter, the onus of food production falls almost totally to the women. "Coleman estimates that by about 1910 approximately 10% of the Nyasalander indigenous male population was working abroad and from 1921 to 1973, this proportion did not fall below 20%,..." (Khaila, 1992, p. 46, see also Cole-King, 1971). This does not include the many men who would be considered internal migrants. These figures reflect a change from a purely subsistence economy to subsistence supplemented by cash. Between settler politics and imperial policy the wage sector in Nyasaland grew too slowly

to absorb the increasing numbers of men being forced into the colonial labour market (Khaila, 1992, p. 50).

Another consequence of migrancy was the widespread phenomenon of female headed households. Kennedy and Peters define *de facto* female headed households as those in which the male head is absent as a migrant worker versus the *de jure* female heads who are widows, divorcees and single women. They further delineate the *de facto* female heads into households in which the husband is working inside Malaŵi or outside the country. As nearby host countries began to have economic problems of their own, external immigration has been severely curtailed. This is significant in that internal migrants are paid much lower wages and can send considerably smaller amounts home. In this way, the families of internal migrants are amongst the poorest households of the rural poor.

Khaila (1992) sums up the economic consequences of colonialism,

“Due to imperial forces, Nyasaland was impoverished with little hope of recovering even long after the end of colonial rule. The major failures of the colonial efforts in development were: 1) the encouragement of the development of wage labour in a stagnant economy, unable to attract and absorb the increasing numbers of men and women offering themselves for work, 2) the neglect and deliberate frustration of peasant agriculture, 3) the investment in irrelevant and economically unviable projects, especially the railway companies, which led to the neglect of the local infrastructure and dried up funds for the development of local human resources, 4) the discouragement of the development of local industry,

and 5) the exploitative practices which were detrimental to capital accumulation (p. 57).

At independence, Malaŵi faced a daunting task in terms of development.

Britain had been reluctant to invest any imperial money to develop the small, landlocked country. For years, the bulk of social services and education had been chiefly provided by the missions which contributed to making Malaŵi one of the most Christianized countries of the region. After a brief flirtation with populist economics and politics, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, the first president, espoused a trickle-down development which was guided at all stages by the advice of the major international financial institutions and donor nations. Agriculture and especially export-oriented agriculture was to form the basis of the country's development. Traditional agricultural and land-holding practises, especially under matriliney (Peters), were deemed inefficient, and had to be changed to maximize productivity. Banda's aim was to create a new class of entrepreneurs who would be the driving force for modernization. He encouraged his ministers and senior government officials to prosper as farmers and businessmen and by so doing serve as examples for "his people" of how capitalism could help everyone develop. This elite were given loans on easy terms and were encouraged to take over large tracts of land and become model farmers for the people to emulate. Strong economic growth throughout the 1970s seemed to confirm the choices Banda had made.

A small class of very rich individuals arose through business, politics and the government administrative machinery which Mhone calls the "Iron Triumvirate." The President, himself, became the richest man in the country and his companies controlled the largest landholdings. A detailed appreciation of the extent of this reality has taken some time to evolve, since the one party government under Banda was sensitive to criticism especially as such an enormous part of the country's commercial and productive life was owned virtually single-handedly by the President himself³. A slightly larger class of small businessmen, "progressive" farmers, civil servants, teachers, professionals and administrators formed a very small middle class by western standards. This middle class was wealthy by comparison to the great poverty of the majority of Malawians and its interests were more closely aligned with the very rich than with the poor. The gap between the small wealthy elite and the large mass of the population grew quickly more conspicuous in the thirty years after independence. The net result has been that the "...poorest 20 percent of families received somewhere between 4 and 8 percent of total income, while the richest 10 percent of families received one-third to one-half of total income" (Pryor, 1990, p. 361). Their great wealth is directly due to the poverty of the country and the hyper-low wages of the peasantry and the other working people of the country.

³ See Pryor, 1990, Chapter 16 for background on the paucity of data on incomes.

The elite was freed from troublesome competition by government policies tailored to protect their interests. Smallholders were subjected to numerous discriminatory policies amounting to implicit taxation, to subsidize the development of the more profitable export oriented sector of the agricultural economy. Peasant agriculture with women's labour as the foundation, continues to feed a growing population on an ever-decreasing customary land base. Peasant farmers are forced to seek nonexistent employment and the price of labour is driven well below its cost of reproduction by the vast number of rural unemployed and underemployed (Cliffe, 1985; Khaila, 1992). Many rural people are forced to integrate onto the large and not so large estates where they often live as tenant farmers in semi-feudal, exploitative conditions.

The asymmetry of gender social relations was heightened under the post-independent state. Sex specificity was not a mere perpetuation of "traditional" division of labour and ownership relations (Daddieh, 1985, p.172). The policy, practices and structures of the Malaŵi Congress Party and the government of Dr. Banda further weakened women's social and political position in the society. Women were given very secondary roles in the daily functioning of the party where the League of Malaŵi Women effectively isolated women from more central participation in party affairs and under-represented their significance in decision making. National consciousness raising was promoted by bringing women together from across the country to dance at political events. Banda was

styled the “*Nkhoswe* number one.” Women’s traditional dances and songs were corrupted into laudatory political messiah worship. In a tragic misrepresentation of their critical role as producers, women were encouraged to improve their homemaker skills as a means to improve children’s health. Their labour was seen as secondary to men’s work in commercial agriculture, while their enormous contribution to domestic and commercial production was both understated and undervalued.

Malaŵi relies heavily on foreign investment, borrowing and aid for economic programmes. Under both the previous regime and the current elected government, great effort has been made to maintain creditor confidence in the Malaŵi model. Nonetheless, an expanding infrastructure, declining terms of trade, population pressure on a small land base, and war in neighbouring Mozambique, all contributed to a mounting debt situation which worsened steadily through the 1980s despite diligent efforts to adapt to its creditors’ requirements. From 1980 onwards, Malaŵi undertook an economic stabilization programme, with support from the IMF, aimed at reducing the country’s persistent balance-of-payments deficit (Europa Yearbook, 1988). In his review of Malaŵi’s economic history, Chirwa (1990) concludes that:

“While several of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) policies have contributed to restoring the foreign exchange balance, easing balance of payments problems, and enhancing output in many sectors, they have not given sufficient consideration to the deteriorating conditions

of the poor or the consequences of cutting back public expenditures on social services, including health and education (50).

If anything, Chirwa, as well as other World Bank commentators like Uma Lele (1990, 1991) understate the impact that the downsizing, deregulation and privatisation has had on the already marginal existence of the poor. The state of data collection in Malaŵi is still underdeveloped, and a full appreciation of the last ten years of SAP imposed conditions may take some time to come. Nevertheless, it is estimated by several sources that life expectancy has fallen and that other indices of human development may be deteriorating rather than improving (UNDP, 1992 & 1997; UNICEF, 1993).

At the end of the 1980s, the Malaŵi Government, under pressure from donors, finally began to acknowledge that poverty and skewed distribution were endemic and worsening. The Situation Analysis of Poverty in Malaŵi (1993) was a joint production of the Malaŵi Government and UNICEF which identified six groups as living in a state of permanent poverty and representing more than half the population of Malaŵi. They are: 1) poor smallholders; 2) *ganyu* labourers and estate workers; 3) tenant farmers; 4) the urban poor; 5) female headed households; 6) children in poverty. There is considerable overlap in these categories but, in general, they are typified by low income levels; low skills and education levels; limited employment potential; minimal access to basic social

services, health and education; food insecurity; chronic malnutrition; high average death rates, mother, child and infant mortality rates (5).

This bleak picture is made more alarming by the population / land crunch. The total population is over nine million people and expected to double over the next ten to fifteen years (UNDP, 1992). The rural social regimes still place a high value on women bearing numerous children and this is reinforced by the high infant mortality rate. Many children must be born for a few to survive. As poor women seek work outside the family landholding, older children are needed to look after the younger children and to help with the family fields. They, in their turn, will require land to feed themselves and their families in the future, but the average plot sizes on customary land have already become unproductively small. Kalipeni estimates that, using current agricultural methods, the country could be self-sufficient in food and support about 11.5 million people. Despite such theoretical calculations, the reality is that a quarter of the population runs out of food only five months after the harvest of the previous years crop (UNICEF, 1993).

The adversities facing poor rural women today arise out of this historical context. The play of internal forces in Chewa society was already much evolved to the advantage of men before British colonial rule irrevocably tipped the gender balance into a male dominated system. Malaŵi's continuing integration

into the global economy has accentuated this inequality. From this nexus of the local and national, the next chapter examines the theoretical underpinnings of the current development paradigm which motivates the policy planners who determine Malaŵi's economic evolution. An understanding of the articulation of their model with the everyday reality of the rural people, particularly with respect to landholding, labour market and social regime, helps to contextualize the information gathered during the research portion of this study.

Chapter 3: Literature Review and Theoretical Overview

This chapter is about the interaction of the global and the local and the relative effect the prevalent market economy has on the fabric of the lives of poor, rural women in the Central Region of Malaŵi. The articulation of the two contributes to the unique face of capitalism in Malaŵi and helps to explain the struggle of the poor women to adapt to and survive change in the Bunda - Mitundu area of the Lilongwe district of Malaŵi. Their social regime provides an ideological framework for what was once a non-capitalist mode of production. In it, social obligations are defined through kinship and geared to providing access to productive resources, in particular, land and labour. While the labour process is differentiated by gender and age, widespread distributive communalism aims to provide subsistence for the household and its village community context. Like any social regime, it is fraught with internal contradictions and faces changing conditions from without, which force people to continually adapt.

Involving rural people more fully in the free market is a principal goal of the development paradigm which guides the formulation of the various plans, programmes and policies of the governments, institutions, and academics in Malaŵi. The paradigm is framed within the context of the global capitalism which is geared to private accumulation, competition and mass consumption (Frankman, 1997; Friedman, 1980; Harris, 1972; Marx, 1968; A. Smith, 1976).

This model has extended its sway throughout all regions of the earth and in face of considerable resistance. By mobilizing enormous financial and industrial wealth, its proponents have used suasion, pressure and coercion to ensure the continuous expansion of the market economy.

Postindependence development strategies have greatly accelerated the restructuring of rural society. In the process, the lives of rural women are becoming harsher (Bertini, 1995; Kirjavainen, 1995, McFadden, 1995). There is a large body of writing which demonstrates the imperfect aspects of the dominant development paradigm (Amin, 1973 & 1982; Appell, 1991; Balleis, 1993; Burkett, 1990; Cliffe, 1985; Griffin & Rahman Khan, 1982; Hettne, 1990; Mhone, 1991; T. Mkandawire, 1987; Nafziger, 1988; Smith & Wallerstein, 1992; Sweezy, 1992). An ever-growing body of literature examines how women's poverty is a visible sign of national domination and social oppression (Deere, 1979; Hafkin & Bay, 1976; Henn, 1988; Marcus, 1989; Mbilinyi, 1985; McFadden, 1995; Meena, 1992; Nijeholt, 1987; Parpart, 1995; Plewes & Stuart, 1991; Sen & Grown, Stichter and Parpart, 1988; Waring, 1988; Waylen, 1996). Much less is available on how local ideologies help people survive the impact of globalizing free market forces.

Capitalism and its propensity for growth have been studied by its proponents and critics since the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century

wrought such dramatic changes in the fabric of European life (A. Smith, 1976; Marx, 1968; inter alia). The modern paradigm for economic development is generally traced to post-war writers such as Walt Rostow in the fifties and early sixties (Swift, 1991, p.10). They linked development to the concepts of growth and progress (Tomlinsom, 1991). The paradigm was based on the existence of nations, framed the problem in structural terms and depended on a dualistic conception to explain the fact that parts of the economy in poor countries seemed to be prospering from integration into the "modern" sector while large parts of the population languished outside the development experience in the "traditional" sector. Amongst more recent writers following in this tradition is the Nobel laureate, Milton Friedman, who, during the seventies and eighties, championed supply side economics which gained much popularity in the corridors of power in London under Margaret Thatcher and Washington under Ronald Reagan. Such powerful patronage meant that it became the orthodoxy of the major institutions involved in supporting the structural adjustment programmes which guide the economic development of the least developed countries with particular effect on the weakest economies such as Malaŵi's (World Bank, 1989 and IMF, 1993).

These neoclassic or neoliberal economists maintain that market forces, when permitted to operate without interference, will reach an equilibrium that allows all its actors to benefit, albeit differentially. This endogenous approach

acknowledges that factors exogenous to the market, such as resource endowment, could affect the initial departure point, but maintains that the final outcome balances out when the invisible hand of the market is allowed to freely work. According to neoliberal writers, the free market promotes efficiency and rationality, because it is motivated by profit. Conversely, these theorists maintain that any form of government regulation or manipulation of the economy is interference which distorts the free play of market forces.

Robert Averitt (1968) claims that the neoclassical view is taken for granted as objective truth, when in fact it is an ideology that uses "efficiency" to justify a hierarchical world order dominated by its proponents (in England and Farkas, 1988, p. 343). Equity proponents on the other hand tend to be "soft-hearted" and define their economics in terms of what J.K. Galbraith (1994) calls the "good society." Frankman (1997), like Galbraith would argue that inequitable distribution is capitalism's greatest weakness. "Neither government, nor community, nor family exist in the basic theoretical model; hence none has a role in distributing income arising from the production process"(3). The UNDP Human Development Report 1997 estimates that the ratio of the share of the world's income of the wealthiest fifth and the poorest fifth has deteriorated from 30:1 in 1960 to 61:1 in 1991 and 78:1 in 1994 (in Frankman, 1997, p.3). Galbraith (1994) argues that equity is efficiency. In his view, the redistribution of wealth

towards the rich is inefficient because their "... spending and investment patterns are free from the disciplinary force of need or aspiration."

These "soft-hearted" critiques of the dominant paradigm have at different times found support within sectors of the development industry. The contradictions of the neoliberal approach became apparent in the late sixties, and early seventies, when it became clear that rapid growth of the weak economies, in most cases, did not lead to any real improvement in the lives of the majority of the people. In response to this "growth without development," measures were proposed to promote redistribution to ensure that the poorest sector's basic needs were met (ILO, 1986). Government policies were to be framed to target the poorest sectors and address social needs as well as employment and economic goals (Chimbe, 1993).

The United Nations Development Programme began to issue its Human Development Report using indicators geared to reflect the quality of people's lives which could not be transmitted through the use of economic aggregates. It gave recognition to living conditions as indicators and used variables such as life expectancy, maternal health, access to safe water, education, caloric intake, etc. (UNDP, 1995 as an example) to reflect how well people were sharing the fruits of development. In response to the criticisms of the environmental lobby, a school of thought gained widespread currency around the concept of sustainable

development. Non-renewable, resource-dependent, technological approaches were to give way to strategies which did not deplete resources and cause cumulative degradation of the social and economic environment (Brown, 1994; Brundtland, 1987; R. Swift, 1991; UNDP, 1993; inter alia). Increasingly strong demands from the feminist movement has also put the issue of women firmly on the agenda of most development institutions. Women in Development, known as WID, led to the introduction of strategies to redress the imbalances which had led to women bearing the brunt of poverty and ensured that development plans and policies included consideration of women's issues when they were being elaborated (Parpart, et al. 1995; Plewes, 1991; Nijeholt, 1987; Semu, 1995; Sen & Grown, 1987; USAID, 1994 & 1995).

Every one of these responses to the "hard hearted" econometric methodology has been the subject of considerable discourse in the circles involved in planning development strategies. Alternative strategies proposed under the rubric of Basic Needs, Human Development, Sustainable Development, Women in Development, while laudable, have usually been contextualized within the dominant paradigm which aims to involve more people as labour and resource producers in the free market (Nijeholt, 1987; Plewes, 1991). Perhaps the clearest example of how the economists dominate is in the "trade versus aid" debate. Unequal international commercial relationships were clearly targeted as the most serious root cause of underdevelopment and

eventually led to the negotiations for a New International Economic Order (NIEO). While reform of world trade was being proposed to open the door for the dominated economies to participate, the neo-liberal orthodoxy was establishing itself as the dominant paradigm in the corridors of power in the donor countries and the agencies dependent on them for funding. Reganism and Thatcherism firmly put the US and Great Britain on course for unrestrained free market development and combined to make their ideological presence felt in all the influential international forums. As Hettne (1990) aptly points out,

“While there was a growing consensus among Third World countries about the need for a radical reform of the international economic order, the idea that radical domestic reforms in the poor world were called for was equally fast gaining strength among development agencies in the developed countries.”(137)

Calls to reform the injustices of the world economic system were diverted by the demands of the donor countries and their agencies using structural adjustment programmes to compel national governments to give up policies and programmes which impeded the workings of the free market.

The econometric approach to globalization usually involves restructuring and adjustment which refers to the process through which local societies must adapt to business and capital moving more and more freely across national boundaries (Chossudovsky, 1997; Frankman, 1997; Greider, 1997). Any force which works against the expansion of global capital is considered non-market and therefore inefficient. The harsh reality is that the global tendency in

agricultural based economies is towards the concentration of land and capital and the "...reduction, differentiation and casualisation of the labour force"(Marcus, 1989, p.1).

The new discussion of globalization is, therefore, in reality, dealing with a very old phenomenon. In fact, the dynamics of the current global "... upheaval eerily resemble what occurred in England two hundred years ago: the infamous Enclosure Movement that accompanied the English industrial revolution, when the ruling interests dispossessed peasants of common lands in the village and effectively drove them to the city's mills and slums" (Greider, 1997, p. 73). Global capital is single-mindedly seeking the "bottom rung" in which to establish industry and exploit ever cheaper, unregulated working environments (Chossudovsky, 1997). Local elites reinforce their power over their fellow citizens and buttress their positions by allying themselves with the global structures.

Paul Sweezy (1992), that perennial critic of American imperialism, described President Bush's call, in the 1980s, for a new international economic order as, "The newest phase of a very old order." Instead of envisaging the redressing of imbalance in favour of poor people and weak national economies, the neo-liberal agenda involves protecting the already strong and dominant actors in the free market. Sweezy belongs to the critical school which clearly

identifies the global system as the basis of the underdevelopment of the weak economies. Socialism would provide an alternative and more equitable path to development. Numerous tendencies manifest themselves in this school, even within the most orthodox of Soviet thinking, but the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, the near complete hegemony of the free market, and the end of socialist style experiments in countries like Angola, Egypt, Mozambique and Tanzania has left this alternative rudderless.

Yet other schools of alternative thinkers evolved, in an effort to explain the phenomenon of underdevelopment. From Latin America came the “dependency” school, which saw the underdevelopment of weak economies as integral to the development of the strong economies. The poverty of the underdeveloped countries is not an original state, but rather a created condition as the powerful exploit the weak. The work of Cardoso (1979), Frank (1967), Furtado (1964), Galeano (1973) and others examined how the dominant development paradigm addressed the symptoms of the problem without dealing with the basic structural elements. The centre-periphery thesis evolved as an offshoot of the dependency theory and, in Africa, Samir Amin followed a similar line of analysis to explain the morass of underdevelopment facing the African people. The weakness of both these schools of thought and to a great extent much Marxist theory was that it placed an overwhelming emphasis on exogenous causes of underdevelopment. The mechanisms of capitalist market

penetration and class formation are far more pervasive and insidious than most critical theories could accommodate. Mandala (1990) is also critical of many of these approaches for relegating the peasants to the status of hapless victims of forces external to their control (p.8).

Wallerstein's world system analysis predates the current discussion around globalization by a decade, but nonetheless very neatly gives it a historical framework - the evolution of western capitalism over the last two or three centuries and introduces the dialectic of class relations - the way distinctions are made within groups. Wallerstein proposes the approach of a unified social science in which the political, social, economic, cultural, anthropological options are treated as one and the same - inextricably intertwined. Of the structural critiques, the World System analysis attempts to avoid the pigeonholing and ahistorical traps that other theories have succumbed to. It draws on dependency and centre-peripheral concepts, but places these in an historical evolutionary time frame and attempts to free itself of a number of biases inherent in both the dominant and alternative paradigms: Eurocentrism, dualism, reductionism, and focus on the nation state.

Quite naturally, as a result of its vast sweep and broad focus, it has come in for criticism, from both left and right, but deserves consideration because of its comprehensive, holistic, historical methodology (Hettne, 1990, p. 122). World

System identifies global capitalism as a social system and describes the steady continuous expansion of capitalism beyond the control of nation states. Nations which grew strong and powerful have become empires and then declined, "...while the world economy , which has expanded steadily since the sixteenth century, today covers most of the world." (Hettne, 1990, p.124) The similarities with the dependency approach are there but the weaknesses are transcended. There are not two types of capitalism, but one global system which is continually integrating weaker peripheral societies. It proposes that the dynamics of the process of integration are internal to any given social order and thus takes a holistic view of how social change is effected.

The emphasis in Smith and Wallerstein's Creating and Transforming Households: the Constraints of the World Economy (1992) has been to carry the project from its initial global framework to the household level to explore how the process of penetration affects economic, social and gender relations in diverse societies. They summarize the world system methodology in the concluding chapter "Core-periphery and household structures."

... we reconceptualized the household as an income-pooling unit, with boundaries subject to continuing change. We suggested that households were socially constituted entities subject to pressures deriving from the cyclical rhythms of the world market and from the state machineries. We argued that ethnicity was a principle modality of socializing household members into particular economic roles, and that these very norms of socialization kept changing under the influence of the multiple pressures generated by the on-going operation of the world-system. Once

formulated, this reconceptualization served as the premise of our collective research (253).

The majority of individuals live in households, which is the entity responsible for reproductive needs. A number of different means of acquiring “income” provide for these needs (Ibid.). The ideological framework within which a household operates is its social regime which must be analyzed within its historical context in order to fathom how the individuals who are members are motivated and how their relationships have evolved. The household like any social milieu is also a site where various conflicts act themselves out. Individual actors can operate differently within the household depending on their priorities and weaker members may be exploited to the advantage of others. Like any social entity, it faces internal contradictions which are the result of struggle between individual and group actors. These struggles can be based on gender, age or class.

The articulation of peasant modes of production and culture, or what Smith and Wallerstein call “ethnicity,” with the market economy has been the focus of much recent study. Each phenomenon identified must be understood in the context of any and all societies as fluid, ever-changing formations rather than static and unmoving. In addition, individual participants in a social setting share different perceptions of how the ideology works depending on the push / pull of factors such as gender, age and class. Mandala and Poewe see gender struggle

as a very clear element of precolonial society, in which parallel spheres of interest were promoted to the advantage of specific groups and that the arrival of free market economics tipped the balance of these forces to one group or another depending on the context at any given moment in history.

In Malaŵi, uneven pre-colonial processes became the basis of today's "... pattern of household activities, gender and age stratification and income pooling practices [which] is bound up with the determinants of the dissolution of the pre-capitalist ways of life and rule" (Martin, 1992, p.233). The narrowing of employment opportunities during the seventies and eighties has led to low wage employment which combined with lack of land, population pressure, and environmental degradation translates as very few income generating possibilities. Male mobility, in the face of this crunch means that many women are still very dependent on labour remittance incomes, while many others no longer can look to such support and become counted as female heads of households. Either way, women face constant day-to-day uncertainty about survival. Khaila (1992) sees household survival as a common priority regardless of rural differentiation:

All three groups [kulak, middle peasantry and poor peasants] reveal household production systems whose logic, to use Bernstein's terminology, is determined by the needs of simple reproduction and not the logic of accumulation.... Hence commodities are produced and

exchanged on the market to obtain money, not to be invested, but rather to buy reproductive commodities (55).

The dichotomy of vision between the planners and practitioners of development and the local milieu where people live their everyday lives is most clearly visible at the level of the household (Kandawire). In peasant communities, the priorities of the household members relate to maximizing limited resources available to the group usually by putting an emphasis on the distributional aspects of production and reproduction (Poewe, 1981). The econometric rules guiding the free market advocates are often unable or disinterested in deciphering the complex web of relations and discordant motivations of the peasant household. At the same time, the plans and policies of government and business and other elements of the global ideology have a significant and often detrimental impact on the household units of the poorest sectors of society (Smith and Wallerstein, 1992).

Studies of peasant life are dominated by the “soft-hearted” sociologists, anthropologist and political scientists. At the one end of the spectrum are the left radicals, Che Guevera (1961), Regis Debray (1967), and Franz Fanon (1968), who see the peasantry as the rural base for revolutionary struggle in non-industrial society. Peasant resistance and their ideological opposition to exploitation by other classes provides a counter-ideological basis for

overthrowing colonial capitalist regimes. On the whole, Marx saw the peasants of mid-nineteenth century France as a conservative force incapable of class consciousness, because of their isolation from each other and from other classes. They were exploited by individual capitalists through mortgages and usury and by the capitalist class through state taxes (Marx, 1852; Essack, 1989). In spite of this exploitation, the peasant classes remained conservatively attached to their small holdings and thus attached to the French middle classes rather than the revolutionary potential of the proletariat. Marx was writing of a specific place and people and within his work recognized that at other times in various sites, peasants had resisted their exploitation rather effectively.

More modern writers have studied the nature of peasants as a transitional class. Alavi, Shanin, Scott and Hesselberg, among others, look at how peasant households and societies perpetuate non-capitalist modes of production and deal with these as survival strategies rather than counter-ideological oppositional forces. Peasant struggle revolves around the right to resources, the use of their labour and the maintenance of social regimes that provide support to members of the group. Oscar Lewis, in his much criticised studies on the culture of poverty, put forth the hypothesis that poverty creates its own culture which becomes cyclical and thus self-perpetuating. Kearney takes a very different tact and writes as a critic of peasant studies and deconstructs the notion of peasant

which he links to the continual search for the “other” typical in most writing since the Enlightenment.

Proponents of the free market model often regard peasants as an impediment to economic development. Cliffe (1985) maintains that "One favourite 'institutional' factor is the persistence of what is incorrectly termed 'communal' rather than individual land tenure. "The World Bank...still saw peasants as 'conservative' so traditionalist that they are unable to respond rationally to new innovations" (p.118). Communal lands were seen to present several impediments to the kind of economic growth and transformation modelled on the west (Ibid., p. 129). Customary landholders could not use their land as collateral for credit and this was seen as a block to investment. It also was supposed to be an inherently insecure method of landholding. In addition, being subject to traditional practices and the decisions by local chiefs, it was prone to fragmentation. All these factors made it important, in the minds of planners, to promote private property to encourage economic growth (Kamchedzera, 1992, p.192 and Mkandawire, 1990, pp.173-174).

Land is the source of wealth and livelihood for the vast majority of Malawians (Peters, 1997, p.191) and is the main arena where the struggle between the two paradigms is most evident. Rights to land evolve through struggle which is mediated by class and gender forces, as well as market forces

with the state acting as a tool of the dominant groups (Chimbe, 1992). The competition for land in precolonial times was considerably mitigated by the nature of shifting agriculture, unrestricted land resources and age (Mandala, 1990; Poewe, 1981). Gender relations established under matriliney gave women considerable influence especially because of uxori-local marriage and matrilineal succession and inheritance (Peters, 1997, p.191). Since early colonial times the challenge to customary land practices has chiefly come from commercial farms alienating tracts for the production of tea, coffee, cotton and tobacco and which led to a duality in agricultural modes.

Over the same period, gender relations have been pushed firmly towards patriarchal values of Victorian Europe. Peters (1997) covers several of the important elements which reinforced male dominance including

... the promotion of the patriarchal nuclear family by missionaries, the preference for a male-headed family by estate owners seeking to control the numbers of tenants resident on their land, the assumption of male-headed households in government policies and programmes of the 1940s and 1950s, and the colonial and post-independence governments' habit of directing agricultural extension and services to men rather than women (p.191).

Atkins (1988) maintains that ownership and size of holdings are "... vital elements in defining a class interest in relation to land" (p.945). The right to land and the nature of land ownership define power in relation to land and "...determining control and appropriation of production." (Ibid., p. 944). The

Banda government justified estate agriculture as essential to efficient cash crop production, and promoted the creation of a class of *achikumbe* or progressive farmers from the ranks of the smallholder farmer. Most critiques identify the alienation of land to estates as a major factor in rural disparity (Atkins, 1988; Gaude and Watzlawick, 1992; Mhone, 1992; R.M. Mkandawire, 1992; inter alia). In addition, Pryor and Chipeta (1990) have identified that, "The most important single cause underlying the rising income inequality was the widening of income differentials within the Malaŵian smallholder sector (see also Pryor 1990A, chapter 16). Using the Gini coefficient to measure the inequality occurring within the smallholder sector, they found that it had more than doubled from .203 to .403 in the seventeen year period between 1967/68 and 1984/85 (p. 65).

On the one hand, it would appear that in matrilineal societies, women ought to have considerable influence because the inheritance of land rights passes through them. Poewe (1981) maintains that matriliney allows women to maintain control of the land and "... marry strangers who ideally come to work for them and their parents" (p.14). Historically, this is Richards' (1956) impression of women in matrilineal areas of Malaŵi as well. Mandala (1990) sees this as critical for women, since it does not allow unscrupulous dominant members of society to disenfranchise women and make them landless as is commonly the case when capitalist practices advance into precapitalist societies.

Working against this positive aspect is the free market emphasis on private property land tenure systems, which has contributed to increased impoverishment by alienating large numbers of people from their traditional access to land. On the one hand, government and private land owners subvert the power of chiefs and headman to allocate land. In some cases, new proprietors have accorded themselves the status of headman or landlord and allocated parcels of their privately held land to poor peasants to farm on a tenancy basis¹. In other cases chiefs tempted by the lure of cash transactions have sold customary lands and thus alienated them from use by the people towards whom they have a fiduciary responsibility (Kamchedzera, 1992, p.198). Finally, the family has been affected when traditionally held lands become private title usually in the man's name. The family members all have an interest and right to the customary land allocated to the family, but in some cases men have been known to sell their land or parts of it for cash. In this one action they permanently disenfranchise all the family members from land rights that had been in existence for generations (Ibid., p.199).

Nevertheless, the male oriented colonial legal system has been continued throughout the post-independence period with the vigorous support of the World Bank. As land is privatised out of customary production it is almost inevitably in

¹ Private conversation with a former assistant district commissioner, who, in his administrative role, dealt regularly with land issues arising from the conflict between the land policies of a large World Bank scheme and customary land practises.

favour of male title and in many cases where private title is accorded to men it has extinguished longstanding women's rights of access to productive land. Cyril Daddieh (1985) sums up how land policy puts women at a disadvantage:

... the continuing crisis of food and agriculture is at the same time a crisis in gender relations through encroachment. The successful expansion of export crop production leads to encroachments on land normally used for food production [or other domestic purposes like fuel gathering]. But where there is a bifurcation between the producers of food crops (women) and cash crop producers (male)... the continued exploitation of the most fertile arable lands represents an indirect assault or encroachment on women's rights (p.163).

After land, the contest for labour is the next critical level in the struggle between the globalizing effects of free market development and the needs of local people. The competition of the free market requires cheap labour and Malaŵi's rural women are the bedrock providing sustenance to their households and contributing to the low cost of market produce. Growing populations and limited income earning opportunities provide the crux of the dilemma of development in much of sub-Saharan Africa and no where more so than Malaŵi. The division of rural labour reflects a reproduction strategy of families struggling to adapt to the overall socioeconomic conditions facing them. The commercialization of agriculture and deepening implication in the market economy has led to considerable differentiation in the rural areas. Martin (1992) feels that this has led to "... the transformation of gender and income structure of the rural households, as well as the stability of their composition (p.232).

In sub-Saharan Africa the real crisis is the failure of employment creation to keep up with the growth of the working age population. In the region, the population growth has been approximately 3.2 percent per annum since the late 1980s but the growth in labour absorption has hovered around 2.2 percent (World Bank, 1993). According to Gaude and Watzlawick (1992) the population in poverty will continue to grow faster than the population with employment at a living wage (p.3). This implies that large parts of the African population will continue to live with underemployment, unemployment and precarious (often informal) employment. This sector of the population forms what Marx would call "the reserve army of the unemployed." Capitalist agro-enterprise and the low level of industrialization cannot even partially absorb the available labour supply. Such large numbers of poor people puts pressure on the wage levels which continue to fall in real terms. In addition, the poor exploit all available land resources in an effort to scratch out a bare subsistence, and, in the process, contribute to deforestation which seriously compromises the country's environmental future.

Deere (1979) postulates that family structure and attendant division of labour by sex are key to the extraction of surplus from noncapitalist modes of production. In particular, the division of labour by sex characterized by female production of foodstuffs and male semi-proletarianization allows the payment by capital of a male wage rate insufficient for familial maintenance and reproduction

(p.133). Judith Van Allen (1974) goes further when she maintains that the profits extracted from Africa

... would not be possible except for the unpaid labour of the wives of their African workers, who feed, clothe, and care for themselves and their children at no cost whatsoever to the companies. Far from being a drag on the modern sector, then, as it is sometimes claimed, the modern sector is dependent for its profits on the free labour done by women.

Deere also points out how women's increased economic role is not a sufficient condition for the development of women's status. Despite taking on an increased role in agricultural production

... the fact that women's participation is in the subordinate mode (subsistence), while men participate in the dominant capitalist mode of production, has had important repercussions for the aspirations and the values which tend to depreciate women's work in the "traditional" mode of production. But perhaps more important, the difference in men's and women's work experiences may have different consequences for the development of class consciousness. The male semiproletarian, by partaking in capitalist social production, is brought into direct struggle with capital, not as an individual, but as a member of an incipient class. The women agriculturalist, in contrast, must rely on her own self sufficiency.... (p.144)

The African peasant, because of this differential integration into the cash economy, must rely chiefly on themselves for producing their own caloric intake. Marxist writers like Lionel Cliffe (1982, 1985) and feminists like Henn (1988) see this as one of the ways that peasants are exploited by the capitalist model of development. Peasants are able to provide low priced wage labour at below the cost of reproducing their own energy because family, usually women, are working uncompensated by the cash economy to feed the peasant labourer

(Cliffe, 1985). Khaila (1992) calls this the “ultimate capture” of the peasantry and the means by which the capitalist system appropriated the peasant surplus. They are increasingly separated from their control over the means of production even while they own the land on which they cultivate (p.56).

In the face of this growing wealth gap, rural people, but poor women in particular, remain committed to their historical social regime, since it defines their principal access to labour and the essential distributive and social support network which help them survive the conditions of their poverty. Matrilineal goals reflect the rural priorities with respect to production, subsistence, survival, adaptation, social support, labour, and land. As a method of survival, it attempts to maximize resources and labour as well as provide a framework for social support. As a social phenomena, the matriliney of Malaŵi’s Central Region is widespread amongst the Zambian Tonga, Toca, Bemba, Bisa as well as the Cheŵa, Yao, and Mang’anja of Zambia, Malaŵi and Mozambique.

The survival responses of individuals and households are numerous. When the historical methods of social relationships are incompatible with capitalism, individuals may adopt new values and seek to sanction their actions within the context of whichever ideological framework that dominates in their social environment (Holy, 1986; Poewe,1981). In other situations, individuals may constructively use matrilineal practices which fit very logically and

compatibly in the capitalist context (Mandala, 1990). However, most feminist writers maintain that the articulation of different ideological systems with free market capitalism is almost always to the disadvantage of women (Parpart, 1995; Plewes & Stuart, 1991; Sen & Grown, Stichter and Parpart, 1988; Waring, 1988; inter alia).

Hondrich claims that contradictions work to make any move towards globalization which he calls functional differentiation invariably produce more segmentation as well (p.357). He calls this concept of segmentation, “niche evolution” or “niche societies” which stand as a theoretical and political complement to the dominant vision of a supersociety which would seem to be the end result of the idea of social evolution based on functional differentiation. Where Barber (1996) treats these niche responses as retrograde, primitive backlash to the process of modernization, Hondrich feels that niche evolution should be valued as a valid socio-cultural pattern which acts against the most negative aspects of functional differentiation. It is along these lines that this study has tended to regard the articulation between the free market forces at work in Malaŵi and the workings of the matrilineal regime of the rural poor in the Central Region.

Holy (1986) found that individual responses were significant among the Toka people. For him, the contradiction is between the individual family of

market patriarchy and the extended family of matriliney, between productive individualism and distributive communalism. The former is related to the degree of integration into the market economy and the latter towards subsistence. The commitment to matriliney is therefore related to how the individual is committed to maintaining a presence within the subsistence economy or integrating more fully into capitalist relations of production. The difficulty with his thesis arises from his willingness to ascribe agency to men as individuals and regard them as critical actors in the tug of war between patriliney and matriliney. On the other hand, he does not ascribe the same capacity to women operating within the matrilineal ideological framework. Women are passive reflections of men's motives in the equation rather than active agents exerting influence over how choices should be made.

Poewe (1981) establishes the widest and most comprehensive definition of matrilineal ideology in which the dominant institution is based on descent rather than marriage. It is holistic in that it encompasses all aspects of rural people's reality or existence, and life sustaining activities. The matrilineal kinship regime defines male / female dynamics, heredity and succession, lineage, access to productive resources, disposition of labour, land, leadership, family support obligations and responsibilities. In the context of economic relations, it determines control of land, other resources, and labour. Social obligations are defined through links of kinship which devolve from the maternal connections

and tend to be extended and inclusive. It is based on the "... principle of unity of the sibling group to provide a means for ordering relatives in a system of wide-range recognition of relationships" (Radcliffe-Brown, 1956, p. 27).

Women and their reproductive power makes them the legitimators of the matrilineal society. Matriliney, in Engel's (1884) analysis of precapitalist social formations (p.452), accorded women a high degree of respect and consideration. Poewe's (1981) thesis is that

.... male dominance is not universal because there have always been at least two fundamentally different forms of sociopolitical organizations: Matriliney which is based on abundance and unrestricted access to resources, conditions which select for sexually parallelistic control, and patriliney, which is based on scarcity and restricted access to resources, conditions which select for male control (p.26).

Several Malaŵian writers (Mandala, 1990; I. Phiri, 1992; K. Phiri, 1983) share this view that matrilineal social structures allowed, at least some women a degree of prestige and power that has slowly been eroded over time.

Now, however, matriliney is generally considered to give dominant roles to males other than husbands (Peters, 1997; I. Phiri, 1992; A. Woods, 1997). The way many individual men integrate their matrilineal background into the market system reinforces their dominance over both the women of their birth family and their spouses. "Under the combined pressure of the market system, Western

government policies, and Protestant ideologies, however, men increasingly create and control nuclear families and thus also women" (Poewe, 1981, p. 34).

Poewe finds that a more fundamental contradiction exists between the wide distributive aims of matriliney and the individual means of production by which produce is created. Individualistic production in matriliney dovetails with capitalism's emphasis on individual accumulation which allows the male producer to produce for himself and the descent group of his choice. In the context of matriliney, men are, therefore, tempted to distance themselves from the onerous obligations of the matrilineal marriage and find ways to either bring their wife into their own kin group or establish themselves on some neutral ground where the product of their labour can accrue to them and their progeny. This is to the disadvantage of a woman moving to a neutral terrain because she loses the security of kin support should the marriage not work out. In conditions of extreme poverty this vulnerability can represent survival itself.

Through the colonial and post-independence period, the process of integrating Malaŵi and other subSaharan countries into the world economy has continued apace. Carmen Deere (1979) describes a very direct link between policies intended to integrate rural populations into the market economy and the maintenance of prior modes of production. In addition, through the process of

adapting to the new mode of commercial production, other noncapitalist modes may evolve.

A primary characteristic of peripheral social formations is the maintenance of precapitalist modes of production alongside the dominant capitalist mode, as well as the creation of other noncapitalist modes by the very process of capitalist expansion.(p.145)

Jane Vock (1988) describes how the nature of peripheral capitalist economies is seen to be the asymmetrical articulation of the capitalist (dominating) and the domestic (dominated) modes of production. The domestic mode has lost both its autonomy and its precapitalist or precolonial character.

This noncapitalist domestic economy is no longer able to provide for its own sustenance (an aspect of the "freeing of labour") but is, at the same time, necessary, because, the wages obtained in the capitalist economy are also insufficient for survival.... Capital benefits from this asymmetrical articulation because the costs of the reproduction of labour power are absorbed in large part in the noncapitalist domestic mode (p.84).

The articulation between modes of production in this case assures that the surplus labour time which is appropriated indirectly from the noncapitalist mode is realized as surplus value by capitalist units of production (Deere, 1979; Khaila, 1992; Van Allen, 1974; Plewes and Stuart, 1991).

Almost inevitably, poor women are the stable core of the family with responsibility for the children and their welfare. The poor, rural women of Malaŵi are caught in a bind caused by the articulation of the matrilineal ideology of the Central Region Chewas and the patriarchal and male-centred forces of the free market. In that articulation, gender, class and age antagonisms have worked to

the detriment of poor rural women. The communitarian aspects of their productive system, especially the resource sharing and the distribution of the product of family labour are in conflict with the tendency to private property, and accumulation promoted by capitalism's view of social relations. This leads to a loss of status and influence in society, and to a serious deterioration in the material well-being. The next chapter examines how this lived reality is understood and dealt with by the actors themselves.

Chapter 4: Methodology

General method

Malawi's rural population has had to considerably modify its social and productive organization to adapt to government and donor development strategies aimed at extending the influence of the market economy. Effectively, these two groups, the rural poor and the administrative operatives, view the process of rural change from very different standpoints. The perspective of the latter are widely documented as politicians, functionaries, planners and academics constantly define, implement, evaluate and justify their policies and plans. This administrative viewpoint is not necessarily counterbalanced by an equal amount of research and writing giving voice to the poorest groups in the population who do not have the means to make known their priorities and their strategies for day to day survival.

The commitment to give voice to the poorest sector of the population has as its corollary the need to deconstruct the aggregating tendencies favoured by the dominant development paradigm. As a result, the methodological bias of this study was away from quantitative research and towards descriptive and qualitative analysis of the rural poor and women in particular. The effort was to let people define their reality in their own words. It is best to declare at the very outset that this researcher is a very partisan observer and thus the work is not very neutral. The research inclination is towards social justice and a research

product which provides people with the knowledge to right wrongs and change the injustices of the free market world they live in. The focus is on the everyday lives of the rural peasantry and semi-proletarianized workers. Consequently, it provides neither a very complete nor sympathetic view of the administrative perspective and the development paradigm which frames its operations.

Until recently, research on Malaŵi has been limited by the elitist nature of the Banda regime which was extremely sensitive to criticism and stifled negative reporting about poverty and inequality. The Banda government undertook numerous quantitative surveys and studies to promote its political and class goals. On the other hand, qualitative research was regarded with great suspicion. Any studies which threatened to reveal inconsistencies or contradictions between the goals of the regime and the lived reality of the mass of the people were unacceptable. Since 1994, the country has undergone an important change towards political democracy which now allows social scientists to undertake more intensive study of the evolution of rural society in Malaŵi. However, while such work is now politically possible, it is still rare and infrequent, because of the limitations of the social and economic reality facing the people capable of undertaking research on behalf of and giving voice to the poorest people. Individuals who become articulate spokespersons of the poor become so enmeshed in the struggle for day to day survival, common in a country with a weak economy, that their energies are drained away from time

consuming, non-remunerative, research and representational activities.

Nonetheless, a number of theoretical criticisms support this ground up methodology. Two key critiques are aptly framed by the geographers, Taylor and Johnston (1991) in "Uneven Development: General Processes and Local Variations." They call the first the autonomous societies assumption of the dominant development paradigm. Development is understood as an internal process occurring within the national borders which delimit a society. The second they refer to as the parallel paths assumption. Development in all societies follows similar parallel sequences. Differences between societies can be situated at different points along these linear paths. The third question arises from feminist critiques and is exemplified by the work of writers like Marilyn Waring (1988) a former politician in New Zealand and Dorothy Smith (1987, 1990), the Marxist feminist sociologist. They challenge the very assumptions and terms of reference on which analysis of economic and social development theories are based. Waring points out that classical economics, in particular, has been dominated by a gender biased ideological outlook that ignores the contributions of women. Smith carries this line of critique over to other disciplines and criticizes the effort to scientifically codify the everyday lives of the people being studied. By so doing, social scientists depersonalize and dehumanize their subjects and convert their life experience to the terms of reference of ruling elites. These critiques are a challenge to many of the basic

assumptions of social and economic modelling represented by liberal neoclassical economics and which permeates academia and the discourse of government, business, finance, industry, development planners and practitioners.

The autonomous society assumptions frame development and related problems within the national borders of the country in question and the focus on internal economic, political and social processes minimizes the role of the global economic system in shaping and affecting people's everyday existence. The international economic order is taken as an irreversible and unquestionable given into which all societies must integrate. Failure to do so is a result of non-economic local factors which impede progress and prevent development. These assumptions allow the imbalances inherent in the structure of the global system to stand unchallenged especially by the weakest partners in the international power relationships.

The parallel sequences concept is a restatement of the Rostow school of economic development. It assumes that what has been good for Europe and North America will hold true when applied to the rest of the world. Development is viewed as economic development and all countries can be situated on a continuum with Western Europe and North America serving as the most evolved models. Once again the constraints on development are seen to be local and by

modifying the economic behaviour of local people, the model can bring benefit to any group. However, as many writers point out, the constraints overcome during European and North American economic development over the last two hundred years are radically different from those facing Malaŵi and the rest of sub-Saharan Africa at the end of the twentieth century. Domination of the economies of Africa perpetuates disparities in the balance of trade which cannot be overcome by simply changing the customs and attitudes of the local peasantry. Growth models and Western progress do not always articulate neatly or painlessly with local contexts and often increase internal and external disparities when applied.

In her critique of the methodological assumptions on which the majority of development paradigms are founded, Dorothy Smith (1987, 1990) focuses on the practice of labelling, aggregating and compartmentalizing which leads academics and policy makers to reify the labels which they themselves have created. By giving labels to people in different circumstances, we aggregate them out of their individual existence and fall into the economist's trap of treating them like dehumanized units of production. At the same time, this process dehumanizes the everyday reality of the people who are the subjects of research. This is not an accidental process. It is related to power and control over subordinate groups in society. It allows generalizations to be drawn without having to refer to inconvenient realities such as class and gender distinctions

which do not fit conveniently into the paradigm, but are the essence of rural poverty in particular.

The main criticism of the dominant development paradigm is that it presents an undemocratic, top-down, Euro-American model. Miguel Angel Centeno (1994) refers to how throughout the thirty years of the post-independence era in Africa, development planning has been led by the ideological and theoretical paradigms evolved in donor countries and the international financial institutions, particularly the World Bank and the IMF. He maintains that:

One of the most striking aspects on the literature on transition is how little we know of what it involves on a daily basis. We have quite an amount of data and analysis of the “macro” side of the transition, but relatively little on the “micro.” ... As students of the transition we should be prepared to spend extended periods of time simply listening to the societies as they undergo this process. (pp. 140-41)

Appell (1991) brings us back to the on-the-ground reality of the micro-level when he refers to the frustration of government officials and economic planners who apply their theories without accounting for these realities:

In fact, what is actually surprising is that anyone would think that an abstract theory, operationalized with reference to an industrial firm or similar limited frame, could prescribe behaviour for farmers who have lived in an environment their entire lives, observed countless details about its soils, crops, weather, labour supply, market prices, and government intervention, and have integrated these experiences with “cultural rules of thumb” into a total understanding that all our research methods in combination can hardly fathom (p.41).

The late J.A. Kamchitete Kandawire (n.d.), a sociologist at the University of Malaŵi, outlined this incompatibility of the definitions used by the rural people and the administrative model of the Malaŵi government and the donor agencies. In one example, he referred to how the village was, on the one hand, viewed by the government as the lowest level of administrative unit. It was given a status and a stable, formal organization for tax collection purposes and to incorporate subsistence agriculture into the money economy to allow government to raise taxes. Peasant behaviour is influenced by manipulating single elements basic to the village's existence, such as fertilizer prices or crop prices. On the other hand, the villager's view of their community is of an entity based on households, family units and the larger *banja* society. The village's shape and very existence is as fluid as the ever-changing relationships resulting from birth, marriage and death. For the inhabitants, village life has to provide all the marital, social, economic and cultural factors to sustain life. The priorities of villagers are survival, subsistence and collective support.

Elias Mandala (1990) criticizes alternative development paradigms for falling into some of the same traps as the dominant paradigm. In his view, world system analysis and centre periphery models "... would make the local population the hapless victims of unequal exchange and ruling class agendas

generated outside of the Valley¹(8). He also denounces the ecological approach which "... would reduce the population to mere captives of the blind forces of nature..."(op. cit.) In his view, these methodologies ignore the agency of the people. They are actors in equal part with others in the articulation of the competing modes of production. In his view, they are changed by the introduction of the market economy, but through a combination of resistance and flexibility they adapt capitalist methods to their needs as much as they are pushed to fit into the market economy.

The original plan for this study foresaw a comparative-historical approach which favoured a bias towards observation and open-ended interviews of people in the rural areas. The observation and interview portion of the methodology were originally seen as the fieldwork and a necessary component of a social science research project. The aim was to verify the theoretical assumptions of the current research project and the claims of other researchers through first-hand accounts from poor men and women in the rural areas. In addition, a search was to be carried out for existing research reports or data from university, government and agency sources that document the condition of rural society and gender relations. This method precluded any attempts to arrive at statistical verification of variable relationships. At this stage of the research, cross-

¹ The Mang'anja people of the Shire Valley have many customs and practices in common with the Chewa people of the Central Region.

referencing through secondary sources and statistical data was considered more than sufficient to complement the qualitative with quantitative material. A long-term goal included a more thoroughly grounded work with the populations in question.

Much of the descriptive data came from interviews together with participant observation during trips through villages, a five day stay in a village and talk with people from many walks of life. Much of the literature on the situation of rural Malaŵian households uses methodologies which are quantitative and oriented to providing statistically verifiable data. The intent was to examine the complexities of village relationships beyond the statistical portrait. With an open ended interview format and questions focussing on relationships, the intent was to undertake a qualitative data gathering process. The objective was to learn in people's own words about how their social mechanisms were coping with the daily dilemmas they face. The interview tool (Appendix III) was meant simply to ensure that, minimally, the interviewer covered the same ground with all the men and women who agreed to talk with us. The interviewer was encouraged to follow up on the answers to questions in order to learn as much as possible about the subjects, in their terms.

The first aim of observing the rural life between Bunda and Mitundu was to build an historical view of the area over a twenty to thirty year period. The

second aim was to use the observations to assess the area's current integration into the market economy, including the presence of government, business and other organizations and to delineate the socioeconomic composition of the local society and the current state of gender relations. In terms of both aims, the observations were to be reviewed with respondents and other researchers, in order to stimulate the interview process and verify the researcher's comments. The observation stage was also meant to help to identify local respondents and to assess the approach of the open ended interviews in terms of content and suitability as well as to determine the ease or difficulty of access for a nonresident foreign researcher.

The interview process allowed contact with a sampling of local people, especially older women whose recollection of history and knowledge of local folklore and customs could provide a historical, cultural and social context against which to try to draw some conclusions about the nature of change in the area. The interview strategy with local people aimed to collect remembrances of quality of life conditions existing thirty or more years previously. Questions were to be designed to attempt to fathom the qualitative nature of gender relations, attitudes and changes people could notice. Such encounters lent themselves to open-ended interviews rather than a strict questionnaire format.

The government and donor agencies produce a great number of documents on a regular basis according to their mandate or on an *ad hoc* basis as required. The first category would include World Bank statistics and the second, reports such as the UNICEF Situation Report on Poverty in Malaŵi. The Malaŵi Government Statistics Office has much census information and other materials, but in some cases the most recent information is not readily available for budgetary and other reasons.

Many agencies recruit Malaŵian academics to prepare special studies, reports or conference presentations on issues related to social and economic welfare. These documents are often in mimeographed and unpublished form. In many cases, they contain otherwise unreported statistical data, and useful theoretical and background information on different fields of interest to this study. These sources were identified chiefly through the library of Bunda College of Agriculture and the Centre for Social Research as well as through visits to agency libraries.

Original concerns of this researcher were around the issue of identifying interview subjects and the viability of a process in which a foreign researcher unable to speak the vernacular must depend on the use of intermediaries and the bias which occurs at the various steps of such research. Ken Wiyo, an irrigation engineer and Bunda College lecturer, who was sent the thesis

proposal for his feedback questioned the feasibility of the field component of the research as follows:

... a field study in my opinion is unnecessary and you can later be attacked for not taking into account statistical sample design during the defence of your thesis. I suggest this field study be omitted and concentrate on meeting professionals/ academics and institutions/ organisations. They already did the surveys you are suggesting and thus have existing info you can easily tap. Most of the info you need can be found at Bunda Library. A lot of work on Women in Development has been done by Bunda (See Dr Beatrice Mtimuni) and Centre for Social Research (Dr Khaila....)

Most of the info here will be found at Bunda. Instead of you collecting the field data MAY I STRONGLY SUGGEST you concentrate on a "DESK STUDY" where Bunda Library is the Desk. It will save you lots of time. Any research work that has been done in Malaŵi, you will find at Bunda since Bunda is the National Repository of Agriculture Info and Margaret Ngwira (ed. the Librarian) has created her own computer databases for you to search info on (ask about MAIZE, ENVIRONMENT, WOMEN in DEVELOPMENT databases at Bunda. Then your work is done.

I can even say, you don't have to spend time at Centre for Social Research coz (sic) all their publications are at Bunda. Also at Bunda you will find the Agricultural Policy Analysis Unit (Dr Ng'ong'ola Director) plus International Food Policy Unit (Dr Mataya for details)

Upon arrival at Bunda, the College's Chief Executive Officer, Mr Joe Kumbuyo, indicated that studies in the rural areas were coordinated through a special government office which oversees research and that permission for such research was a long process. His comments were echoed by Fanwell Bokosi who is studying economics at the Master's level at Bunda College and whose studies were directed towards issues of rural poverty and disparity. Both

confirmed that much of the data of interest was available from a variety of existing research documents, thesis and presentation papers available either in the Bunda Library or from various Bunda faculty members. Another researcher, Professor Zeller felt that a thorough field research project would require two to three months to produce the kind of data needed for inference.

This news was a setback for about the first week and a half of the research trip. Later information revealed that while such procedures exist, they had been instituted by the previous government as part of its security fixation and while the new democratic dispensation had not done away with the ruling, it nonetheless allowed researchers the freedom to work in the rural areas. By this time, the work in the library and in contact with the World Bank, UNICEF, etc. revealed the truth of Prof. Wiyo's comments about much groundwork having been done on the nature of evolving relations in Malaŵi's rural society.

In addition, this researcher was staying with a Malaŵian friend, in one of the larger houses in the support and administrative staff quarters. Every morning, there were frequent interruptions by people from the surrounding area seeking *ganyu* (piecework) for the day. On one morning alone, four women and two men asked for *ganyu*. The matron of the house indicated that they were often willing to work for food rather than for money, because they had run out of staples in their household. It became apparent that this phenomenon was

related to what was described in the literature as food insecurity. In the period November to February every year, the previous year's food supplies were exhausted and the poorest groups were obliged to seek *ganyu* employment to supplement their food supply at the very time when they needed to prepare their own fields, weed and fertilize the new crop.

A decision was made to interview a random cross section of *ganyu* seekers as an alternative to interviews amongst a selected population in a given village. The *ganyu* seekers represented the poorest sectors of the rural society, as described in the literature and apparent from observation. The goal was set at 10 to 15 interviews, in order to gain the experience and insight that mounting an interview process can provide for social research. The planned interviews were too few to be statistically significant, but the responses would, nonetheless, serve as indicators of the accuracy and veracity of other research. In addition, the *ganyu* seekers, being amongst the poorest sector of the population, were the prime focus of the study and were self-selected by virtue of appearing at the courtyard gate looking for work.

The problem of language was solved serendipitously. The eldest daughter of my host family is a nursing graduate who had time available. She had taken courses in interview techniques as part of her nurse training. The nurses are taught how to seek information from patients who are illiterate and

who may have low level numeracy skills. She and Mr. Bokosi, both read the thesis proposal and helped develop the interview instrument to be used. After the experience of one interview, the instrument was revised and appears in Appendix III. All interviewing was thus influenced by the intermediary interviewer/ translator as well as the researcher's bias. My interviewer had completed five interviews by the time I had to leave and thereafter continued the process of interviewing and transcribing until she accomplished fifteen in total. The first five were taped, but in the interests of efficiency, it proved easier for her to write the subjects' responses as they spoke and the taping was abandoned.

Variables were chosen to provide an opportunity for the respondents to reflect on their material condition, status, family roles and responsibilities. An attempt was also made to allow the respondents to recall family history in order to gain an insight, even though subjective, into the evolution of the variables from generation to generation. The indicators of change over a period of two or three generations included: access to land and how much; labour supply, domestic and production work; gender roles; disbursement of produce, who decides; state of marital relations; marriage location *chikamwini* (uxorilocal) or *chitengwa* (virilocal); family decision making; knowledge of and reflections on mother's/ father's condition; access to credit. The questionnaires were designed with the assistance of Mr. Bokosi and the interviewer, Miss Kumbuyo, and were

framed in a way which was thought to be appropriate for getting information without being invasive or offensive.

The sample was drawn from the people who live in villages within walking distance of Bunda College. The dominant group of people in the area are historically Chewa. Their social organization is matrilineal and the people of the area have had considerable contact with the commercial economy. This offers the possibility of learning about how the matrilineal regime is surviving the steady commercialization of the economy and how it helps people to cope or prevents them from making essential adaptations. Their Chewa background and the fact that they are all *ganyu* seekers produces a relatively homogenous sample. All of the 15 respondents came from villages within walking distance of Bunda College. All of their parents came from the nearby districts, so they shared the common background of Chewa matriliney. Since the study focus was on the poverty facing women within the matrilineal tradition, it was decided to interview more women than men. Since the study attempts to look back historically, it was of interest to identify older women who could reflect upon historical condition of the family. The choice of *ganyu* seekers as a sample population meant that the respondents would very likely be from among the poorest members of their village communities. The respondents often preferred to be paid in food rather than money since it solved their basic need without having to use money and deal with an intermediary to sell them foodstuff.

The observation plans met with equally good luck. Banos Kalande Chidovu, a smallholder farmer remembered the researcher from 1971. He very helpfully acted as guide through the village paths between Bunda, Mkwinda, Nakuyela, Mlale and Mitundu. The insights he provided by taking me into the homes of two of his three wives and the home of his sister and several of his adult children were invaluable. He stopped frequently to introduce the local headmen and relatives of his extended family network in the area. His guidance through the pathways opened vistas on Malaŵi that would have been unavailable to the desk-bound, or road-bound traveller/ researcher. Between his broken English and the researcher's equally limited knowledge of Chicheŵa, there was enough communication to learn a great deal about his family life and relationships with his wives and children.

These observations were supplemented by visits to two other rural parts of the Central Region. One was a day long visit with the Reverend Kingston Kaunde who runs a church station at Ndeka, northwest of Lilongwe and another stay of five nights in a homestead near Kasungu, about a hundred kilometres north of Lilongwe. Rev. Kaunde cast considerable light on the role of religion in the rural areas and how many of the rural people are still firmly attached to their ancestral religious practices. He also spoke of how his own marriage to his first cousin had been arranged by his father. The trip to his station was an education in how inaccessible small villages can be to transport and facilities and

reinforced Bunda observations about agricultural practices, population density, and deforestation. Another visit was to Makupo Cottage in Kasungu. This is a small family holding on the Chilanga, Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian mission lands held by the descendants of Mrs. Namumba, the maternal grandmother of the researcher's wife. Two matriarch daughters of Mrs Namumba currently hold the title to the land through a long term lease from the mission. Through the visit and discussions with their children and themselves a great deal was learned about the way rural life has been changing in that area.

In total, the researcher spent five weeks in Malaŵi, for the most part in rural areas, but also in town looking for data and documentation. On a very human level, it was difficult, as a foreigner, to escape the influence of the market economy and the privileged life of the elite in order to meet and learn about the everyday life of the poorest sector of the population. Many of Malaŵi's elite never leave the comfort of electricity and urban life to visit villages and have little knowledge of, or interest in the poverty facing the rural populace. At the same time, the newspapers were full of the discourse of the dominant paradigm and the self-promoting efforts of the elites and international agencies. The poor have almost no voice in this context.

Chapter 5: Data - Presentation and Interpretation

The reality of Malaŵi's poverty is reflected in the status and the physical condition of the poorest of rural women. This chapter examines the stress they face in their daily lives and how these pressures have an impact on their relationships and material condition. This is accomplished by focussing on the critical elements of rural life - land, labour and social regime. The availability of fertile land, combined with the pressure of population seriously affects the stability of rural households. The large number of people coming into the labour market coincides with the household division of labour and places women in a disadvantaged position. All these factors place strain on marital relations and people call on what support they can through the social regime, in this case matriliney which largely guides social relations, rights and obligations in village households. Specific micro-level information is based on listening to what people say about their lives in interviews¹ as well as observing what they do. This information has been supplemented by data from researchers who have examined these and related issues in the Bunda area or elsewhere in Malaŵi.

This everyday reality is contrasted to the policies and programmes of the dominant paradigm as applied to Malaŵi. The global component of the free-

¹ The interview questionnaire appears in Appendix III. Questions in the following text are identified in brackets by number, e.g. (5.1).

market is represented by the complex of overlapping interests of tobacco, tea and other agri-business and multinational corporate interests, the IMF, World Bank, and a variety of governmental and non-governmental agencies. The local ruling class is firmly oriented to the free-market ideology and includes Mhone's (1992A) "Iron Triumvirate" of business, political, and bureaucratic elite. It also includes the rural kulak classes, the government infrastructure promoting market agriculture, as well as religious denominations espousing values chiefly evolved from occidental capitalism. The business and government agenda is aligned to goals of efficiency and competition, and promotes the concentration of land, low labour costs and increased accumulation through improved productivity of commercial agriculture. These local elites are essential elements of the articulation process, but since the study's focus is poor, rural women, this global side of the equation is not addressed except in grossly general terms, which do not do justice to the complexity of its makeup.

The dichotomy between the formal structures of the state and the development community with the lived reality of local households is very apparent in the approach to land, labour and social planning. For the most part, policy makers and planners design programmes and projects which emphasize productivity, technology and cash returns. On the other hand, peasant farmers, particularly women, with their critical responsibility for domestic reproduction, are faced with the everyday problem of distributing limited resources as broadly as

possible to provide for the very basic needs of their households. In the absence of social supports through the market system, the family regime defines who is responsible to care for whom and since most such care is domestic in nature, the burden falls particularly hard on women.

Land is, without question, a rural farmer's most critical resource. Food is produced on the land, and income is generated, chiefly through cash cropping. Many other resources are also land based. The soil is packed to make the walls of houses. Grasses for thatching, fences and weaving grow on the land as does the firewood for cooking. Most water is from the aquifers under the surface. Access to land is, therefore, critical for people when the local and national economy do not provide other means of acquiring food and the means of existence.

A glance at the outdated topographical map of the area² (Appendix II) reveals that a sizeable portion of the land is not available for smallholder use. The Bunda Forest Reserve, Bunda College of Agriculture and its farmlands, the schools, post office, hospital and roadways are classed as public lands. The Mlale, Mitundu and Dzanzi estates are private lands and comprise a large percentage of the arable farmland. The map is based on a 1970 aerial survey

² At the time of the study, this was the most recent version which was available from the Department of Survey's Map Office in Blantyre.

and since that time more land has been alienated away from customary use by the expansion of both public and private landholding. Bunda College lands now extend northwards along the border of the Forest Reserve as far as Bunda Mountain and from the College campus to the Mitundu-Lilongwe road. A number of local residents had to be relocated, often outside of the district, when the government expropriated their lands for college use.

Not all the rest of the land is available to the smallholder as customary landholdings. Apart from the public and private lands, the map does not distinguish which parts of the land are privately held smallholdings. As part of the World Bank strategy for increasing production, a programme to privatize collectively held lands was undertaken, so a class of small landholders came to hold title to what had previously been customary lands. In free market terms, the logic of leasehold and freehold was to make larger units which would be more productive than the average customary held plots. Two of the interview respondents indicated that land is still available for purchase, despite the lack of customary land available for the expansion of agriculture.

Another reality, which is not evident from the maps, is that the colonialists usually established their estates on prime agricultural land and that the rural village farmers were left to fend on customary land which was often marginal and less fertile (see also Chimbe (1992), pages 37 - 40 and 52 - 57). To

accommodate this reality and maximize productivity, family holdings are often not one contiguous package but can be several scattered pieces in different areas depending on soil type and the use to which the land is to be put. A household's maize and tobacco may be grown on the higher ground in sandy, loam soil and in a distinctly separate and sometimes distant piece of land the household may have access to wetter *dambo*³ soils for growing *ndiwo*⁴ and some market produce. Needless to say, this method of scattered landholding is difficult to reconcile with the techniques of freehold title which prefer land held as an easily surveyed contiguous entity.

The size of a rural farmer's landholding has a direct impact on the ability of the people to feed themselves and their household and earn an income to provide the basic necessities. Questions 4.1 and 3.6 were asked to elicit information⁵ about how much land people had for their use and how many people were supported off the land allocation. Table 1 reproduces their answers. Line one indicates the respondent's gender and the order in which they were interviewed. Line two (Question 4.1) indicates the amount of land the respondent

³ A *dambo* is an area of land in which ground water is retained close to the surface. These areas retain their moisture well into the dry season, which allows limited agriculture to occur after the rains have stopped.

⁴ *Ndiwo* is the "relish" or side dish eaten with the *nsima* and usually includes various leafy vegetables, tomatoes, and beans.

⁵ Responses are in the third person as transcribed by the translator / interviewer. The respondents are identified by number in order of the interview and their sex, e.g. 2M, 4F. See Appendix I for a social / demographic picture of all the respondents.

holds and line three (Question 3.6) how many people eat at the respondent's home and are therefore fed from the fields in question.

Table 1: Size of Plots and Household

Question 4.1 How much land do you have for your use? (Answer in hectares)

Question 3.6 Who eats at your house? (Number of people)

	1 F	2 M	3 F	4 F	5 F	6 F	7 F	8 F	9 M	10 F	11 F	12 M	13 M	14 F	15 M
4.1	1	1.3	0.4	1	0.6	0.2	0.4	1.2	0.8	1	0.8	1.2	0.8	0.8	0.8
3.6	5	6	3	3?	5	6/8	3/5	7	7	7	5	6	5	5	8

The table reveals the following information about the respondents:

Total hectares available to the 15 interviewees and their households	12.3	hectares
Average hectares per interviewee	0.8	hectares
Largest garden	1.3	hectares
Smallest garden	0.2	hectares
Average size of men's plots	0.98	hectares
Average size of women's plots	0.74	hectares
Smallest household supported on plot	3	people
Largest household	8	people
Average household per plot	5.2	people

In matriliney, a husband's access to land is through the family of his mother-in-law. In such a circumstance, the women would seem to have an advantage over the men. The table, however, shows that on average the male respondents had larger plots than the women. The three smallest plots all belonged to women, the two oldest respondents in their sixties and the youngest, a nineteen year old. Respondents 4F, 6F and 7F did not give clear answers about how many people ate at their hearth. These were the three oldest

participants. Their daughters, and grandchildren may often join them for meals, out of respect for their age and status.

Research indicates a very direct and transparent relationship between class, size of landholding, and food security. Many reports (Khaila, 1992; R. Mkandawire, 1987, n.d., 1992; Msukwa, 1990, 1994; UNICEF, 1993; World Bank, 1990B, 1991, 1995) describe, in varying detail, how most smallholders on plots of less than two hectares cannot live the full year on the maize produced solely on their plots. The harvest is generally around April, and as many as twenty-three percent of the households have depleted the maize stocks within five months of the previous harvest period. This figure rises to over sixty percent of households by January, which is the season when people must work the hardest to plant, cultivate, weed and fertilize (R. Mkandawire, n.d.). Members of these households have several strategies for surviving until the next harvest. First they can seek alternative sources of income such as “*ganyu*” or piecework. They can also call on support from their social network of friends and relatives. In addition, they can reduce their daily food consumption (Msukwa, 1990). Figures indicate that during this period many people have as little as one meal a day for prolonged periods during the months of November through March, in order to extend the available food. December through February most rural people facing shortages eat less than two meals a day. This national statistic is more revealing when it is further decomposed. Table 2 shows that as many as

twenty-seven percent of all households eat only one meal a day during the month of February, and that when this figure is more closely examined, the numbers reveal that forty percent of women and twenty-four percent of men eat only once a day. (Msukwa, 1990, p. 36-37) As a result of this annual food deficit women lose between 1.9 and 4.2 kilogrammes of body weight. This nutritional wasting⁶ has a variety of serious effects on the health of women, especially with respect to pregnancy, delivery, breastfeeding and the health of new born babies. The reduced calorie intake is especially deleterious when combined with the work day of the women which according to some studies can average twice as much as men when domestic and child rearing duties are combined with field work and *ganyu* (World Bank, 1991, p.16).

⁶ Nutritional Wasting is a low weight for height value, generally below 90% of the reference standard.

Table 2: Percentage of Households Preparing One Meal a Day by Sex of Household Head for all Agricultural Development Districts

Month	Sex of Household Head		Both Sexes
	Male	Female	
May 1990	9.2	4.3	7.4
June	9.4	12.2	9.9
July	11.4	12.7	11.6
August	11.1	15.6	11.9
September	16.7	18.2	17.0
October	16.2	23.6	17.5
November	18.7	28.3	20.3
December	21.4	30.9	23.1
January 1991	23.6	30.2	24.7
February	24.1	40.4	27.1
March	20.7	22.0	20.9
April	12.6	9.9	12.1

Council for Social Research (1992) Field Survey on Impact of Grain Marketing Liberalization on Household Food and Income Security (Msukwa 1994)

Food security and nutrition are directly related to the size of the plot of land available. Almost fifty per cent of the households subsisting on half of one hectare report that they have depleted their food stocks by October and those living with less than two hectares report that their food stocks have run out by December. In terms of food self sufficiency, the critical subsistence point occurs above 2 hectares. That is the minimum size which allows a family to maintain adequate supplies from their own production, except in periods of drought. At six

percent, a much smaller number of households reported depleted food stocks when they had two hectares or more to farm.

In a follow up question (4.2) to the Bunda *ganyu* seekers, respondents were asked if they could get more land if they needed it. All fifteen respondents were unanimous in replying that there was no more customary land available. Most made comments like the first woman, “No, because there is no customary land to be shared with people, but (she) could only get more land if she has money to buy but she said she doesn’t have the money.” In addition, the continuous use of the land for maize and tobacco crops, in particular, has tended to exhaust the soil. The lack of available land means that the land has no fallow time to replenish essential soil nutrients. Fertilizers can only do a partial job, so the soil’s fertility declines and repetitive cropping on the same piece of land gradually leads to a decline in productivity. When combined with the deforestation resulting from the demand for fuelwood, this loss of soil fertility represents a serious ecological disaster with long term consequences for the ability of the population to attain food security.

The answers of the respondents reflect the pressure they face as a result of the shortage of customary land, which is well documented in the literature. This situation would also appear to be longstanding, since in several cases grandparents had moved into this area because of the shortage of land in their

home areas in other districts of the Central Region. This corroborates the observations, from the historical record, made as long as one hundred years ago. Even when the population was considerably smaller, there was, nonetheless, a large concentration of people sharing the land in the Lilongwe area compared to the rugged, less accessible, empty spaces nearby, in what is today Mozambique to the south and Zambia to the west.

The poorest farmers face a dilemma as a result of the small plot size available to the rural population. The largest portion of the available land must be dedicated to food production. The plots are too small to simultaneously produce crops for the cash economy, yet cash is required to buy fertilizers to produce the food needed to survive. In the memories of the older women particularly, the situation of the rural poor would appear to have deteriorated since the time of their parents. Within living memory there was enough land available that slash and burn agriculture allowed areas of land to lie fallow long enough for the soil to regain its fertility. Under pressure from the dense population, the land is permanently being cultivated and needs fertilizer to maintain even partial fertility. In answer to questions about how her mother's situation was different for better or worse, one woman (5F) indicated that, in her mother's time, food was never scarce and her mother had been able to afford the daily household needs of salt, soap and sugar. Her response can be linked to the fact that a generation earlier the rural farmer had access to enough land to

produce food to meet the household needs. This also indirectly indicates that soil fertility was higher than today. Another woman (8F) said, "My mother's situation was better in the sense that there were no frequent droughts and people could harvest enough maize without applying fertilizer to their garden, whilst nowadays rain is a problem and you can't have enough maize without fertilizer but even the fertilizer is just too expensive." She indicates very directly that the soil fertility has been declining and that fertilizer is an essential input for an abundant crop.

In a month of walking, driving and bicycling through the area, the pressure on the land is clearly evident. Quite literally all the land is under cultivation. In 1968, there was considerable bush and brush land, but a population density of over 150 people per square kilometre has led people to cut most of the bush to open land for cultivation. The wood also serves their household fuel needs and is a means of earning cash from the bicycle traders who pedal their enormous loads of wood into the Lilongwe firewood market. As the bush disappears, crops are planted, under pressure from farmers attempting to use all available land. Trees are even being cut from the cemeteries which are the subject of serious cultural taboos and generally left untouched to grow over. This deforestation combines with the leaching of soil fertility to create a serious environmental predicament.

The fields are cultivated up to the ditches bordering the road and to the foundation of village houses. Even marginal lands, such as waterlogged low-lying areas and rocky hillsides, have been ridged and planted despite the evident poor results of such practices. The line between customary land and estate land is not usually marked by a dividing fence or hedge but is, nonetheless, clearly evident by the change from the patchwork of smallholder fields to large acreages of monocropping, usually tobacco. Amongst the smallholders, the class disparities manifest themselves in the fields. Large holdings and small are interspersed. Fertilizer, which the poorer farmers cannot afford, has been applied to the crops of the more prosperous smallholder. Adjoining fields contrast starkly with tall, dark green crops on one side, while the fields of the poor neighbour have short, unhealthy looking, yellow-green plants.

In Malaŵi the distinction between estate and smallholder is based on the land tenure arrangement rather than the size. A smallholder is anyone farming under customary land tenure while an estate is held under freehold or leasehold. There are basically three distinct types of landholdings . The first is the estate sector which in 1984 accounted for one-fifth of cultivable land and 90 percent of export earnings. The second group is the commercial smallholding which is larger than average and is market-oriented. Along with the estate sector, these two groups account for the quasi-totality of export production. The third group consists of the subsistence smallholders living under customary land-holding

arrangements and who are the poorest sector of the population. They lack adequate land to generate a living income so they serve as both a labour reserve and a market for food crops.

Kamchadzera (1992) refers to how the government had accepted a model of development promoted by large western donor agencies and uses as evidence the way the Malawian government redefined the land laws in the late 1960s to permit private ownership of what was previously customary lands. "Both the problem and the solution were conjured up very simply: change customary land tenure to private ownership as conceived in free marketism. Development it is clear was conceived as economic development" (p.192). Chimbe (1992) points out how the government's role in structuring economic relations based on land distribution is not neutral but in favour of specific social and economic groups specifically the larger land owners and cash crop growers (p.127).

Customary land is continually under pressure as it is divided and subdivided into ever-smaller holdings. In 1968/69 the average smallholding was 1.6 hectares and this had fallen to 1.2 hectares by 1980/81. In 1993, over half the households in the country live on a mere 0.55 hectare of land (UNICEF, 1993, p. 77) and that with present population trends the per capita distribution could fall as low as .26 hectares (Lele, 1990, p. 1208). The land shortage is

accentuated to critical proportions by population pressure, which is, in large part, a result of the Banda government's pro-natalist population policy (Kalipeni, 1992; Mhone, 1992; R. Mkandawire, 1992). Male migrancy and private title contribute further to eroding customary landholding practices.

The vast majority of the rural people cannot subsist on such small plots which are inadequate to provide for all the household needs. To meet the household needs, women as well as men must seek employment to acquire the balance of family food requirements. Work available in the rural areas is very often in the least paying sectors of the economy and very often is outside the cash economy in the form of work for food payments. Kadyampakeni (1988) points out from his research that "...the proportion of males working on their own holdings who worked part-time elsewhere increased from 12.5 percent in 1966 to 30 percent in 1977" (1313). Twenty years later, as conditions have deteriorated, both men and women from the poorest families seek *ganyu*, like the fifteen respondents of this study. Khaila (1992) also shows how many more women are being drawn into the wage economy because their lands cannot support them throughout the year and even with the low wage earnings of a male household member, the women must work to bring in revenue to balance the budget in terms of food needs (pp.80-81). The sad irony for poor women is that having children is one way to ensure adequate labour is available to support their work in domestic production.

The difference between the survival rationale of the village households and the free market impetus of the government is clarion clear over the issue of food versus cash crops. The Government, under the influence of World Bank macro-economic orthodoxy, sought to establish a balance which would allow a significant increase in cash crop production while maintaining food self-sufficiency. This policy specifically declared that food production was not to be at the expense of land available for cash crops. In its Guide to Agricultural Production in Malaŵi 1979/80, the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources stated very explicitly how this conflict of interests would be viewed from a planning perspective,

“... increased need for maize should be the result of higher yields per acre, and no encouragement should be given to of growing maize on land at present used to grow other crops.... any tendency to increase the proportion of cultivated land planted with maize would be directly contrary to the nation’s long-term objectives” (quoted in Mhone, The State and Agriculture in Africa, 59).

In many cases, the only direct encounter many villagers have with the government is through the farmers clubs, usually set up by a Ministry of Agriculture extension officer. These agriculture officers are the lowest rung of the administrative ladder. According to Kandawire (n.d.), this is the level at which the village inhabitants and their ideological perception interfaces with the government and its plans and policies. The government views the village as an administrative unit. The national priorities for increasing productivity are

transmitted to the villagers via the agricultural extension officer. Hirschman (1991) recorded the noticeable discrimination faced by women farmers. They lack extension advice and access to credit which is generally channelled to men, because most rural development schemes are "...predicated on a given level of profit in a given form, obtained through a hierarchy of state, scheme management, and male household heads: women's labour is assumed to be an asset of the male head of household" (Barbara Lewis, in Hirschman p.1688; see also footnote 33 and the bibliographic reference). The net effect has led to an "unmotivated female peasantry" (Ibid., p. 1688). Even when women are consulted, they will often not speak up especially when men are present. Women have little incentive to participate in the cash economy because of the discrimination.

Within the village communities, the research indicates that, on the whole, the poorest rural smallholders and women particularly have limited access to extension support, credit facilities and are often excluded as members of farmers clubs because they lack the resources needed to repay loans. The farmers clubs are meant to be the lowest administrative unit in the Ministry of Agriculture where the state and the local people interface. Larger smallholders and men in general have much easier access to credit, inputs and advice as it is needed. The poorest farmers, limited by their tiny plots of land, raise only non-cash food crops. They often do not have access to credit and therefore fertilizer and hybrid

seed because they do not raise cash crops and therefore cannot easily repay loans. This reduces their productivity and leaves them with a reduced supply of foodstuff for the following year. The cycle is worsened, because the lack of fertilizer means the soil nutrients of the small plots are gradually depleted and harvests slowly diminish each subsequent year.

On the whole farmers clubs have not served women and the rural poor. One woman (1F) said she was not a member of the farmers club, "... because they only give credit to those people with enough land so that when they sell their crops they will have enough money from their sales to pay the loan." Another woman respondent (3F) gave a rather ambiguous answer about the farmers clubs being only for the well to do. Yet another woman (4F) responded that she had no access to a farmers club because in her village, "...the club no longer functioned because members did not pay back the money they had borrowed because of poor rains. They didn't have enough crops to sell." The oldest woman (6F), at 61 years, responded that her village farmers club is only open to those who grow tobacco, so she is not a member. One of the more instructive answers was from another woman (8F), who did not answer directly whether she was a member of the farmers club. "Members of farmers clubs are only those with enough land so that after they harvest and sell their produce they will be in a position to pay back their loans." She says her household has access to 1.2 hectares and she implies through her answer that she and/or her husband

are not members because of the small size of their plot. Since they have one of the largest plots in the sample, then the club in her area must be exclusive to another class of rural farmer which has acquired larger plots.

While estate agriculture was seen as essential to efficient cash crop production, the Banda government promoted the creation of a class of *achikumbe* or progressive farmers from the ranks of the smallholder farmer. Conventional critiques identify the alienation of land to estates as a major factor in rural disparity (Gaude and Watzlawick, 1992; Mhone, 1992; R.M. Mkandawire, 1992). There is no doubt that there is an important element of inequitable distribution between the great wealth of the elite and the mass of the peasantry. However, Pryor and Chipeta (1990) have identified the most important single cause underlying the rising income inequality as the widening of income differentials within the smallholder sector (see also Pryor 1990A, Chapter 16). Using the Gini coefficient to measure the inequality occurring within the smallholder sector, Pryor and Chipeta found that it had more than doubled from .203 to .403 in the seventeen year period between 1967/68 and 1984/85 (ibid. 65).

After the issue of land and access to resources, labour stands as one of the most crucial aspects of life facing poor, rural women. It must be stated from the start that it is very hard work to be poor in Malaŵi. Both poor men and

women expend considerable energy to find the means to survive against often difficult odds. The literature and the answers of the interview respondents show that gender has a significant impact on women's status and is a factor when they talk about the pressure they face. Women participate by working on both the food crops and the cash crops as part of the household labour unit. As well, the double burden means that they are responsible for domestic child-rearing, food processing and preparation. In addition, when food supplies are depleted, they also seek *ganyu* to feed their children.

Lorna Butler's research from 1976 found that there can be considerable overlapping of activities, complementary separation as well as strict gender differentiation of work. Women's domestic work is complemented by men's participation in the heavy work, or work within the cash economy, trading and producing items or services for sale. Butler divided the household work into three categories: agricultural, domestic and other activities⁷. In the first and the last, the work is somewhat evenly divided. There is some complementarity with men taking the heavier tasks of tree cutting, construction and carpentry, while the women help by cutting up the fallen trees, collecting the building materials or finishing the construction by smearing the walls with mud. The heaviest work of agriculture remains the hoeing, planting and harvesting to which both men and women contribute a great deal. In the fields, I observed men and women,

⁷ See her Table in Appendix V

working singly, in mixed couples of men and women or gender defined groups. Men and women work in both the maize and tobacco fields. However, while women were seen at the hearth and in the fields, men were in the fields, but not at the hearth. The domestic work of food processing and cooking, home maintenance and child rearing is almost exclusively a woman's world. Younger children were not usually present in the fields, but young boys and girls alike help with domestic work, including carrying water and sweeping. However, the activities most closely related to cooking are almost exclusively undertaken by women and girls.

One of the more time consuming and arduous tasks facing women is not mentioned in Butler's table. Transport takes up a large part of the day. In the absence of vehicle support and road infrastructure, women are estimated to convey over seventy percent of the goods produced or used by the household (World Bank, 1991, p. iii). This is largely by head-loading sacks, pails, basins, or firewood tied in bundles through the myriad of paths that link the villages which cannot be accessed by car or truck. Literally all the household needs are carried home on their heads. The World Bank figures for the Lilongwe area indicate that forty-five percent of household water must be brought from distances between two and eight kilometres. Thirty-two percent of household firewood must be sought from the same distance. Grain is very often carried to the mill or market for sale. Other produce is also head loaded to the roadside where it is either

sold or the people wait patiently for the cheapest transport they can afford to take them to market.

Butler's table, done twenty years before this study, also doesn't reflect another element of the rural economy that is dominated by men. Bicycle transport profits from the proximity to Lilongwe, a ready market, the shortage of cheap sources of fuel in town and the paved road from Bunda to Lilongwe. From early morning until late afternoon, men pedalling bicycles precariously loaded with large bags of produce, goats, chickens or firewood labour along the road towards Lilongwe to serve that city's population. Consultation with local informants revealed that a load of firewood can fetch as high as Malaŵi Kwacha 40 (at MK15 to the US \$1) depending on how it is sold and that a man might make two trips in one day over the approximately 30 km distance. Some men travelled as far as 60 kilometres each direction. At several centres, typically a bus stop and a few meagrely stocked stores, men had set themselves up as bicycle repairmen to fix flat tires and carry out light to medium bicycle repairs. Bicycle transport and the spin off is almost exclusively a male domain and to purchase and maintain a bicycle requires investment capital beyond the capacity of *ganyu* seekers. The poorest villagers who lack the capital to invest, participate in the heavy task of collecting and cutting firewood to sell to the bicycle transporters.

Men's work includes the farm labour and among the interview respondents, the men and the husbands of the women respondents all earn cash through *ganyu* labour. The two exceptions are one husband who has regular employment as a watchman and another of the male respondents who is employed on a seasonal basis as a field hand. These occupations, while regular, are very poorly paid. One husband weaves mats and another cuts firewood for sale to the bicycle traders who transport it into Lilongwe. Two of the male respondents indicated that they sometimes sell vegetables for cash. It is worth remembering that all the respondents, male and female, in the sample were, in fact, *ganyu* seekers, which points to the necessity in the poorest families for husband, wife and even the children to seek employment to make ends meet during the food deficit period.

On the other hand, domestic firewood collection is almost exclusively a female domain according to my observations and sources. Women returning homeward from the fields were often seen head-loading long bundles of firewood for home. This cooking fuel might be considered second grade pieces and not the firewood desired for commercial sale in Lilongwe. The women's loads consist of twigs, branches, bark, and roots. Such wood is easier to cut to length compared to the commercial firewood which must be split by axe and cut to size. Gathering and transporting firewood is one of the more onerous tasks facing women. Once home, the small pieces are more easily cut than the

commercial wood, and at the same time the household uses a resource that otherwise is less desirable for sale. Since the household work is gender divided it represents a separation of the tasks related to the different spheres of activity engaged in by men and women. It is also evidence of the pressure on the rural people to use every resource available to them. While this may be considered an efficient use of resources, the process has contributed to the deforestation of the countryside, since there is so little prime wood available for fuel purposes.

Another measure of status is related to the influence over household decisions. In three separate questions, the respondents were asked who makes important decisions (3.5), who is the head of the house (3.4) and who decides what to plant (4.4). The question about the head of the household, led to the uniform reply from all respondents that the husband was the household head. The same uniformity existed in relation to the question about who makes the important household decisions. The husband was the maker of important decisions, except in the case of one man (2M) who claimed that he made most of the major decisions, although his wife shared some decisions.

The questions covering crop ownership, planting decisions and field labour were intended to identify distinctions in status with regard to influence in the household decision making process. Four of the five male respondents identified themselves as the critical person making the decision about crops to

plant, while one man acknowledged that he and his wife jointly made the decisions. The women were more divided over who held responsibility for food crop decisions. Four of the women said that their husband made the crop decisions; two said it was a joint decision, while the other four, including the two divorcees, made the decisions themselves.

One woman respondent (14F) was emphatic about the decision being hers and she linked it directly to her central role in the household food processing. She also indicated that her husband shared the work in the maize field. Six of the women indicated that the crops were jointly owned for the household's use as did four of the men. The other men and women identified the husband as the owner of the crops. One of the women (1F) said the maize crop was jointly owned while the small tobacco crop, which she worked on was her husband's. Everyone confirmed the observation that the field work was shared by all and often included the children. The children's labour was particularly important for the female single parents.

A series of questions (5.11, 5.12, 5.13 & 5.14 for women and 6.11, 6.12, 6.13 & 6.14 for men) sought to elicit a historical evaluation of how gender relations are evolving and whether any of the main features of matrilineal practices are still followed or not, especially in their roles as wives and husbands. In seven cases out of ten, the women considered that their mothers

were better off than they were. The answers were quite categorical and in most cases very descriptive of how it was different. The two chief questions were, “How does your situation differ from your mother’s/ father’s? and “Was your mother’s / father’s situation better or worse than your own?”

Three women considered that their mothers’ lives were no different than their own and three women simply stated that their mothers led better lives than they did without describing any difference. The other four women had three major concerns. These were food and expenses, children and conjugal support. With respect to food and expenses, it is worth recalling that all the interview subjects were *ganyu* seekers at the crucial time in the agricultural cycle when weeding and fertilizing in their own fields should have been occurring. They were seeking food or money to cover the food needs not met from their own small plots. Five of the women mentioned that their mothers seemed to be able to provide their families with the basic necessities, such as soap, salt and sugar and food while the respondents are having great difficulty making ends meet. One (5F) states clearly in her reply that, “Her situation is different in that her mother was able to afford the daily basic needs like soap, salt, sugar and was not affected by hunger. Food was not scarce at her house throughout the year.” Another echoed her comments, “... during her mother’s time things were not that expensive and were affordable but nowadays things are expensive and money is difficult to get, thus making it difficult to afford basic needs.” These women are

not commenting directly on gender relations or matriliney, but they certainly provide benchmarks to measure the advance of rural poverty in the area.

Children, as new workers, are a crucial component in the reproductive cycle of both the matrilineal and capitalist mode of production. By all reports, Malaŵian women in the child bearing years will have on average 7 children (World Bank, 1991), and the respondents' experience with childbearing reflects the high child morbidity and mortality rate of people who live with limited access to health care facilities. All but the youngest (19 years old) of the women had lost children, while only two of the men acknowledged that their wives had lost children. On average the women had lost three children each. One woman who was fifty-one years old had lost nine of her ten children and was very pained at the loss of so many of her offspring. The most recent had died leaving her, as a grandmother, to feed and clothe three young children. This was imposing a substantial burden on an older woman. She did not indicate if she was getting support from other family members, particularly her *nkhoswe* or husband's family.

At 3.6 percent, the population growth rate in sub-Saharan Africa is almost the fastest anywhere in the world. The average population on the continent is 21 people per square kilometre and Malaŵi's at 89.6 people per square kilometre is one of the most densely populated countries in the region. This is

starkly apparent when compared with its neighbours: Zambia 11; Mozambique 19; Tanzania 28 inhabitants per square kilometre. Malaŵi is facing a situation in which the supply of available wage labour is growing faster than the demand for it. House and Zimalirana (1992) estimate that in the period 1987 to 1997 the labour force will have grown by over one third from 2,870,000 to 3,930,000 "...[a]ssuming moderate fertility decline, constant mortality, and unchanged rates of participation..." (p.152)

The population dynamic is complicated by the continuous lack of health and education services in the rural areas. Medical attention is either fee paying at Mlale Mission or free at the Mitundu government hospital which is seven kilometres from the Bunda turnoff. However, once a patient has arrived at the government hospital, there are no drugs for the majority of the most common ailments. The Structural Adjustment Programmes enforce a strict curtailing of public sector employment and spending, at a time when good health facilities are needed to reduce maternal and child morbidity rates and expanded education programmes a prerequisite to aggressively promote appropriate family planning. With the long days, hard work, inadequate nutrition, and high birth rate, women are particularly hard hit by the poor state of the health care system (Chimbe, 1992; Chirwa, 1990; Lele, 1990). This creates what Chimbe calls a cycle of poverty, since all these conditions have an impact on the people's productive

capacity and contributes to the inadequate food supply which in turn negatively affects people's health.

Many studies have detailed the pressure facing poor women as a result of the curtailing of government programmes and services (McFadden, 1995; Meena, 1992; Mhone, 1991; Plewes, 1991; inter alia). One of the interview respondents brought up the issue of fertilizer being too expensive for poor farmers to buy. The government logic for the subsidy withdrawal is to allow market forces to determine price and availability. Even when fertilizer was highly subsidized, it was apparent that many of the poorest members of the rural population were not getting a share⁸. Government cutbacks of staff have seen thousands of frontline workers laid off. These were often the workers who provided extension support albeit limited and biased against women. In the absence of paid employment in a downsizing economy, many of those workers have had to return to their home villages. They require plots for food production and call on the *nkhoswe* of their matrikin to provide for them out of already overextended land resources.

The devastating impact of the Structural Adjustment Programmes on the poor has led to a great deal of discussion and writing in government and aid

⁸ See Nyasanet Website (<http://www.math.unh.edu/~llk/malawi/mwstart.html>) for an extremely informative analysis by a number of Malaŵians who contributed to a discussion on this issue as the subsidies were being removed in 1995.

circles about poverty alleviation, equity and improving the situation of women who suffer the worst consequences of these government programmes. Judging from the documentation, two strategies are being pursued quite vigorously and apparently at the instigation of the many aid agencies involved in Malaŵi's development planning and the publicity being given in the media. The first and most popular solution favoured by all levels of the aid industry involves implicating women more fully in the cash economy through income generating activities (e.g. USAID, 1992). The other solution to women's problems is to get more girls in school for longer periods (Zulfiqar, 1993).

There seem to be two principal approaches to increasing women's revenue earning capacities. One route has been to encourage them to compete directly with men by growing burley tobacco which has typically been treated in the villages as a man's crop. There are a number of problems with this route. One difficulty is overcoming the historically ingrained barriers separating men's and women's work. Tobacco also requires expending a great deal of energy, which is often beyond the capacity of women whose labour is fully accounted for in their long work day. The evidence indicates that women who are from a well-to-do sector of rural society have the capacity to move into these roles and not the poorest women. They have the initial capital and land base needed to produce tobacco and can afford to pay for seasonal labour. The second problem demonstrates how the global economy has a direct effect on local villagers.

Malaŵi's dependency on cash crop exports leaves it vulnerable to pricing forces beyond its borders and out of its control. Tobacco is a crop which faces stiff competition from a variety of cheap producers and the objective of involving more producers in the production is to lower the cost to buyers and consequently to producers. The effect of involving women in a traditional men's crop may be that their labour may simply reduce the cost of production and reduce returns rather than increase overall revenue to the family.

Two examples illustrate this effect and show the tension in a society being asked to work and produce more but getting fewer returns. In 1980, it took 30 days of work at the rural minimum wage to be able to buy a 90 kilogram bag of maize, which is seen as the minimum monthly nutritional intake for the bare survival of a family of four. In 1989 it took 40 days to buy the same bag. The returns of more work and greater productivity do not accrue to the rural workers. When the tobacco crop went on sale in April of 1997, there were riots on the tobacco auction floors. The local traders attacked the buyers representing the large tobacco multinationals who were offering as low as \$1.40 a pound which is far below the cost of production (Agence France Presse, April 16, 1997).

An alternative route to involve women more directly in the market economy is to identify cash crops such as soya and peanuts which women can grow without competing with men. Twenty years ago, peanuts were a popular

crop which was largely left for woman because of the intensive labour involved. Malaŵi peanuts received a high price on the international market and were valued by the confectionary industry because they were hand shelled. The shelling was basically women's work and the low cost of their labour made the processing feasible. The market price of peanuts fell and after several years of low prices it was not cost efficient for the farmers to grow, given all the work involved. In a month of travel, no large fields of peanuts were evident on the scale of the mid-seventies. The cash crop being currently promoted for women is soya which also requires considerable labour. However, as soya production is vigorously promoted, more soya will come onto the market with a resulting effect of lowering the price paid to the producers. The tendency of international prices to fall, once again, leaves women producers vulnerable if soya production expands beyond market demand.

Increasing the school enrollment of girls is the other major strategy, particularly promoted by the USAID inspired initiative known as Girls' Attainment in Basic Literacy and Education (GABLE). The logic of GABLE is based on the observed link between women's education and a decreased number of children who survive in better health (Zulfiqar, 1993). Educated women also tend to contribute more to increased productivity. GABLE is an integral part of the "strategic objectives" of the USAID mission in Malaŵi to enhance the economic well-being of the average Malaŵian household in the context of a government

“supportive of economic reform, private sector growth and the West” (USAID, 1994, 1995). Arif Zulfiqar, The Resident Representative of the World Bank stated the motivation most clearly in a 1993 presentation to politicians during the campaign to end one party rule. “Giving women increased access to education is one of the most effective ways of not only reducing fertility rates, but also improving family health and productivity. In fact, getting more girls into school is probably the single most effective anti-poverty policy in the development world today.”

In 1994-95, the government of Bakili Muluzi instituted free education for all primary students as an election commitment and in the face of considerable opposition from the funding agencies and donor countries. In direct opposition to Zulfiqar’s declaration, the orthodoxy of the period maintained that the government debt, and the cost of the required infrastructure meant that the government would not be able to financially support the expansion of the school system. Aid agencies and the international financial institutions lobbied the government to maintain school fees which effectively block large segments of the poor population from receiving a basic education. Despite many difficulties, primary school enrollment effectively doubled, and the orthodoxy has slowly modified its stance to acknowledge the important contribution of an educated populace. Many writers maintained that when cash is short, rural families would spend the available money on boys’ schooling and withdraw the girls from

school to help shoulder the domestic and farming burden with their mothers. However, the responses of the Bunda *ganyu* seekers did not reveal a pattern of preferential treatment of boys or girls with respect to schooling. However, the interviews did reveal that the older respondents had not been able to send their children to school and that all the younger respondents, either have children in school or plan to send them. Free education could make a significant difference for poor families. Nonetheless, there is a negative effect on mothers. The absence from the house of children, particularly young girls, deprives women of an essential support with their work.

Government policy has tended to adhere to the World Bank dogma of free market efficiency. This has emphasized the need to mobilize cheap labour to expand cash crop production. No expansion in land dedicated to food crops was foreseen. Rather, productivity was to be increased on the land already dedicated to growing food (Mhone, 1992B). The large number of male government extension workers confirmed by their actions and attitudes the secondary importance attributed to food production and women's related labour contribution (N. Ngwira, 1987; World Bank, 1991, p.9). Credit has regularly been offered to men only or made inaccessible for women. Most extension officers are men and have been known to deal with women's labour as an extension of the man's means of production or labour units available to the men (Spring, 1986; Hirschman, 1985). In their everyday social roles, men and women do not

socialize a great deal. Mixed meetings of men and women are very difficult for women whose socialization from childhood has taught them to acquiesce and be demur in front of their husbands in public.

The balance between food crop and cash crop is particularly critical to a peasant farmer. Only farmers, with sufficient land to ensure their food security, would be able to dedicate a part of their land to cash cropping. With small plots, the risk of a poor harvest makes it unthinkable to jeopardize even an inadequate food crop by growing cash crops in place of food. The government and donor agency planning to improve food production and expand cash cropping among women, does not seem to take account of the diminutive size of smallholder plots. In addition, the large number of female headed households points to why economic growth has not been possible through this sector of the labour market. Such farmers need to ensure their families' food security first and only after can export crops be considered.

This is particularly true in Malaŵi where a World Bank report (1990B) indicates that female headed households make up almost one-third of all smallholders. They have on average 0.3 hectares of arable land for cultivation but their holdings are only able to provide for approximately 70 percent of their needs. Such people are not responding to market incentives but food security needs regardless of any other stimuli which may be applied to encourage

growth. They have no room to increase production. In addition, they are extremely vulnerable to weather irregularities and make up the bulk of the hungry population when crops do not produce the yield expected.

A further erosion of their food security has come about by the World Bank promotion of private traders to replace the equalizing role of ADMARC, the state run marketing board. Maize reserves are now very low, and distribution very skewed as traders rush to easily reached areas, but ignore the more inaccessible localities and sell for quick profits instead of storing up reserves for periods of shortage. Without subsidized maize distributions, the rural poor are unable to acquire the maize necessary to bridge the food deficit period. One informant explained how the policies of different donors can be at variance. On the one hand the World Bank and IMF promote market efficiency to meet the needs of the populace, while, on the other hand, the World Food Programme (WFP) has steadily contributed grain stocks and nutritious food supplements to rural areas. By 1995, the WFP had decided to cut its contribution back to very low levels since the problem of food security is perennial and it did not want to be forever filling the food deficit rather than developing a solution to the shortfall.

In response to these pressures on their material condition, women's status within the social regime of rural life is always evolving. Depending on their class and age there can be considerable variation in the responses. In Poewe's

study of the matrilineal patterns of the people of Luapula province in Zambia, she determined that class has a significant impact on the maintenance of matrilineality. She found that it is often the poorer classes who depend on the ideology of matrilineality since it emphasizes rights and distribution. In the case of the poor, rural Chewa people of Malawi's Central Region, matrilineal practice is one route to gain access to land, through a wife's family. Maintaining family connections becomes very critical as customary land is limited.

Among many elements commonly associated with the matrilineal practices of Malawi's Central Region, three have been referred to by various writers as a reflection of the status of Chewa women (I. Phiri, 1992; K. Phiri, 1983; inter alia). These would include the traditional religious practices, the mother-right to remain resident with her kinfolk after marriage, and the *nkhoswe* system whereby a woman's brother or maternal uncle has a responsibility for his *mbumba*. According to Holy's criterion, the continued existence of such practices reflects their continued usefulness to the people.

Several elements of the original African religion, which my interpreter called the *mzinda*⁹ are still present in the rural areas and provide an ideological

⁹ The translator comes from a devoutly Presbyterian household and had difficulty knowing what to call traditional religion. "Mzinda" means a large number of people such as at a meeting or in a crowd. She used *mzinda* as a euphemism for the traditional religious practices which do not have an identifiably specific name. Of all the many elements of the previous religion, the most commonly known aspect of the traditional religion is the secret society for men known as the "Gule wamkulu" or the big dance, but this is simply

underpinning to the social regime of many villagers. Since the colonial period, there has been a constant struggle by the church to bring more of the population into its orbit. Nevertheless, despite the extensive evangelical proselytizing of the Christians, only three out of fifteen respondents claimed to have been married in church ceremonies. All the rest identified their marriages as customary. Another three identified themselves as belonging to the African church. Unfortunately this question was not explored deeply enough to determine if the responses indicated they belong to Africanized Christian churches or the traditional religion of the Chewas. One of the oldest women (7F) quite proudly identified herself as belonging to the *mzinda* religion. In fact, her son is a “*mfumu wa bwalo*” or chief of the group or local gathering.

Mandala (1990) specifically identifies the religious ideology of the pre-colonial Mang'anja people of the Shire River valley as a crucial system of control, “an instrument by which the dominant group compelled social conformity...”(p.27). Mandala considers this religiously imposed conformity as important to the functioning of the matrilineal system as the church was to maintaining order in feudal society. Women are believed to have held considerable influence in the pre-Christian religion and as a result could aspire to considerable prestige and power (I. Phiri, 1992). They filled key roles as oracles, priestesses, custodians of the holy shrines and as midwives.

one, particularly visible aspect.

One other woman (1F) also associated herself with the old belief system and identified one of the reasons why the Christian church could not attract people of her class background. The translator writes that, "She belongs to the *mzinda* church (*gule wamkulu*) but she said that things are changing with Christianity because more people are leaving *mzinda* and joining different churches. Anyone from almost eight years and above can join but you need to pay money." There is not much motive for a poor person to join the church if attendance requires money. Poewe found, in the case of Luapula matriliney, that people who had accumulated personal wealth and wanted to avoid the redistributing effects of matriliney, would often adopt western religions with their patrilineal values. A superficial reading of the responses of the Bunda *ganyu* seekers would point to a similar effect.

Certain features of matriliney which continue to exist and, as Holy writes, still appear to have a credible purpose for the people are the residence practices (*chikamwini* - uxorilocality versus *chitengwa* - virilocality) and the role of the *nkhoswe* (family guardian). The practice of a young man becoming beholding to his in-laws has been thoroughly and rigorously examined in Mandala's (1990) masterful research. Nonetheless, *chitengwa* has always existed as a residence alternative for Chewa couples. While *chikamwini* was the usual practice, *chitengwa* could occur in the case of an older man or one who had social or economic status or who was a chief or headman or who would become one.

Separate questions were asked about the marriage residence of the respondents' maternal and paternal grandparents, parents, themselves and their siblings. This indicated the residence patterns over a span of three generations. The responses are summarized in Appendix VI and summarized in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Residence after marriage - Summary of Appendix VI

	Chikamwini	Chitengwa	same village	land
Female respond	9= 100%	NA	NA	NA
Male respond	2= 40%	3= 60%	NA	NA
Brothers	7= 24%	22= 76%	NA	NA
Sisters	18= 40%	14= 44%	NA	NA
Mother's parents	6= 42%	2= 14%	3= 21%	3= 21%
Fathers' parents	3= 25%	5= 41%	0	4= 33%

Previous generations would seem to have had more flexibility in deciding to practice *chikamwini* or *chitengwa*, if the answers of the respondents are any indicator. The majority of the maternal grandparents had marriages based on *chikamwini* and only two on *chitengwa*. The ratio with respect to the paternal grandparents was effectively reversed. In the grandparent's generation, there were two deviations on the residence patterns, which do not seem to have reappeared in the more recent generations. Apparently it was common practice

in families to marry a father's son to his sister's daughter (first cousins) in order for the father to keep both his avuncular and conjugal households together in the village. This effectively fulfilled the young man's *chikamwini* obligation by serving his father's sister. The father was then able to keep any accumulation of wealth inside his lineage and to maintain a link with his offspring. Three of the parents on the mothers' side married and remained in the village in which they had both been born. Another deviation from the *chikamwini* practice occurred because of land pressure in neighbouring districts. On both parents' sides there seems to have been considerable movement into the Bunda area over the previous two generations in search of land.

Among the respondents, men and women revealed quite different preferences for residence choices. All the women were living in their kin villages and had married men who had moved into their communities as *amwini*. Three of the five men, on the other hand, had brought their wives to live in their villages as *atengwa*. The two divorced women indicated that their ex-husbands had returned to their home villages after the marriages ended. The men had to leave the wife's village because the rights acquired by marriage had ceased to exist. One respondent (4F) had been married twice and each time the husband moved to her village. In the case of the oldest respondent, half of her brothers followed the *chikamwini* practice and the other half *chitengwa*. Her sisters also split evenly between the two practices.

Women seem to appreciate the flexibility offered by the right to remain or return to their kin village. The two oldest women (6F & 7F) had both originally moved to their husbands' villages upon marriage. The first returned to her kin village after her husband married another wife. The other had married once in both the *chitengwa* and *chikamwini* customs. In addition, upon the death of her first husband, she was to have become the wife of one of his brothers, following the levitical practice. The interviewer writes, "Herself went to Chiwamba village for *chitengwa* but came back after her husband died because the other relatives of the husband were no longer interested in her and after some time they set her free to go back to her village and after she remarried it was her husband who came to stay in her village." The first respondent (1F) told of how one of her sisters, "... went to her husband's village (*chitengwa*) but came back to her village because the husband was not caring for her in terms of dressing her and the children, so the husband has followed her to her village (*chikamwini*) and now he tries his best to help, since it's her village and her brother, her *nkhoswe*, makes sure that the husband is taking care of his family."

This social support function of the African village was also revealed through the comments of several respondents. One woman (14F) stated that she and her sisters stayed in their birth village because, "... they want to be taking care of their old parents because if they will go away it will be difficult for them to look after the parents well." In two other cases, the sons and daughters indicate

that family considerations can affect the decision of both male and female siblings to remain together. In two cases, the women's husbands moved into their village as did the brothers' wives. One man (13M) and one woman (12F) indicated that all the brothers and sisters had stayed together to look after their old parents.

The *nkhoswe* tradition is still strong and in one case the respondent showed how her mother's brother maintained his influence over the village. The respondent (11F), a woman, indicated that the siblings had brought their spouses to their villages at the insistence of their maternal uncle, "... because their uncle doesn't want them to go away since they are his *mbumba* and he said he wants to see how their husbands treat them in case of the ladies and in case of the men how they treat their wives." One woman who objected to how her husband spent too much on his second wife, went on to show how the *nkhoswe* system of matriliney can defend the interests of the women. Her husband had neglected her and their children after he married a second wife. She, "...complained to *ankhoswe* of both sides, its when he changed after discussing it with him."

The men largely showed a different propensity. Three among the men had married according to *chitengwa*, in order to remain in their kin village. One respondent (2M) articulated the dilemma faced by men with respect to rights to

land. "Himself he didn't go for *chikamwini* because once you leave your village, the problem is there is not much development because there are no men to take care of things and land for cultivation is scarce since that is not your real home, so when you come back home you'll find no land to cultivate." Another man (13M) also mentioned that his parents had cattle and that his siblings and he stayed together to maintain their rights in the cattle. One man was an orphan and knew nothing of his birth parents. By moving to his wife's village he was able to gain rights to some land, since he did not know of either his mother's or father's homes. Another man (12M) had begun married life under *chitengwa* but had decided he would settle, "... in his wife's village, Chatenga, because in Lumbadzi [his birth village] there is a lot of witchcraft¹⁰ and three of his children died while they were staying there, so after discussing with the wife, they thought it wise to move to the wife's village." His reply would indicate that the couple can negotiate residence between themselves. This corresponds to Poewe's observation that family practice, including the choice of residence location, can change as a couple's needs evolve during the course of a marriage.

With respect to marital relations, the answers from men and women reflected very different realities. On the whole the women were relatively open and candid, while the men did not acknowledge that there were problems and

¹⁰ The term "witchcraft" is the interpreter's translation and should be considered gender neutral. Perhaps "sorcery" could have been more correctly used since it could imply both men and women.

serious differences. Several women remarked that their mothers had a much easier time than they and attributed the difference to the monogamous marriages of the parents. One of the women (6F) summed it up, "Her situation differs from her mother's because her mother was the only wife whilst.... her husband had three wives and the time he was marrying the second wife he was not caring for her [the respondent] and was not even found at home..." Another woman (4F) stated, "Mother never got divorced and her father was a caring father. She herself has had two divorces ..."

One of the wives (5F) of a polygamist husband, also identified herself as chiefly responsible for buying fertilizer for the crop. Even though men and women all respond that the man is the head of the household and makes all the key decisions, this respondent points out her essential responsibility for carrying out decisions related to food production and consumption. She has a field of maize and some tomatoes, but her answer does not indicate whether her husband has access to more land and a cash crop at his second wife's. On the other hand, she indicates that he does regularly help with the domestic chores of sweeping the grounds and chopping firewood. However, it seems that even if he contributes on the domestic front, his energy is divided between two different households. His absences, every second week, put an additional burden on the women of the two households to make up for the part of the work that would have otherwise been fully dedicated to one unit. She also reveals in her answer

the impact of the World Bank directed policy of cutting subsidies which had previously provided free fertilizer. She is under pressure with the removal of the subsidy, because there is no money to buy fertilizer which she knows is required to increase food production.

None of the women in polygynous marriages felt that they gained any advantage from the relationship. Quite the opposite, the woman (11F) married in a polygynous relationship explained how, "The problem is when the husband is visiting the 2nd wife, he doesn't care whether at the first wife's place there is food or other basic needs and at first he was buying clothes for the second wife..." The feeling was echoed in the answer of another woman (5F) who compared herself to her mother, "The difference is that her father had one wife which was her mum and they were staying together all the time, whilst in her case, her husband has two wives and at first he lied that he is not married, that's why she accepted him and she discovered that he was already married after one year of their marriage." In terms of labour and social status, a polygamous relationship represents a lower standing for the women.

It is difficult to determine, without more research, what to make of the responses of men and women with respect to polygynous marriages. Having more than one wife was once considered a sign of wealth and indicated that a man could support many wives. However, with the *ganyu* seeking interviewees, it

would appear to be a response to poverty. Polygyny may be a man's way of maximizing his income security, by having several working household units to support him. If the small sample is to be any indicator, more men would seem to be opting out of *chikamwini* and either staying with their kinfolk after marriage or embarking on multiple relationships. This could be as a result of the shortage of land. An in-marrying man depends on the goodwill of his land strapped in-laws and may not be allocated a large enough portion for profitable agriculture.

Despite the proclaimed disadvantages to the women, the *nkhoswe* seem to tolerate the activity. The women imply by their answers that their parents did not face this situation, hence the conclusion may be that there were fewer such marriages in the past. The men make no reference to the past in their answers. The differing response to polygyny by men and women indicates that marital partners can have very different interests in the relationship. The apparent numbers of such marriages also runs counter to the increasing Christianization of the country. Most Christian denominations require monogamy of couples.

The reaction to pressure or stress markedly distinguishes the men and women respondents more than the questions intended to elicit status differences. In response to the question, "What pressures are you under to fulfill your role as a wife or husband?" the women all had comments relating to labour

and money, while the men tended to focus on social relations. Two women¹¹ claimed that they had no pressure to fulfil their roles as wives. All the remaining eight, except the two women who are single parents, identified domestic work, feeding and caring for children as a pressure, including the oldest woman who was raising her grandchildren. Domestic work was clearly a woman's domain. All but one of the four men, claimed to help their wives with the domestic work when she was sick. On the other hand, six of the women said their husbands never helped with the domestic work while only four of the 10 women acknowledged that their husbands helped, but only when the women were sick. Two of the women did indicate that their husbands helped regularly with some of the domestic duties. Another woman (14F) spoke of how she had to care for her elderly parents in addition to her own household, which, for her, was like "working for two bosses."

The assymetry of gender roles and differentiation of activities certainly leads to tension between partners. Two women found this domestic pressure heightened because their husbands shared their time with their second wives and in their absence the women had an increased responsibility for providing for the children. Another woman mentioned that her workload increased enormously when a child was sick and she had to expend extra energy on nursing the infant

¹¹ They were the earliest respondents, so perhaps the thin replies at the beginning were due to the inexperience of the interviewer, since the answers grew more detailed thereafter.

and continue all her other domestic duties. By implication she was saying that her husband does not contribute support in such circumstances and, in fact, she remains responsible for serving him and the sick child. One respondent (8F) clearly remarked on the gender disparity with respect to work when she noted that, "The pressure is that you are expected to do all the domestic work alone plus caring for the children whilst the husband does nothing except going to the garden which the wife does as well." The research indicates that women work considerably longer days than men. A 1981 time study of twenty-eight households in two villages found that the women's work day lasted twelve hours compared with four to six hours for men (in World Bank, 1991, p. 7). Domestic chores consumed four to six hours of that time. More recently, in 1987, Mkandawire, Asiedu and Mtimuni (1988) calculated that women and men worked fifteen and six hours respectively each day.

The negative side of the matrilineal coin is reflected in the answer of another woman, "The problem is that the husband misuses money in such a way that he likes helping his relatives more than her own family." This is compatible with the matrilineal practice of *chikamwini*. The dilemma facing a Chewā man is that of being *nkhoswe* responsible for the children of his sisters and still being expected to play a role in the raising of his offspring, who are the responsibility of the wife's *nkhoswe*. It is a reflection that this couple lives so much within the matrilineal system that after twenty years of marriage, and matrilineal residence,

he still keeps links with the obligations of his birth family and she still considers it a misuse of funds when he gives money to his kinfolk. Two other women (7F & 14F) complained that their husbands were beer drinkers and spent household money on drinking rather than essential supplies for the household. One of them had responded that she did not have any real problem with her husband then later brought up the issue of his drinking.

While several women identified work, money and children as problems, the men tended to see their problems more in terms of social relations. They were also less forthcoming than the women. Two men had become *amwini* but had very different experiences with the uxorilocal aspect of matriliney. The one man (9M) who identified himself as an orphan was quite unhappy with his in-laws who, after twelve years of marriage "... take advantage of him being an orphan and as such don't respect him and they want to know everything happening to their sister.." On the other hand, another man (12M) claimed to have no problem with his in-laws, "... the people there [wife's village] are very cooperative and understanding and they take him as part of the family." Another man (15M) maintained that since his father only had one wife and he had two, he therefore carried more responsibility. Apart from that he didn't have any problems with his marriages, and, in fact, his wives loved each other. His impression varies considerably from the experience recounted by the two women married to polygynist men.

The status and the material condition of the poorest of rural women is reflected in the stress they face in their daily lives and has an impact on their relationships. The lack of fertile land, combined with a growing population seriously affects the stability of rural households by placing a strain on marital relations. Individuals call on what support they can through the social regime, in this case matriliney, which largely guides social relations, rights and obligations in village households. As conditions change, in this case mostly for the worse, people make whatever adaptations they can to improve their chances of surviving. The gender differentiated responses arise both from the demands of the market economy for labour, chiefly male, as well as historically evolved male dominant roles within the household and larger village community.

CONCLUSIONS:

The purpose of this study has been to identify the constraints which diminish the status and jeopardize the material survival of rural women in the Central Region of Malaŵi. The aim was to understand the organization of gender and social relations which determines their access to resources, how their labour is exploited and how their social environment buffers them from the adversity of poverty or perhaps contributes to it. As a result of the dual impact of constraints which the market regime imposes on their ability to provide for their families and the internal contradictions of the subsistence economy which work against their interests, poor rural women are subjected to severe material insecurity. The stress they deal with has been accentuated by population pressures on a steadily diminishing customary land base.

Their struggle is starkly visible with respect to land and resource use, labour differentiation and social responsibilities. The imperatives of the subsistence economy mean men and women alike must have access to adequate land resources to feed themselves and their households. However, the people of the Bunda area have seen much of their available customary land resources alienated by the creation of estate lands, the transfer of customary to private landholding and the expropriation by government for public use. Private landholding in the free market, tends to maintain the holdings at a size capable

of producing adequately for the individual farmer as well as generating an income. By comparison, the distributional priorities of the subsistence economy lead to the constant subdivision of the land to ensure that family responsibilities are fulfilled. Government policy has been to promote cash production in order to meet its fiscal obligations. Technology, extension and credit have focussed largely on those who have enough land to plant cash crops. The balance of cash farming versus food sufficiency has been seriously distorted creating a situation of permanent food shortage, which neither the customary family based arrangements nor the free market economy can solve.

Customary land is so limited that the role of the chief and headman has been seriously reduced. Allocations to families are more or less permanent and the family heads, *nkhoswe* are able to re-allocate according to the needs of the households in their charge without reference outside of the group for land, since there is none available. As a result *nkhoswe/mbumba* affiliation still provides access to limited land for both men and women. Plot size is steadily diminishing as families subdivide plots to permit new family members access. Men who move to a wife's home join the wife's family in the allocation of these ever smaller portions of land. A corollary is that men are increasingly reluctant to move from their birth homes to their wife's village unless their access to land is better than what they can acquire by staying with their own kin group.

When customary methods of land allocation no longer provide for people they are obliged to seek alternatives as the land reaches the limit of its elasticity of subdivision. Already growing numbers of people are finding themselves landless. Rural employment opportunities are extremely limited. People are leaving their home villages to seek employment in the cities and on estates. The opportunities available in cities are very scarce for rural people, where there is no significant industrialization to absorb the largely unskilled labour force. Urban sprawl has already expanded far beyond the capacity of local administrations to provide services. Most estates provide land to their labourers, but usually in semi-feudal tenancy relationships and with conditions as severe as the poverty of the home village.

Women and children bear the brunt of this land shortage, most visibly as hunger. Even though women have rights to land through their maternally related family members, they will generally have smaller holdings than men within the village group. The village's ideological context promotes male dominance and saddles women with the burden of domestic responsibilities. Men eat first followed by the children and finally the women. Food shortages hurt women as the lowest order on this family food chain. The local cultural bias in favour of men corresponds to the male oriented market economy which values cash cropping and paid employment. The food shortage and land deterioration is an ecological crisis with a long term impact on the people who are trying to survive

within it. The stress of living such difficult circumstances would strain any individual relationships and create consequent stresses on any family system.

The land/ population dilemma rebounds on both the labour of the subsistence economy and the free market. The poor peasant farmers' small plots do not allow them to plant cash crops and are too small to feed the household for the full year between harvests. Both men and women attempt to enter the labour market to seek cash to supplement the food shortfall. This produces a labour shortage on the land at the very period in the year when labour is needed to ensure that the family food crop is well established. However, rural employment opportunities are extremely limited and the market economy is in no position to employ large numbers of people. This ensures that labour remains very cheap. Even sending children to school, which is meant to create social capital, deprives the household of labour support in the fields, with child care and domestic work and further contributes to the long work day of women.

Men and women live very different gender roles under a matrilineal regime. While some work is complementary and shared, there is considerable separation of the sexes in literally all spheres of activity. The men have a dominant responsibility in the cash economy, while the women bear the double burden of responsibility in the domestic life of the family including food production and contributing to income generating activities. Despite distinct

responsibilities in the subsistence economy, marital partners still combine their efforts to maximize resources and labour. The differential use of firewood is an example of separation of spheres of endeavour for efficiency's sake. This in no way implies that such a division is equitable nor untainted with dominant/subordinate relations. Quite the opposite, the cash economy offers men mobility while matrilineal traditions tie women to the children and domestic responsibilities. Having cash in hand, gives men power over acquisition and consumption decisions. This can clearly be a source of friction as evidenced by the women who complained that their husbands used the household money for drinking and another who complained that her husband spent his money on his birth family.

The government is an integral part of the free market system and is highly partisan in its interventions in the articulation of the subsistence and cash economy. Government policies and planning reflect male bias and contribute to rural women's cumulative disadvantage. The Malaŵi Government does not have any systematic or comprehensive policy to improve the welfare of the mass of the population living under the poverty line. Rather, it has aimed at creating socio-economic structures that deepen and perpetuate the exploitation of the cheap labour of the mass of the people. Government policy has until recently excluded women as significant economic actors or at least discouraged their participation through neglect or the error of omission. Extension officers, health

officials and numerous other civil servants and programmes transmit the free market priorities to the people. However, the priorities of the villagers are not reflected back upward to the government. The villagers are supposed to adopt the recommended policies and change their economic behaviour according to the planners' design. The government, on the other hand, rarely modifies its planning to respond to the subsistence practices or the needs of the poorest sector of the population.

As long as the two modes of production coexist and the people are forced to call on the one because of the failings of the other, then the peasantry will continue to exist as a transitional stage between the old system and the new capitalist mode. As much as matriliney must adapt to the new realities which confront it, the intruding reality must adapt to the local reality. This corresponds to Poewe's conclusions about the relationship between matriliney and Christian religions in Luapula. She found correlations between the class position of people and their willingness to embrace matrilineal or Christian values. She found that it is often the poorer classes who depend on the alternate ideology of matriliney since it emphasized rights and distribution. Her thesis transposes very readily to the reality of poor women in the Bunda area where cash cropping and land disparity will likely contribute to the growing inequality between different groups living within the rural economy.

Holy, Mandala and Poewe define matrilineal practices as arising out of the people's ideological framework and guiding their everyday lives, actions, expectations, relationships, rights and responsibilities. The matrilineal social regime of the Central Region Chewas has most certainly undergone significant changes and is constantly adapting to the pressures of Malaŵi's severe economic underdevelopment. However, large numbers of the rural people still live their everyday lives framed by their matrilineal social regime which continues to govern access to customary land and labour and provides essential social supports.

A signal that customary family is declining in importance would be the widespread presence of nuclear family formations. In the case of the contemporary societies in capitalist North America and Europe, nuclear family relations have become the norm. Holy, in particular, addresses the issue of matriliney being replaced by patrilineal, nuclear family values more usually associated with free market ideological norms. In the study area, all the respondents in the sample lived in close proximity to their relatives. Extended family support still seems to be an essential feature of their lives. Their access to vital land resources is dependent on family relations. Their *mbumba* and *nkhoswe* provide them with social support that the market economy is not capable of furnishing. To that extent, the redistributive aspects of the

subsistence economy reinforces the dependence on relationships with their matrikin.

Another indicator of the erosion of matrilineal values would be the appearance of patrilineal relations which tend to fit more compatibly with the male dominant gender relations of capitalist society. Certainly, the matrilineal ideology does not seem to make any great difference in how much domestic work, Chewa men are willing to do compared to their patrilineal neighbours to the north and west. Neither do changes in residency patterns from uxori-local to viri-local indicate an erosion in matrilineal practices. The historical record and the research of Peters and Poewe indicate that residency has always been a flexible matter contingent on a number of variables: availability of land, dominant status of one or the other partners, evolution in the family cycle, power of the maternal male relatives, or simply the preference of the couple. The men who remain in their kin villages cannot necessarily be considered to have adopted patrilineal practices. Their preference to remain may be based on a variety of factors including the wish to support their aging mother, the influence of their mother's brother, the availability of land through the maternal connections in their birth village, or reluctance to accept the loss of status contingent on moving as *chikamwini* especially if the wife's village is more poorly endowed than the man's home village. This confirms Fox's (1967) contention that, "Where... land is scarce, then maternal nephews will be keen to be under the authority of their

mother's brothers as they wish to inherit land from them" (106). Far from being a patrilineal response, the man is confirming his commitment to his significant relative in the matrilineal system.

The socialization of women in the Chewa tradition, emphasizes respect towards their husbands and the need to produce children and please him. While age may provide increased status, it does not seem to have benefited the older respondents from the poor group of *ganyu* seekers. In the case of the rural poor women, their spouses also appear to be poor and only involved in the cash economy as marginal producers or cheap labour. According to the aggregated data, female headed households are amongst the poorest sector of the rural population. Yet, such women are never totally isolated, nuclear units. They call on the support of their matrikin to maintain their rights to land and status within the larger *banja* units.

As Mandala points out, gender relations are one of the arenas of competition within rural society. Women's formal status may be inferior to men and Chewa cultural education emphasizes the primacy of men. Nonetheless, their status within the matrikin group allows them a degree of autonomy and recourse against abuse. Women still felt strongly about their role in decisions to plant the major food crop. This corresponds to Moitse's (1992) observation about the Sotho family. She concluded that even in a patriarchal, patrilineal social

setting and despite male authority and dominance in a couple's relationship, many of the key family administrative matters were in the hands of women. A couple of women who had significant problems with their mate had called upon their matrilineal guardians, the *nkhoswe*, to rectify their spouses' negligent behaviour. In face of the advance of the cash economy, the respondents would seem to confirm Mandala's (1990) thesis that, at a minimum, the customary system has kept women from becoming dispossessed and homeless even though they may have lost power or status in other ways (p.155).

Mandala (1990) also maintains that the intervention of pre-existing class, gender and other forms of societal conflict partly explain the differential effect of capitalism and colonialism on non-western societies (p.9). Capitalism has not eliminated but has coexisted with and in a number of significant ways reinforced the content of precapitalist structures of control. Historically the matrilineal ideology gave women some influence and power, but it was still largely male dominated on the political scene. As a result of the articulation of the competing social regimes, woman have been placed at a considerable disadvantage. The visible effects of this are the singularly long and hard work day that has accrued to them and their constant battle against hunger.

The poor have more commitment to the subsistence economy because of the distributional advantages it offers. In some respects, poverty reinforces poor

people's commitment to aspects of matriliney. Women, quite naturally, want to reside where their family rights afford them any form of security and social supports, not available through other sources. The guardianship of the mother's brother is preferable to uprooting oneself and becoming dependent on the husband's family who have limited commitment to her and her children. Men will settle uxorilocally, if the move offers some advantage, like access to land or freedom from social pressure, as was the case of the male respondent who moved to his wife's home because there was too much witchcraft at his own home.

People are committed to matrilineal practices because they value the aid from womb-mates. A wide network of ties with matrikin can help buffer individuals from the potential hardships of uncertainty associated with economic expansion (Poewe, 47). In any regime under stress, individuals reaction depends on personal experience. Where it is useful, it is called upon. In this context, matriliney provides a minimal but essential support not available to women through other means. The precarious existence of the rural poor would be completely untenable if it were not for the family support and the framework for group survival that Chewā matriliney provides.

However, the constraints women face are a combination of factors from both the matrilineal tradition and the free market. In their daily relationships,

rural women are bound to a male dominated system which keeps them dependent on their brothers and uncles as much as it may provide them support. The impositions of free market priorities on the local people and its seemingly irresistible appropriation of their natural and labour resources ensures their place as cheap labour within the global marketplace. The study of the Central Region of rural Malaŵi confirms the almost universal experience that the social reorganization this demands operates to the disadvantage of women. The poverty of Malaŵi's rural women is thus an indicator of national domination and their social oppression.

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Appendix I - Malawi Demographic Information

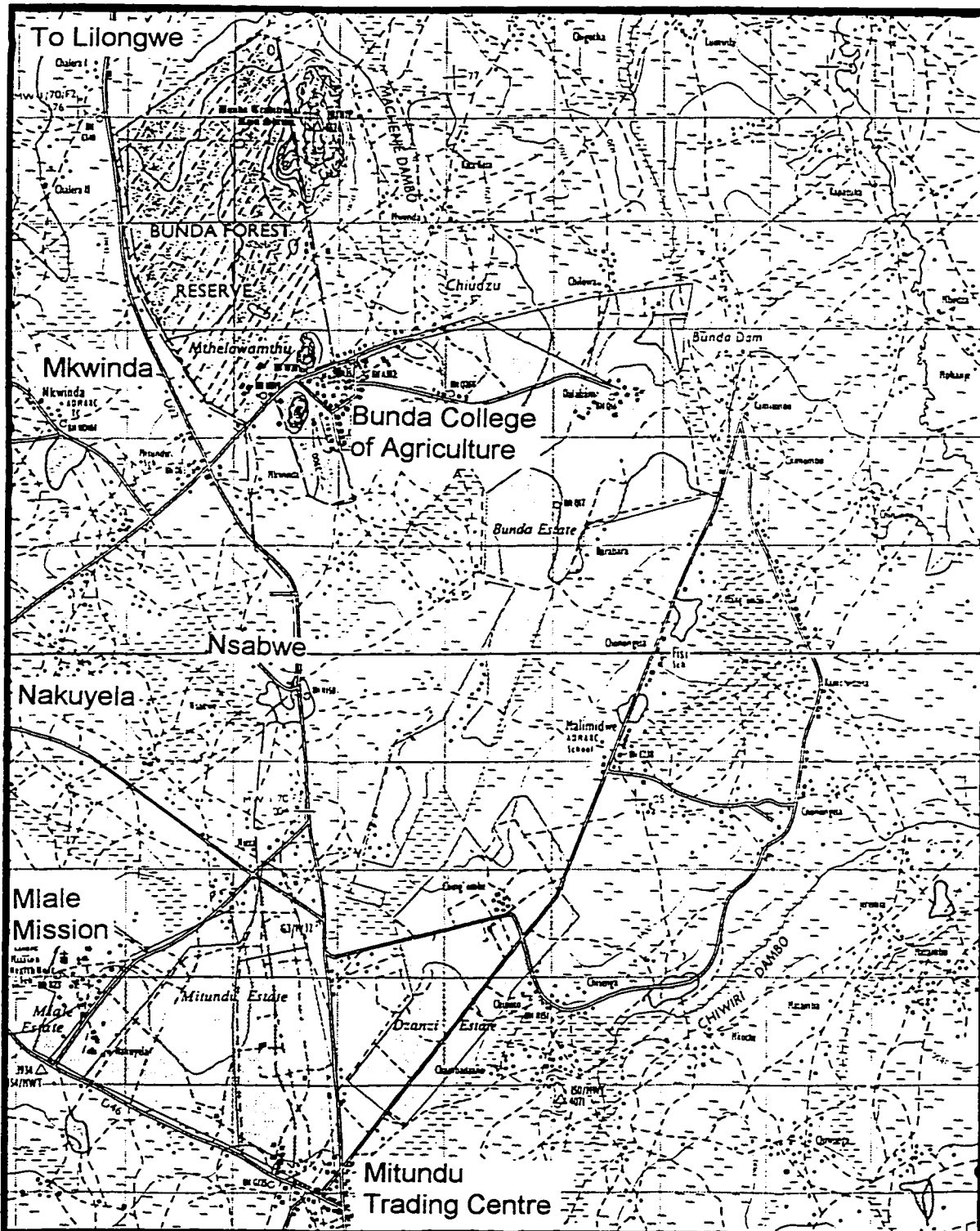
	MALAWI	ZIMBABWE	CANADA
Population			
1960	3.5	3.8	17.9
1990	8.8	9.7	26.5
projected 2000	12.5	13.1	28.5
annual population growth rate	'95 4.7 '90 3.6	3.1	.7
population under 15 yrs (1987)* 30 yrs	±50% ±75%		
population per sq km	89.6	25.1	±3
Gini coefficient - all Malawi - rural	.62 .57	Brazil .57 Egypt .38	
population per - doctor - nurse	11330 3110	6700 1000	510
Rural / urban	88%	72%	13%
GNP per capita 1989 US\$	180	650	19,030
Life expectancy at birth - women	48.1 48.7	59.6 61.4	77 ±82
Births per woman	7.6	5.6	1.7
mother mortality rate 1988 1986-1992	500 620	330	7
infant mortality <1	144	61	± 6
Child mortality <5	253	87	
avg years of school men 25 yrs+ women	2.4 1.1	4.2 1.7	12.3 11.9

Figures are 1990 unless otherwise indicated.

Data from UNDP Human Development Report 1992 except

* from UNICEF / Malawi Government "Situation Analysis of Poverty in Malawi"

Appendix II - Topographic Map of Study Area: Mitundu - Bunda



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INTERVIEW FORMAT

Objective: to learn about the organisation of gender and social relations in rural society.

Issues to explore:

land
work
sharing of product
responsibilities
rights
decision making
history

Introduction:

Poverty alleviation: The government and international community are trying to help people. Doug Miller is a researcher from Canada and he is trying to learn about how poverty is changing village life. Why does poverty continue and why does it seem to be so difficult to overcome?

Tape recorder:

We would like to use the tape recorder, to make it easier to remember what people said and to help when we translate into English.

QUESTIONS:

1: Village

- 1.1 What is the name of the village where you live?
- 1.2 Traditional Authority?
- 1.3 District?

2: Birth Family

- 2.1 Who was your mother?
- 2.2 Who were your mother's parents?
- 2.3 Where were they from and where did they settle and why?
- 2.4 How many brothers and sisters did your mother have?
- 2.5 Who was your father?
- 2.6 Who were your father's parents?
- 2.7 Where were they from and where did they settle and why?
- 2.8 How many brothers and sisters did your father have?
- 2.9 How many brothers and sisters do you have?
- 2.10 What year were you born? How many children before and after you?
- 2.11 Do you all have the same father and mother? (Inquire further where appropriate)
- 2.12 Do they live nearby? (Chikamwini? Chitengwa?)
- 2.13 How many went to school and what level did they go until?

3: Household

- 3.1 What is your marital status? unmarried, married, divorced
- 3.2 How long have you been (were you) married?
- 3.3 Form of marriage - church (which one), mzinda, common law
- 3.4 Whose village are you staying in: husband's; wife's?
- 3.4 Who is the head of the family?

- 3.5 Who makes the important family decisions?
- 3.6 Who eats at your house?
- 3.7 Number of children: boys; girls; lost.
- 3.8 Which children go to school? Why some and not others?
- 3.9 What level have they each reached?
- 3.10 Who pays for their copy books, uniforms?

4: Land

- 4.1 How much land do you have for your use?
- 4.2 Could you get more if you needed it?
- 4.3 How do you use the land? Which crops have you planted?
- 4.4 Who decided what to plant?
- 4.5 Whose crops are they?
- 4.6 Who works on the cultivation?
 - Weeding?
 - Fertilizing?
 - Harvesting?
- 4.7 Did you have access to Farmers Clubs?
 - Who are members?
 - Who borrows?
 - How often does the extension worker come?

5: For Women

- 5.1 How many wives does your husband have?
- 5.2 Where does he stay/live?
- 5.3 Where does he sleep?
- 5.4 What work does he do? Does he do other things to make money?
- 5.5 How often does he come home?
- 5.6 How long have you been married to him?
- 5.7 Have you been married previously? How long did that marriage last?
What caused the separation? Where are the children?
- 5.8 Who helps with the children when you work? (husband, sister, other children)
- 5.9 Does he help with domestic work?
- 5.10 What pressures are you under to fill your role as a wife?
- 5.11 How does your situation differ from your mother's?
- 5.12 Was your mother's situation better or worse than your own?
- 5.13 Do you have any problems with your husband?
- 5.14 Did your father treat his wife differently than your husband treats you?

6: For men

- 6.1 How many wives do you have?
- 6.2 Where do you stay/live?
- 6.3 Where do you sleep?
- 6.4 How often do you come home?
- 6.5 What work do you do? Do you do other things to make money?
- 6.6 How long have you been married to your wife?
- 6.7 Have you been married previously?
- 6.8 How do your previous wives support themselves? Where are the children?
- 6.9 Do you help with the children?
- 6.10 Do you help with domestic work?
- 6.11 What pressures are you under to fill your role as a husband?
(Chikamwini)
- 6.12 How does your situation differ from your father's?
- 6.13 Was your father's situation better or worse than your own?
- 6.14 Do you have any problems with your wife?
- 6.15 Did your father treat his wife differently than you treat yours?
- 6.16 Does your wife treat you like your mother treated your father?

Appendix IV: Respondents - Demographic Information

Respondent	Question 2.1 Year born	Question 3.1 Marital status	Question 3.2 Years mar'd	Question 3.3 Marriage frm	Question 3.4 Chikamwini	Question 4.1 Hectares	Question 3.6 # in household	Question 3.7 Gin/boy/lost
1F	NA	1	15	1	2	1	5	1/2/4
2M	1964	1	9	1	1	1.3	6	2/2/-
3F	1977	1	2	1	1	0.4	3	-/1/-
4F	1945	2	15-1st \ 7-2nd	1	1	1	3	8/2/9
5F	1968	1p	10	2	1	0.6	5	1/1/3
6F	1935	2p	21	3	1	0.2	6	-/5/1
7F	1936	1	8 widow / 5	2	1	0.4	3	1/1/5
8F	1960	1	15	1	1	1.2	7	3/2/-
9M	NA	1	12	2	1	0.8	7	3/2/2
10F	1954	1	20	1	1	1	7	2/3/2
11F	NA	1p	16	1	1	0.8	5	2/1/3
12M	1952	1	20	1	1	1.2	6	2/2/2
13M	1968	1	7	1	2	0.8	5	2/1/-
14F	1965	1	10	1	1	0.8	5	1/2/2
15M	1967	1p	7 \ 4	1	2	0.8	8	2/4/-

10 women
5 men
avg. 38.4 men avg
33.25 women avg.
41

1 = married
2 = divorced
p = polygamous marriage

1 = customary
2 = church
3 = mzinda

1 = chikamwini
2 = chitengwa

Appendix V

“Sexual Division of Labour in Mkwinda and Mazinga Villages” (105) in Butler,
Lorna Bases of Women’s Influence in the Rural Malawian Domestic Group

Males	Females
A. Agricultural Activities	
Tree cutting	
Branch gathering, piling, burning	Branch gathering, piling, burning
Hoeing	Hoeing
Planting	Planting
Harvesting	Harvesting
Marketing and Trading: subsistence and cash crops, livestock, fowl, fruit and vegetables, baskets, mats, hoes, mortars, divining charms	Marketing and Trading: subsistence and cash crops (except tobacco), flour, fruit and vegetables, small livestock, fowl, pots, beer, scones and prepared foods
Caring for cattle, hogs, goats, chickens, ducks, pigeons	Collecting bush foods for relish Caring for goats, chickens, ducks and pigeons
Building granaries, livestock enclosures, fences	
Helping friends, kin or headman with garden work	Gathering and carrying grass and poles for building fences, granaries, livestock enclosures Helping friends, kin or headman with garden work
B. Domestic Activities	
Killing livestock or fowl for feeding family or guests	Preparing and cooking food Going to mill Washing dishes Brewing beer, <i>kachasu</i> (distilled alcohol) Fetching water, boiling for bathing Fetching firewood Smearing floors, walls Sweeping inside house and outside
Disciplining male children	Rearing children
Ironing own shirts and trousers	Washing clothes, blankets, mats Helping friends or kin with pounding, washing, cooking, etc.

C. Other Activities

Assisting work group with houses or school building	Assisting work groups with house or school building, making mud, mudding walls, smearing
Building houses (cutting and setting poles, Mudding walls, thatching)	
Basket and mat making	Pottery making
Carpentry	Carrying gifts of flour, <i>nsima</i> , chicken, etc. to friends
Secret society ritual mask and costume construction (specialized)	
Mortar and pounding stick-making	
Tailoring	
Metalwork	
Assisting with and attending funerals, weddings and other celebrations	Attending and assisting with funerals, weddings and other celebrations

Appendix VI: Residence after marriage

Respondent	Mother's parents 2.3a	Father's parents 2.7	Brothers 2.12a # / response	Sisters 2.12b # / response	Them- selves 3.4
1F	1	na	1 / 2	2 / 1	na
2M	1	1	1 / 2	2 / 2	2
3F	1	4	1 / 2	1 / 1	1
4F	1	1	1 / 2	4 / 2	1
5F	1	na	na	2 / 1	1
6F	4	4	2 / 1, 2 / 2	2 / 1, 2 / 2	1
7F	4	4	1 / 1	2 / 2	1
8F	2	1	3 / 2	2 / 1, 1 / 2	1
9M	na	na	1 / 1	1 / 2	1
10F	3	2	4 / 2	1 / 1, 2 / 2	1
11F	3	2	3 / 2	2 / 1	1
12M	2	4	3 / 2	1 / 1, 1 / Bt	1
13M	1	2	1 / 1, 1 / 2	35430	2
14F	4	2	2 / 1	2 / 1	1
15M	3	2	2 / 2	2 / 1	2

Legend: 1 = Chikamwini
2 = Chitengwa

3 = both partners from same village - probably cousin-marriage
4 = moved elsewhere to acquire land

Table Summary

Mothers' parents:

chikamwini = 6 = 42%
chitengwa = 2 = 14%
same village = 3 = 21%
land = 3 = 21%

Fathers' parents:

chikamwini = 3 = 25%
chitengwa = 5 = 41%
same village = 0
land = 4 = 33%

Brothers

chikamwini = 7 = 24%
chitengwa = 22 = 76%

Sisters

chikamwini = 18 = 56%
chitengwa = 14 = 44%

Male Respondents

chikamwini = 2 = 40%
chitengwa = 3 = 60%

Female Respondents

chikamwini = 9 = 100%
chitengwa = 0

CHEŴA VOCABULARY

amwini	a wedding partner, who resides in his or her spouse's home village. It is most commonly used when a man resides among his wife's kinfolk.
anamkungwi	senior woman responsible for the initiation of girls, also akunjira
ankhoswe	plural of nkhoswe
banja	literally the family in its extended sense.
bele	breast = founding ancestress
chikamwini	the practice of a partner moving to his or her spouses home to reside. See amwini.
chilundu	multipurpose cloth, wrapped sarong style around the waist or used to carry babies on the back
chinamwali	girls' initiation rites
chisuwani	cross cousin marriages
chitengwa	custom of spouse moving to reside in his or her husband's village after marriage;
ganyu	casual, day labour or piece work - from Portuguese "to gain"
gule wamkulu	literally the "big dance" but in fact a ritual part of the male secret society also called "Nyao"
lobola	bride price
mbumba	sorority group, consanguineously related women and their children reckoning back to a founding ancestress.
mfumu wa bwalo	literally chief of the meeting
mtengwa	usually refers to a woman who resides with her husband's kinfolk

mzinda	village initiation rites. See also gule wa mkulu
nkokwe	circular silo structures made of woven branches to store the maize crop.
nkhoswe	male sorority group leader, usually a woman's elder brother or maternal uncle - plural ankhoswe
nkuku ya ukwati	a engagement gift from the husband's family to the wife's