

**'What can I do?' Living with doubt and uncertainty in the  
Central Region of Malawi.**

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## **Abstract.**

This thesis is about the decisions a man named David Kaso made during the time I lived with him and his family. It describes how David tried to make sense of what he should do in different situations, and the doubts and uncertainties that he experienced as he did so. Through looking at David's life in detail the thesis suggests some of the limits of ethnographic methodologies to explain people's actions. My interest in uncertainty developed during the course of a fifteen-month stay with David's family in Chimtengo village, in the rural Central Region of Malawi. There was an overarching imperative on people in Chimtengo to give each other help, yet how exactly he should mediate this support was not something that always appeared easy for David to work out. There were structures that gave some order to his relationships and to what he did. Through getting to know David over a long period I became aware of the significance to him of being a 'strong' Christian, a good husband, and a big man. Following the course of his life in detail though, the limits of these different ideas as heuristic devices, or social rules of thumb, became apparent. These limits left David doubtful of his decisions, and me to live with uncertainties about my analysis of his actions. Focusing on David's life suggested the heuristic nature of ethnographic knowledge, some of the ways that it is constrained by the time and the relationships out of which it is produced.

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Pomaliza, ndikufuna kuthokoza anthu onse aku mudzi, maka maka Abusa ndi Amayi Abusa. Mwandisamala, mwandionesta zinthu zambiri. Ambuye akudalitseni. Zikomo kwambiri.

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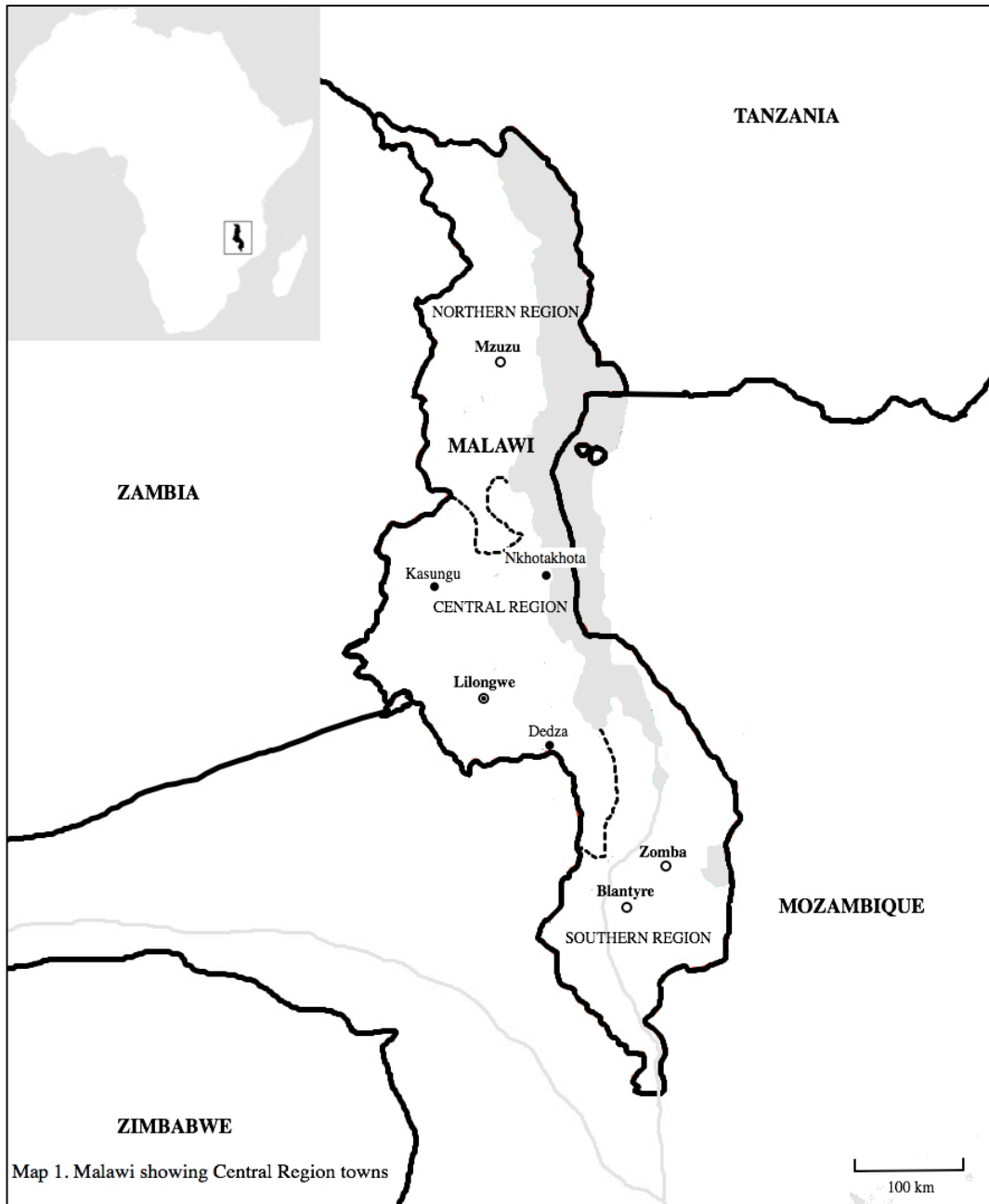
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## Malawi and Central Region towns.





## Chapter One. Getting to know people.

### *Introduction*

*'What can I do?'*

It is September 2012 in Chimtengo, a Chewa village in the Central Region of Malawi (Map 1. p. ii), and Pastor David Kaso is telling me about his plan to move his family from the village to a nearby trading centre, Chimsika. Only the occasional bark of a dog breaks the hum of the cicadas in the blackness outside the house. Most people in the village have long since turned in for the evening. David, rolling a small ball of *nsima*<sup>1</sup> in his hand, sets out some of the influences hanging over the prospective move. *'I want to move my household to Chimsika. I can be closer to the tarmac road to Lilongwe there, which will mean less walking. And I can have electricity to run a computer with the Internet for email to communicate with missionaries. But rent is very expensive, 11,000 kwacha (34 USD) a month, and we would have to buy all our firewood. And now we have to plant our maize, so we will not go. Maybe next year.'*

A couple of months later and David is walking around and around his house in the growing cool of evening. Taking his phone from his ear, he looks down in frustration at the glowing screen for the fifth or sixth time. David is searching for signal, which is very erratic in the village. Pastor John Moyo has been trying to call David from Lilongwe to arrange for the visit of a US missionary to Pamtunda Baptist, the church near Chimtengo that David leads. Eventually the pair manage to discuss the visitor for a couple of minutes. The conversation prompts David to talk to me, and his wife Martha, about the move to Chimsika. *'I will have one of the boys, maybe James, stay in the house here when we move. It is important to have a place here. John Moyo, he moved to Lilongwe, but kept no place in the village. That is dangerous. Where will he be buried?'*

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<sup>1</sup> A thick porridge made from flour and water and cooked until solid. The staple food in Chimtengo and the Central Region.

January 2013, and David has just been called by Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo to discuss a meeting that the chief, David and David's brother Harold will be involved in the following day. There is a dispute in the village over the payment of a fee to an NGO for a tree-planting project. The NGO are giving out tree saplings to villages for a nominal payment but some members of Chimtengo believe they should not have to pay a contribution to the village's fee, arguing that they are too poor to afford it. The disagreement will have to be resolved in order to get the trees. Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo wants David's help to persuade the others to pay. David is a '*big man*' in the village. It is late, after dark, and David is tired. As he walks off to Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo's house David tells me that, '*There will be no more going to see the Chief when I live in Chimsika*'.

March, and David has just finished hosting a meeting for some of the deacons from Pamtunda Baptist and the other congregations he leads in the area around Chimtengo. Some are setting off on foot, others on bicycles. It is the early afternoon but several will not reach their houses until nightfall. The hungry season is at its height and during the meeting there had been much talk about food shortages amongst the members of the churches. The deacons had petitioned David to ask Pastor Moyo if he could get some missionaries to provide food relief for the churches. They had also heard David was considering moving to the trading centre and were not happy about it. Sitting on the veranda of his house after the meeting, David summarised what the leaders had said to him. '*They don't want me to go, they say they will build me a new house at Pamtunda*'.

It is now May, nearing the time when the main maize crop should be taken in. There will be little harvested from the field where David and I are standing; the crop has been destroyed by termites. Having surveyed the field David tells me about his grandfather Chimtengo Three, the old chief of the village. '*He looked after so many people. I take my example from him, I try to support people as well*'. Having mentioned a few of the people that Chief Chimtengo Three supported, including himself, David tells me about the move to Chimsika again and his plans for his adopted thirteen year old boy Ganizani. '*I am very troubled in my heart*'.

*about Ganizani. I want to move my family; but there is not enough space in the houses in Chimsika. I want Ganizani to leave my household. But Ganizani has nowhere else to go; I know he will not continue his schooling if he is not part of my household. But what can I do?*

### *Understanding and uncertainty*

This thesis is about the decisions David Kaso faced during the time I lived with him in Chimtengo village. It describes how he tried to make sense of them, and the doubts and uncertainties that he experienced as he did so. Through looking at David's life in detail the thesis also suggests some of the limits of ethnographic analysis. My interest in doubt and uncertainty developed during the course of a fifteen-month stay in David's household from July 2012 to September 2013. While I was living there, everyone in Chimtengo village talked of their poverty and emphasised the importance of providing each other with help or support. There was a lot of worry about being seen as a 'selfish' (-*mana*) or 'proud' (-*nyada*) person, the kind who did not provide help or support (*thandizo*), or care (*chisamalo*) for relations and other acquaintances. The expression '*moyo woyipa*', meaning '*bad soul*' or '*bad spirit*', was used to describe people who did not give others help. Although this overarching imperative to give support and care was powerful, to whom exactly help and support should be given was not something that always appeared easy for people in Chimtengo to work out. I saw David Kaso worry, wondering over what he should do. He vacillated over his decisions, discussing them, questioning them, often making one resolution and then going back on it again, asking if it really was the best thing to do.

This is not to say that there were no important social structures in Chimtengo and the surrounds, that life there was completely without pattern or order. Institutions like family, village and church, and ideas about what it meant to be a man or a woman, a 'big man' (*munthu wamkulu*) or a dependent and a Christian or a non-Christian, helped people in Chimtengo understand their relationships and what they should do for each other. They provided a useful guide to how social life should play out in the village. Through getting to know David over a

long period of time I learned some of the ways in which these ideas and institutions were important to him. As I spent time with him and he grappled with the decisions he had to make, like over the move to Chimsika, David indicated to me the particular significance to him of being a big man, a 'strong' Christian, and a good husband. David himself sought opportunities to get to know other people whenever he could, recognising that anything he could learn about them would reduce some of the uncertainty he would face were he to have to make decisions that involved them in the future.

It was difficult for David to avoid doubt and uncertainty entirely though. Following the course of David's life in detail, the limits of different ideas and institutions as heuristic devices, or social rules of thumb, became apparent<sup>2</sup>. Their relative capacity to explain people and their actions was indicated by the questions, discussions, worries and vacillations that run through the thesis. The decisions David took were often not arrived at easily and he regularly appeared torn between different people that were important to him. On occasion what he did seemed to contradict what he had told me about the significance of different ideas and institutions to his life. His actions also at times sat uncomfortably with some of the things he had done previously. David could recognise the discrepancies himself. The disjunctures left him living with doubts about his life, and me to live with uncertainties about my own analysis of it.

The kind of fieldwork I did in Chimtengo, following David's life in detail, allows me to point to the limits to which it is possible for persons to know others and,

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<sup>2</sup> Through the thesis I use the terms 'ideas' and 'institutions' to describe what shaped how David Kaso and others made sense of their lives. This is as opposed to terms like 'discourses', 'logics' or even 'morals' or 'culture'. The latter terms carry at least some connotation of 'grand theory', or totalising schemas. As this thesis probes the limits of such social schemas or structures, it seems more appropriate to use the former terms. Writing about piecemeal, situated, 'ideas' seems a better way of describing what played into David's decisions. Whilst admitting their capacity to structure and order social life, I also regard institutions, sets of ideas, as situated and dynamic, mutable. The situatedness in time and place of the ideas and institutions that were important to people in Chimtengo also leads me to use the term 'social landscape' through the thesis. The ideas and institutions I write about were features in this landscape, the '*terroir*' (Bayart 2009) in which David and other people in the area could be understood.

therefore, to know themselves. In this respect the thesis contributes to an anthropological literature that discusses the extent to which the person can be understood through their relationships, or their 'wealth in people' (Guyer, 1993, Piot, 1991, Comaroff and Comaroff, 2001, Guyer and Belinga, 1995, Smith, 2004, LiPuma, 1998, Swidler and Watkins, 2007, Niehaus, 2012 p. 20, Ferguson, 2013). The person's actions are conceptualised as inseparable from the relationships that make them who they are, and are revealing of those relationships (Strathern, 1988, Taylor, 1990, Taylor, 1992, Englund, 1999). Anticipating this work, Max Marwick wrote Chewa he worked amongst in the 1940s told him that 'a man who fails to care (-*sunga*, -*samala*) for his dependants and leaves them to their own devices "is not a person" (*simunthu yai*).' (1965 p. 164). Harri Englund writes that for the Chewa he spent time with in the 1990s, in an area about seventy five kilometres from Chimtengo village, the self appeared as a 'composite of relationships...' (1999 p. 141, 2002a p. 25-28), people 'constituted and constrained' to different degrees by their connections to others (Englund, 2002a p. 27). The thesis suggests that being a person, constituted and constrained in relationships, means having to live with doubt and uncertainty.

In focusing on David's life in particular, the thesis pushes up against some of the limits of social analysis, indicating the necessarily 'pragmatic' nature of anthropological research (Whyte, 1998, Hastrup, 2005, Ortner, 2006, Niehaus, 2012). While admitting that ideas or institutions can never explain a particular person's actions entirely, a pragmatic approach to ethnography nonetheless holds that at least some heuristic connections can be drawn between social or cultural structures and the actions of particular persons living within them. I try to show through the thesis that although always partial, this pragmatic process of social analysis and explanation is nonetheless valuable (Whyte, 1998 p. 232).

### ***Reconciling social relationships with individuals and their actions***

Marshall Sahlins discusses the different ways in which historians and anthropologists have explained people's actions in his study of history and

anthropology, *'Apologies to Thucydides'* (2004). Analytical approaches have turned around people's structural position, or around more unique kinds of biographic information. Sahlins describes an 'epistemological break' (2004 p. 151) between social structures and processes on the one hand, and individuals and events on the other. In the study of history, whenever a social process has been studied, it is to the collective, the social system or structure, to which the historian has normally turned for explanation. When an event is the subject of analysis, causality is rather explained in reference to individual action. There is, in other words, a divide between the evidence needed to understand specific events, and the evidence needed to understand social processes.

Sahlins writes causal connections can be overdrawn when this epistemological break is collapsed. He describes what he calls 'Leviathanology', the thesis '... that the individual does not exist as such but only as the expression of an all-powerful system - variously identified as society, culture, or hegemonic discourse, or some form thereof, such as capitalism, nationalism or colonialism...' The individual and their action are reduced simply to the function of a structure (2004 p. 143). Sahlins identifies Foucault's work on discipline and power as a key example of this theoretical position (Foucault, 1977a, Foucault, 1979)<sup>3</sup>, and goes on to argue that the shift in anthropology and sociology from the 1960s and 1970s, towards the study of the individual subject (Ortner, 1984), was not generally accompanied by a move away from these theoretical underpinnings. All too often in anthropological case studies of *'dramatis personae...* of modern subjects, post modern subjects, and post-colonial African subjects... essentialism... creeps back into the individual-as-microcosm' (2004 p. 149-150)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Sahlins does not spend much time writing about the fact that Foucault himself engaged with the implications of his theorising about discipline and power for the agency of the person, and sought to undermine the totalising schemas of earlier social theorists. Foucault's later work shows his discomfort with the thought that in attempting to undercut old certainties he may be read as setting up new ones. See for example, the papers 'Questions of Method' (1981) and 'The subject and Power' (1982). For a review of the development of Foucault's thinking in this respect see Philp (1985).

<sup>4</sup> Englund and Leach argue similarly to Sahlins in an article from 2000, writing that 'metanarratives of modernity' are all too often read into contemporary ethnographic cases studies.

But social structures do have their effects on the individual, and so on specific actions and events. Leviathanology cannot simply be reversed and the individual theorised as entirely apart from all social relationship. This produces a conceptualisation of the person as perfectly rational, the utilitarian individual of classic economics that anthropologists have spent so much time critiquing. A less dichotomous approach is needed. Sahlins writes that relationships have their effects on people, but the individual mediates those influences in a unique way, meaning that what they do has its resonances with the larger collective they are a part of, but cannot be entirely reduced to a product of that collective (also see Hastrup, 2005, Toren, 2002a, Ortner, 2006). Each person retains and expresses their own biography in their action. Returning to his point about the apparent epistemological incommensurability of events and individuals with processes and structures, Sahlins suggests that it is possible to conceptualise a place for structures in explaining particular actions and events. Despite their ultimately being 'irreducible the one to the other...' (2004 p. 155) wider relationships, structures, are what puts the person in a position to act, even if those relationships do not necessarily dictate exactly what that person does. Sahlins identifies two ways in which relationships influence people's actions, labelling these systematic and conjunctural agency (2004 p. 155-159). Whilst he presents systematic and conjunctural agency as 'polar types' for the sake of clarity, Sahlins admits the ways in which each encroaches on the other in lived reality (2004 p. 155).

Systematic agency is permitted to a person by their position in long running, institutionalised relationships with a collective, kings and their people being the best examples from history. The king's position does not necessarily define what they do exactly; this would be too strong a suggestion and collapse the epistemological break between social structure and the action of the individual. However, the king's structured, institutionalised relationship with their people nonetheless makes good sense of why they are able to act as they do. This systematic agency, suggests Sahlins, is the more familiar kind of relationship conceptualised between structures and individuals and events in historical and anthropological writing.

The ability to exercise conjunctural agency is by contrast only permitted to a person through a conjunction of relationships that emerges piecemeal, for perhaps only a brief period in time. Unlike the king, Sahlins writes that the batter who hits the winning home run in a championship game of baseball was only able to hit the ball because of a particular set of events and relationships that played out through the rest of the season, and during the game itself. It was this idiosyncratic course of events, rather than one patterned or institutionalised, that put the batter on the plate. Sahlins acknowledges the batter in question had an institutionalised position in the baseball team but points out that it alone did not guarantee that it would be he that would have the opportunity to hit the team's winning home run. Things had to come together to put him in a place to act. Individuals' actions and the outcomes of events can in this way be made sense of as emerging out of two kinds of relationships - more structured, institutionalised ones, or more unpredictable ones - fleeting conjunctions.

Isak Niehaus (Niehaus, 2012, Niehaus, 2013) draws on Sahlins' work on systematic and conjunctural agencies in his ethnographic studies of witchcraft in South Africa. In particular, Niehaus has been interested in explaining why one of his research assistants, Jimmy Mohale, came to believe he was bewitched, having not believed in witchcraft for much of his life. Niehaus writes that academics writing on witchcraft in South Africa have largely focused on a perceived increase in the fear of witchcraft in the country at the end of the twentieth century (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999, Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000, Ashforth, 1999, Ashforth, 2005). The development has been explained as a response to broader socio-political malaise and insecurity experienced since the end of apartheid. Niehaus argues though that neither social malaise, nor some kind of generalised 'African identity' can, in and of itself, explain individual experiences of witchcraft (2012 p. 5-6, cf. Ashforth, 1999). Such an analytical jump, as Sahlins shows, ignores the important epistemological break between structures and processes, and individuals and events, and implies that individual actions are no more than a function of the collective of which they are a part, in Niehaus's case an impoverished, insecure South Africa at the start of the twenty-first century.



Niehaus suggests that where particular experiences of witchcraft are at issue collective insecurity in South African society must only be treated as a 'possible context' in which beliefs in witchcraft might emerge (2012 p. 5).

Niehaus writes that Jimmy Mohale had endured hardship and insecurity for much of his life and nonetheless remained unconvinced about the power and reality of witchcraft. Niehaus points out this makes it difficult to explain Mohale's decision to believe in witchcraft as a result of his structural position in South African society. A 'conventional social analysis' of systematic agency, the effect of social structures or discourses on people's behaviour, could not alone explain why Mohale made a choice to believe in witchcraft at the time that he did. Niehaus suggests that Mohale's decision is better explained as an instance of conjunctive agency, a response to a particular set of relationships and events that were unique to Mohale's life (2012 p. 7). This kind of information is only available through the stories people tell of their own lives, their biographies. Niehaus argues that through attending to the connections between relationships, events and contexts that people draw as they tell their life stories, it is possible to begin to indicate the ways in which different institutions and ideas are meaningful to them in particular. This is as opposed to assuming the importance of certain social structures and interpreting individual's actions with respect to witchcraft, or anything else, as functions of those structures. Niehaus writes that biography makes it possible, in a partial, pragmatic way, to transcend the 'binary opposition between social structure and individual agency', to indicate the relative importance of different institutions and ideas in the life of the individual (2012 p. 203).

The relative power of family, village and church, and ideas about gender, religion and 'bigness', were suggested by the amount of uncertainty that existed in the lives of David Kaso and other people in Chimtengo village. Whilst the social landscape provided them with a way of making sense of what they should do for others, and what they could expect in return, there were limits to the assurances it provided. As he made his choices, David relied on what he knew about persons in particular, what he knew about the specific significance of different ideas and

institutions to them. This kind of biographical information provided him with a better sense of how to act towards the different people he knew. When I arrived in Chimtengo to stay with David, I only had theoretical knowledge of the importance of certain institutions and ideas to the life of Chewa people in rural Malawi. I lacked the kind of biographical information that David and everyone else in the village relied upon to make their decisions, leaving me far more uncertain about life in the village than anyone else. The only way to understand how the theories I had learned about were, or were not, important to David, and to others, was to get to know them better as persons in particular.

### ***Biographic ethnography***

#### *Getting to know David*

I developed close relationships with David and the members of his family over the fifteen months that I stayed with them. I had a room in their house and ate all my meals with the family. I went with them to plant in the fields, played and joked with the children, and helped with tasks like rounding up the goats and running errands in Chimsika. I often spent time chatting with David late into the evenings. After a time people in the village, and David himself, began to jokingly suggest that I was his child (*mwana*). David also called me 'brother' (*achimwemwe*) and gave me a Chewa name. Right from the start of my stay David had expected me to take a full part in the life of the church. Each Sunday I went to the service at Pamtunda Baptist Church, or a service at another of the churches David led. I often joined in with other church events and activities as well. David was less expectant that I would join in with what went on in Chimtengo, but I did, going along with him or other family members to weddings, funerals and football matches, and to visit Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo, and relatives and other acquaintances in the village.

In focusing my time in the field and my writing on David in particular my approach is similar to Niehaus's work on Jimmy Mohale. Niehaus's book on

Mohale's life itself sits in a long tradition of biographical ethnographic writing, which stretches back to the first half of the twentieth century<sup>5</sup>. Biographies do not focus on social structures and the histories of social processes writ large, but on events, moments when particular conjunctions form, and specific decisions emerge. Niehaus writes that Jimmy Mohale selected and 'put forward the topics for their discussions' directing the analysis of witchcraft Niehaus produced (2012 p. 18). Niehaus argues biographic methodologies are in this way different from 'conventional', 'monological modes of ethnographic I-witnessing', because they permit the coeval production of analysis by researcher and researched in a 'polyphonic' way (2012 p. 18). They do not, in other words, present an analysis that rests on the ethnographer's analytical inferences alone. These are the kinds of theoretical inferences that, 'threaten[s] to dissolve individuals into victims of the hegemonic order, subjects without agency... [or] unique biographies...' (Niehaus, 2013 p. 653, also see Sahlins, 2004). Unchecked against the perspectives of the people they are meant to describe, ethnographic theories can become so distanced from those people as to obscure important empirical details about their lives. James Staples, who recently published a biography of a Tamil man suffering from leprosy in South India, draws on Niehaus and another ethnographic biographer, John Chernoff<sup>6</sup>, when he writes that his biographic methodology,

'... enabled the complexities of social practice to emerge much more clearly, contradictions intact, than in conventional ethnography, where case studies often need to be shoehorned to fit the arguments we want to make. As Chernoff points out, stories can actually be more revealing than what we learn from analyses based on abstract concepts.' (2014 p. xxiii)

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<sup>5</sup> Notable biographic ethnographies include Paul Radin's early work *Crashing Thunder: The Autobiography of an American Indian* (1926), Sydney Mintz's *Worker in the Cain: A Puerto Rican Life History* (1972), Vincent Crapanzano's *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan* (1980) and Richard Werbner's *Tears of the Dead: the social biography of an African Family* (1991). More recently Niehaus's *Witchcraft and a Life in the New South Africa* (2012), James Staples' *Leprosy and Life in South India: Journeys with a Tamil Brahmin* (2014) and John Chernoff's *Hustling is not Stealing. Stories of an African Bar Girl* (2003) have seen the genre of ethnographic biography continue to expand.

<sup>6</sup> I write more on Chernoff's work below.

The difference Niehaus and Staples claim between 'conventional' ethnography and ethnographic biography appears a matter of degree. Ethnographers doing 'conventional' ethnography have recognised the importance of allowing their interlocutors a voice for a long time<sup>7</sup>. What varies between the two approaches is rather the extent of the coequality of researcher and researched. Sharon Hutchinson writes in the introduction to her ethnography of the Nuer that her approach to fieldwork involved "perfecting the art of conversation" (1996 p. 45) in order to produce knowledge with the people she spent time with<sup>8</sup>. Engaging in conversation and exchange with the subjects of research is not about 'becoming' a Nuer, or a Tamil, or a Chewa. It rather involves the researcher showing themselves as a person with their own biography. Hutchinson observes 'for a rewarding conversation, one needs thoughts and opinions for other people to engage with' and she found that conversation during her fieldwork was at its most rewarding, or at least most revealing, when those thoughts and opinions were of 'disbelief', 'disagreement' or 'surprise' (1996 p. 45). In the same vein, Niehaus writes his debates and disagreements with Jimmy Mohale provided 'insight into unquestioned assumptions,' and revealed 'similarities and differences in worldviews' (2012 p. 22).

Difference between researcher and research subject is often described in terms of aspects of class, gender, religion, seniority or ethnicity. These define a researcher's positionality in the field and the information they are able to gather. As researcher and interlocutor get to know each other better the way in which different ideas matter to them becomes clearer, nuancing the analysis the researcher produces. Niehaus writes how his own exchanges over witchcraft

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<sup>7</sup> There is a history of critique of overly etic, introspective, 'i-witness' approaches to analysis that 'shoehorn' empirical detail into ill-fitting theories (Geertz 1988 p. 73-102, Moore 1994 p. 107-128, Englund and Leach 2000, Mallett, 2003 p. 27-31).

<sup>8</sup> I have found Katy Gardner's statement on the anthropological method in her ethnography of connection in rural Bangladesh extremely helpful. Gardner argues similarly to Hutchinson about the importance of conversation, but also acknowledges some of the insecurities that anthropologists might feel about the approach. These insecurities were familiar to me. 'Anthropological research is by definition a messy affair. Unlike structured questionnaires, baseline surveys or satisfactorily completed PRA (Participatory Rural Assessment) sessions, sitting around and chatting to people, or watching events take place over series of months or years, rarely feels like 'proper' research... however [it is] the only way that the detailed contexts of peoples' lives and the ways that these unfold can be understood.' (2012, p. 11)

with Jimmy Mohale changed as their relationship became closer, over more than fifteen years of acquaintance. Ceasing to be an 'outsider' to Mohale did not necessitate Niehaus adopting the same beliefs about witchcraft as Mohale, Niehaus never accepted witchcraft's 'existence as an empirical reality' (2012 p. 21). Closer relationship did however engender a greater degree of trust in Mohale that Niehaus would not end their relationship over Mohale's beliefs in witchcraft. Mohale came to see the specific significance of witchcraft to Niehaus, and its implications for their relationship. Niehaus describes the enabling and constraining effects of his relationship with Mohale as the 'shadow' over the account of his life that Mohale gave him. 'Stories are structured by the listener's presence; by his or her questions, expectations, and attributes; and also by the nature of the interactions between the story-teller and the listener' (2012 p. 21, also see Hoskins, 1998).

I arrived in Chimtengo armed with theories about what life and the people there would be like, theories informed by what I had read about kinship, gender and religion amongst the Chewa. It quickly became apparent that David had his theories about me as well. Chief amongst these was the idea that I was a missionary to Pamtunda Baptist Church and the other churches that he led<sup>9</sup>. Pastor John Moyo had introduced me to David, and David correctly assumed my Christian beliefs from my relationship with Moyo. He believed that as a Christian from the UK I must be in Malawi to proselytise and '*to plant churches*' (*-bzala mipingo*). David thought too that I had to eat meat at least once a day, that I was not able to ride a bicycle or walk very far, and that I would not really be interested in getting to know people outside of the church. These ideas, amongst others, structured the form of my interactions with David and his family during my first few weeks in the village.

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<sup>9</sup> This assumption has been made of other ethnographers working on the Church in Africa. Harri Englund (2001 p. 244) and Jane Soothill (2007, p. 5-6) both write that the members of the congregations they spent time amongst assumed that they were missionaries when they first started to attend their churches.

Despite the fact that I had tried to explain to him before I came to the village that I was interested in doing research (*kafukufuku*) and learning Chichewa, the local language, rather than *'being a missionary'* I spent most of my first two weeks with David *'encouraging'* (*-limbikitsa*) various groups of church members that he took me to visit, sat on the back of his bicycle. David also insisted that I lead a Bible study and prayers for his family every night after dinner. When I suggested to David that I would like to meet people in Chimtengo village and not just in his churches, he assumed that I wanted to proselytise, to go, as he put it in English, *'door-to-door'*.

As the days went by I discussed with David what it would and would not be possible for me to do while I stayed with him. Our conversations suggested more about the theories David had about *'white people'* (*azungu*). They also indicated the significance to David of institutions like family, village and church, and associated ideas about what it meant to be a man, a big man, and a strong Christian. I describe what I learnt about the social landscape of Chimtengo and the surrounds at length in chapter two, and the particular importance of its institutions and ideas to David through the rest of the thesis. As for what he learned about me, David eventually explained he had been worried because he thought that a white person like me would struggle to stay in his house. It was not a manner in which the foreign missionaries he knew lived, or even wealthy Malawians. David had expressed his concern that I might be *'disappointed'* with my living arrangements, if I were not able to eat meat everyday or if I had to cycle or *'foot it'*, as he put it, around the local area. He was cautiously relieved as I insisted, and subsequently proved, that such issues would not cause me to be disappointed, or to end my relationship with him and his family and move back to town.

David was less willing for me to curtail the number of visits I was making to his churches. Despite my explanations that I was primarily in the village to do research, David continued to ask me to preach and teach at church, to give financial support to the congregations, and to support him in his role as their pastor. We came to something of a compromise in my first few weeks in

Chimtengo; I went to his churches less than David would have liked, but did speak to his congregations from time to time. I only gave small amounts to the churches in tithes and to support David's family while I was in the village, but arranged to leave both the Pamtunda Churches and David's family more substantial gifts when I left Chimtengo at the end of my fieldwork.

This was not the usual way in which the missionaries that David knew worked. David reflected on this when he thanked me for staying with his family at the end of my time in the village; *'Dan you said when you arrived, "I am not a missionary", but you have done more for us than a missionary.'* The comment picked up on the way I had upset David's initial theories of who I was, and his hopes of what I might do for him. At the same time it acknowledged that as we had got to know each other, different possibilities and opportunities had opened up that David had not expected based upon what he had guessed about me initially. In this sense David experienced doubts and uncertainties over his relationship with me. Whilst we came to something of an accommodation in my first few weeks in his household, David continued to question how our relationship might play into different situations that he faced. He remained anxious to get my perspective on his leadership of Pamtunda church and regularly asked me whether I might be able to support him, his family or the church financially, for one reason or another. I remark upon the ways in which David expressed the influence I had with him and the uncertainties our relationship caused him throughout the thesis.

#### *Getting to know others*

Whilst David Kaso is the main protagonist in the thesis, I also draw other people into the analysis. This reflects the fact that my fieldwork was informed not just by my biography, and David's, but by the lives of a wider cast of characters as well. The relationship I had with David was entwined with relationships I had with David's family and people in the village and the church. The most prominent of these people, David's wife Martha, his brother Harold, Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo, Ganizani, and a US missionary named Bob Miller, feature through the pages of the thesis. Persons being constituted by their relations, it is important to

know the opinions or interests of many in order to know better those of one. The knowledge that was produced through my fieldwork was not just a product of the relationship between David and myself, but of our relationships with others. Knowing about others and their interests, also allows me to shift the focus of the thesis to demonstrate the way their relationships, including those they had with David, played on what they did as well. David was not the only one feeling doubtful and uncertain as he tried to work out what he should do in life.

In addressing multiple personae, the thesis follows the example Richard Werbner sets in his book *Tears of the Dead* (1991), a history of one family in South Eastern Zimbabwe. Werbner's book is something of an exception to most other biographic ethnographic texts as it includes, at length, the voices of multiple characters. The study is, as Werbner terms it, a 'social biography' (2002a p. 4). By making his analysis more 'social' than is normally the case, Werbner avoids the kind of psychological reductionism that accounts that focus heavily on a single life can be prone to (van Onselen, 1993 p. 498-501, Geertz, 1988 p. 92). A biographical approach must avoid inferring that a person is best understood apart from the perspectives of the people who make them who they are (Hastrup, 2005 p. 138). As Werbner writes, biography's purpose is, 'not just to make people's voices heard... it is to make them heard, and understood, as voices which talk with, against and about each other' (1991 p. 4). It is for this reason that even accounts that focus to a greater extent on one life, like Niehaus' account of Jimmy Mohale, include some of the voices, perspectives and interests of other characters (Niehaus, 2012 p. 23). My own efforts to get to know people other than David Kaso were motivated by a similar concern, and were more than just about 'fact-checking' the things that David told me (cf. Niehaus, 2012 p. 23-34).

As my relationship with David developed, and my ability with Chichewa improved, I gradually carved out some space to spend time with people in Chimtengo without David chaperoning me. Broad conventions around gender, seniority and wealth shaped my interactions with people, but, as had been the case with David, my relationships were gradually nuanced by what I learnt about



others in particular, and what they learnt about me. Even when he was not with me, my relationship with David, and with his family, undoubtedly made a difference to how I was received by others. People said they appreciated my desire to live in the village and to learn Chichewa, things that they commented were not normal for white people, who did not tend to speak the language or spend much time in villages. 'They just stay in town' was what I was often told. At the same time, and while people did criticise David in my hearing, my relationship with David meant that what I could learn about some people and areas of life in the village was limited. One area where I was particularly constrained was the *Nyau*. A secret society for Chewa men, *Nyau* has been much maligned by church leaders in Malawi and David appeared in this respect to be no exception to the general rule. David's Christian faith and position as a pastor made me circumspect about attempting find out more about the *Nyau* and when I was invited by some members of the village to be initiated into it about half way through my stay I declined<sup>10</sup>.

Although the decision meant I did not gain as much insight into the *Nyau* as other researchers have, declining to join it was an important part of my becoming a person in the eyes of people in the village. As Sharon Hutchinson points out, disagreements do not necessarily have to mean the end of relationships. Rather they can mark out the researcher as a person, someone with their own positions and opinions. My efforts to learn language, chat with people in the village and my failure to join *Nyau*, amongst other things, indicated to people the specific significance of certain ideas and institutions to me personally. These specificities could be learnt, giving people a better idea of how to relate with me, and of what I might be willing to do for them. As one of the key things that people knew about me was the relationship I had with David, the way I engaged with them has to be understood in the light of who David was, and the relationships he had with people in the village. In the same way, knowing about David involved knowing

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<sup>10</sup> Christian faith has not prevented others from learning about the *Nyau*. Claude Boucher (2012) and J.W.M. van Breugel (2000), the authors of two of the most detailed books on *Nyau* and Chewa religion are both clergymen. It was more my desire to maintain good relationships with David and his family that restricted the extent to which I was able to pursue enquiry about the nature of *Nyau* in and around Chimtengo.

about people in the village, and in the Pamtunda churches. It was not possible to know about him, without knowing some of the important relationships that constituted him as a person.

*Scale, imminence and the limits of biographic ethnography*

The style of my fieldwork has important implications for the kind of data that I collected and for what I am able to argue in the thesis about doubt and uncertainty. I have already indicated the 'lived in' nature of my fieldwork earlier in this chapter, the way I took part in the life of David's family, Chimtengo village and the Pamtunda churches. I conducted few formal interviews and most of my data comes from participant observation and notes made by hand as I talked with people as they went about daily life. The interviews I did record were completed at the start of my fieldwork, and were all with David. These had their telos as testimonies of Christian faith, his conversion in the early 1990s the pivot around which they turned. The different contexts in which I collected information, in interview with David, but also as he lived out life day-to-day, enable me to suggest the extent to which it is possible to explain David's decisions. Listening to the biography he told and following him throughout the time I was in the village suggested the importance of different ideas and institutions to his life. But it also showed up some of the limits of biographic ethnography, and the heuristic nature of social analysis.

Biographers and ethnographers have written that the life-history interview tends to imbue the life and past decisions of the subject with a certain kind of coherence. Although they may contain their 'ups and downs' (Staples, 2014 p. xviii), a structuring teleology of one kind or another will always emerge in an analysis produced from life history interviews<sup>11</sup>. Richard Werbner writes they

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<sup>11</sup> There is a large literature on biography, the interview and the life history interview. Keesing's (1985) article on Melanesian women's autobiographies' covers many of the issues to do with biography that I note in the thesis, including the complex relationship between people's descriptions of themselves, their actual social standing and their actions. Keesing writes, 'women's muteness or "articulatedness" can never be taken at face value; the texts we create together never speak for themselves' (1985 p. 38). Keesing argues that the contexts in which

can be 'artful... stylised discourse[s]' (Werbner, 1991 p. 3). This is not to say they are necessarily created strategically or instrumentally, but only that story telling has its requirements and rules as a form of communication. Niehaus touches helpfully on how his account of Jimmy Mohale is affected by its basis on life-history interview. The narrative that Mohale offered in their conversations was not only delimited by his personal relationship with Niehaus but by what Niehaus describes as the 'broader conventions of story telling', the imperative upon Mohale, like all story tellers, to produce a coherent narrative for his listener (2012 p. 19). The story Mohale told of his life was structured by his belief that he had been bewitched, and past relationships and events were construed as the inevitable precursors to what had happened to him. It is in this way that the life history interview tends to reify coherence, requiring the interviewee to conform the events and relationships of their whole life to complement a single telos, central event or end.

Wolf Bleek (1987b) has suggested that ethnographers often only write about what people say they do, and not what they actually see them doing. This critique is particularly true for biographical approaches, relying as they largely do on information from interviews, the emic commentary of events in the interlocutor's life. The biographer or ethnographer cannot easily contrast the information that they derive from such interviews with observation of what their subject actually did, making it difficult to critique the coherence of the biographical account. James Staples contrasts the way the protagonist of his ethnographic life history, a man he calls Das, described his own biography in early interviews, to what he told Staples as they travelled to different places from his past. The first interviews took place in relatively, 'neutral' settings (2014 p. xx), and the stories Das told were relatively short and sweeping, with a distinct telos. Das compared his story to the film '*Slumdog Millionaire*' (2014 p. xvi). The

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autobiographies are produced are intimately connected to their content. Werbner's introduction to *Tears of the Dead* (1991), covers similar ground, as does van Onselen's (1993) review of his use of oral testimony in his work on South Africa. Smith, Staples and Rapport's recently published volume (2015) covers much of the older literature on interviews and suggests new perspectives and areas for further work, including in the area of the ethnographic biography.

subsequent interviews, completed in different locations were different, describing piecemeal events and memories. Staples writes,

‘... in telling histories over time, out of chronological order and in different contexts, [his memories] became less anchored in the overarching narrative structure... that Das gave to the story of his life in shorter accounts’, a page later, Staples reflects that context, ‘transformed the ways in which [Das] resurrected the memories he had been drawing upon.’ (2014 p. xxi-xxii)

Whilst he had a biography that he told me in interview, my focus on imminent or present events that transpired while I was in Chimtengo meant that David also told me his history in bits and pieces, prompted by his deliberations over different decisions that he had to make. These fragments were not really anchored in an overarching narrative. There were some consistent points of reference, or characters that he would return to again and again, his Christian faith and his dead grandfather Chief Chimtengo Three in particular, but what he recalled and the way he used his memories to help make sense of the present varied situationally, from case to case. His biography appeared to inform what he did in a piecemeal way and whilst it gave a guide to what he might do, it did not explain his decisions definitively.

The progress of David’s life appeared uneven, his decisions emerging in response to specific conjunctions and not always sitting easily with the broader story he told of his life. Living with him and accompanying him to church, town and other places, I saw David vacillate and worry. He could stay up late into the night going over what he should do. The ‘lived in’ nature of my fieldwork allowed me to observe what David did, and appreciate how he understood events as they happened, and compare this with what he said about himself and his life at more of a distance, like in the life history interviews that we conducted at the start of my stay. The dissonances between these moments allow me to suggest the different ways in which David made sense of his own life, depending on context. At times the significance David attached to certain ideas and institutions in his biography were not reflected in the choices he made ‘in the moment’. As he told

his biography, the negotiation and renegotiation through which David actually maintained his relationships and made his way in life were brushed over for the sake of making a coherent narrative out of his life as a whole.

I am unable to make this kind of comparison with other characters in the thesis, like Martha or Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo, as I did not sit down with them and record their narratives of their lives. Another consequence of focusing on information gathered from life in process and not from interview is that the biographies I offer in the thesis are not as 'full' as in biographic ethnographies. Even in David's story there are many gaps that I would have liked to have filled, but as situations were resolved and decisions made, further enquiries into the memories that had influenced them seemed to jar. The past was not so important to David and other people in the abstract, disconnected from present situations they were trying to make sense of. It sometimes prompted awkwardness when I questioned David about the consistency of what he was doing with the narrative of his broader life story. This was reflected in the fact that when I tried to write a full history of David's life, by compiling all of the individual recollections that I had collected, the story lacked the thread of a single meaning, the memories in it unconnected to an overarching telos, divorced from the specific contexts in which they were actually drawn up. The requirement on me, like any other author, to tell a coherent story means I have put some of these memories together in a way they did not emerge. This is particularly the case for characters in the thesis other than David. I do though for the most part try to present David's memories as they emerged in the field, connected to the specific episodes that gave them their significance.

#### *Extended case studies*

As a result of the kinds of unevenness that David's life presented I have structured the thesis around extended case studies, rather than as the kind of narrative life history that is more typical of biographic ethnographies. Max Gluckman and the members of the Manchester School developed the extended case study method during the 1950s in an attempt to elucidate and explain

processes of social change that could not be captured through the functionalist methodologies popular in British social anthropology at that time (Evans and Handelman, 2008 p. 1-2, Werbner, 1984 p. 157-158). Bruce Kapferer writes that, although it goes unremarked in his work, Sahlins' concern with connecting up events to social processes and structures is very close to the interest that animated Gluckman and his colleagues (2008 p. 146, Evans and Handelman, 2008 p. 6). In 1940 Gluckman published a paper about the opening of a bridge in South Africa, using the interactions of the characters involved to theorise about wider South African social life and history (1958 (1940)). The implication of this pioneering 'situational analysis' was that a case could show a 'generative moment' in social life, rather than simply being an 'apt illustration' of an existing theory or state of affairs (Kapferer, 2008 p. 134-136). The extended case study was developed and deployed by members of the Manchester School, most notably J. Clyde Mitchell (1956, 1983), in response to the promise of Gluckman's bridge case (Kapferer, 2008 p. 134, Werbner, 1984 p. 162).

The success of different members of the Manchester School in using the extended case study to move social analysis away from functionalism varied; Mitchell himself was critical of his own efforts (Kapferer, 2008 p. 134). Although they put the focus on events, situational analyses, and many extended case studies, were still connected up to wider social life essentially as examples of the latter. Several anthropologists have suggested Victor Turner's (Turner, 1967, Turner, 1957) work on the Ndembu probably overcame this tendency the best (Kapferer, 2008 p. 136-137, Evans and Handelman, 2008 p. 7, Englund, 2002a p. 29, Werbner, 1984 p. 176). Turner set up his case studies as 'social dramas', that move successively through moments of crisis, breach, redressive action and reintegration (Turner, 1957 p. 91-92, Turner, 1974). In doing this Turner clearly demonstrated how studying events could not only unveil new theories about social life at particular moments in time, which was what situational analysis and many extended cases studies had effectively established, but could also capture the detailed, constitutive moments of processes of social change. Turner's case studies, as Kapferer writes, 'do more than illustrate principles at work—they indicate new dynamics in formation' (Kapferer, 2008 p. 136).

Extended case studies have been criticised for being synchronic, and for failing to admit the perspectives of those people caught up in the events they describe (Rosaldo, 1989 p. 140-142). While these critiques are applicable to some of the Manchester School work, Turner's ethnography and other ethnography inspired by the School have since gone a long way to meeting them (Colson, 1974, Colson, 1976, Werbner, 1991, Englund, 2002a). Werbner's *Tears of the Dead* is one example of such work, and given what it also owes to biography, is particularly relevant to discuss here. As a social biography, Werbner gives significant space to his interlocutors to describe different moments in their lives and their significance to them. He not only brings multiple characters to the fore, disrupting the sense of order that a single biographic narrative tends to create, but is also able to draw out narratives from different points in time, spread across several decades. Admitting the perspectives of various people, at various points in time, Werbner shows, in a similar way to Turner, the 'ever provisional', processual nature of social life (Werbner, 1991 p. 148).

Although the period of time covered here is drastically shorter, through using cases it is possible to indicate the way in which David had to reassess his relationships from event to event. The case studies in the thesis draw others into the analysis to indicate more exactly the interests that pulled upon him. While I suggest how he also pulled on others, David remains the main protagonist in the thesis. This focus allows me to describe in detail a number of the different relationships that played upon him. The opening vignette about the move to Chimsika indicates some of their complexity. I return to the move to Chimsika at the end of the thesis to demonstrate how picking out episodes or cases over time indicates the fleeting, piecemeal nature of some of David's decisions, and of the influences that helped him make sense of them. David's relationships were reconstituted through the events I describe in the thesis; through each a new condition established, different to what had been before, even if only slightly so, and ever vulnerable to being cast into doubt itself.

The detailed descriptions in the case study chapters suggest the ways in which certain ideas in the social landscape were important to David. They show the significance to him of being a big man, a 'strong' Christian, and a good husband. But they also indicate the limits of different ideas as heuristic devices, or social rules of thumb. His actions sometimes seemed to contradict what he had done before, and what he had told me about his life in the interviews we conducted. Even though I got to know David well there were still limits to the extent to which I could understand him and the decisions he made. Situated in particular relationships and acting at particular moments in time, David himself faced uncertainties and doubts himself as he weighed up what he should do. He discussed, questioned, vacillated and worried, making decisions whilst doubtful of their outcomes. Sometimes things worked out as he hoped, other times they did not, prompting more doubt and worry.

### ***Ethics***

During my time in Chimtengo I was contrasted favourably with missionaries, NGO workers and researchers, whose brief visits to the village denied them the opportunity to develop relationships with people living there. This led to them being labelled pejoratively as '*proud people*' (*-nyada*) in a similar way to that in which people in the village were labelled proud when they declined or denied relationship. David and other people I knew in Chimtengo and the surrounds appreciated the fact that I was able to build relationships with them over an extended period of time. Commenting in a speech at the end of my stay in the village, Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo said, '*Dan, he knows us, he has been with us in our village here, he was with us at funerals, he went to weddings, to the fields. Dan he knows us.*' The arguments I make in this thesis, about the ideas through which people made sense of their lives, and the explanatory limits of these ideas, do derive from the claim that I know people in Chimtengo well, and that I can accurately represent their lives. This issue, the extent to which I know about David's life, and the lives of others, and also the authority or 'right' I have to



present them as I do, are the two main questions around which the ethics of this study turn.

Ever since the 1980s and the publishing of Clifford and Marcus' *Writing Culture* (1986), the ethnographer's capacity to know the subjects of their research, and their ability to represent them in their writing, have been put to sustained critique. I will not review these critiques here, but it is worth noting that the disjunctures of social realities and written texts are particularly acute problems for ethnographic biography, given the strong claims made in the genre to demonstrating the subjective. One approach to tackling the issue has been to remove authorial description and analysis from texts entirely, allowing the subject to tell their 'own story' as John Chernoff puts it in *Hustling is not Stealing*, which he labels in his introduction as an 'autobiography' (2003 p. 6). Chernoff's approach means that the contexts and relationships in which his protagonist, Hawa, produced her narrative, including her relationship to Chernoff, remain obscure. It appears as if these contexts and relationships had no bearing upon her or the stories she told<sup>12</sup>. Most ethnographic biographies are less extreme in this respect. Whilst Staples and Niehaus, 'allow character, motivation and action to emerge gradually out of stories' (Staples, 2014 p. xxiii) they also, as I have already suggested, make more explicit the relationships and compromises entailed in the production of their accounts, including their power as researcher to dictate the shape of the final narrative. Whilst recognising that such an effort will always be partial, in what remains of this section I try to make clearer the relationships and compromises that informed the production of this thesis.

In Chimtengo there appeared at times to be a gulf between what people understood I was researching, and what I was actually researching. Everyone I spoke to was appreciative of my stated intentions at the start of my fieldwork, to learn language and culture, and people quickly got the idea that I was not a missionary, even if David wanted me to be one. People saw the use of learning

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<sup>12</sup> Chernoff's book garnered much praise, but also caused some controversy for this reason, amongst others. For a critique see Hilary Mantel's 2004 review.

Chichewa, and Chewa culture, as they felt that white people did not know much about these and that it would be useful if they did. Although the kind of general description of intention that I gave is common in ethnographic fieldwork (Englund, 2002a p. 31, Hutchinson, 1996 p. 44), as my research became more focused on David's life, and the lives others in particular, my statements about wanting to learn language and culture felt increasingly disingenuous. Instead I started to talk to people about how I would write about specific people, problems (*mavuto*) and stories (*nkhani*), the cases that appear in this thesis. Although David and others appeared to understand that I would be writing about them in particular, as well as about language and the social landscape in general, it was impossible to tell the extent to which they knew this to be the case.

The extent to which people actually gave me permission to write about them is blurred further by the fact that, unlike conventional biographic ethnographies that are based largely on interviews, my own concern with observing and listening to life in progress meant that it was impractical to collect individual research permissions from everyone that I came into contact with during the fieldwork. In the course of negotiating my stay in his home I obtained verbal permission from David to do my research. He advised me I should also ask Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo as well, in his capacity as the village chief. As chapter five shows, the idea that Kubwalo's word might somehow stand for the whole village is dubious, and I did not treat the permission he gave as a pass to approach other people in the village *carte blanche*.

Although I got to know people in Chimtengo and Pamtunda Baptist Church, part of our relating continued to revolve around the fact that I was a researcher, this was part of my biography as much as my Christianity, taste in food or desire to speak Chichewa. Day-to-day, people regularly tailed off conversation, descended into laughter, or started speaking Chichewa I could not follow, when I approached them. When David said he needed to discuss something with Martha, which was often, that normally meant a conversation in the privacy of their room, after dark. I was never privy to the substance of those undoubtedly

important conversations. It was in these ways, more than through the permissions I discussed with David and Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo at the start of my stay, that people in the village indicated to me what I could know and what I could tell as a researcher.

Of course, what the claims of the thesis really rest upon is that my proximity to David and other people in the village meant that it was inevitable that I would see and hear things that might not necessarily have been meant for me to see and hear. In tiredness, confusion or worry, stories emerged that jarred with other narratives I was presented with at other times. The point is not so much that people were instrumental, or that there was a 'hidden transcript' (Scott, 1990) that was being held from me. While I am sure there were things that David and others went to lengths to keep from me, the point is rather that there were different ways in which people made sense of things, in response to different people and contexts, and these were at times discernable to me because of my close proximity to life in David's household. Quite where the lines between what I was meant to hear and what I was not was difficult to work out. The extent to which David was aware that I might see and hear things he was not comfortable with was indicated through the discussions I had with him about the anonymisation of my research.

Given that the argument of the thesis has to do with the importance of knowing people and their biographies it may appear contradictory to anonymise people's names as I have done in the thesis<sup>13</sup>. David was not happy when I suggested at the start of my stay that I would remove people's real names from my work. It was one of the points at which he was most obviously annoyed with me during my time in the village. David did not view my research as being very helpful

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<sup>13</sup> Whilst changing names I have tried to retain a sense of their character. For example I use the kind of Scottish names popular across Malawi since the Scots' missions of the late nineteenth century and used widely in Chimtengo and the surrounds. Married women in the village were nearly always called 'Amayi', meaning 'Mrs' or 'mother', followed by the name of their husband or one of their children. As married women took on the first name of their husband as their second name, for clarity I generally tend to refer to women by their first names through the thesis. As children also take on their father's name as their second name I generally refer to men by their first names as well. Chimtengo, Chimsika, and the names of the other villages surrounding Chimtengo have also been changed.

unless it had some practical benefit, as he said of my plan to anonymise the thesis, '*you should put real names in your book so that people can come and help us here*'. How would missionaries or NGOs know about their problems and come help if they did not know I was writing about David, his family, the Pamtunda churches and Chimtengo? I felt it important to use pseudonyms given that I could not be entirely sure that everyone had given their consent to be presented in the research nor, even where people like David had consented more clearly, could they be sure exactly how they would appear in the final text. Whilst I try to show the emic perspectives he had on his life, my account also goes beyond those, to observations and to theory, and makes connections of which David was and is not fully aware. In short, I wanted to anonymise the thesis because I am its sole author.

Over the opening weeks of my stay I tried to explain to David that it was difficult to foresee some of the outcomes of identifying him and everyone else in the village, however unlikely it was that serious attention or harm would come to the family given the subjects I was intending to write about. Mostly my focus is on David and his relationships with people in Chimtengo and the surrounds, as they negotiated mundane issues of day-to-day life. More powerful individuals and organisations do feature in chapters five and six, where I describe the implementation of the Malawi Government's fertiliser subsidy programme, and American missionaries' support of David respectively. It was to the government and missionaries that I drew David's attention as we discussed anonymisation. I pointed out that neither he nor I would be able to control exactly how they would react to my account, if they were ever to read it. David saw the logic of this and agreed that it could cause '*problems*' if I were to use real names in any writing based on my time with him. Our discussions indicated that my research was not something David was sure about, and his agreement to it, and to its anonymisation, did not mean he was without his doubts subsequently. In this sense the permission I had to do my fieldwork was maintained as my time in the village went by.

Neither David, nor any of the other people in it have been able to comment on a draft of this thesis. Unlike other biographers, whose subjects' had more formal education, David would struggle to read a draft, even if it were translated into Chichewa (cf. Niehaus, 2012 p. 23, Staples, 2014 p. xxvii). I do still keep in contact with David, phoning him once every two or three weeks. Keeping up the relationship has involved continuing discussion, an extension of the process of getting to know one another that began in the village. Whilst the narrative of the thesis has been fixed without David commenting on its final form, this ongoing communication at least involves the possibility that David can indicate to me the way his relationships have changed since I left Chimtengo. As Richard Werbner (1991) demonstrates, such a longitudinal perspective can show the way in which people assess and reassess their relationships over time, and the fleeting nature of the different influences that inform them (Hastrup, 2005 p. 143, Strathern, 1996). In terms of the ethics of my research, the fact that I have maintained a relationship with David is evidence of his continuing agreement to my work on his life.

### ***Summary of the thesis***

In chapter two I set a context for the case studies in the thesis by describing the social landscape of Chimtengo village and the surrounds. The chapter details the institutions and ideas that were important to people there. Family, village, chieftaincy, church and *Nyau*, and ideas about kin roles, gender, bigness, and religion, all helped people make sense of their relatedness and the decisions they had to make. Some of these structures appeared to matter more than others, and I try to indicate the relative importance of each through the chapter.

The case studies that follow chapter two look in more detail at the limits of the institutions and ideas in the landscape to help people, and David in particular, to understand the decisions they faced. By looking at biographical information and the detailed conjunctions through which he made certain decisions, the specific significance to David of being a strong Christian, a big man and a husband,

amongst other things, become more apparent. The case study chapters are not arranged in a hierarchical way, to suggest that one institution or ideal had preeminent importance in David's life and to the decisions he made. Instead the structure of the thesis reflects how David had to juggle many valued relationships. Sometimes this appeared relatively straightforward but on other occasions these different relationships demanded things of him that were difficult to reconcile, causing David to doubt what he should do.

In the first of the case based chapters, chapter three, I describe an intractable illness that David's brother Sunday suffered, and the difficulties David had trying to make sense of it in relation to his own testimony as a Christian. The story David told of his life, which I recount in the chapter, was structured as a narrative of persistent faith in God through difficult and disturbing circumstances. It showed the significance to David of his identity as a pastor and strong, faithful Christian. As Sunday's illness progressed however, David showed uncertainty and doubt over how he should respond to it. What David did was better explained by the specific conjunction of influences surrounding Sunday's illness, than by the broader story he told me of his life in interview.

The conjunction of influences from which David's decision about Sunday emerged involved particular relationships. In chapter four I try to show in more detail the ways in which people's decisions were made, and best made sense of, socially. In the chapter I focus on Martha, David's wife, and her discussions with her husband over the use of their household's money. Through looking at the purchase of a new blouse and skirt for Martha, chapter four gives a sense of the importance of different ideas and institutions to her. While she talked about how men should provide for their wives, Martha also engaged in relations of interdependence with other women. These fed back into her relationship with David. The mutuality between Martha and David's interests became apparent only as I got to know both Martha *and* David; understanding one helped make sense of the other. Despite having been married for many years, Martha and David still experienced doubts about what to do with respect to each other,

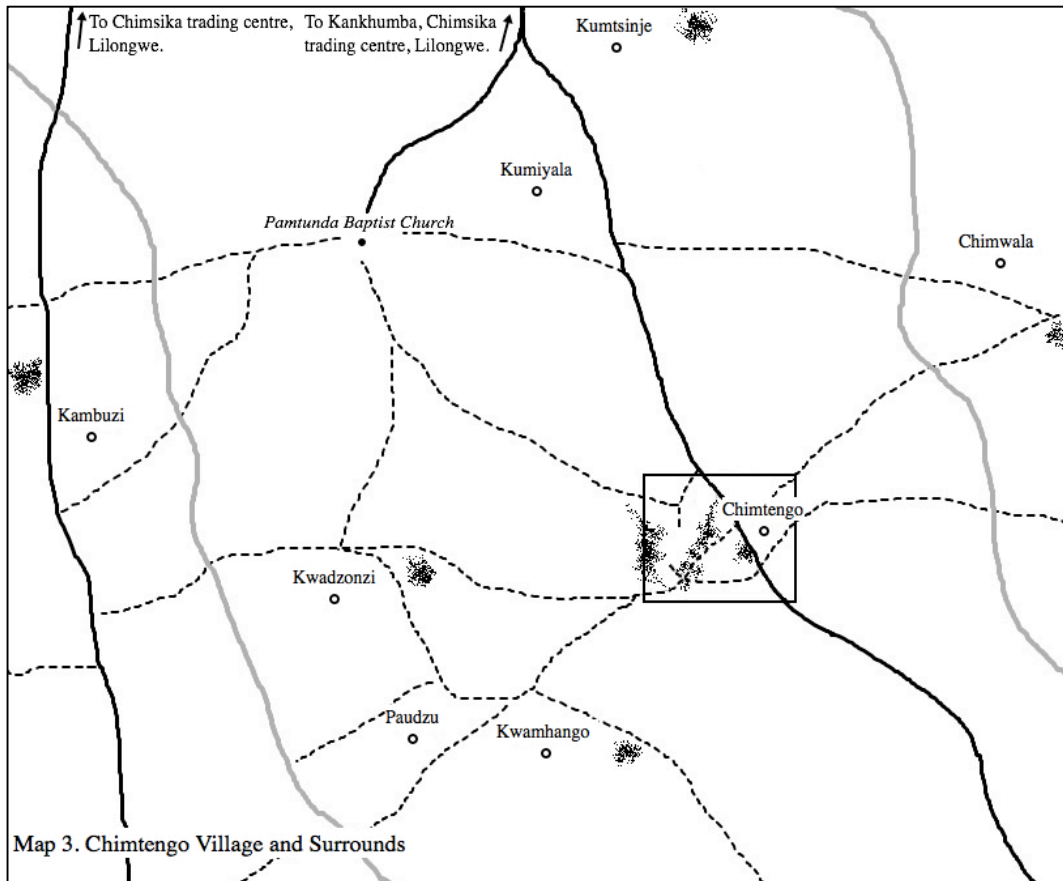
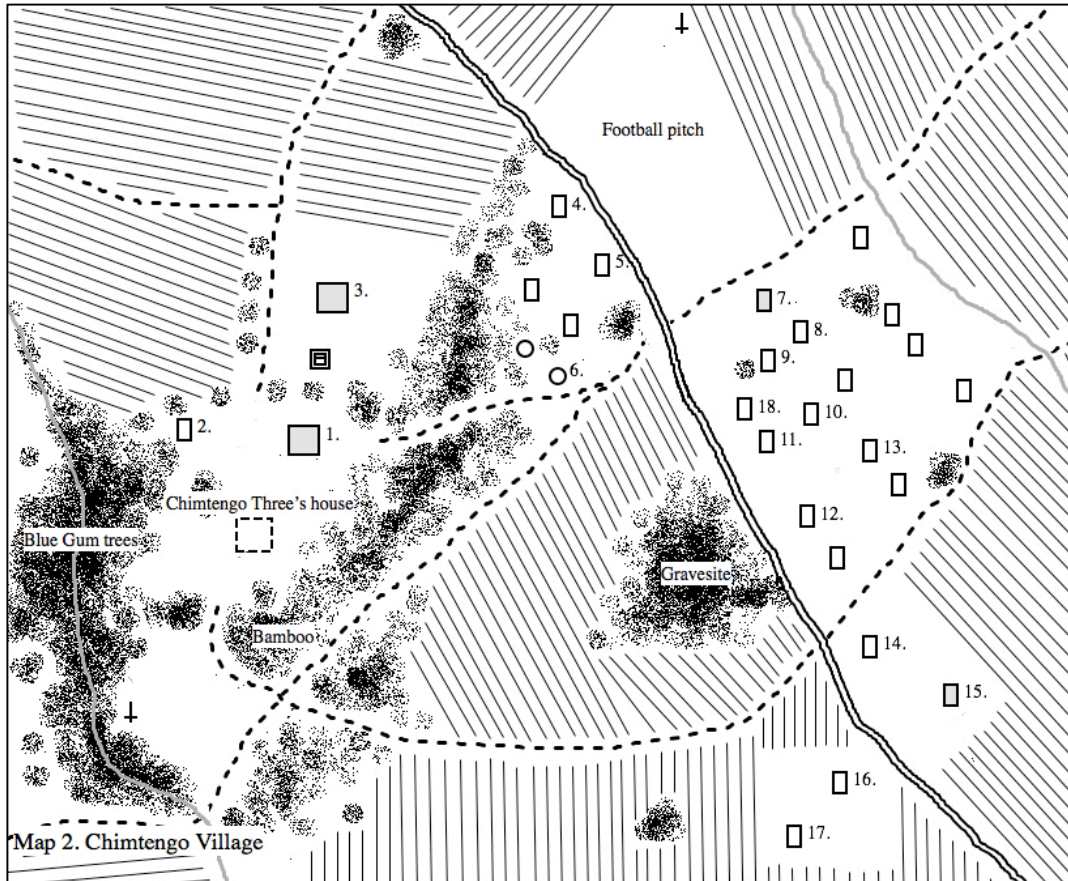
indicating the limits to which it is possible to understand the relationships that make persons who they are.

Chapter five looks again at the way David's biography or life history helped him to make sense of his decisions by describing the way in which he and Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo negotiated the distribution of government-subsidised fertiliser in Chimtengo. David was a big man in Chimtengo, a position that had particular significance for him because of his closeness to his grandfather Chief Chimtengo Three, who had also been a big man. David and Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo discussed the distribution of the fertiliser repeatedly, vacillating and doubting what the other might do about it. But what David did do was at least partly informed by the genealogy of bigness in which he saw himself, and by what he knew of Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo's struggles to command bigness in Chimtengo. Being big mattered to David, and to the decisions he made, providing him with some guidance over what he should do, even if it did not remove doubt and uncertainty over the subsidised fertiliser entirely.











In the last case study chapter, chapter six, I look at the extent to which David's '*special friendship*' with a missionary named Bob Miller reassured David about a decision he had to make over some bicycles that Miller had given him to distribute to the deacons in his churches. I look at how the same limits to knowledge that meant David struggled with doubt and uncertainty in some situations also gave him reason for hope in the case of the bicycles. I describe two different ideals about help and support in the chapter, one held by David and his deacons, and another by the US missionaries that visited Pamtunda Baptist Church. The chapter shows how, whilst generally acting along similar lines, American missionaries did not all give help and support in the same way. David was hopeful of finding a missionary who might act as a patron to him and the churches he led. Bob Miller was the closest David had come to finding such an exception. Bob Miller's difference from other missionaries gave David reason to hope that what he did about the bicycles might not mean the end of his relationship with Miller.

Chapter seven draws together the threads of thesis by returning to the decision David faced over the move to Chimsika that I described at the start of this introduction. I summarise what had happened over the move in the period after I left Chimtengo in September 2013, and before I returned to the village for a brief two-week visit in November 2014. David had made a resolution about the move, and then went back on it not anticipating the distress the decision would cause him. As in the other cases in the thesis, what transpired suggested the limits of the connections between the abstract knowledge of institutions and ideas in theory, the knowledge of their significance to David, and the actions that David actually took. After discussing what happened over the move I come back to the methodological discussions in this chapter, and suggest how the evidence presented in the thesis adds to a growing case for the value of a 'pragmatic anthropology' (James, 2003, Hastrup, 2005, Whyte, 1998, Niehaus, 2012 p. 203-206). This pragmatism acknowledges, as David and other people in Chimtengo did, that whilst it is not always easy to understand why people do what they do, or to predict their decisions with much certainty, that does not mean it is not worth striving to try.





## Map Key

	Fields	Chimtengo Kubwalo Households	
	Wooded areas	1. David Kaso	11. Agness Msindiza
	Main roads	2. MacDonald Mwale	12. Tatu Bonda
	Footpaths	3. Harold Kaso	13. Bester Mkanda
	Rivers and streams	4. Limbani Kaso	14. Madalitso Nyirongo
	Grass roofed house	5. Davey Banda	15. Mwayi Namangale
	Iron roofed house	6. Bill Bonasi	16. Mvula Imani
	Round house	7. Yamikani Misozi	17. Panjira Mbvuto
	Borehole	8. Lloyd Bonasi	18. James Khumbo
	Maize Mill	9. Thokozani Bonasi	
		10. Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo	

## **Chapter Two. The social landscape of Chimtengo village and the surrounds.**

### ***Chimtengo village and the surrounds***

Chimtengo village lies about fifty kilometres from Lilongwe, Malawi's capital city, in the Central Region of Malawi (Map 1. p. ii). When I arrived in July 2012 David and his family were living in the largest house in the village. There were several dozen houses in total, most small and squat, built with mud bricks and roofed with grass. Arranged amongst them were woven granaries, animal pens and various kinds of outbuildings. David's home sat away from the main area of settlement, surrounded on three sides by tall trees (Map 2. p. 33). The only other wooded area was the village's gravesite. The fields that spread out around Chimtengo were mostly cultivated for maize, tobacco and groundnuts during the annual rainy season from November to March. Wet gardens lined the larger watercourses and were tended year-round for maize and vegetables. The land was heavily farmed and many Chimtengo villagers' fields lay alongside and in amongst the fields of people from other villages; there were seven within a kilometre of Chimtengo (Map 3. p. 33). Pamtunda Baptist Church also lay within this area. It was built of brick, about five metres by fifteen, and had a battered corrugated iron roof and a half concreted floor. A few white plastic chairs were the only furniture inside. There were several more churches, as well as schools, groceries, maize mills, a government health centre and a weekly market at Chimsika, which lay about six kilometres along the main track that ran through Chimtengo. The tarmac road to Lilongwe was another ten kilometres along the dirt road beyond Chimsika.

### ***Introduction***

This chapter is about the social landscape of Chimtengo and its surrounds, the institutions and ideas that were important to people there. These provide a

context within which David's deliberations, vacillations and resolutions in the case study chapters can be understood. I look at family, village, the *Nyau* and church and some related beliefs about what it meant to be a man or a woman, a chief, a big man and a Christian. In addition to describing the landscape, I draw on the work of other ethnographers and historians to suggest some of the ways in which the institutions and ideas I write about have structured social life amongst other people living in and near the Central Region of Malawi. Of particular importance are Max Marwick's work from the 1940s, on Chewa just over the border from the Central Region in eastern Zambia (1965, 1963), and Harri Englund's more recent studies of Dedza (2002a, 1999, 1996), a district of the Central Region around one hundred kilometres south of Chimtengo (Map 1. p. ii), and his work on peri-urban Lilongwe (2007, 2002c, 2000, 2001). The chapter demonstrates the ways in which the social landscape of Chimtengo and the surrounds was relatively open, the degree to which social structures there were mutable, leaving people to live with indeterminacies.

While my main point in the chapter is that institutions and ideas were flexible, it is important to hold on to the fact that social structures did matter in Chimtengo. Pauline Peters points out in her work on kinship in Southern Malawi that 'one can... overdo flexibility, contestation and indeterminacy...' (1997b p. 140) and in what follows I do try to indicate some of the ideas and institutions that were harder for people to ignore. As Marshall Sahlins (2004) suggests, although people and their actions are not simply the functions of 'Leviathan' structures or discourses, what they do is nonetheless made possible by the relationships they have, and many of these relationships are patterned or systematised. Some ideas and institutions in and around Chimtengo appeared mutable, but others set more rigid boundaries around what people could do, providing reassurance in the different situations they faced. My long-term residence in Chimtengo, and the work of other scholars, allow me to suggest why some features of the social landscape had the relative influence that they did.

One idea that did not appear to structure life in Chimtengo and the surrounds was ethnicity, 'Chewaness'. It is worth noting briefly here that while I use the

term Chewa in this chapter and throughout the thesis, I largely try to avoid using it as an analytical category. There were no other ethnic groups in the area of the Central Region where I did my fieldwork and people in Chimtengo and the surrounds spent little time reifying themselves or their practices as Chewa, *Nyau* perhaps excepted<sup>14</sup>. As I show in what follows, there were other ways of marking out identity and making sense of peoples' actions that were more important. I only use the term Chewa to locate my work geographically and within the literature, which, particularly in the case of older work, has favoured ethnicity as an analytical category (Marwick, 1965 p. 61, cf. Englund, 1996 p. 130).

### ***Family and kinship***

When I was living there, Chimtengo villagers used the word '*banja*' to describe a unit of husband, wife and children, living together in a household. At the same time they also used '*family*' (*banja*) to describe their relatives outside this smaller unit, extended family on both the father and mother's sides, living in other houses in the village and further afield. The difference between smaller and larger family units was marked only by the use of different possessive adjectives by husbands and fathers when they talked about their family relations. When David talked about '*my family*' (*banja langa*), the singular, he always meant his wife Martha and the children they looked after. When he talked about '*our family*' (*banja lathu*), the plural, he referred to his brothers and other kin in the village and elsewhere. This was irrespective of whether they were on his father's or mother's side. I identified households in the village by identifying married men, and listening to whom they described as being in their family

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<sup>14</sup> People in Chimtengo did talk about national politics, but normally described and critiqued the merits of individual characters, presidents, or particular MPs, rather than political parties or ideologies. This being the case, they did not talk about these individuals' ethnicities, rather the help and support (*thandizo*) they provided while in their office. The best Presidents, like Malawi's first leader after independence, Kamuzu Banda, were those that 'helped' (*kuthandiza*) people in the village through the provision of fertiliser and paid employment. For people in Chimtengo, no subsequent president had really lived up to Banda's example.

singularly, '*my family*'<sup>15</sup>. Women and children never used the singular possessive to talk about family, using the plural '*our family*' to describe both the nuclear group they were part of and their extended family.

Max Marwick noted the term '*banja*', 'shares... the ambiguity of its English translation', describing 'a group as small as an elementary family to one as large as a village section' (1965 p. 44). Lucy Mair, who worked on marriage and family in Dedza district in the 1940s, found its meaning to be similarly vague (1951 p. 104, also see Richards, 1950 p. 234). Marwick and Mair write that other terms- *bele* and *mbumba* respectively- were used to describe wider maternal kin groups of different sizes<sup>16</sup>. These have also been used in the Southern Malawian societies that share language with the Chewa (Peters, 1997b p. 207, Peters, 2010 p. 183). *Bele* and *mbumba* were not terms that were commonly used in Chimtengo, implying that drawing a distinction between maternal and paternal kin was not as important there as it has been elsewhere in the Central and Southern Regions- paternal and maternal kin were all just '*family*', *banja*. Although the way in which men in Chimtengo described their wives and children as their families' in the singular, '*my family*', implies that the patrilineal link of father to child had particular significance in Chimtengo and the surrounds, what went on in the village implied that that link was not necessarily more important than the maternal connection.

Chimtengo village was made up of three smaller villages, Chimtengo Kubwalo, Chimtengo Kunjira and Chimtengo Kutsidya, each itself made up of several extended families. Chimtengo Kubwalo, the Chimtengo village to which David and his family belonged, contained four extended family groups, living in sixteen

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<sup>15</sup> The problems of defining the household and the limits of analysis of communities based upon the unit of the household have been discussed extensively. Important work includes Guyer (1981), Guyer and Peters (1987) and Moore and Vaughan (1994 p. 206-229).

<sup>16</sup> Marwick also details the labels of members of the matrilineal kin group and the particular roles and relationships they have in the extended family (1965 p. 121-138, also see Richards, 1950 p.233). Many of these terms, like mother's brother (*atsibweni*), mother's brother's wife (*apongozi*) and sibling-in-law (*mlamu*) were in use in Chimtengo. They did not however lend as much structure to debates about who should be doing what in village or family as it appears they did in Marwick's fieldsite. For a more general discussion of ways in which it is possible to conceive kinship relations conceptually see Janet Carsten's *After Kinship* (2004).

different households (Figures 1. p. 39 and 3. p. 92 and Map 2. p. 33). Three widowed, senior women, Thokozani Bonasi, Tatu Bonda and David's aunt Agness Msindiza, each had a house of their own, which they lived in with at least one of their grandchildren<sup>17</sup>. Nuclear families occupied the rest of the houses in the village, many of which were scattered in and amongst the houses of the families belonging to the two other Chimtengo villages, Chimtengo Kutsidya and Chimtengo Kunjira. By the time I left the village, Chimtengo Kubwalo had eighteen occupied houses. Over the course of my fifteen months stay, James Khumbo, one of the boys living in David's household, had married and started his own household. A man named Bill Bonasi also returned to Chimtengo Kubwalo from Kasungu, where he had been for some years working on a tobacco estate. He quickly married a woman from a nearby village and built a house for them to live in in Chimtengo.

In some ways the living situation of Chimtengo's households, and the practice of family relations amongst them, suggested the importance of paternal links. Aside from Davey Banda and Mvula Imani, who had married uxorilocally, all of the married couples in Chimtengo Kubwalo were settled virilocally<sup>18</sup>. The households did most of their agricultural labour as a unit, and consumed much of their produce themselves<sup>19</sup>. David had the biggest family in the village, numbering himself, his wife Martha, and eight children; their own five girls and

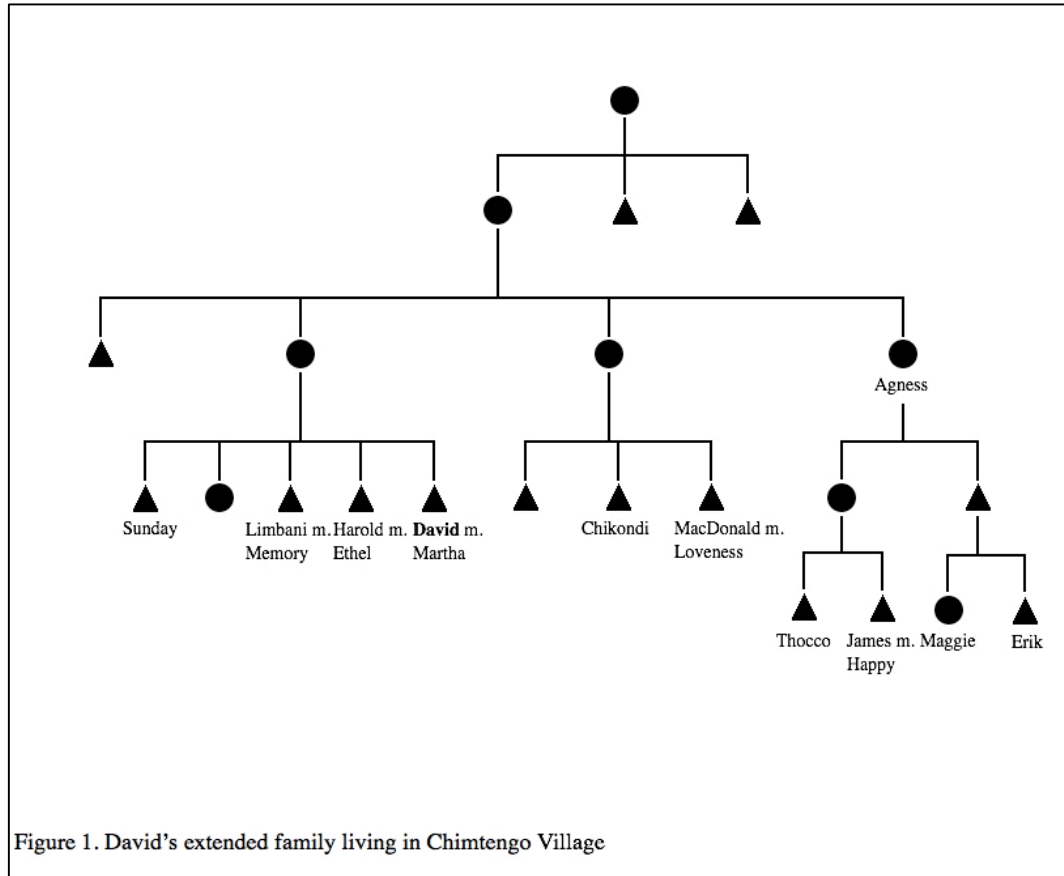
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<sup>17</sup> I identify these three as separate households with hesitance. None of the women talked of having their own family singularly. Agness Msindiza farmed her own land and had a granary of her own. She lived with her grandchildren Thocco, Erik and Georgie (Figure 1. p. 38). Thokozani Bonasi and Tatu Bonda worked with their children living in other Chimtengo households, and received maize from their granaries. At the same time, their male sons or sons-in-law did not describe them as being part of their households, but as extended family.

<sup>18</sup> This was labelled '*chitengwa*' marriage in the village, as opposed to '*chimkomweni*', a word derived from 'son-in-law', '*mkomweni*' (Marwick 1965 p. 126, also see Englund, 2002a p. 99, on '*chimkamwini*'), where husband lived uxorilocally with the wife's family. People did not spend much time talking about marriage settlement patterns and I had to ask David for these terms specifically.

<sup>19</sup> Englund did not find much communal labour taking place in Dedza District and suggests it may always have been unusual (Englund 1999 p. 149-150). Davison (1993) argues that women in Southern Malawi have continued prefer to farm through the labour of their own household in order to avoid claims upon their produce from members of their wider kin group (also see Peters 1997b p. 204).

three adopted boys, David's cousin Chikondi, nephew James, and Ganizani (Figure 1.)<sup>20</sup>.



David's family, like most of the others in Chimtengo Kubwalo, cultivated fields of maize and groundnuts in the November to March rainy season. Each household had its own granary into which they collected their maize harvest each May. In their wet gardens people grew various quantities of tomatoes, beans and leaves, some of which were consumed by the household, and some of which were sold. As well as these vegetables and the groundnuts, in the 2012-2013 season five households in the village also cultivated tobacco as a cash crop. There was a gendered division of agricultural labour; wives mostly worked cultivating the maize, while their husbands, who did a significant amount of work in the maize

<sup>20</sup> Ganizani was not from David's extended family so does not feature in Figure 1. After James got married David's household numbered ten members, including myself.



fields as well, took responsibility for the cash crops, and tobacco in particular. Men also did most of the cash labour in the households in the village.

For most of the households in Chimtengo, the most significant yearly expenditure was on fertiliser, which they bought between September and December, before the start of the rains<sup>21</sup>. One fifty kilogramme bag in September 2012 cost MK 15000 (46 USD)<sup>22</sup>, and most families needed two or three of these to grow enough maize to meet their needs. David said his large household needed seven bags. Other large, infrequent expenditures, on items like phones, hoe blades and construction materials were normally made after the harvest in May, when food and cash were at their most plentiful. Through the rest of the year the household's money was mostly spent on basic consumption goods such as clothes, soap, and relishes to go with the staple maize *nsima*<sup>23</sup>. Primary education in Malawi is free, but households still had to pay for the costs of uniforms, exercise books and pens, placing further stress on their limited resources<sup>24</sup>. Men and women emphasised the responsibility of husbands and fathers to provide these things for their own wives and children. This, along with the virilocal settlement pattern in the village, and the focus of labour and consumption in the household unit, suggests that links of paternal kinship were the more important in Chimtengo and the surrounds.

However, other aspects of life in the village indicated that paternal ties did not pattern kin relationships in a straightforward way. While emphasising the importance of the husband and father as provider, people in Chimtengo also maintained that the mother's village was the '*home village*' (*kumudzi kwathu*),

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<sup>21</sup> People complained that the soil around Chimtengo was no longer as fertile as it had once been. Soil exhaustion is a problem across Malawi, due to over-cropping and the use of chemical fertilisers over many decades (Munthali 2007).

<sup>22</sup> Rapid inflation following the Malawi government's devaluation of the kwacha against the dollar in May 2012 (BBC 2012) meant the exchange rate changed dramatically from July 2012, when I arrived in the village, to September 2013 when I left. In July 2012 the rate was around MK 370 to 1 USD, by September 2013, it had dropped below MK 280 to 1 USD. The rate of 325 MK to 1 USD that I use throughout the thesis stood during October and November 2012.

<sup>23</sup> At Chimsika a pair of women's plastic shoes cost about MK 500 (1.5 USD), a bar of soap MK 60 (0.20 USD), and a kilo of beans MK 300 (1 USD).

<sup>24</sup> Secondary school fees at the government secondary school in Chimsika were several thousand kwacha a term, putting secondary education beyond the reach of most village households.

rather than the father's. To be settled virilocally in the area thus meant to be settled in the village of the husband's maternal kin, as most of the households in Chimtengo Kubwalo were. All the land that was worked in the village had also been inherited through the female line. David and his married brothers, Harold and Limbani, had, for example, received their fields and wet gardens, and other inheritance, from Chief Chimtengo Three, the brother of their mother's mother<sup>25</sup>. Any simple reversal of the conclusion that matrilineal ties were more important than patrilineal ones is confounded by the fact that David and his brothers made a successful claim on the inheritance of a small portion of land in their dead father's home village, Mtete, while I was living in Chimtengo Kubwalo. Many of the other discussions about inheritance that I heard talk of in the village featured claims being made by both the children and the nephews and nieces of the deceased.

While David's father's family lived nearly seventy kilometres away from Chimtengo, the maintenance of relationships through both paternal and maternal lines was generally easy for people in Chimtengo because of the geographical proximity of extended family. While settled virilocally, most of the married women in Chimtengo Kubwalo came from settlements within a few kilometres, and several from some of the seven immediately neighbouring the village (Map 3. p. 33). This meant members of the wives' maternal kin group could easily visit their daughters' families, enabling them to maintain relations with the father and other family of their nieces and nephews. Visits between husbands and wives and wives' families could just consist of a chat or involve more serious discussions about work or the provision of support or help (*thandizo*). Although men and women talked about husbands and fathers' responsibilities to provide for their own wives and children, rather than the children's maternal kin, the frequent scarcity of food and cash, and the unpredictable availability of work, meant requests for help were regularly

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<sup>25</sup> David and Harold called Chief Chimtengo Three 'grandfather' for reasons I suggest later in the thesis.

exchanged with the maternal kin of the wife in villages around Chimtengo, or with the maternal kin of the husband in the village itself.

The desire to work and consume resources as a household had to be maintained in the face of these kinds of requests from extended family members, and from requests from other people outside of it. The people that most frequently asked for help, or to work for other households were those individuals who were members of households that, for various reasons, did not have sufficient land or labour or inputs to grow enough maize to feed themselves. Sometimes needy people offered help in the form of labour rather than request it in cash or maize, but these offers were premised upon the knowledge that people receiving it would be obliged to reciprocate with a portion of their maize<sup>26</sup>. For this reason, households often refused offers of help from their relatives. While farming their own land as a household, MacDonald Mwale's wife, Loveness, and Limbani's wife Memory both regularly asked to help Martha with David's family's maize during the planting season. MacDonald Mwale and Loveness also helped work the land of her maternal uncle in another village.

People faced pressures to direct their resources away from the household in other ways as well. Funerals, weddings and other large communal gatherings prompted discussions amongst extended families about who should contribute what towards the events. Maternal links and paternal links were both used as channels through which requests were made and received. During my first few weeks living in Chimtengo Kubwalo with David's family, Silizani Jim, an uncle on David's mother's side, repeatedly walked over two hours to see David to try to persuade him to provide a cow for his son's wedding celebration. David told me that he also had to provide a cow for his own father's funeral when he had died. It was in such ways that various kinds of kin ties showed themselves to be significant to families in Chimtengo Kubwalo and the surrounds.

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<sup>26</sup> Both help offered with labour and help requested in the form of food or cash were described by people in Chimtengo as *thandizo*.

The mutability of kin roles and responsibilities is a feature through the anthropological and historical literature on the Chewa. Chewa who spoke to anthropologists in the 1940s and 1950s emphasised the traditional importance of matrilineal groups, the *bele* and the *mbumba*, and the strength of ties between uncles and nephews and nieces within them, children being provided for by the uncle, rather than the father (Marwick, 1965 p. 180-181, Mair, 1951 p. 118, Richards, 1950 p. 233). Lucy Mair questioned whether links to fathers could have been as weak in practice as such accounts of tradition suggested, as did Audrey Richards when she described a 'matrilineal puzzle' amongst the Chewa and other societies in Africa's 'matrilineal belt'<sup>27</sup>. Despite these doubts, and the scant evidence of pre-colonial kinship practices, Mair, Richards and Marwick all credit the patrilineal kinship features they observed amongst Chewa they studied to the influence of colonialism.

Colonial rule undoubtedly had its implications for Chewa families, but quite what these were is not perhaps as clear as Mair, Richards and Marwick implied. Following their 1891<sup>28</sup> declaration of a Protectorate over the area that is now Malawi, the British Government encouraged the development of the cash economy in an attempt to make the territory profitable. Established largely between the two World Wars, smallholder tobacco cultivation and international migrant labour became the most prominent economic sectors in the Central Region (McCracken, 2012 p. 162-192, Englund, 2002a p. 46-48, Kydd and Christiansen, 1982 p. 356-366, Crush et al., 1991 p. 37)<sup>29</sup>. As was the case across the rest of the Protectorate, in the Central Region men were identified as breadwinners, expected to look after their own wives and children by paying hut

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<sup>27</sup> Richards (1950 p. 246) questioned how it would be practicable for men, given that they were inevitably husbands *and* brothers, to exert avunculate authority living away from their sisters and nephews and nieces in uxori-local marriages in the villages of their wives.

<sup>28</sup> It was first named the British Central Africa Protectorate, and then renamed Nyasaland in 1907.

<sup>29</sup> At first the Central and the Northern Regions received little attention relative to the Southern Region of the Protectorate, where settlers had been running plantations since the 1880s. Broadly speaking, historic patterns of economic development across the three Regions of Malawi have always differed, being driven by plantation agriculture and migrant labour in the South, smallholder agriculture and migrant labour in the Centre, and migrant labour alone in the North (McCracken 2012 p. 162-192, Vail, 1975, 1981, White 1987).

taxes and other household expenses, rather than distributing cash to members of their extended family, beyond their nuclear household (Peters, 1997b p. 193, Davison, 1993 p. 409, White, 1987 p. 100, Phiri, 1983 p. 269-270). Mission Churches endorsed the Protectorate administration's view of the primacy of the nuclear family unit over connections through maternal ties (Phiri, 1983 p. 268). Missionaries of the Dutch Reformed Church, the first church to found a mission in the Central Region, had taught this kind of family ideal to their nascent congregations and school classes since before the declaration of the Protectorate (Pretorius, 1972 p. 373-374).

Changes in practice amongst kin groups did not however take place in a uniform way under the influence of colonial economy, administration and church. Max Marwick writes many men did try to avoid sharing their earnings with members of their matrilineal kin group, choosing to spend it largely on their nuclear family instead, strengthening ties with their own children (1965 p. 247-258). Based on historic pounding songs, Landeg White (1987 p. 228-229) suggests that wives in the Southern Region of Malawi put more demands on their husbands to provide for them and their own children than had been the case in the past. White argues this was an attempt to take advantage of the emphasis in the church and colonial economy on the significance of the relationship of husband and father to wife and children (also see Vaughan 1987 p. 123). Some men were circumspect in the face of the competing demands from their own nuclear families, and those of their matrikin. Marwick writes how one man, feeling torn between his children and his sister's children arranged to have his inheritance divided between them (1965 p. 181-182). There are several other cases in Marwick's work that feature returning labour migrants agonising over how to balance the demands of their matrikin with the desire to invest in their own households<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Tensions of this kind have been studied in work on the history of other Southern African locales that went through broadly comparable structural changes under colonial rule. Schmidt (1992) and Jeater (1993) look at changes in kin and gender relations in what is now Zimbabwe, while Moore and Vaughan (1994), and Seur (1992), look at Zambia.

In her work on Southern Malawi Pauline Peters argues the variation of the colonial era should be seen as demonstrating the way in which kinship is constructed in specific historical circumstances, rather than imposed as a total system, patrilineal, matrilineal or otherwise (Peters, 1997a, Peters, 1997b, also see Vaughan, 1983, Vaughan, 1987)<sup>31</sup>. Peters' analysis is somewhat at odds with the older structural-functionalist scholarship of anthropologists like Marwick, Richards and Mair. They regarded the variation they observed in family life amongst the Chewa during the 1940s and 1950s as evidence of the early stages of an inevitable shift from matrilineal kinship to patrilineal kinship under the influence of capitalist economy and Christian church (Mair, 1951 p. 119, Marwick, 1965 p. 247-258). Peters' evidence shows however that only a 'tiny group' ever fully adopted mission ideologies about the family, and that kinship practices varied widely from family to family even as the cash economy continued to develop through the middle of the twentieth century and after Malawi's independence from Britain in 1964 (Peters, 1997b p. 193, p. 195, cf. White, 1987 p. 178, Phiri, 1983 p. 273-274).

Referencing Peters' work, Harri Englund observes that a range of family ties were important to people in Dedza district in the 1990s. Amongst other things, he describes inheritance claims to land being made by both maternal and paternal kin. In the light of such evidence Englund suggests that kinship in the area would best be described as 'cognatic' (2002a p. 55-56). Given this open-endedness, which allows for people to make and justify a lot of different claims based on kin relations, Englund suggests that the key analytical task in contexts like the one in which he did his fieldwork, is to work out exactly why people are able to make and sustain the claims that they do. Rather than focusing on delineations of kinship, he writes that this is more a matter of identifying the

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<sup>31</sup> Peters argues that Richard's matrilineal puzzle was 'in part, self-imposed - generated or exacerbated by the chosen [structural-functionalist] lens' of anthropologists of the time (1997a p. 127-128). Peters summarizes several ways in which structural-functionalist anthropologists' neglected historical context and applied analytical categories of family and relationship that were not those used in the societies that they studied (p. 127-132). Megan Vaughan argues similarly, focusing particularly on issues to do with data in the early scholarship on Southern Malawi (1983). For a critique of structural-functionalist approaches to the study of kinship in general, see the introduction to Janet Carsten's *After Kinship* (2004).

particular 'historical contingencies, that underlie[s] personal trajectories'(2002a p. 57). In Chimtengo Kubwalo and the surrounds there was an emphasis on production and consumption within households, and of fatherly and husbandly provision for children and wives. At the same time, men and women exchanged requests for help and work with their matrikin. Like in Englund's Dedza fieldsite, inheritance was pursued through both maternal and paternal lines. Exactly how kin links were pursued was therefore best explained through the particular historical contingencies and the specific situations in which people in Chimtengo Kubwalo were located. Kinship provided people with some useful social rules of thumb, but not with a definitive guide to how they should act towards each other.

### ***Men and women***

Gender identities, whilst playing out across all aspects of life in Chimtengo and the surrounds, perhaps found their most important expression within the context of the family. Being a man or a woman in Chimtengo was wrapped up with being married, having a wife or husband and children in a nuclear family. This was reflected in the fact that the words for man - *amuna* - and woman - *amkazi* - also translate as the words for husband and wife. Until they were married, junior members of the village were mostly described as boys (*anyamata*), girls (*atsikana*) or youth (*chinyamata*). Men and women talked about the man as having the 'power' (*mphamvu*) in the household, an idea that was also reflected in the fact that husbands described their nuclear families as theirs singularly - 'my family' - while wives did not. The chat of both men and women in the village did not really critique male power, but rather centred on whether husbands used their position to provide for their wives and children, to 'care' (-*samala*) for them. Women were criticised for failing to care too, through neglecting to prepare food or complete other domestic tasks. This language and criticism reflected the gendered division of activity in the household and beyond it.

In Chimtengo Kubwalo everyone over the age of about twenty, aside from the senior widowed women of the village, was married. Elopement (*chikumu*), described colloquially as, 'to howl like a dog' (*-uwa galu*), was the most common way of getting married. It involved a man going to the house of his intended bride at night, and bringing her back to the house he had built for them in his village. This act forced discussions to take place between the couple's respective elders and chiefs until they agreed on a bride price (*chiongo*), making the marriage official<sup>32</sup>. Elopement was certainly not the ideal; I was told the discussions it prompted should ideally take place before the couple came to together to spend the night in the boy's village, and agreement between their respective families be celebrated with a large wedding party (*chikwati*). Christians in particular were against elopement, as it did not involve a church ceremony. At the same time, everyone I spoke to in Chimtengo agreed that getting families and chiefs to agree on a marriage, and to support a large party with all its expenses, was difficult for young couples to do. Because of this elopement was generally accepted in practice, if not as an ideal.

Labour in the household of married couples was divided along gendered lines. Men did most of the cultivation of cash crops, work in the wet garden, and most cash labour, whilst both men and women worked in the maize fields. Women alone did all of the household's domestic tasks<sup>33</sup>. Cash labour was called *ganyu* in the village and the surrounds, the term describing both agricultural piecework in the local area, and various kinds of itinerant work elsewhere in Lilongwe city, the Central Region or further afield. Bill Bonasi told me the work he had done on

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<sup>32</sup> I have found no reference to *chiongo* in any of the literature on the Chewa, although '*chiongola msana*' has an entry in Paas's Chichewa-English dictionary as a 'brideprice given to the bridesmaid's parents' (2009 p. 55). James Khumbo's family and other members of Chimtengo Kubwalo paid MK 21000 (65 USD) for his bride, which, I was told, was a fairly typical amount for the area. This is a much smaller payment than brideprices traditionally paid amongst Southern Africa's patrilineal societies (see for example Barnes 1951). Marwick suggested these larger amounts of bridewealth are a mark of the fact that amongst these groups the bridewealth secures rights over the offspring of the wife. Smaller payments he witnessed being made amongst the Chewa did not secure this right (1965 p. 169-170).

<sup>33</sup> The pattern reflects practice elsewhere in the Central Region and Malawi. See, for example, Peters 2010 p. 188, Davison 1993, Englund 1999, Bryceson 2006 p. 180-182 and 194. In one contrast to the situation in Chimtengo, Hirschmann and Vaughan (1983) write that around Zomba in Southern Malawi it was women that mainly cultivated wet gardens.



the tobacco estate at Kasungu had been *ganyu*, while David's brother Limbani also described labour he did for a Chinese construction company in Lilongwe using the term. Limbani earned MK 15,000 (46 USD) for a couple of months work with the Chinese. He described this as a poor rate. Rates for local *ganyu* varied, but a day's work making ridges in a field near Chimtengo could earn a pieceworker up to MK 1000 (3 USD). Making ridges, into which maize seed was planted, was regarded as very hard work, and less arduous tasks were remunerated accordingly. The other popular way of earning cash amongst men in the village was by buying or making charcoal and selling it in Lilongwe. Selling a batch of charcoal could earn a man MK 3000 (9 USD), but the small number of trees in the area around Chimtengo limited the amount of money that could be made<sup>34</sup>. Most men in Chimtengo Kubwalo went to sell charcoal only once or twice a month.

Women in other villages in the area, and in Chimtengo Kutsidya and Chimtengo Kunjira, engaged in both *ganyu* close to home and further afield. They also earned cash through regularly making and selling *zitumbua* or *chigumu* or brewing beer or *kachaso*<sup>35</sup>. During the time I was in Chimtengo Kubwalo, the only cash earned by the women that lived there was through local agricultural *ganyu* in the fields of people living in neighbouring villages, and only very occasionally through selling *zitumbua* or a small portion of the crops from their family's wet gardens. Women in Chimtengo Kubwalo told me they were restricted in how much *ganyu* they could do by the onus on them to care for their children, cook, clean and do other domestic tasks. Whilst they shared in the work of cultivating the maize if they were present in the village, the fact that many men spent significant portions of time away doing *ganyu* in Lilongwe or elsewhere, or selling charcoal in the city, meant many of Chimtengo Kubwalo's

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<sup>34</sup> David and Harold controlled access to their wood lots tightly (see below) and it was not permitted to cut and take trees from the wooded gravesites of the villages in the area. Associated with the spirits of the dead and the practice of witchcraft, gravesites have traditionally been off-limits for Chewa people. The village chief can permit access, but only for funerals and other rites or events related to burials (Van Breugel 2001 p. 73-106).

<sup>35</sup> *Zitumbua* and *chigumu* are different varieties of maize cake eaten as snacks or for breakfast. *Kachaso* is a strong spirit distilled from sprouted maize or other grains.

women also shouldered the larger part of the work cultivating maize from November through to the harvest in May.

The division of labour in Chimtengo Kubwalo meant that although women normally held some money, which most kept tied up in a knot in the corner of their cloth wraps, men's higher earning power left them in control of the greater share of what little money there was within the household. Women tended to have to ask their husbands for money, or get them to buy things for them. It was around these discussions and debates that criticism of a lack of 'care' (*chisamalo*), and of 'stinginess' (*-mana*) on the part of the village's men often emerged.

Although the divide between men and women mostly showed itself in the relationship between husbands and wives in the context of the household, the divide between what men and women did also manifested in other family relationships as well. Men were sought out by their sisters, their sister's husbands, and their nieces and nephews, to provide support for them, as well as being expected to use the money they had earned to provide for their own wives and children. Members of their extended families also petitioned women for support. Although they could use the little money they obtained through *ganyu* or other means to meet these requests, women often had to ask their husbands to help the kin that came to them. These negotiations extending across family groups demonstrate that whilst the state of being married as a husband or wife was a key part of being a man or woman, what people did as men and women cannot be completely reduced to what they did as husbands and wives. Men in particular were cast as providers as uncles and brothers, as well as husbands. Relations and decisions in Chimtengo Kubwalo are perhaps therefore most helpfully understood as structured by gender, rather than by kin roles. The fact that women were also petitioned for help and support by their kin in Chimtengo does also suggest however that gender identities were themselves open, at least to a degree.

The complex nature of the gender divide in the social landscape of Chimtengo and the surrounds was reflected outside the family, in other important institutions like the village and the church. At communal events that took place in the villages, women would always be responsible for cooking. A few men would have responsibility for directing the course of the event in question and at funerals some younger ones would be given the responsibility of digging the grave, but most sat and talked. Those people who spoke in public at funerals and other meetings tended to be men - household heads, chiefs and pastors. The majority of church leaders in the area were men, although the leader of the Pentecostal Assemblies of God Church in Chimsika was a woman, the appropriateness of which I heard called into question by some men and women when she attended a funeral in the village. Chiefs in the area were predominantly male as well. One exception was the chief of Kumtsinje village (Map 3. p. 33). At the events I saw her attend she sat with the other male chiefs and addressed people in a similar manner to them. Men and women approaching her showed the same degree of deference they showed her male counterparts. On several occasions when I suggested that men seemed to hold power in the families and villages in area, several people presented Chief Kumtsinje to me as an example of how, whilst not usual, it was possible for women in the area to hold a significant degree of 'power' (*mphamvu*) to influence the affairs of men as well as women.

The history and anthropology of the Chewa and of Malawi offers evidence of the way in which gender has structured the relationships of people living there, and the ways in which it has been possible for men and women to negotiate its limits. Oral tradition recorded by Max Marwick and by W.H.J. Rangeley - who studied Chewa in Nkhotakota District, around one hundred kilometers from Chimtengo (Map 1. p. ii) - suggests that women have been selected as chiefs amongst the Chewa since the pre-colonial period (Rangeley, 1948 p. 10, Marwick, 1965). At the same time, these accounts also suggest that, unlike amongst Southern Malawi's matrilineal societies, their authority derived from their relationship to advisors (*ankhoswe*) who were all male (cf. Vaughan, 1987, Peters, 1997b). This situation was similar to that which existed within the family, where the man, whether in their capacity as husband or as a brother or uncle, is described as

having responsibility to direct the affairs of the family and provide for its women. Women are described as having held responsibility for childcare, and other domestic duties. While these descriptions of traditional, pre-colonial arrangements are subject to the same caveats about evidence that are attached to descriptions about kinship traditions in the previous section, the observations of anthropologists in the middle of the twentieth century show more definitively that such ideas about gender identity were certainly a part of the social landscape in the Central Region by that time.

The mission churches' ideal of the Christian family held that men had responsibility to provide for women. Pretorius writes in the Dutch Reformed Church mission schools men were taught skills to enable them to work in the colonial economy and administration, reading, writing and cultivation techniques, while women were largely, if not exclusively, 'taught housecraft... washing, ironing, cooking...' (Pretorius, 1972 p. 373). Protectorate administration policy fitted with that of the missions on this count, accepting men as opposed to women as migrant labourers and smallholder tobacco farmers, and creating a situation in which women were generally dependent upon men to pay hut taxes and for consumption goods in the increasingly commoditised economy. The policy of indirect rule, formally introduced through legislation in 1912 and 1933, incorporated chiefs into the Protectorate administration but, as a result of British perceptions about the nature 'traditional' chieftaincy, and of gendered roles and responsibility, female chiefs were excluded. This impinged upon whatever power and authority women had been able to secure as chiefs prior to the advent of colonial rule.

The institutions and ideas that had structured gender relations through the colonial era largely persisted after its end in 1964. Kamuzu Banda, President of Malawi for nearly thirty years from independence, elided registers of pre-colonial tradition and modernity as he maintained that women were responsible for domestic affairs in the home, whilst men were to go out and work (Short, 1974 p. 279-282, Gilman, 2004, Gilman, 2009). Banda was always accompanied at public rallies by hundreds of women, dancing and singing him praise songs in

a vivid visual demonstration of the relative positions of men and women that he described in his speeches and radio broadcasts (Gilman, 2004, Gilman, 2009). Janneke Verheijen Zokokov found Banda's influence to have been significant upon gender relations in her field site in Southern Malawi, women there telling her that their ability to exercise influence over men declined significantly during his rule (2013 p. 32). By contrast, Verheijen Zokokov (2013 p. 33) notes that more recent women's empowerment programmes have had relatively little impact on gender identities in the village where she was working.

While all this suggests the ideology of male authority and responsibility over women has perhaps grown stronger since the end of the colonial period, Verheijen Zokokov and other researchers have provided plentiful evidence that men and women have been able to circumvent it. Other cases indicate that the ideology has, in some instances, proved to be of advantage to women. As White shows, women in Southern Malawi used pounding songs to emphasise the ideal of the male provider, shaming men into providing for them (1987 p. 228). Megan Vaughan writes that during the severe Southern and Central Region famine of 1949, men complained that women's songs made them feel so ashamed of their inability to provide that they 'died of "anxiety"' (1987 p. 123).

As well as making the best of their dependent position through reifying the ideal that locates them there, women have also found ways to earn money and attain power themselves. Female earning has grown in importance in more recent times, since the decline of the tobacco and migrant labour economies in Malawi in the late 1970s. Bryceson (2006) describes women in the Central Region who, without any capital, have had to do poorly remunerated *ganyu* labour to support themselves and their children. Bryceson and Englund both note that beer brewing has been an important source of income for women with some capital, and has at times produced relatively sizable profits for them (Bryceson, 2006 p. 181, p. 183, Englund, 1999 p. 147-148). Verheijen Zokokov writes that many women from her field site in the Southern Region had run brewing businesses and other small enterprises for many years, with the result that they had as much money, if not more, than their husbands. Some of these men invested what

money they earned in their wives' business activities, seeing an opportunity to improve their lives through their wives' enterprises (2013 p. 70-71).

Women have also continued to be chiefs of their villages, despite the obstacles placed in their way by colonial and post-colonial government policy. The actual reach of the Colonial Administration has been debated (McCracken, 2012 p. 225, White, 1987 p. 179-180, Eggen, 2011 p. 317), and whilst senior chiefs during the colonial period were certainly all men some female chiefs may well have remained at the village level. Evidence of female chiefs holding power in Southern Malawi (Verheijen Zokokov 2013 p. 24) and observations from my own fieldwork suggest that female village chiefs have in fact survived relatively unaffected by national policy. These examples of female chiefs, and of women earning money and running businesses, indicate the varied ways that, in practice, men and women have both been able to negotiate a better position for themselves in the continuing presence of an ideology that locates the man as provider and women as dependent caregiver<sup>36</sup>.

Gender identities provided a useful guide to action for people in Chimtengo, but there were limits to the extent to which they could be said to define what men and women did. Negotiation between men and women was common and the fact that women did not tend to hold much cash, and did less cash labour than men did not mean they were necessarily 'subordinate'. Laying the burden of responsibility on men to provide for them appeared to be an important strategy for women in the village. The 'ideology of male provider' was widely espoused, spoken about in a similar way to that in which it has been used elsewhere in Malawi (Verheijen Zokokov, 2013 p. 207, Vaughan, 1987 p. 123, White, 1987 p. 228). But, as I will show in chapter four on Martha and David's relationship, the importance of the ideal was connected to the specific circumstances in which men and women related. Talk about male provision was not always designed for

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<sup>36</sup> Han Seur (1992) describes a similar kind of negotiation having taken place amongst the Lala in Zambia. Seur writes against a literature that concluded that across Southern Africa '... population growth, colonial rule, migration, urban employment, the introduction of the plough, the penetration of capitalism... have the marginalisation of women as their final and inevitable outcome.' (1992 p. 228) Amongst others Seur critiques Boserup (1970), Rogers (1980), and Whitehead (1981).

women to get resources out of men, husbands, brothers, or other male relatives, but could also be used by women to insulate themselves from the demands of other women. The relative importance of the ideology of male provision, and its relationship to men and women's positions in the village, only becomes clearer when the particular context in which it is advanced is taken into consideration.

### ***Villages, chiefs and big men***

Aside from family the group that people in the area around Chimtengo most frequently talked about belonging to was the village (*mudzi*). Belonging to a village was defined as much as having a relationship with a chief, as an association to a particular place or piece of land<sup>37</sup>. This made chiefs (*amfumu*) important figures<sup>38</sup>. The close relationship of chief and village was reflected in the fact that on becoming chief a villager adopted the name of the village as his or her own, like Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo. In Chimtengo and the surrounds I heard the chief described as the '*pen*' (*khola*) of the village - the person that prevented it from breaking up - in the same way that pens held cows, goats and pigs together to keep them from scattering. Chiefs were also described as '*big men*'. This term, particularly when used in the plural - *aakulu* as opposed to *munthu wamkulu* - also meant elders, but in Chimtengo it was most often used to describe rich men of varying ages who used their wealth to give support to others, building relationships and gaining influence in the process.

Although never labeled so, chiefs appear unrivalled as big men in oral accounts of Chewa society prior to the start of the colonial period. Chiefs were described

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<sup>37</sup> Ann Swidler makes a similar observation in her work on Malawian chiefs. 'In Malawi, the village does not exist as a village except in so far as it has a chief... the sentence "Traditional Authority Zulu [person] is the Traditional Authority [official title] of Traditional Authority Zulu [administrative unit]" is a perfectly coherent sentence, true by definition.' (2013 p. 325)

<sup>38</sup> There was a hierarchy of chiefs in the area around Chimtengo. At the top was the Traditional Authority (TA) under the District Commissioner (DC). The TA of the area Chimtengo was in had responsibility for tens of thousands of people. Under the TA were dozens of Groups Village Heads (GVH), with responsibility for their own village and the oversight of hundreds of Village Heads (VH). All these individuals were frequently called chiefs, '*amfumu*', but Village Heads almost exclusively so. Unless otherwise stated, this section and the rest of the thesis focuses on chiefs as Village Heads.

to Max Marwick and to W.H.J. Rangeley as having been the 'owners' (*mwini*) of the community, its most powerful and wealthy members, as well as its spiritual leaders (Marwick, 1965 p. 203, Rangeley, 1948 p. 6-7). At the same time Rangeley writes he was also told that chiefs' ability to influence their people varied depending upon their 'personal power and vigour' (1948 p. 19)<sup>39</sup>. Marwick notes that chiefly succession was not strictly hereditary amongst the Chewa, but that male and female elders selected a chief after discussing the merits of prospective candidates (1965 p. 118)<sup>40</sup>. After selection, chiefs continued to be subject to male advisors or councillors (*ankhoswe*) (Rangeley, 1948 p. 10). The chief thus had no divine right to power and their position remained dependent upon their performance in the role, their ability to maintain political support (Langworthy, 1972, Marwick, 1965 p. 118). Marwick writes that the chief, 'has the privilege... of directing the affairs of his followers, who... are obliged to obey his orders. In return he must place his worldly wisdom, ritual power and economic strength at the disposal of his followers.' (1965 p. 139). Where this relationship broke down, which according to the literature was not an infrequent occurrence, the 'budding off' of new villages occurred as dissatisfied factions declared new chiefs for themselves (Rangeley, 1948 p. 6, Marwick, 1963 p. 383, Langworthy, 1972). The position of the chief and the cohesion of their following, the village, was in this way tied up with the chief's ability to negotiate and mediate support - to act as a big man. Or, as Sahlins puts it for Melanesian big men, 'personal loyalty [to the big man] has to be made and constantly reinforced; if there is discontent it may well be severed. Merely to create a faction takes time and effort, and to hold it, still more effort' (1962 p. 292).

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<sup>39</sup> Marshall Sahlins (1963), in his foundational work on the 'big man' in Melanesia, contrasts them with Polynesian chiefs. He writes that unlike Polynesian chiefs, whose authority is inherited, given by the office or the institutional position of chieftaincy, Melanesian big men have to make and maintain their position themselves. Médard (1992) borrows this distinction in his work on African big men, writing that they are 'self made', and therefore distinct from chiefs. In contexts with a history of more hierarchical political organisation this distinction is perhaps useful (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940). Amongst the Chewa however, it seems that being a chief has always been about commanding bigness.

<sup>40</sup> As I noted in the previous section there is evidence that there were both male and female chiefs, as well as male and female elders (Rangeley 1948 p. 10).



When I was doing my fieldwork, 'big man' was not a category that was used solely to describe chiefs; David and his second brother Harold were labelled 'big men' in Chimtengo Kubwalo as frequently as Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo himself. There were big men aside from chiefs in other local villages as well. All of these individuals, including David and Harold, were described as wealthy. In the village, people recognised a group of 'very poor' people (*osauka kwambiri*), a middle group that did not really have a label, and 'rich men' (*anthu olemera* or *mabwana*) like David and Harold. It is important to note though that the 'classes' people in Chimtengo referred to were all relative (Figure 2. p. 58); David and Harold were talked of as poor in comparison to people with salaried jobs in town and in comparison to white people.

Household	Adults	Children	Roof material	Number of cows	Owned goats or pigs	Owned a bicycle	FISP 2012 fertiliser
David Kaso	2	9	Iron/Grass	13	Yes	Yes	3 bags
Harold Kaso	2	4	Iron	14	Yes	Yes	4 bags
MacDonald Mwale	2	3	Grass	0	Yes	Yes	1 bag
Limbani Kaso	2	3	Grass	0	Yes	Yes	1 bag
Davey Banda	2	4	Grass	0	Yes	No	1 bag
Mwayi Namangale	2	3	Iron/Grass	1	Yes	No	1 bag
Bill Bonasi	2	0	Grass	0	No	No	none
Thokozeni Bonasi	1	1	Grass	0	No	No	none
Yamtkani Misozi	2	3	Iron	6	Yes	Yes	2 (2) bags
Lloyd Bonasi	2	1	Grass	0	Yes	Yes	1 bag
Chimtengo Kubwalo	3	8	Grass	0	Yes	Yes	2 (2) bags
Agness Msindiza	1	3	Grass	0	No	No	1 bag
Tatu Bonda	1	1	Grass	0	No	No	none
Madalitso Nyirongo	2	3	Grass	0	Yes	Yes	1 bag
Panjira Mbvuto	2	2	Grass	0	Yes	No	1 bag
Mvula Imani	2	0	Grass	0	No	Yes	1 bag
Bester Mikanda	2	0	Grass	0	No	No	1 bag

Figure 2. Chimtengo Kubwalo households and assets

The 'very poor' (*osauka kwambiri*) of Chimtengo Kubwalo were those who engaged only in piecework, as opposed to farming their own land. Without any maize stock, they lived hand-to-mouth throughout the year. They had the smallest houses in the village, round single-room dwellings (Map 2. p. 33). Bill Bonasi built and lived in such a house when he returned from Kasungu. Although Bill announced his intention to farm for himself, families like his often did not stay in local villages for very long, choosing to move on to find work on estates or in Lilongwe.

The next group people recognised had no label, but made up the majority of the population in the area. In Chimtengo Kubwalo it included Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo, David's third brother Limbani, and his cousin MacDonald Mwale's households. Most of these families had a small number of goats, pigs and chickens, and a radio and a bicycle (Figure 2. p. 58). All had their own granaries and grew enough maize to feed themselves through most of the year. Unlike the very poor, they were able to balance *ganyu* with the cultivation of their own land. As well as *ganyu*, the households earned cash from their yearly harvest of groundnuts and, if they grew it, tobacco. Groundnuts were cheap to grow, but sold for much less than tobacco; an average sized harvest in the village in 2013 brought in MK 20,000-30,000 (60-90 USD). Tobacco required a lot of fertiliser, so even though one bale - the quantity of tobacco produced by a household in Chimtengo - could sell for around MK 100,000 (300 USD), at least half of this money went into cultivating the next crop. Even so, the 'middle-class' households doing best were those that had been cultivating tobacco for some years. In Chimtengo Kubwalo the half-brothers Yamikani Misozi and Mwayi Namangale had successfully managed to do this. Neither had houses any larger than most other people in the village, but they were iron-roofed (Map 2. p. 33, Figure 2. p. 58). They also owned some cows, a couple of which had been inherited from their mother's brother, an inheritance that had formed the foundation for their subsequent prosperity through the cultivation of tobacco.

An inheritance, received from Chief Chimtengo Three, was the basis for David and Harold's affluence as well. The brothers were described in Chimtengo

Kubwalo and the surrounds as 'rich people': '*anthu olemera*' or '*mabwana*'. They had the largest houses in the village, iron roofed and concrete floored<sup>41</sup>. David and Harold jointly owned a herd of more than a dozen cows, as well as two wood lots, one of blue gum and one of bamboo, that made up the copses surrounding David's house (Map. 2 p. 33)<sup>42</sup>. Harold, who was the biggest farmer in Chimtengo, earned money from selling his surplus maize<sup>43</sup> and also cultivated tobacco. David, who told me he did not cultivate tobacco because of the amount of work and investment it involved, got a significant if irregular income of his own from his association to foreign missionaries as the pastor of Pamtunda Baptist Church.

'Rich men' (*mabwana* or *anthu olemera*), was a label that was used largely as a pejorative (cf. Booth et al., 2006, Anders, 2002)<sup>44</sup> in the village, applied to men that did not use their wealth to help and support others. What made David, Harold and other men in the area big, and not just rich, was the way they used their money and other resources to provide for their dependents<sup>45</sup>. Throughout the year people from the brothers' extended family, the village, and, in David's case, the church, came to them for help (*thandizo*), sometimes saying explicitly that they needed a '*big man*' to assist them in their need. Normally the help needed was material and provided for in cash or maize. On other occasions people came to the brothers for advice. In David's case in particular, his

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<sup>41</sup> David only roofed his house with iron sheets during the time I was staying with him. Mwayi Namangale also had his house roofed with iron half way through my time in Chimtengo (see Figure 2. p. 58 and chapter four).

<sup>42</sup> Harold had also invested in one cow of his own, which he kept with the others he shared with David (see Figure 2. p. 58)

<sup>43</sup> The brothers brought in the largest maize harvests in the village: Harold, thirty carts and David thirteen in 2013. People measured their harvests by the cartful (*ngolo*). David estimated that each cart held five fifty kilogramme bags of maize, meaning one cartful amounted to two hundred and fifty kilogrammes of maize. For contrast, Limbani, who had not received as much inheritance as his brothers owing to his junior position and later arrival in Chimtengo, harvested just two carts of maize. Most other households harvested little more than this, perhaps four or five carts. Yamikani Misozi managed to bring in eleven carts, prompting suggestions around the village that he was becoming a big man.

<sup>44</sup> Some observers like Booth et al. (2006) and Anders (2002 p. 8) have treated *bwana* somewhat synonymously with *munthu wamkulu*, as meaning 'big man'. In Chimtengo though the former phrase seemed to lack the distributional aspect that the latter included. In urban areas of Malawi I found '*Bwana*' often used as a polite title, or in a more ironic way, to say 'sir' or 'boss'. It was rarely used like this in Chimtengo. Paas's dictionary (2009 p. 29) suggests these different meanings, listing *bwana* '1. Boss. 2. Master 3. Rich person'.

<sup>45</sup> Sahlins drew this distinction in his article on Melanesian big men, defining them as 'generous rich men' as opposed to just 'rich men' (1963 p. 289).

education and role as a pastor had allowed him to see life away from the village, and make connections with powerful people in town. This being the case, his opinions carried some weight in discussions in the village, and more formal court cases (*milandu*), to which Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo frequently called David and Harold as his advisors or councillors (*ankhoswe*).

The big man's help with food, money or advice, was reciprocated through expressions of respect, gratefulness and, often at a later point, through forms of help or support. Big men in the area regularly needed help, most significantly with agricultural labour, but also with other things, from support in a court case, to help getting some relish for an evening meal. Given this it would be most accurate to characterise big men as engaged in relations of unequal interdependence with others, rather than simply as men with dependents.

Given their larger farms and the other enterprises they ran, David and Harold were better able to offer *ganyu* than most people in the area around Chimtengo. Generally, they preferred to pay money for pieceworkers to do agricultural work on their land, rather than accept the help of extended family members. The distinction between piecework (*ganyu*) and help (*thandizo*) turned on the form of reciprocity they entailed. Employing pieceworkers involved a direct, immediate transaction of money or maize for labour, while the correct form of reciprocation for help was more open. The line between what was regarded as an offer of mutually beneficial help (*thandizo*) from kin and what was in fact 'begging' (*-pempha*) was contentious and frequently the focus of debate. That written, piecework prices were not fixed at a market rate either and people often negotiated how much they should be paid for *ganyu*.

Personal histories fed into these discussions. Poorer people like Bill Bonasi regularly sought out work from David and Harold. Bill and several of the other pieceworkers the brothers employed told me how they had 'relied' (*-dalira*) on David and Harold to give them work over many years, and relied on Chief Chimtengo Three before them. Their employment on the land of the brothers' family was one of the main ways in which they had managed to maintain a

livelihood over the years. Sometimes people asked to help with labour, do *ganyu*, and to receive help in the same visit to David's house, suggesting the way in which, although distinct, giving work (*ganyu*) and help (*thandizo*), or agreeing to accept an offer of help (*thandizo*), all served similar social purposes. They all allowed big men and their dependents to mark and strengthen the relationships that existed between them, relationships that in some instances had histories over several generations.

Other than wealth and its distribution, the points that identified a person as big when I was in Chimtengo were their sex and their 'social age'. People told me that women were not labelled 'big', but as I noted in the previous section, it was readily acknowledged that there were women in the area around the village - like Chief Kumtsinje - who had accrued the kind of wealth and power that would define a man as such. Being a woman was thus not an absolute barrier to accruing wealth and power, although the attainment of these would have to be navigated around the prevailing gender ideologies and norms described in the previous section. As I wrote there, manhood and womanhood were defined in large part by marriage. People in the village said they had lost many of their male (*ndoda*) and female (*mtchembele*) elders in the late 1990s, and several more in the 2002 famine<sup>46</sup>. When I was in the village Panjira Mbvuto and Bester Mkanda, both in their sixties, were categorised as elders (*aakulu*)<sup>47</sup>, but were not considered big men. By contrast, Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo was in his fifties, David was thirty-nine and Harold only thirty-five. Some big men in the area were even younger. All though were men with regards to their marital status,

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<sup>46</sup> People did not talk about the disease much, but several Chimtengo villagers mentioned to me that they suspected many of the deaths of village members during the 1990s had been caused by HIV/AIDS, the prevalence of which was and is still high across Malawi (UNAIDS 2015). The 2002 famine was also a disaster at a national level (Devereux 2002). In Chimtengo people remembered having to eat the husks (*gaga*) of maize kernels normally used to feed pigs, and foraging for unpalatable roots in the scrub around desolate maize fields.

<sup>47</sup> The plural term *aakulu* was used to describe big men, but also elders. That two distinct, if potentially overlapping positions did exist was reflected by the different ways in which the singular 'big man' was used. While Mbvuto and Mkanda together were '*aakulu*', they were never called '*munthu wamkulu*' individually. Other common terms for elder bear out the distinction. *Ndoda* described a male elder, while *ntchembele* was used to describe a female elder. Neither David or Rashid were called '*ndoda*' even though they were often labelled big men.

suggesting that it was social age, rather than physical age, that was the more important aspect of status and bigness in Chimtengo and the surrounds<sup>48</sup>.

While the chief appears to have been unchallenged as a type of big man prior to the advent of colonial rule, new 'avenues' (Lentz, 1998) or 'paths' (Vincent, 1971) to bigness away from the institution of chieftaincy appeared after the declaration of the British Protectorate. Max Marwick describes 'a Cewa middle class'<sup>49</sup> emerging during the 1940s (1965 p. 47). This - male - class took advantage of the opportunities created by the new colonial economy to accrue the kind of wealth that allowed them to give support to others and obtain power and influence in a similar way to chiefs. In the Central Region, the extension of the migrant labour and tobacco sectors meant that by the 1970s the Central Region had the highest peasant producer incomes in Malawi (Potts, 1985 p. 187, Kydd and Christiansen, 1982). Mission churches and schools had offered further possibilities, if only to a few, to accrue wealth and status through accessing white-collar jobs in the church and Protectorate administration.

Marwick notes that some senior chiefs were part of the emergent 'middle class' as well, incorporated into the administrative hierarchy of indirect rule under District Commissioners and the central administration in the colonial capital in Zomba (Map 1. p. ii) (McCracken, 2012 p. 220-230, White, 1987 p. 147-148, 179-180, Chancock, 1975 p. 328). The extent to which the support of the government meant chiefs became the kind of 'decentralised despots' Mahmood Mamdani (Mamdani, 1996) has described is debated (McCracken, 2012 p. 225, Eggen, 2011 p. 317) but, whether because of their relationship to the colonial state, or to people in their villages, chieftaincy remained a path to bigness in Malawi through the first half of the twentieth century<sup>50</sup>. The chiefs were now one kind of big man amongst several and the negotiation and mediation that had always been part of the role now had to take in these new big men as well.

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<sup>48</sup> Harri Englund writes about the importance of social age and growth (*kukula*), having a family, as an aspect of power relations where he was working in Dedza District (2002a p. 99).

<sup>49</sup> Marwick uses 'Cewa' rather than 'Chewa' as he was writing with an old Chichewa orthography.

<sup>50</sup> For reviews of how chieftaincy was made or transformed in the colonial era in other contexts see Peter Geschiere's (1993) study of Cameroon or Jane Collier's work on Fiji (2003).

As President Kamuzu Banda centralised power through the 1960s it became increasingly difficult to obtain wealth and status without connection to him or his Malawi Congress Party (MCP) (Mapanje, 2011, Englund, 1996 p. 108, Mapanje, 2002, van Donge, 1995p. 228). Through the late 1960s and early 1970s smallholder tobacco cultivation was gradually curtailed as people in the Central Region were pushed into poorly paid work on tobacco estates owned by Banda and the MCP (Chirwa, 1996p. 624, Kydd and Christiansen, 1982 p. 366). In 1974 the government also banned labour migration abroad, further limiting people's economic options (Chirwa, 1996). Englund remarks for Dedza district that since this time 'employment outside the villages has been very limited' (Englund, 2002a p. 52). Being a clergyman or a chief still had the potential to be a path to bigness, even if during Banda's rule the path was routed through association to the party. Throughout Banda's rule, the paramilitary wing of the MCP, the Malawi Young Pioneers (MYP) attacked and imprisoned both chiefs and church leaders (McCracken, 2012 p. 418-419, Englund, 1996). These assaults were however far from systematic. When Banda was publicly attacked in an open letter written by the leaders of the Catholic Church at the start of the 1990s the CCAP<sup>51</sup> synod of the Central Region supported him, for which they received a substantial financial donation (Englund, 1996 p. 124). There is also evidence that Banda supported chiefs, particularly in the Central Region, throughout his rule as part of his strategy to legitimate his position through appeal to 'traditional' sources of authority (McCracken, 2012 p. 446).

After Banda's fall from power in the 1994 multiparty elections, economic prospects for rural people in the Central Region remained poor (Harrigan, 2003). For most *ganyu* in the villages or on estates were the only employment options (Bryceson, 2006, Englund, 2002a p. 170-176). The new government encouraged people from rural areas to move to the country's cities, promising jobs and start up loans for businesses. Lilongwe's population grew 6.1 per cent between 1987

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<sup>51</sup> Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian. The CCAP was formed by the Northern and Southern Region Scots missions' amalgamation with the Central Region Dutch Reformed Church Mission in 1924 (McCracken 2012 p. 211).



and 1998<sup>52</sup> (Englund, 2002c p. 141), but Englund writes that few jobs were actually created, and that people in Lilongwe compared unfavourably contemporary opportunities to earn cash in the city with the opportunities of the past (Englund, 2002c p. 139). Salaried jobs in the growing NGO sector were largely restricted to educated urban elites (Englund, 2000 p. 583-584, Englund, 2006 p. 70-98, Swidler and Watkins, 2009 p. 201, Watkins and Swidler, 2012 p. 1191). More likely was work in a Pentecostal church, many of which had been springing up since the end of the 1980s and which were led, in some cases, by relatively uneducated men and women (Englund, 2001 p. 243).

Chieftaincy did remain a potential avenue to wealth and status following the 1994 elections<sup>53</sup>. In the absence of functioning local government assemblies, chiefs have taken on important roles in facilitating state and NGO development projects in the multiparty era (Cammack et al., 2009 p. 6-9, Eggen, 2012 p. 4, Swidler, 2013 p. 329-332). From 2005 they have played a prominent role in the yearly distribution of state-subsidised fertiliser (Chirwa and Dorward, 2013 p. 105, Lunduka et al., 2013 p. 570, Eggen, 2012 p. 10), a programme seen as vital in Chimtengo and the surrounds because of the exhaustion of the soil and the ever-increasing market price of the input.

Although he does not describe them as big men, Oyvind Eggen writes how chiefs in rural Southern Malawi distributed government-subsidised fertiliser amongst their villagers according to particular relational dynamics, rather than implementing the pro-poor distribution plan developed on a prior visit by agricultural extension workers (Eggen, 2012 p. 10). Similarly, Englund describes how labour relations between larger farmers and *ganyu* workers were not impersonal or 'commoditized' in Dedza district, but marked out by particular relations between the former and the latter (Englund, 1999 p. 155-156). While

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<sup>52</sup> Englund notes that city boundaries were altered during this period, skewing these statistics. The total population of the Central Region grew by nearly a million people during this period, being 3,110,986 in 1987 and 4,066,340 in 1998. In 2008, the year of the latest census, the Central Region population was 5,510,195 (National Statistic Office 1991 p. 17, 2001 p. 10, 2008 p. 5).

<sup>53</sup> Based on national survey data, Dionne (2012) suggests that Malawians believe that chiefs have more interest in their people than politicians do in their constituents, and view them as a more legitimate source of authority than elected members of local or national government.

neither Englund nor Eggen write about big men, they both describe the kind of mediation of support, along the lines of specific affective relationships, which defined big men in Chimtengo and the surrounds when I was doing my fieldwork<sup>54</sup>. These examples and the evidence from my own fieldwork suggest that although opportunities to accrue wealth and status have changed in the Central Region through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, being big remains an important idea through which people make sense of their relationships. In the rural Central Region, contemporary conditions mean chiefs can continue to be big men, but only alongside other types of big men, such as larger farmers and church leaders<sup>55</sup>.

### ***Chewa Religion and Christianity***

The final aspect of the social landscape of Chimtengo village and the surrounds that it is important to cover here is religion. As well as enquiring about family and village, when people met for the first time in the area around Chimtengo, they might also ask each other whether they went to church (*mpingo*), a question most often phrased, 'Do you worship?' (*Mumapemphera?*)<sup>56</sup>. If they answered in the negative, the person normally explained that they 'went to Nyau' (*ndimapita ku Nyau*). My position in David's household meant I did not find out as much about Nyau as I did the Baptist Church. However what conversation I did have with people who 'went to Nyau' suggested that although people drew a

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<sup>54</sup> There are several other examples of the importance of 'bigness' to chieftaincy and to other positions in contemporary Malawian society, even if it is not labelled as such. Swidler (2013) suggests the successful mediation of 'collective goods' like fertiliser by chiefs across Malawi is what has meant the institution has continued to have importance in the country. Similarly, Cammack, Kanyongolo and O'Neil in their work on town chiefs suggest that these leaders hold their position based on their "good character", expressed in their willingness to help people (2009 p.18). In another study focused on urban Malawi, Anders writes that civil servants maintain their status in a similar way, through distributing resources to dependants inside and outside government as '*bwana*' (2002).

<sup>55</sup> There is not much discussion of pastors as big men in the literature on Malawi. In chapter six, where I describe the 'bigness' David had as a pastor, I refer mainly to literature from other African contexts, particularly Karen Lauterbach's (2008) work on Ghana. She argues that church leadership there was an alternative source of bigness in an economy that, like Malawi's, presented people with few other opportunities to accrue wealth and status.

<sup>56</sup> There was a small mosque in Chimsika but I met no Muslims living outside of the trading centre during the time I lived in Chimtengo.

distinction between Chewa religion - of which *Nyau* was a part - and Christianity, there was a basic similarity was perceived between the two. Both religions rested on a distinction between 'spiritual things' (*za uzimu*) and the temporal world (*dziko la pansi*) and adherents to each both believed that the former could have an influence on the latter. This influence could often be malign, brought on by witchcraft (*ufiti*) or the dissatisfied spirits of ancestors (*mizimu*). Christians talked about the 'strong' (*-limba*) and the 'weak' (*-fooka*) of their number as a way of distinguishing between people who faithfully (*-khulupirika*) tried to avoid sin (*tchim*) and endured problems in their lives, and those that did not. They acknowledged, however, that problems and sin were impossible to avoid completely, and that even the strongest Christians would experience difficulties. Until they went to heaven (*pa mwamba*), they had to negotiate life on earth (*padziko la pansi*) as best they could.

Max Marwick notes that the Chewa where he worked in the 1940s elided the Christian God with the Chewa God (both *Mulungu*) when they talked with him, making it difficult to distinguish which they were referring to (Marwick, 1965 p. 64). Missionaries of the Dutch Reformed Church had hoped to establish 'Christian Kingdoms' (Pretorius, 1972 p. 371) but they, and the Catholic White Fathers who arrived in the Central Region a decade after them at the turn of the nineteenth century, were repeatedly disappointed as many of their converts became what they called "backsliders" (Marwick, 1965 p. 64). Communal beer drinking, polygamy, divorce and attendance at the *Nyau* continued to be practised by such individuals, up to the middle of the twentieth century and beyond (Marwick, 1965, Mair, 1951 p. 115).

Marwick describes the *Nyau* only briefly in his work, as a society into which all Chewa men were initiated, of which a select number performed 'esoteric mime productions' (1965 p. 59). Other researchers have since ascribed *Nyau* more significance, arguing the mimes and dances it involves - the *Gule Wamkulu* - act as a medium through which ancestral spirits interact with men and women, so that they might together be able to resolve problems in the temporal world

(Boucher, 2012 p. 6-12, van Breugel, 2001 p. 125-152)<sup>57</sup>. The dances took place at funerals and other communal events, like the installation of new chiefs (Boucher, 2012 p. xii). Marwick alludes to the *Gule Wamkulu* when he writes that 'pagan' practices sat side by side with Bible readings and prayers at most of the funerals he attended (1965 p. 64). This coexistence and the continuation of other practices frowned upon in the missions suggests that the important distinction for the Chewa has historically been between the temporal and spiritual worlds, rather than between church and *Nyau* or other temporal institutions and practices. Converting to Christianity has, historically at least, not meant drastic changes in Chewa people's lifestyles.

In Chimtengo Kubwalo there were a mix of churchgoers and people who went to *Nyau*. Most of the Christians living in Chimtengo Kubwalo belonged to David's extended family, and went to Pamtunda Baptist Church. In addition to David, Martha and their children, Harold and Limbani, and their wives Ethel and Memory attended Pamtunda, as did Loveness, MacDonald's wife. David excepted, the women went far more regularly to church than the men and it was generally acknowledged that women were the stronger (*-limba*) Christians. When I asked Christian men in Chimtengo like Harold and Limbani why they didn't go to church more often they all said they were busy with 'work' (*nchito*). Their wives however said they were 'just playing around' (*angosewera*), an accusation that formed a part of the general gendered critique of men's provision in the village. Children outnumbered both men and women at church. Several of the older children and youth in Chimtengo told me they liked to attend because singing in the choirs was fun (*zoseketsa*). Several had met boyfriends and girlfriends (*chibwenzi*) there. Aside from David's extended family, only Davey Banda and his wife Enaliss attended Pamtunda from Chimtengo Kubwalo, Enaliss doing so much more frequently than her husband. Mwayi Namangale occasionally went to the Catholic Church in Chimsika with his family, but the rest of the adults in the

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<sup>57</sup> There is some tension in writing on the *Nyau* and *Gule Wamkulu*. On the one hand it presents *Nyau* as unchanging; a point of resistance and an 'expression of what it is to be a traditional Chewa' (Boucher 2012, p. 1, also see, van Breugel 2000, p. 168, Kaspin 1993, p. 54). On the other, *Nyau* is described as something more flexible, which 'manifests signs of continuity and discontinuity... throughout its long history' (Boucher 2012, p. 259).

village watched the *Gule Wamkulu*. This group included Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo who, as chief, organised *Gule Wamkulu* for events in the village, and David's aunt Agness Msindiza.

The way many people in Chimtengo and the surrounds practised their Christianity reflected the awkward way in which it sat with some of their relationships. Pamtunda Baptist was the church that I knew best; I went at least every other Sunday during my time in the village. Pamtunda was the church that David normally attended too, although he had responsibility for more than a dozen smaller Baptist churches in a fifteen kilometre radius around Pamtunda, the church from where they had been '*planted*' (*-bzala*)<sup>58</sup>. There was a full programme of events throughout the year. Sunday services and mid-week choir practices happened on a weekly basis, as did formal and informal visits and meetings between church members. At these, people might chat, pray, or discuss practical arrangements for church events. David made visits or held meetings at least two or three times per week. He prayed for the sick, chided members who he had not seen at church for sometime and planned events with his lay leaders. A few times a year there were special large-scale prayer meetings lasting twenty-four hours or more, revival meetings (*msonkhano wa chitsitsimutso*) and visits by foreign missionaries. Church members gave a tithe (*chakhumi*) throughout the year and donated money at the larger events as well. David's Baptist Churches, unlike the CCAP and Catholic Churches at Chimsika trading centre, received no regular financial support from a central or international office so tithes were used to maintain church buildings, to give David some financial support, and to help sick congregation members.

Hundreds of people from across all the Baptist churches could gather for a missionary visit or revival meeting, and Pamtunda regularly got more than a hundred adult congregants on Sundays in June, July or August. During busy times

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<sup>58</sup> David oversaw sixteen churches, each led by one or two lay deacons. Pamtunda was sometimes referred to as the 'mother church' of these others and in the thesis I sometimes use the term 'Pamtunda churches' as a short hand for referring to all sixteen. Sometimes I also refer to the churches as those that David pastored, something that reflects the way in which he often talked about the churches as his - 'my churches' (*mipingo yanga*).

like harvest, or in the hungry season however, as few as a dozen adults attended Pamtunda. Tithing dropped commensurately. In July Pamtunda recorded its highest offering of the year, MK 1950 (6 USD), but in February there was a service where just MK 150 (0.50 USD)<sup>59</sup> was collected. When I saw them in the villages around Pamtunda and asked why they had not been at church, Pamtunda members would explain they had been 'in the field' (*kumunda*) or had been 'hungry' (*njala*), depending on the time of year. Others just said they had been 'lazy' (*-ulesi*).

Alongside 'laziness', in all the Protestant churches in the area, not just Pamtunda, beer drinking, divorce, and *Nyau* were identified by pastors and church members as the most serious problems, the main things which led people to stop coming to church completely. There were members from Pamtunda and the other churches David led who had all left church because of them. David told me that the owner of the local teashop that he liked to visit in Kwamhango village (Map 3, p. 33) had stopped coming to Pamtunda Baptist after David advised him not to divorce and remarry - that had been some years ago. Two more men got divorced and left Pamtunda churches during the time I was in the village. One was a lay leader of one of David's congregations. Other members - men and women - decided to start going to watch the *Gule Wamkulu* during the time I was in the village.

David and other church members bemoaned the 'weakness' (*-fooka*) of the people that did such things, drawing comparisons with 'strong' (*-limba*) members who attended church throughout the year, and stayed away from things like alcohol and the *Nyau*. David called troublesome church members for meetings over 'discipline'<sup>60</sup>, to discuss (*-kambirana*) with them what they were doing and to 'encourage' them (*-limbikitsa*) to continue to be faithful (-

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<sup>59</sup> Over the course of a full twelve months giving at Pamtunda averaged MK 970 (3 USD). What I write about attendance and tithing here is based upon my own records. Tallies of attendance and giving were made every Sunday at Pamtunda but they were often written down on small scraps of paper, or school exercise books. These were poorly collated and what records I did see were difficult to make sense of.

<sup>60</sup> Even church members who spoke no English always used the English word 'discipline' in these situations.

*khulupirika*) to God and Christian practice. No one was ever publicly rebuked in church, but members did privately challenge other member's behaviour if it were not deemed proper. If the person concerned did not stop what they were doing after the encouragements and rebukes of David and the church, they would be excluded from the spiritual and material support the church and David himself could provide them with. Giving this kind of spiritual and material help to other Christians was not just about being a 'big man' - it was, along with regular prayer and church attendance, spoken of as a key mark of a strong (-*limba*) Christian life.

Despite the discipline meted out to errant church members, there was considerable tolerance between stronger Christians, weaker Christians, and those who had never been to church. Unlike in Max Marwick's account, the funerals that I saw in and around Chimtengo, numbering a dozen, never featured both *Nyau* and Christian practices. But, while they did hold themselves resolutely apart from *Nyau* performers, and refuse to give money to them, Christians nonetheless went to *Nyau* funerals in the area. Even David, who described the *Gule Wamkulu* to me as 'satanic', attended the funerals of *Nyau* members, explaining that this was justified by connection to the person through kinship or affection. When Martha's brother-in-law's uncle died - a staunch member of the *Nyau* - David explained he should go to the funeral, as the man was 'family'. Forbearance extended from stronger Christians to weaker ones as well. The deacon who got divorced was allowed to start going to church with his new wife, although not to the same congregation that his old wife was in. Other people went back and forth between *Nyau* and church. MacDonald Mwale, unlike his wife Loveness, had been going to *Nyau* when I arrived in Chimtengo. After a couple of months he started to go to Pamtunda and joined one of the choirs, only to leave again and go back to *Nyau* a few months later. Although David and Loveness regretted MacDonald's vacillation, their relations with him in the village continued to be much the same when he was in church as when he was going to *Nyau*.

Where a person had left the church over issues like divorce, persistent beer drinking, or attendance at *Nyau*, a discussion over discipline with David, and a word that they would stop and not repeat what they had done, was sufficient to enable them to re-enter church life. I learnt through listening to David's discussions with other protestant pastors at Chimsika that this tended to be their approach to discipline as well<sup>61</sup>. When I asked David why he put up with some of the things his church members did, often over and over again, he explained that whilst their actions were '*not good*', and at times threatened to '*destroy the church*' (*-ononga mpingo*) all people, including himself, were '*some parts good, some parts bad*' and that as Christians it was important to show '*grace*' (*chisomo*). It was important to bear with weaker members, even as they struggled, as no Christian could be expected to behave perfectly while on earth.

The early strategy of both the Dutch Reformed Church and the Catholic Church in the Central Region was to draw converts out of what they viewed as harmful social relations with 'pagans' and on to mission stations (Pretorius, 1972, Schoffeleers and Linden, 1972). On the stations converts received education that would equip them for their roles in new 'Christian Kingdoms' (Pretorius, 1972 p. 371). Improvement on earth was to be made through earthly effort, namely education. Mission teaching held that Christian conversion was more about obtaining life after death, than giving the believer any kind of spiritual power to confront misfortune and difficulty in the temporal world. The missions largely dismissed as backward the beliefs in witchcraft and evil spirits that most Chewa people held important and mission Christianity offered nothing like the *Gule Wamkulu* or witchdoctors (*sing'anga*), through whom Christians could directly address, the spiritual, unseen forces acting upon their earthly situations and relationships.

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<sup>61</sup> David attended regular meetings with other protestant pastors in the area and also visited their churches. Protestant and Catholic leaders mixed less, and though I have no evidence of my own, the literature suggests that the Catholic Church in the Central Region has historically been less forbearing than Protestant churches towards errant congregants, particular over matters to do with divorce (see Mair 1951, p. 115, Englund 1996, p. 115).



New churches developed alongside the mission churches throughout the twentieth century, bringing with them some new theological ideas. In the Central Region, between the late 1920s and 1940s, a number of independent churches were established alongside the older mission churches (McCracken, 1968 p. 200). Led by mission-educated ministers, the churches mostly continued to promote 'betterment' along the same lines as the older churches, teaching against beer drinking, polygamy and the *Nyau*, and encouraging formal education in school (McCracken, 1968 p. 200). From the end of the 1980s, Pentecostal teaching has continued to emphasise the sinfulness of the former things, but also introduced the possibility of overcoming them through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the believer (Robbins, 2004 p. 121). As well as avoiding sin the Pentecostal Christian can expect to be able to resolve problems like ill health through the use of spiritual gifts like healing and exorcism. These ideas present something of a contrast to the doctrines of the older mission and independents churches, emphasising as they do that conversion to Christianity can involve the provision of spiritual protection from earthly misfortune, as well as the attainment of life after death. Researchers have suggested that the 'explosion' of Pentecostal influence in African Christianity is explained by its theology of spiritual gifts - the idea that God can intercede into temporal problems through the believer, and bring about dramatic change (Meyer, 1998a, Meyer, 1998c p. 762, Maxwell, 2006a p. 9)<sup>62</sup>.

Based on his research on Pentecostalism in urban Lilongwe Harri Englund suggests a less strong formulation. Rather than being somehow against culture, or involving a radical 'break', Pentecostals in Chinsapo township talked about how after conversion they remained part of the world, subject to all its imperfections and problems (Englund, 2007 p. 483-485, cf. van Dijk, 1992, Meyer, 1998a, Martin, 1990). Pastors in the township advised that 'second birth [conversion], is a gradual process... with the insight that it is in the practical

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<sup>62</sup> Work on the church across sub-Saharan Africa has argued that the mission churches failed to address people's concern with supernatural threats, and provide supernatural means to address their problems. This failure fed into the growth of other churches and denominations through the twentieth century (Barrett 1968, Anderson 2001).

engagement with the world that this growth takes place...' (2007 p. 485, also see Englund, 2000 p. 598). In this context, spiritual gifts are better understood as tools to help the person negotiate the difficulties of continuing to live in an insecure environment, beset by poverty and relational uncertainties, rather than as ways to help break with it completely. Englund writes that Pentecostal pastors exhibited considerable forbearance with 'backsliders', explaining to him that this was because the growth of a Christian on earth could 'only be gradual' (Englund, 2007 p. 485).

In Chimtengo and the surrounds, people moved between church and *Nyau* relatively easily, and carried on relationships away from the church in many ways unaffected by religious affiliations. The idea of grace (*Chisomo*) made it possible for errant members of the Pamtunda churches to return to the church. Even stronger Christians like David recognised that whilst their faith provided them with guidance and a degree of protection or help as they negotiated their earthly lives and relationships, they could not avoid sin and misfortune entirely, making grace important to them as well. While they were living in the world there would always be occasions where their lives and their behaviour would not match up to the ideals set out in the teaching of the church.

### ***Conclusion***

In this chapter I have attempted to set a context for the rest of the thesis by describing the social landscape of Chimtengo and the surrounds - the institutions and ideas that were important to people there. Relationships structured around family, village and church were all significant to people as sources of support and help in a context of poverty. These institutions, and ideas about what made a big man, a strong Christian or a man or woman, provided people with ways of making sense of the different situations that they faced and delimited, to an extent, how they responded to them. They provided a guide to how social life should play out, a sense of what they should do and what they could expect of others. But there were limits to the assurances and guidance that these

structures gave. My own observations, and the work of other anthropologists and historians indicate the flexibility of the different ideas and institutions mentioned in the chapter, the relative openness of the social landscape of the Central Region, and the area around Chimtengo more particularly. Family members, for example, maintained diverse sets of kin ties, and women worked for cash despite a strong ideology of male provision in the village. Ideas in the landscape appeared as rules of thumb, rather than immutable structures.

Following the approach of Isak Niehaus and some of the other ethnographers I mentioned in the introduction, in subsequent chapters I use the detailed information I gathered as I got to know David to try to explain the importance of some the features of the social landscape to him. I attempt to provide some explanation of his actions, those of his wife Martha, and of others, without 'shoehorning' them into structures or systems which they do not really fit (Staples, 2014 p. xxiii, Sahlins, 2004 p. 142-154). Through learning about David's life history and following the course of different events over the time I was in the village, the relative influence of different ideas in David's life became more apparent. In the chapters I detail the ways in which family, village and church, and ideas about what it meant to be a man or a woman, a big man or a dependent, and a Christian or a non-Christian, mattered to him. Despite the detailed nature of my fieldwork indeterminacies remained, there were occasions when David's actions did not match up with what he had told me about his past before I arrived in the village, or with what had I seen him do while I had been living there. The next chapter shows how, whilst David talked about how his Christian faith had provided him with a great degree of assurance through his life, it did not in fact remove uncertainty and doubt from him entirely when he faced up to an illness suffered by his brother Sunday.

## **Chapter Three. 'If we remain faithful': responding to a case of serious illness.**

### ***Introduction***

*'Sunday is not getting better'*

David, Martha and Harold all looked worried. They were sat in the gloom of David and Martha's living room, faces illuminated by torchlight. It was March, about nine months after my arrival in Chintengo. Harold had come over to David's house to discuss their youngest brother Sunday and the sickness he was experiencing. He had started to get ill the previous week and had gradually deteriorated since. He was weak, his stomach was distended and he was vomiting frequently. Harold and David had both taken him to different healthcare facilities and the previous day Sunday had been to Lilongwe, where David, Pastor John Moyo and a '*special team*' of pastors had prayed for his healing. None of these efforts had however arrested Sunday's decline. Harold pointed this out, '*He is saying he is better, but Sunday is not getting better*'. Harold had been told at the private hospital he had taken his brother to that Sunday should be admitted for treatment for stomach ulcers. Harold now suggested that between them he and David should find money for Sunday to go back to the hospital so that he could get help there. David asked Martha what she thought. Martha agreed with her brother-in-law, saying that Sunday did not look good. I suggested I could provide money for Sunday's treatment. Having listened to me, David then said what he thought should be done. He agreed that Sunday had not been healed by the prayer of the '*special team*', but disagreed about returning him to the private hospital. He went on for some minutes, but summed up saying,

*'I myself, I believe that God will heal him. We will pray, no, we will not be perturbed or weak. They prayed in town - the next stage is to pray and fast. If we remain*

*faithful (-khulupirika) - he will heal. I believe God. He shouldn't go to hospital because we are praying. Those are my thoughts.'*

Harold and Martha sat impassively whilst David talked. When he had finished Harold did not look happy. He silently nodded his agreement to his elder brother, said his goodnight, and left. Martha went to bed saying she was tired.

### *A misfortune to question*

In this chapter I focus on Sunday's illness and attempt to make sense of why David responded to it as he did. I begin by looking at the history of the theology of the spiritual (*uzimu*) and the temporal worlds (*dziko la pansi*) in the Baptist churches David pastored, situated in a brief discussion of the wider religious landscape in the Central Region. In particular I describe the doctrines of '*born-again*' salvation, the Holy Spirit and beliefs about witchcraft, which David came to believe had caused Sunday's illness. The chapter does not look at the institutional structure of the church, or at the exchange of material support that went on between its members. These are dealt with in chapter six. Instead I look here at the at what Karen Lauterbach terms 'spiritual services' (2008 p. 103)<sup>63</sup>, the prayers and other spiritual functions David provided for his church members. David saw prayer for the supernatural protection and the healing of members of his congregations as an important part of his identity as a pastor. Whilst David acknowledged the influence of Pentecostal theology on his beliefs, and on his practices, he and his congregations were fairly phlegmatic about miraculous, divine intervention. David did not see much miraculous healing and he and his church members regularly sought medical care, seeing this as another way in which God might remove their illnesses. David emphasised the importance of persevering (*-pilira*) in faithful (*-khulupirika*) prayer, even when divine intervention did not seem to be forthcoming. This kind of faithful

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<sup>63</sup> Lauterbach (2008) spent time in Pentecostal churches in Kumasi, Ghana, for her PhD fieldwork.

perseverance marked his biography and was part of what defined a strong (-*limba*) Christian in the Pamtunda churches.

The intractability of Sunday's illness caused David to doubt or question his theology of what God would do for him and how He would do it. In the presence of these doubts, David ended up acting with a pragmatism that was difficult to reconcile with the beliefs that structured how he made sense of past events in his life. His actions did not sit comfortably with the testimony of Christian faith he had told me, suggesting some of the limits of biographies or life histories to provide explanation of who people are and what they do (Hastrup, 2005 p. 138, cf. Niehaus, 2012 , Staples, 2014). Susan Reynolds Whyte (1998) addresses events like Sunday's illness in her book on misfortune in Eastern Uganda writing that when analyzing such episodes, it is helpful to look at specific consequences rather than at the general convictions or ideas people offer by way of explanation. I suggest that it is set in the particular context of David's relationships with Harold and Sunday, and me, that what he did about his youngest brother is best explained. Looking at the consequences of Sunday's illness for those relationships, and how David acted in response to them casts the strength of his Christian belief, or convictions, in a relative light.

### ***Theologies of Born Again salvation and Spiritual Gifts***

#### *History of Baptist doctrines in Malawi*<sup>64</sup>

In this section I describe the history of the theology of the churches David pastored in relation to the broader spiritual landscape of the Central Region. In particular, I look at the doctrines of born again salvation and of spiritual gifts. Pamtunda Baptist Church was founded in the mid-1970s with the help of Southern Baptist Missionaries, acting as part of the Baptist Mission in Malawi

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<sup>64</sup> Much of the information in this section, and the history section in chapter six, is taken from Hany Longwe's 2011 history of the Baptist Church in Malawi, *Christians by grace, Baptists by choice*.

(BMIM). I give more detail of the history and organization of the mission in chapter six. I start here by examining the theology of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), which the BMIM has taught through its time in Malawi. I briefly compare it to different sets of beliefs that were already widespread in the country on the arrival of the first BMIM missionaries in the late 1950s - broadly, those of the older Protestant and Catholic mission churches, and those of Chewa religion<sup>65</sup>. The second part of the section looks at the Pentecostal theology of spiritual gifts, the ways in which this came to influence the Baptist church in Malawi and David's churches in particular. Many of the ideas in this section were introduced in chapter two, but I develop them here in greater detail to give a better impression of what guided how David reacted to Sunday's illness.

Southern Baptist theology has historically held that conversion to Christianity meant an individual being 'born again' (Southern Baptist Convention, 2000, Longwe, 2011 p. 17). BMIM missionaries exhorted people to do this through their early work in the 1960s with small groups of converts and subsequently at large scale crusades in the 1970s (Longwe, 2011 p. 73-77). The Southern Baptist *Faith and Message*<sup>66</sup> describes how a person becomes a born again Christian. Upon making a personal decision to believe in God, God forgives the person of the sins of which they had become convicted and permanently justifies them from sin in the future, securing for them life after death. In this way, salvation is achieved through God's grace on conversion, rather than through any kind of on-going work or the supplications of a priest or minister. Amongst Southern Baptists, baptism - full immersion in water - is a sign of the decision to believe, symbolising the death of the old person and the new birth and life of the believer, their being 'born again'. In churches that were part of the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA), founded by Malawian Baptists in 1970 on the

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<sup>65</sup> I am aware that Chewa, Protestant, Catholic and Pentecostal religious institutions are dynamic, showing considerable variation in theologies and practices through their histories. My focus being the Baptist Church in Malawi, there is not scope to go into these details here.

<sup>66</sup> Southern Baptists have no creed, but this is the closest statement to one, developed in 1925 and revised in 1963 and 2000 (Southern Baptist Convention 2000). The description of the doctrines of salvation, and of the Holy Spirit have remained largely the same through the different iterations. Longwe also describes the development of the doctrine in the SBC in America and its presence amongst the BACOMA churches (2011, p. 17, p. 73-77, p. 428).

encouragement of BMIM missionaries (Longwe, 2011 p. 68-73), baptism was also the qualification for church membership (Longwe, 2011). Implying as it does an equality of all believers before God, the born-again doctrine of salvation sits easily with the Congregationalist principles of church governance held by the SBC and BMIM, discussed at length in chapter six.

Longwe writes that converts to the Baptist church in Malawi were attracted to it by the fact that all Baptist Christians were 'priests' with equal access to God (2011 p. 73). There were few 'rules and regulations' involved in becoming a Baptist Christian (2011 p. 146). Baptist churches were different to the Catholic and Presbyterian churches in the Central Region, whose own doctrines of salvation and church membership were more institutionalised (Linden and Linden, 1974, McCracken, 1968). John McCracken writes about the frustration African members of the CCAP had felt at the amount of study missionaries required them to do before they were accepted as Christians and church members during the first half of the nineteenth century (1968 p. 193-196). Although belonging to the mission churches became easier in subsequent years, Longwe notes many instances of Presbyterians and Catholics being born again and moving from the Catholic Church and CCAP to join Baptist congregations, or to start Baptist churches themselves<sup>67</sup>. People with no church background could also join and progress quickly in the Baptist church<sup>68</sup>. John Moyo had founded Pamtunda with the BMIM missionaries who had baptised him at a crusade near Chimsika in the mid 1970s. He had been able to do so despite having no previous relationship to a Christian denomination and no formal education. Although Moyo later received training at the Baptist Seminaries in Lilongwe and Lusaka, Zambia, Longwe notes that many Baptist pastors worked with little such instruction. The majority of church members and leaders in BACOMA churches remained formally uneducated into the 1980s and 1990s (2011 p. 484), being born-again and baptised remaining the key requisites for belonging to the church.

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<sup>67</sup> For examples of people leaving the CCAP see pages 78, 105, 122, 150-151 and 196. For examples of people leaving Catholic churches see pages 102, 103, 147 and 157.

<sup>68</sup> See pages 113, 137 and 156.



Historically, including during the period when BMIM began its work in Malawi, Southern Baptists have been cessationists. This doctrine holds that the Holy Spirit (*Mzimu Woyera*) - God's presence in the converted believer - ceased to grant supernatural spiritual gifts at the end of the period of history covered by the Bible. Cessationists believe that the Holy Spirit no longer grants Christians the ability to speak in unearthly languages - glossolalia or tongues - to prophesy, or do miracles, like the healing of illnesses. This theology was reflected in the early work of BMIM and BACOMA in the 1960s and 1970s. Longwe does not mention the practice of spiritual gifts at all in his account of the period, nor did John Moyo or the older members of the Pamtunda churches remember them being practised at the crusades around Chimsika. They talked only of large crowds, singing and baptisms. In this respect the BACOMA churches were like the older mission churches in Malawi. The mission churches mainly described conversion as the achievement of other-worldly salvation - a place in heaven (*ku mwamba*) - rather than as something that offered divine protection and help against temporal, earthly misfortunes. The enhancement of converts' lives on earth was mostly based upon human effort, in the form of formal education. The strategy of the CCAP and the Catholic church had been to help people improve their lives by drawing them away from what they regarded as harmful social relations and practices, providing them with education on mission stations and at missions schools (Pretorius, 1972, Schoffeleers and Linden, 1972, McCracken, 1968 p. 104-107, White, 1987 p. 3-70).

Mission theology and the strategy it informed was dissonant with traditional Chewa religious beliefs about the nature of the relationship between the spiritual and temporal worlds. The *Gule Wamkulu* served to facilitate the communication of dead ancestors with the living, so that the spirits of the former might rebuke the latter for their misdemeanors and neglect of Chewa traditional morals (Boucher, 2012 p. 7-10, van Breugel, 2001 p. 75-92, Marwick, 1965 p. 63-66)<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>69</sup> People in Chimtengo talked more about the *miyambo ya makolo*, literally 'the proverbs of the ancestors', than tradition, 'mwambo'.

Chewa sought out witchdoctors, *sing'anga*, to diagnose the sources of problems: from ill health, to failure in farming, to miscarriages. The causes were normally either *ziwanda*, the mischievous, restless spirits of dead relatives, or witches, *mfiti* (Marwick, 1965 p. 66-83, van Breugel, 2001 p. 213-228). Max Marwick writes that virtually all of the Chewa he surveyed during the 1940s believed in witchcraft (Marwick, 1965 p. 3). He and other writers note that the Chewa drew distinctions between those people who engaged in witchcraft, using poisons and *nyanga* - small sharp sticks for stabbing into effigies of victims - and those who were witches innately, eating flesh at the graveyard and dancing and casting spells (*-tamba*) at night. The former were called '*mphelanjilu*', while the latter, more threatening, were called '*nfiti yeni-yeni*' (1965 p. 79, van Breugel, 2001 p. 213). The mission churches largely failed to draw out the distinctions between the *Gule*, *sing'anga* and witches, nor did their theologies of the relationship between the spiritual and temporal worlds allow for much engagement with them, or with spiritual insecurity in general (Boucher, 2012 p. 6, Schoffeleers and Linden, 1972, Linden and Linden, 1974, McCracken, 1968).

### *Pentecostal Influence*

In contrast to the mission churches and BMIM, the theology of Pentecostal churches in Malawi has often suggested that being a Christian involves having the ability to access spiritual help to address temporal misfortune<sup>70</sup>. Like Southern Baptists, Pentecostals believe in born-again salvation through grace (Maxwell, 2006a p. 6, Robbins, 2004 p. 121). Throughout their history, Pentecostals have however also encouraged the practice of glossolalia, healing and deliverance from demons (Maxwell, 2006a, Robbins, 2004 p. 121, Soothill, 2007 p. 2-4). In the most recent wave of Pentecostalism in Africa - sometimes labeled '*neo-Pentecostalism*' - spiritual gifts have become part of the '*prosperity gospel*', the theology that God will supernaturally bring wealth and health to

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<sup>70</sup> An important caveat on this section is that Pentecostal churches, like Baptist churches, operate with a considerable degree of independence from hierarchies of church governance (see Robbins 2004). Harri Englund (2001) remarks that the Pentecostal church in Malawi is extremely diverse in its practices. I offer only the broadest generalisations here.

those who confess belief in him and give of their time and money to the church (Maxwell, 2006a, Lauterbach, 2008, Gifford, 1994, Gifford, 2004, Englund, 2004). This giving and work for the church is not about achieving future salvation, which is obtained on conversion, but about attaining a better life on earth. Researchers have suggested that this strong emphasis on divine assistance and temporal well being explains the success of neo-Pentecostalism in poor, insecure African countries like Malawi, where established mission churches had traditionally emphasised salvation for the afterlife alone and not miraculous help on earth (Ukah, 2005 , Meyer, 1998c p. 762, Maxwell, 2006a p. 9, Anderson, 2001)<sup>71</sup>.

Pentecostal doctrine had its effects amongst the BACOMA churches. Cessationism seems to have prevailed amongst them up until the start of the 1990s, at which time spiritual gifts started to be practised more. Longwe writes that speaking in tongues was encouraged and practised in some BACOMA Baptist churches at the start of the decade (2011 p. 477). No other gifts were practised at first, but the development nonetheless caused friction within BACOMA, as some Convention churches and pastors continued to hold with cessationism. Change was slow and uneven. Longwe notes that pastors had to explain to some members of their congregations what was going on when other members started praying in tongues and practising other spiritual gifts (2011 p. 477). Developments in BACOMA were mirrored in the Southern Baptist Convention in the US, increasing numbers of its member churches renouncing cessationism and embracing the practice of spiritual gifts (Kwon, 2007). Longwe is clear though that in the BACOMA churches the changes during the 1990s were put down to the growing influence of Pentecostalism in the country more than developments in the SBC in America. Amongst the BACOMA churches during the 1990s, tongues and gifts were described as being '*chipente*' (literally, a 'thing of the Pentecostals') and that the BACOMA leadership - a group who had remained

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<sup>71</sup> This point has been argued for other contexts beyond Africa, see for example Martin (1990) and chapters of Corten and Marshall-Fratani (2001) on Latin America.

cessationists (2011 p. 477-478) - started pejoratively labelling churches that practised gifts as '*Pentecostal*'.

David and John Moyo both recognised the growth of the Pentecostal church in Malawi during the late 1980s and the 1990s, and cited the influence of its doctrine of spiritual gifts on their own congregations. After receiving his seminary training, Moyo had gone on to establish many Baptist churches, handing leadership of Pamtunda over to his brother before giving it to David. Around 1990 Moyo had left BACOMA, taking many of the churches he had founded with him<sup>72</sup>. Moyo told me his departure from BACOMA was motivated by his desire to see people in his churches benefit from the '*things of the spirit*' (*za uzimu*)- healings, prophecies and tongues - which he felt were not being encouraged within BACOMA. He spoke of the divisions in BACOMA that Longwe notes, and felt it would be better to leave the convention in order to develop the practice of spiritual gifts, rather than to try to do so within it. I went to a couple of services at Moyo's main church in Lilongwe during my time in Malawi. Tongues were spoken and people also received prayer for deliverance from demons and for healing.

David himself talked about the influence of a specific Pentecostal denomination on his practice, the Assemblies of God, rather than of Pentecostalism in general. The Assemblies of God had been established in Malawi since the 1940s but reflecting David's belief that it had started in the 1990s, it had only developed significantly in size since the late 1980s. Membership grew forty percent between 1989 and 1996, the church building a large Bible college in the centre of Lilongwe to train pastors and leaders (Englund, 2001 p. 243). Harri Englund writes that Assemblies of God Pentecostals in the Chinsapo township where he conducted fieldwork were attracted by the earthly '*security*' (*chitetezo*) that the church's theology implied (2004 p. 241-242)<sup>73</sup>. David visited the Assemblies of

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<sup>72</sup> I describe John Moyo's life and ministry in more detail in chapter six, including his exit from BACOMA.

<sup>73</sup> Englund writes of a '*security*' gospel rather than a prosperity gospel being important in the Pentecostal churches he studied (2004 p. 302). Pentecostals saw wealth as leading to

God Bible School for trainings and talks himself and was, as I describe later on in the chapter, attending a training course when Sunday came to Lilongwe to receive prayer. In the next section I look in more detail at the prominent place God had in David's narrative of his life up to the point that I joined him in Chimtengo, and the ways in which he felt God had given him security (*chititezo*) in his life. I then look at the practice of spiritual gifts in the Pamtunda churches. This was somewhat different from what has been observed in many Pentecostal churches, and from what went on in John Moyo's church.

### ***Belief and practice: David and the Pamtunda churches***

#### *The place of God in David's life story*

The story of his conversion to Christianity structured the life history interviews I conducted with David at the start of my stay in Chimtengo. Given that he knew I was a Christian this is perhaps unsurprising. Other key themes emerged as my time in the village went on, particularly to do with 'bigness', as I discuss in chapter five. David continued to refer back to his conversion narrative as well though, repeating it nearly word for word on several other occasions in subsequent months. He explained to me each time that he used the story to 'encourage' (*-limbikitsa*) the members of his churches in their own faith.

David described his conversion as a 'crucial' moment in his life, beginning the story in 1993, when he was at a secondary school on the outskirts of Lilongwe. David described himself as 'lost'. He said there was no background of Christianity in his family and that he had been initiated into the *Nyau* while he had been living in Mtete with his mother and father. His grandfather, Chief Chimtengo Three, to whose house in Chimtengo David moved in 1983, was also not a

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complacency and to the neglect of the worship of God (Also see Lauterbach 2008 p. 90). Whilst I think this division can be helpful, it can also, as Englund writes elsewhere, be difficult in practice to draw a line between what is a prayer for 'protection' and what is a prayer for 'prosperity'. To prosper it is necessary to be protected from malign spiritual forces (2001 p. 241). David recognised the dangers of not distributing material wealth, but saw his material prosperity and supernatural protection as both deriving from being a faithful Christian and pastor.

Christian. Like Pentecostals Englund met in Chinsapo, David emphasised a 'deplorable past' in his story of conversion (Englund, 2001 p. 246-247)<sup>74</sup>. He told me he smoked marijuana and regularly got into fights at school. One day he and some of his friends vandalised a house near the school, breaking all its windows. Accosted by the police David and one friend, Isaac, ran away towards the busy main road through the township. Seeing an articulated lorry speeding down the road David stopped and shouted to Isaac to do the same. Isaac though continued and was hit and killed by the lorry. David attended Isaac's funeral at a Baptist church in Dedza where, having listened to the preacher talk about being born-again, David chose, as he put it, '*to receive my Jesus Christ*'. He was baptised shortly after at Pamtunda, the closest church to Chimtengo village (Map 3. p. 33), and attended whenever he could.

David told me that he '*saw the grace (chisomo) of God*' in his hesitation to run into the road, explaining that he felt God saved his life for a purpose, even though he had not been a believer. David saw God's influence in subsequent events in his life through the 1990s. Like so many young Malawian men at that time, he was frustrated in his efforts to find paid employment in Lilongwe. He failed an exam to become a soldier in the army, what he described as having been his '*dream*' job when he was in school. David explained his failure to get into the army, and to find other employment, as God's way of directing him to become a pastor. Not getting the army job '*was the grace of God*'. It led to David returning to the Chimtengo, spending more time at Pamtunda Baptist, and to being spotted by Pastor Moyo. Although he talked about Pastor Moyo as his '*spiritual father*'<sup>75</sup>, and the role Moyo had played in his becoming a pastor, David gave most of the credit to God, '*It was God, through Pastor Moyo, that made me a Pastor*'. When he showed me the photos of his ordination service soon after I had arrived in Chimtengo David told me, '*It was then that God chose me to be a pastor*'. Since

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<sup>74</sup> Similar stories of undesirable pasts have been recorded amongst other Pentecostal Christians. See Meyer on Pentecostals in Ghana (1998a) and Martin on believers in various Latin American countries (1990 p. 178).

<sup>75</sup> This term has been noted in studies of Pentecostal churches in Ghana. Lauterbach (2008 p. 117) and Soothill (2007 p. 3) both describe it as a label through which junior pastors marked out a spiritual relationship, or a genealogical connection, to more senior pastors. These kinds of relationships were as important to progressing in these churches as formal qualifications.

becoming a pastor David said he had experienced several bouts of debilitating illnesses, including one that had kept him housebound for several months. Some of the sicknesses had been healed miraculously upon his prayers, and those of friends and other pastors. Others passed with the help of medicines from the hospital, David attributing all the recoveries to God and identifying God at work even when his prayers for miraculous healing appeared to go unanswered.

David attributed some of the difficulties he had faced in life to natural causes, but others he linked more directly to the work of Satan - '*Satana*'. Harri Englund writes Pentecostals in Chinsapo described *ziwanda* as demonic spirits that worked for Satan (Englund, 2007 p. 478, Englund, 2004 p. 301). David did not really talk about these, but instead identified witchcraft (*ufiti*) as '*Satan's process*<sup>76</sup>. There were four episodes of witchcraft that I heard of while I was in Chimtengo. Twice the witch operated through *nyanga* and twice through dancing and casting spells at night on the victim's doorstep (*-tamba*). I did not hear people in Chimtengo draw the distinctions Marwick heard about these practices; all were simply instances of '*ufiti*', and equally worrying. David described them as evidence of his on-going need for divine protection. One evening in January, before Sunday got ill, David told Martha and I that a person had been seen casting spells (*-tamba*) in the main part of the village. It being the first instance of witchcraft I had heard of in the village, Martha asked me if I was '*scared*'. Before I could answer David cut in, '*He is not scared, he prays to God. I am not afraid either but this witchcraft is why I pray every night to God for protection (chitetezo)*'. I agreed with David that I was not afraid, and did indeed pray for God's protection and help in my own life.

David felt that to continue to get the help and protection from God that he had seen through his life he should do the things that the Bible taught: praying, looking after the poor and orphans, avoiding drink, and staying away from the

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<sup>76</sup> Reflecting the old mission church and BMIM perspective, David described the *Gule Wamkulu* and *sing'anga* as demonic as well. He did, however, draw a distinction between these and witches, believing that only witches could do him supernatural harm.

*Gule Wamkulu* and *sing'anga*. These were the things that made a strong Christian. He felt he should do the work of a pastor too, providing spiritual and material assistance to his congregations, as it was this work that he understood God had led him to. He told me several times during my stay *'I work for God, and He gives back to me'*, a dynamic that other pastors and Christians elsewhere in Africa have also described (Lauterbach, 2008, Scherz, 2013, Scherz, 2014, Englund, 2001). I write about the way in which David went about giving material support to his deacons in chapter six. In the rest of this section I focus on describing the kind of spiritual help David mediated to his deacons and congregations, and how they received it.

#### *The practice of spiritual gifts in the Pamtunda Churches*

David said that several of the things that went on in the Pamtunda churches *'came from the Assemblies'*, including the practice of some spiritual gifts. Like Chinsapo's Pentecostals, David talked about God as an active and involved presence with him on earth, providing him and his congregations with protection and help against misfortune. David did not, however, speak in tongues and I saw him pray for deliverance only once during my time in the village. Most often David prayed for people to be healed, but he saw little in the way of instantaneous, miraculous answers to his prayers. He was phlegmatic about this however, encouraging his congregants to persist (*-pilira*) in praying whilst pursuing medical care, which he saw as another way in which God could bring about healing.

It was on visits to the homes of his congregations, rather than at services, that David prayed for deliverance or healing for his church members. Neither prayer for supernatural healing and deliverance, nor glossolalia, took place during the church services I saw at Pamtunda or in the other churches David led (cf. Soothill, 2007 p. 2-4, Werbner, 2011). Whenever he visited the homes of people who were experiencing misfortunes however, David always prayed for the supernatural relief of the problem. His ability to make these visits was, like much else, limited by the seasons, but through the year he probably averaged one or



two a week, travelling many miles on foot and bicycle to reach people. He made particular effort if they were deacons, or he knew those concerned personally. Visiting those experiencing misfortunes, especially the sick, has traditionally been important amongst the Chewa. Van Breugel suggests this is because visits defer suspicions of witchcraft, the same rationale also applying to attendance at funerals (2001 p. 223 also see, Rangeley, 1948 p. 50 and 61). David though emphasised his visits were part of his pastoral duties. When I asked why he felt compelled to make one particularly laborious journey to see a sick member of a church several kilometres from Chimtengo he explained that doing so was part of his '*work as a pastor*'.

There were stronger (*-limba*) church members, but also weaker (*-fooka*) ones in the Pamtunda churches, and how a member reacted to problems like ill health was one way in which the strength of their Christianity was gauged by David and the rest of the churches' members. Sometimes David was invited to visit with people, other times he just heard of people experiencing problems and went of his own accord. Whilst deacons and members of his congregations regularly came to see him in the hope that he would provide material help for them, relatively few people came to ask David if he might come and pray for healing or deliverance. Church members were very much aware of the influence of malign spiritual forces, but even amongst the stronger ones there did not seem to be great expectation that David would mediate miraculous change through his prayers. David and the stronger members of his churches rather talked about the importance of persevering faithfully (*-khala wokhulupirika*) in prayer, as God rarely seemed to act in a miraculous way to relieve their misfortunes. It was this kind of faithful perseverance that marked out strong Christians.

One day in November, a small boy found David and I at home in Chimtengo Kubwalo. He was quite agitated and explained that his parents, who attended Pamtunda, wanted David to come to their house immediately. On the short walk to the nearby village David explained to me that the parents believed their daughter had been possessed by '*satana*'. When we arrived at the house the girl - a young teenager - was thrashing around and screaming as her mother tried to

hold her inside. A small, worried looking crowd had assembled. The girl's father thanked David for coming and they quickly went in to the girl, who the father explained had been acting as she was for at least half an hour. David, with the parents holding the girl, put his hand on her and prayed loudly that Satan would '*get out*' (*choka*) of her. He invoked God's power (*mphamvu*), and the name of Jesus (*dzina la yesu*) as he did so. The girl continued to shout and writhe as David prayed. After a few minutes she fainted, coming round dazed but her normal self after a few minutes more. Her parents exclaimed, '*Praise God*' (*Tiyamike Mulungu*) as she did so, before thanking David profusely for coming and praying. As we walked home David explained that this kind of '*deliverance*'<sup>77</sup> was part of his work as a pastor.

This episode was the only time I saw David pray for deliverance, and it was also the only time that I saw his prayers accompanied by a sudden change in a person's condition. I went with him around a dozen times to see him pray for healing but never saw any immediate improvement. There were all sorts of health problems that David went to pray for: chronic disabilities, acute debilitating headaches, infected cuts, and various kinds of '*fevers*' (*malungo*). Sometimes people hinted at suspicions of witchcraft as they explained what had happened to them, other times they did not. Whatever the ailment and its cause, after he had finished listening to the person's story, David always did the same thing. Sitting near them, he would lay a hand on them and invite others present, including me, to join him as he prayed. David would then pray quietly, invoking God's power and asking God to heal the person. When it became apparent there had not been a change, David always counselled the family to '*persevere*' (*-pilira*) in prayer nonetheless, telling them that he would do the same. Before leaving the home David normally gave the family around MK 50 to MK 250 (0.15-0.75 USD) to buy medicines or to help pay for the transport of the sick person to a hospital. If he did not have any money, which was not unusual, he would ask me to help

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<sup>77</sup> David normally used the English term '*deliverance*', even when he was speaking Chichewa. In my experience, the Chichewa term, *chipulumutso*, was used by the rest of the people in the Pamtunda churches. It described being '*saved*', being converted or born again, as well as release from the influence of demons or Satan.

and I would offer the family a similar amount. David nearly always took at least a few minutes to pray each evening for himself, his family, and his congregants before going to bed, even after we had stopped doing the bible studies that he had asked me to do when I had first arrived in Chimtengo. Of the people we visited many got better in time, but others did not.

One man we visited right at the start of my stay in Chimtengo had been discharged from Kamuzu Central Hospital in Lilongwe unable able to stand. He had been hit by a truck on the tarmac road to Lilongwe whilst carrying charcoal to the city on his bicycle. His wife Emelda Phiri showed us a bent bicycle wheel as she explained what had happened. Whilst the man was not a regular attendee at Pamtunda, Emelda Phiri was. According David and Martha, she was one of the church's strongest members, singing in the choir, cooking for special events like missionary visits and praying regularly. After we had heard the story of what had happened David sat by Emelda's husband, who was barely conscious. He laid a hand on him and prayed that God would heal him. David went on praying for a minute or so before we all said '*amen*'. Nothing happened to the man, who continued to lay prone on his mat. As we left, David gave Emelda a few kwacha for some milk and bread, apologising that he did not have more to give. She thanked him. Emelda continued to attend Pamtunda through her husband's convalescence. When I asked her how he was she insisted '*He will get better. I am trusting in God*'. By the time I left the village her husband was able to stand and hobble around supported by a staff he put under the pit of his arm.

Around the end of my stay in the village, David received a phone call to say that one of his best friends in the Pamtunda churches, Wiseman Nkhoma, was very ill and that David should come see him. Wiseman was one of the older members of the churches. He had been a deacon for many years at Chileka Baptist, and had taught David's Bible study class when he had first become a Christian. He was a strong believer like Emelda Phiri. At the first opportunity David and I walked to Chileka village to see Wiseman. We found him inside his house sitting on his mat, propped against the wall. Wiseman and his wife explained that he had pain in his stomach and chest, and could not keep food down. They were trying to find funds

to get him to 'Central' - Kamuzu Central Hospital in Lilongwe. Having heard the explanation David laid a hand on Wiseman and prayed that he would be healed. Opening his eyes, David asked Wiseman how he felt. Wiseman admitted he felt no better, but also expressed confidence that he would - '*God is good, I will get better*'. David said he would keep praying, and then gave Wiseman the money that I had given him on our way to Wiseman's, to help him get to 'Central'. Wiseman and his wife thanked David and I for the money, and for coming to visit. A week or so later, Wiseman passed by David's house. He told us he had been to hospital and was completely healed, thanking David again for his prayers and money. Wiseman, David and Martha agreed they '*should praise God*' (*Tiyamike Mulungu*) for Wiseman's return to health.

David trusted (*-khulupirira*) that God was working despite his failure to mediate miraculous healings in situations like these. The stronger members of his congregations persevered (*-pilira*) similarly in the face of their problems and doubts. In his work on Ghanaian Pentecostalism, Rijk van Dijk writes of a mutuality that exists between pastors and congregations. Pastors provide miraculous healing, deliverance from demons, and prayers against misfortune, whilst congregations reciprocate through 'the show of gratitude, respect and appreciation' (1999 p. 79). A consequence of this relationship can be that a pastor's position falls into question if they do not provide spiritual or material support for their congregations. Harri Englund writes that the failure of Assemblies of God Pentecostal pastors to bring about healings amongst their Lilongwe congregations could provoke 'doubts... about the pastor's credentials as a Born-Again' (2004 p. 302). The successful practice of spiritual gifts did not seem to be so important to the members of the Baptist churches David pastored, or at least to the stronger ones. They recognized that while still on the earth (*padziko la pansi*), Christians would, inevitably, face problems and misfortunes and that these might not always be relieved; as humans they were still 'imperfect' (Englund, 2007 p. 483-487). The strong Christian was one who was faithful and trusting of God through these trials. In this sense, David's position as

a pastor did not appear to rest heavily on his ability to mediate healing and other kinds of spiritual gifts amongst the members of his congregations<sup>78</sup>.

There were many people in the area - most of Chimtengo village for example - who seemed unconvinced that God might protect and help them in their temporal, earthly lives. Many people did not go to church, but to *Nyau* instead. Many more were weaker Christians, who drifted in and out of church, over the course of months and years. Men were generally more liable to do this; women and younger people were always the more numerous at church services. The prevailing attitude of stoic faithfulness amongst the stronger church members towards the spiritual gifts David practised, and of ambivalence amongst weaker ones, is an important context within which the case of Sunday's sickness can be understood. The case is also illuminated in the light of a discussion of the biographies of Sunday and Harold, to which I now turn. Harold fell into the category of weaker church member, but other aspects of his identity and relationship to David are also important to know about when addressing the case of their youngest brother's illness.

### ***Harold and Sunday Kaso***

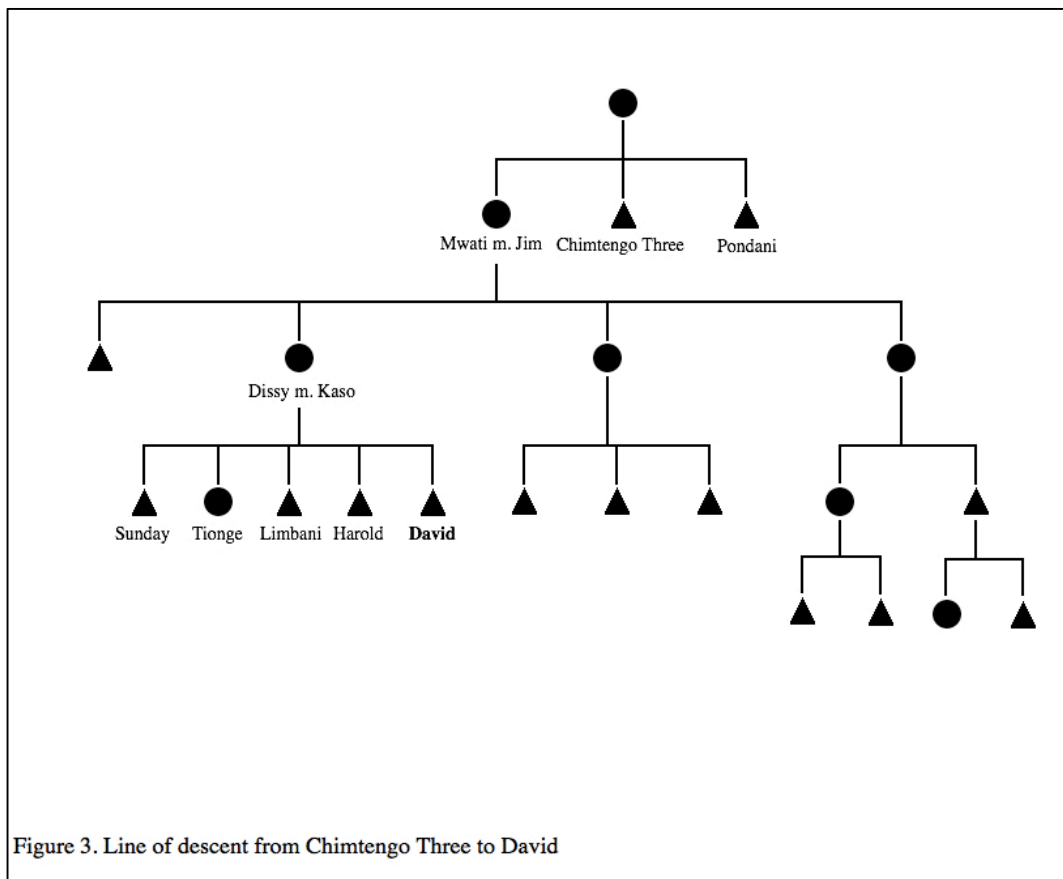
#### *Harold*

Harold arrived in Chimtengo after David, in 1985, when he was ten years old. Like his elder brother before him, and his younger siblings after him, Harold had left their father Kaso Dimi's village, Mtete, because of the long running difficulties Kaso had had providing for his children (Figure 3. p. 94). Chief Chimtengo Three, the siblings' grandfather, supported Harold to go to school, like he did David, but Harold did not get as far as his brother, dropping out in the fourth year of primary school. When I asked him about this Harold asserted that he had

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<sup>78</sup> This would suggest that the historic Baptist doctrines of cessationism that I described earlier in the chapter remained influential in the Pamtunda congregations and that the 'Pentecostalisation' of these churches was limited.

preferred the idea of farming and earning money. By 1990 he had stopped attempting to pursue formal education and was entirely committed to helping Chimtengo Three farm and to manage his other investments in the village. Harold explained how he learned about all kinds of cultivation, of maize and tobacco, and of tomatoes in the wet garden, from Chimtengo Three. David, by contrast, had told me that he had been *'very mobile'* for most of the 1990s, first going to secondary school away from the village and then searching for work in Lilongwe. Chimtengo Three had consequently been reliant on Harold to help him run things day-to-day in the village. In 1995, Kaso's third child Limbani, moved to Chimtengo to help Chimtengo Three as well.



Harold became a Christian during the 1990s under the influence of David. He could not remember exactly when he had converted to Christianity from *Nyau*, into which he had been initiated in Mtete. He married his wife Ethel in 2000, with a church ceremony at Pamtunda paid for by David, who then had the newly-

weds to live with him and Martha for a year, a kind of probation that has been customary amongst the Chewa for some time (Mair, 1951 p. 111). Now that Chimtengo Three was in his eighties, Harold took more responsibility directing the *ganyu* labour in the chief's fields and conducting other business on his behalf. David was still '*very mobile*', although now it was church work that kept him busy and that took him away from Chimtengo. At the same time, with his greater level of education David was still involved in Chimtengo Three's business in important ways. It was only David that could take responsibility for filling out forms, calculating budgets or reading instructions for his grandfather. When Chimtengo Three invested in the maize mill that stood between David and Harold's houses (Map 2. p. 33), it was David that had found where to buy it in Lilongwe and arranged for its installation; he explained this to me while showing me the old receipts for it. Harold though had operated the maize mill day-to-day, a skill that David never learnt. The respective involvement of both the brothers in Chimtengo Three's life was reflected in the joint inheritance they secured in the discussions following the chief's death in 2007.

When Harold talked to me about his past he did not make sense of it through a relationship to God - through divine guidance and intervention - in the way that David did. Beyond noting his brother's influence, he had no testimony of conversion or story of breaking with an undesirable past. While I was in the village Harold never put anything down to God's influence or suggested thankfulness to Him. He attended Pamtunda on only two or three occasions; Harold did not watch the *gule wamkulu* but was one of the men that told me his absence from church was due to the quantity of work he had to do. One Sunday, when David and I were walking back from Pamtunda, where the path passed Harold's house, David told me to ask Harold why he had not been at church, saying to me '*Harold he just stays away from Pamtunda*'. I did what David asked, calling out to Harold where he was sat on his veranda. Harold shouted back, '*Eh! Dan, this morning I've been to the fields to look at the tobacco, then over to the wet garden. I watered all the tomatoes there with Sunday and Freddy. Hard work!*' David expressed his unhappiness about his brother's lack of attendance at church on several other occasions, wondering whether his brother was a

Christian at all. Harold's approach to his Christianity was just one of several points of tension between the two brothers.

The pair criticised each other over their livelihood choices. Harold thought David spent too much time *'just wandering around'* (*angoyendayenda*) with his church work. Harold explained to me that this is what his elder brother had always been like. David's wet garden was wild and overgrown for a large part of the time I was in the village. Harold bemoaned this and told me his brother lacked the kind of dogged perseverance (*khama*) necessary to be a successful farmer. David meanwhile thought Harold was not generous enough in sharing (*-gawa*) the large maize harvests he gathered as a *'big farmer'* (*chikumbi*)<sup>79</sup>. Each brother felt the other spent too much money on tea and scones<sup>80</sup> at the teashop in Kwamhango village (Map 3. p. 33). Other tensions existed over the brothers' inheritance from Chimtengo Three. Harold agreed with David that the cows and trees were shared, but told me that the maize mill was his alone. Chimtengo Three had left it to him because he had been the one who had operated it, and spent time maintaining it. David, who had produced the purchase receipts for me as evidence, said that it belonged to him as well and complained that he should be seeing more money from it than Harold gave him.

While I was in the village, the brothers also clashed over the use of the iron sheets on Chimtengo Three's old house. The issue arose when David took some to build a cooking shelter for Martha. He didn't ask Harold, who felt he had a claim on the sheets as well. When Harold saw what was going on, he promptly dragged the sheets that remained at Chimtengo Three's house to his own. He eventually built a cook shed in exactly the same style as his brother. Sunday was sat with me as I watched Harold haul the sheets past David's house. Chuckling, Sunday commented that his elder brothers found it *'difficult to arrange things with each other'* (*-longana*) and had been *'in competition'* (*-pikisana*) as long as he

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<sup>79</sup> This nickname was taken from the title of a colonial-era agricultural extension programme, the 'Master Farmer' or *Chikumbi* scheme. See chapter five.

<sup>80</sup> Tea and scones - small bread rolls made of wheat flour - were luxury items in Chimtengo and the surrounds.



could remember. Sunday's joking was cut short when Harold called out at him to come help drag the iron sheets to his house.

### *Sunday*

Aged nineteen, Sunday was much younger than both David and Harold and had been dependent upon his elder brothers for support throughout his time in the village. Sunday had followed David, Harold and Limbani from Mtete to Chimtengo but not until 2006, just before Chimtengo Three's death. Like Limbani, Sunday explained his lack of inheritance as a result of this late arrival in Chimtengo and his '*junior*' (*wamng'ono*) position in the family. With the support of Harold and David, Sunday had got as far as his penultimate year of primary school - standard seven - before dropping out. Like Harold, Sunday explained his decision as a result of his desire to start working and finding money (*-peza ndalama*). David and Harold said that they had not objected, as Sunday '*was not able*' (*sakhoza*) at school, a suggestion Sunday readily agreed with when I asked him about it. Sunday lived with David after he arrived in Chimtengo and worked for both him and Harold after he gave up on school. Very shortly after I arrived in Chimtengo Sunday moved to Harold's. Harold wanted more help with farming and David thought that it was also time his second brother gave more support (*thandizo*) to Sunday, given that he himself had had both Harold and Limbani stay in his household over the years. Later David explained to me Sunday's move was also part of his plan to make his household small enough to move to Chimsika trading centre.

Sunday worked hard for Harold and David while I was in the village. Depending on the time of year he would get up early to water Harold's tobacco seedlings or tomatoes at the wet garden, before clearing the ground or make ridges in a field. The afternoon could see him cycle many miles to collect fuel for the maize mill engine or run an errand for David to Chimsika or to a church member's house. The elder brothers acknowledged Sunday's work ethic - '*he works hard*' (*amagwira nchito kwambiri*) - contrasting him with some other '*lazy*' (*-ulesi*) and

*'flighty' (-sewera)* young people in the village. Harold, David, and the rest of the families in Chimtengo also appreciated Sunday's wit and sense of humor.

Sunday, like many young, unmarried people in the area around the church, was very committed to Pamtunda. Like Harold, Sunday did not really talk to me of seeing God's direction through his life, and told me simply that he had been converted and baptised by David when he came to the village. He did however attend Pamtunda most weeks. Even if he had to do work for Harold, he normally quickly bathed and then made it to the service before it finished. He sang in the youth choir and it was in the choir that he had met his girlfriend (*chibwenzi*), Florence, from Kwamhango village (Map 3. p. 33). Sunday wanted to get married to Florence as soon as Harold and David agreed to give him money to pay for a church ceremony. Although he did not talk about God's direction in his past, Sunday did talk to me about prayer to God, suggesting several times that he or I should *'pray to God' (-pemphera kwa Mulungu)* for help over difficult situations of one kind or another. David thought Sunday was *'a good man' (munthu wamkulu)*. He appreciated his younger brother's attendance at church and his desire to have a Christian marriage. He worried that Harold would not help support Sunday to have a wedding at Pamtunda. Knowing this, and the other aspects of David's history with both his brothers helps make sense of what David did about Sunday's illness.

### ***Case study: responding to Sunday's illness***

#### *Sunday gets sick*

Sunday's illness had come on quite gradually at first. He complained of stomachache before vomiting once a couple of nights after he had first felt unwell. The following morning Harold and David agreed that David should take Sunday to the local health centre in Chimsika. The health centre was not very well regarded by people, and was only used as a first point of call, or if relatives felt there was no other option available for the treatment of their sick. People

complained that there were always crowds and said the *doctolas* - the health attendants<sup>81</sup> - were often not there or had no drugs (*mankhwala*) to give out. David was, however, a friend of one of the health attendants and, explaining that he often got medicines from him, said he could get some for Sunday. When David and Sunday came back from the health centre, Sunday showed me about half a dozen pills wrapped in a small twist of newspaper. David wasn't very happy, saying that his friend had had '*only Panadol*' to give them<sup>82</sup>. Sunday took the *Panadol* over the next couple of days. His condition did not appear to get any worse, but neither did he feel better.

Despite Sunday's fragile condition, a couple of days later David decided to leave Chimtengo for a four-night residential pastors' training course run by US missionaries at the Assemblies of God Bible School in Lilongwe. A missionary had paid for his fees and he was particularly keen to attend as he had heard that they would hand out a lot of books on theology and church practice at the end of the course; '*As a pastor, it is important to have knowledge*' David explained. Sunday was, however, on his mind as he departed the village. As I accompanied David on his way, walking him a short distance out of Chimtengo, he expressed his fears of the costs that treating Sunday might incur, and worried about how he would find the cash given all of the other things that he needed to pay for. '*These days everything needs money - Sunday sick, money, transport to town, money, for the children to go to school, money*'. I assured David that whilst I had already given him some money to get to Lilongwe for the training course, when it came to Sunday's health I would gladly give more if his condition worsened.

Besides the Chimsika health centre, all of the other options for medical care for people in the area around Chimtengo involved financial costs. '*Central*' - Kamuzu Central Hospital in Lilongwe city was the major referral hospital for the whole

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<sup>81</sup> An employee from an International NGO that worked with the Malawian Ministry of Health told me the Chimsika centre was understaffed. There were also rumors in the trading centre that some staff sold off medicines for personal profit.

<sup>82</sup> *Panado* is the local brand of *Paracetamol*. David and people in Chimtengo thought it lacked power (*mphamvu*) compared to the tablets I brought with me from the UK. As a consequence my *Paracetamol* supply was exhausted within a few weeks of arriving in Chimtengo.

Region. People knew *Central* had better equipment and doctors than Chimsika, but they also knew they would likely face lengthy waits to be seen, at a distance from the support of people at home. Food would have to be purchased for cash in town and transport paid for. Normally a relative accompanied the sick in order to look after them. This doubled costs. Wiseman Nkhoma had talked about needing to raise MK 10,000 (30 USD) for his trip to *Central* with his wife, the equivalent of several weeks' wages for *ganyu* in town. Even so if there were a case of serious illness it was to *Central* that the patient normally tried to go. A charitable mobile clinic that set up at Kuulalo, a village half a day's walk from Chimtengo, was a popular option. It however only arrived once or twice a month, so was not much use in emergencies. A new alternative to the mobile clinic and Kamuzu Central Hospital was a small private hospital along the tarmac road at a trading centre called Katete.

Harold and David had heard talk that the Katete hospital was a good facility and it was there that Harold took Sunday when his condition took a sharp decline the night after David's departure for his training in Lilongwe. Sunday had been so violently sick that he had woken up Harold and Ethel, who had then woken up Martha and me. In the middle of the night there was not much to be done other than wipe the vomit off Sunday's face until the bout eventually subsided. Although by morning Sunday had recovered somewhat, the events of the night prompted Harold to depart with Sunday at first light for Katete. Martha and I had agreed with Harold that this was the right thing to do, and I had given Harold enough money to cover what we thought would be the costs of transport to and treatment at Katete. Late in the evening the brothers had still not returned. Martha and I waited up for news. At about 9.30pm, we saw a light moving in the dark towards Harold's house. Martha went over to greet her brothers-in-law and hear what had happened. After a few minutes she came back with Harold. He explained the diagnosis Sunday had been given at the hospital,

*'Sunday has a serious problem. He has ulcers in his stomach and the doctor told us we should come back on Wednesday. He wants to admit Sunday then. He thinks*

*Sunday ate bad meat. But it's a lot of money. It was 3700 kwacha (11 USD) just for today and that is not including transport.'*

Tired, Harold did not stay much longer after he had told us this. When he had left, Martha asked if I would phone David in Lilongwe to tell him the news. I did, passing the phone over to Martha after I had greeted him. When Martha had hung up she said that David had told her that Sunday should travel to Lilongwe the following day, where David would meet him and take him to Pastor Moyo's for prayer for healing. Martha hurried off after Harold to tell him this. When she came back she said, *'Harold doesn't agree, he wants David to come back here'*.

The morning after Sunday and Harold came back from the hospital David called me to ask when Sunday would be arriving in Lilongwe for prayer. I passed the phone to Martha who explained to David that Harold did not want Sunday to go to town, but for David to come back to the village. She put the phone down and said that David had told her to tell Harold to send Sunday. Going over to Harold's, where he and Sunday were sat on the floor threading together tobacco leaves for drying, Martha genuflected and explained to Harold what David had said. *'He is still refusing'* she told me when she returned. She asked if we could ring David again. This time David told me to give the phone to Harold himself, so I went over to Harold's, explained and gave him the phone. I didn't hear what David said on the other end of the line and Harold replied only with *'ooh's* and *'ok's*. When he hung up however Harold told Sunday to get ready to go to Lilongwe. Sunday, who had had a better night's sleep, looked quite excited by the idea of a trip into the city. By mid-morning he was perched on the back of Harold's bicycle and heading with his brother down the track away from Chimtengo towards Chimsika and the tarmac road, where he would catch a lift alone into Lilongwe.

David rang in the afternoon to say Sunday had arrived and would stay overnight at Pastor Moyo's house. The next morning the brothers' only sister, Tionge Amon, arrived in the village to see Sunday having heard he was sick. Not finding him she spent several hours chatting with Martha, and Memory Limbani and Loveness MacDonald. Part of their conversation involved a long discussion

between Martha and Tionge about whether David and Martha could afford to spare some maize for Tionge. Tionge was a middle child, born between Limbani and Sunday (Figure 3. p. 94). She'd lived in Chimtengo for a short while after moving from Mtete and before she entered into a virilocal marriage in a village around ten kilometres from Chimtengo. In the course of their conversation Memory said that Limbani also wanted to see his sick brother and planned to return from where he had been working in Lilongwe at the weekend. As the woman chatted several Pamtunda church members passed by and enquired after Sunday. When Martha explained he'd gone to town for prayer, the church members affirmed the decision, and commented that they would be praying that he got better as well.

Sunday returned that evening, after Tionge had gone home. He said that he had not seen much of David, who had spent most of the day at his training course at the Assemblies of God campus. David had, however, joined Pastor Moyo and some other pastors to pray for him. Sunday said the group had put their hands on him as they had prayed for healing. The prayer had taken place in pastor Moyo's living room. Sunday said he had felt better as soon as the pastors had finished praying - *'I'm healed, I feel very well now'* (*Ndachira, nidkumva bwino kwambiri tsopano*). Martha sighed dubiously at this and I said he did not look well. Harold shook his head and said Sunday should have gone back to hospital. It was now Wednesday, the day that the doctor at the Katete hospital had said that Sunday would be able to be admitted for treatment. I agreed with Harold that it would have been good had Friday gone back to the hospital. Martha and Harold both looked worried. Sunday's stomach was swollen and his face gaunt. Overnight, he started throwing up again.

Sunday continued to insist that he was better the next day, despite continuing to be sick periodically. David got back from Lilongwe in the late afternoon. He said he had had a good time at the training course and received many books, which he had left with Pastor Moyo until he could find a way of safely transporting them to the village. David said the prayer for Sunday with the *'special team'* of pastors had been a *'good time'*. Sunday told his eldest brother that the prayers had

healed him. David accepted what Sunday said, but didn't look convinced. It was later that evening that David disagreed with Harold and I about sending Sunday back to the Katete hospital, in favour of trusting (*-khulupiriria*) in the efficacy of prayer and fasting alone. When I offered to pay for Friday to go to Katete again, David listed off the things I had already helped his household with in the last couple of months: fertiliser, some school fees and his transport to Lilongwe. He concluded, *'You have done too much'*. Harold agreed, but suggested that they could find the money amongst friends in the local area. David though vetoed idea of going to hospital entirely, maintaining *'If we are faithful, he will heal'*.

#### *Worries about witchcraft*

That night, after Harold and Martha had left us, David told me that he now suspected Sunday's problem was being caused by witchcraft. He explained that when he had been in Lilongwe at the training Pastor Moyo had told him he should get Sunday to come to receive prayer from a small group of pastors in the city who had a reputation for success at healing illnesses. After this *'special team'* had finished praying for Sunday, one of the pastors in the team had explained that he had had a *'vision'* (*masomphenya*). Sunday was walking to Chimsika eating a fruit. He finished, discarding what was left on the ground. After he had moved on, an old woman coming along at a distance behind him had picked up the fruit. The scene changed. Now the pastor saw the old woman at her house with the remnants of the fruit. She had a small pointed stick, a *'nyanga'*, the kind used for killing through witchcraft. She was sticking it into the fruit. David said he suspected he knew who the old woman was, Sungi Msisya, an old woman from a village close by to Chimtengo. She had a reputation for witchcraft. The pastors and David agreed that this was the cause of Sunday's illness. Before he went to bed David re-emphasised his decision to continue to pray, and to begin fasting. *'I am not afraid, I know my God will heal him'*. I reemphasised the fact that I thought it would be a good idea for Friday to go to hospital, and that I would pay for Friday to go back to Katete should David allow it, then said my goodnight.

Fasting was, as David had put when it when he had spoken about Sunday, a '*next step*', a way of demonstrating faith in and dependence upon God, beyond prayer alone. David and other church members had fasted at other times while I had been living in Chimtengo. There were prayer meetings where members and deacons of the Pamtunda churches gathered together to pray for the upcoming activities of the churches. These meetings lasted at least twenty-four hours, David and others forgoing food during this time. When the rains held off for more than a week during the rainy season, David fasted as he prayed for them to begin again. Karen Lauterbach writes that when they faced important moments in their lives, pastors in Ghana often fasted for days at a time, adding this to their prayers for direction and change in their lives (Lauterbach, 2008 p. 162-165). Englund and Longwe describe Malawian Pentecostals and Baptists, respectively, fasting with similar intentions (Englund, 2004 p. 307, Longwe, 2011 p. 111, 167).

When he got up the next day, David went without his morning tea and bread. I prayed with him that Friday would be healed, but forwent fasting. David said he did not mind this. He ate neither lunch nor dinner. Sunday spent the day around David and Harold's houses; he was not vomiting but complained of tiredness. In the evening Harold came over again and David told him about his suspicions about Sungi Msisya. He said he had already told Martha. Harold looked worried. Shaking his head he said, '*This is not good. All she has to do is look at us and we could be dead...*' Thinking a while, Harold then told us that he had met a friend a couple of months before who had told him he had heard Sungi Msisya's son speaking malicious '*gossip*' (*mseche*) against Harold and David- '*He was saying he wants to kill us*'. The brothers both shook their heads. Despite the new information Harold repeated his suggestion that Sunday should go back to the hospital at Katete. Although I added my support for Harold's position, David restated that he would continue to fast and pray, and not let Friday go to hospital. He gave an illustration of the effectiveness of persistent prayer from a time that he had been seriously ill in the past. '*In 2008 I was grounded for six months - but because I prayed and Martha prayed and friends prayed I got better...*'



Sunday, however, got worse again overnight. One of his legs swelled up dramatically while his stomach remained painfully distended. In the morning I found him lying impassive outside David's house on a reed mat. He was no longer saying that he was better. A steady stream of people came from the village to see him through the morning. Some members from Pamtunda joined them, including Sunday's girlfriend Florence. Harold phoned the brothers' remaining relatives in Mtete to tell them that Sunday was very, very sick and that they should visit him if they could. He, Ethel, David and Martha all looked upon Sunday worriedly throughout the morning. *'I am very scared about Sunday'*, David said to me. I admitted I was very worried too, and suggested again that we should try a hospital, while continuing to pray. David had not eaten breakfast but, just before midday, suddenly broke his fast, taking me to drink tea and scones at the teashop in Kwamhango village. As we walked there I asked David why he was breaking his fast. He replied he was *'feeling hungry'* and said no more.

After finishing his tea, David told me that he had heard that the next day the mobile clinic run by the medical charity would be setting up at Kuulalo village. He explained it was well regarded by local people as it had a white doctor and good equipment, as well as cheap medicines subsidised by the charity. Large crowds normally gathered to wait to be treated. When we got back to Chintengo David told Martha and Harold he would take Sunday to Kuualo for treatment. They both agreed Sunday should go. No one mentioned David's resolution that he would not take Sunday for medical care, but pray, fast and rely on God to heal him. Very early the next morning, just as it was getting light, Sunday got onto the back of David's bicycle. He could barely hang on. David apologised that I could not come with them, but he wanted to get to Kuulalo quickly before the crowds built up. I waited with Martha at home for them; Harold went to water his tomatoes in his wet garden, saying he had fallen behind with work there. David and Sunday came back early in the afternoon, having been seen quickly after their arrival at Kuulalo. Sunday had received some tests that had confirmed he had ulcers in his stomach. He had been given some discounted medicines, David

paying the MK 500 (1.50 USD) fee, and told to come back to the clinic when it returned to Kuulalo in a couple of weeks time.

Sunday got better quickly and after ten days he stopped taking the medicine. He did not go back to the clinic either. When I suggested that he should carry on taking the medicine, and go back to Kuulalo, he said there was no need - he was feeling well. David and Martha and Harold praised the 'power' (*mphamvu*) of the medicine, as did many of the people from Chimtengo and Pamtunda who came to check on Sunday's progress. Several of the church members also said 'that God should be praised' (*Tiyamike Mulungu*) for the change in Sunday. David agreed, and thanked God in his own prayers each night for several days. Neither David nor Harold, nor anyone else brought up David's changes of heart towards Sunday's treatment. In the weeks after Sunday's visit to Kuulalo I twice asked David why he had decided against medical treatment but then given up on fasting and taken Sunday to the clinic. Both times he avoided answering the question. He did say a little more about Sungi Msisya. David explained he had not gone to speak with her about Sunday. David said that she wanted to hurt him, Sunday and other members of his household because she thought he was a 'now a proud man' (*-nyada*). When I asked what he might do David said he would just 'keep quiet' and continue to pray to God for protection (*chititezo*).

### **Conclusion**

Faithful perseverance was the theme of the biography that I recorded with David at the start of my stay in Chimtengo. Following his conversion David saw evidence of God working through his life, protecting him in difficult situations, bringing healing and leading him to become the pastor of Pamtunda. David construed his difficulties in finding a job in Lilongwe and even his illnesses, as part of God's plan for him. He explained successes and failures, good times and bad as being under God's direction. David told his testimony repeatedly through my time in Chimtengo, to try to 'encourage' or 'strengthen' (*-limbikitsa*) church members who were going through difficulties, worrying and doubting their faith. Like the biographies I mentioned in the introduction to the thesis (Niehaus,

2012, Staples, 2014), David's story had a distinct telos. In his case it was of being a strong (*-limba*), faithful (*-khulupirika*) Christian, maintaining a relationship with God and trusting Him through various events and incidents, even when those events and incidents were upsetting or uncomfortable.

The nature of David's Christian convictions were reflected in his approach to the practice of spiritual gifts in the Pamtunda churches, as well as in his biography. When David prayed for healing in peoples' homes he normally saw no dramatic change. In keeping with his life story, he put emphasis on perseverance (*chipiliro*) and faith (*chikhulupiro*), in the absence of the miraculous. Stronger members of his congregations talked similarly about the importance of faithfulness in adversity as well. Despite some 'pentecostalisation' of the Pamtunda churches, this emphasis was different to that described in many accounts of Pentecostal Christianity elsewhere in Malawi and Africa (cf. van Dijk, 1999 p. 79, Lauterbach, 2008 p. 131, Englund, 2004). David's position as a pastor did not rest heavily upon the successful mediation of spiritual gifts like healing. At Pamtunda, amongst strong Christians at least, there appeared to be an acceptance of what Englund writes his interlocutors in urban Lilongwe described as 'human imperfection' (2007 p. 483-487), the idea that no one could avoid or overcome misfortune entirely on earth, even David as a pastor. Englund writes that the people he talked to believed they grew as Christians through facing these difficulties. In a similar way, part of being a strong Christian in the Pamtunda Baptist churches was about persevering in the face of doubts and difficulties.

The practice and theology of the Pamtunda churches, and David's own testimony, sat awkwardly with what he did about Sunday's illness. He went back and forth between different courses of action. At first he took Sunday to the Chimsika health centre, but subsequently insisted that no further medical care should be pursued, in favour of prayer and fasting. This was despite my insistence that I thought pursuing medical care was a good idea and the fact that David never advised his own congregants to not seek it themselves. Medical treatment was a means through which God could work. After little over a day of fasting, David

decided to take Sunday to get medical treatment at the mobile clinic at Kuulalo village. After he had done this I seemed to be the only person in the household, Chimtengo or Pamtunda church that questioned the apparent contradictions David's actions presented. His testimony and his normal practice as a pastor did not fit with his vacillation and changes of mind over what to do about Sunday. Despite the fact that other people simply seemed to accept what had happened, I did not really think at the time of the difficulties my questions about David's actions posed.

Susan Reynolds Whyte writes that much of the ethnography on misfortune succeeding E. Evans-Pritchard's foundational work on the Zande (Evans-Pritchard, 1937, 1967), 'has been concerned with the structure and function of knowledge and ritual...' (1998 p. 21), the capacity of knowledge and ritual to provide answers and assurance in the face of disquiet and difficulty. Whyte discusses the way in which Evans-Pritchard's arguments about misfortune reflect the kind of information he gathered in the field. She points out that Evans-Pritchard did not focus on events in process, but on narratives of events. Whyte subsequently argues that these reify the significance of knowledge and ritual to people's lives. A similar point has been made about the empirical basis for the argument that Pentecostal theologies provide believers with ways in which they can confront temporal misfortunes with spiritual gifts after being born-again (Maxwell, 2000b p. 473, Gifford, 2004 p. 172)<sup>83</sup>. Whyte writes that tracing the progress of a serious illness or other misfortune close-to raises questions about the extent to which people find assurance in the knowledge or rituals that they describe as important. Whyte suggests that knowledge and rituals 'do not necessarily resolve doubt and... are not always satisfying' (1998 p. 22, also see Lambek, 1993, cf. Geertz, 1973a).

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<sup>83</sup> Gifford (2004) makes the point that many accounts of Pentecostal Christians' lives have been written from records of preaching and sermons, rather than from information showing how congregants act out their faith in their day-to-day lives. Maxwell (2000b) meanwhile points out that some of the literature on Pentecostal Christianity does not give enough weight to how Christian messages and theology have been appropriated and transformed in the lives of church members.

Sunday's illness cast the importance of the Christian ideas and beliefs that structured David's biography in a relative light, confounding the coherence of the narrative he told of his life as a strong Christian (cf. Niehaus, 2012, Staples, 2014). Such dissonance can go unobserved and unexplained (Bleek, 1987b) unless, as Whyte suggests, the ethnographer follows the course of an event in detail, looking at the 'consequences' as well as the 'convictions' that inform people's responses to it (1998 p. 230). Whyte writes that while convictions - beliefs might be a better word in this case - are conveyed in the narrative accounts through which people make sense of life, consequences are the specifically situated outcomes of actions<sup>84</sup>. What David did about Sunday's illness was influenced by his relationships with Sunday and with Harold, as well as his convictions about the way in which God was acting in the situation. David acted pragmatically, he did not want Sunday to die, and did not want to lose face with Harold either. Considering specific consequences like these makes it possible to better understand why David did what he did.

The questions I asked David as Sunday recuperated were difficult for him to answer because they suggested a dissonance between how he made sense of his life story, and how he decided what to do about Sunday's illness in particular. Even my assurances that, as a fellow Christian, I was not disappointed by what he had done did not seem to make David any more comfortable. My questions required him to confront the relative strength of his Christian convictions or beliefs, and face up to the doubts and uncertainties that he experienced over them. Of course, my own questions had been prompted by the fact that David's vacillations over Sunday had surprised me somewhat, causing me to question my own analysis of the place of David's Christianity in his life. In this sense, Sunday's illness challenged the some of the conclusions I had drawn as an ethnographer,

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<sup>84</sup> Consequences are not just biomedical, but social too. As Evans-Pritchard (1937, 1967) had done in his work on witchcraft amongst the Zande, Max Marwick (1965) suggested that Chewa always set their misfortunes in the context of specific social relationships. Whyte notes examples from Bunyole, Uganda, of people choosing a certain treatment rather than another one, in order to make a point to a relative (1998 p. 230).

as well as challenging David's beliefs. What had happened caused both of us to doubt, all be it for different reasons.

## **Chapter Four. Marriage and female friendships: buying a blouse and skirt for Martha.**

### ***Introduction***

#### *Worries after a women's meeting*

Meetings for women in the Pamtunda churches took place on several occasions while I was living in Chimtengo. Women gathered for one, sometimes two days to sing, pray and listen to Bible teaching. At least one deacon normally came to do the Bible teaching, but only at the invitation of Martha, who led the meetings. In April, the month after Sunday had been sick, I was invited to attend a women's meeting at Pamtunda as a special guest of Martha. I went for the second day of the two-day event, accompanied by Wiseman Nkhoma. I gave a brief '*encouragement*' (-*limbikitsa*) to the women, and joined in with their singing and praying. Wiseman preached. When we got back home after the meeting David asked us how it had gone. Martha commented it had been too cold sleeping in the church building overnight, but said that it had been a good time overall and that Wiseman Nkhoma had preached well. She also described the dress of some of the women who attended. On the first day of the meeting none of the women had worn the uniform of the Union of Baptist Women in Malawi (*Umodzi wa Amayi Abaptist ku Malawi*) and one lady, Mpatso Mwala, had arrived in a '*very fine skirt and blouse*'. '*She brought it in town*' Martha explained.

The following morning Martha told David and I that she had heard gossip (*mseche*) about herself during the women's meeting. She had not mentioned this the previous evening. Martha said Mpatso Mwala had led the gossip, drawing in some of the other ladies at the meeting. Mpatso lived at a trading centre on the tarmac road to Lilongwe and attended one of David's churches there. She had completed her secondary education and her husband, who did not go to church, ran a small shop selling miscellaneous household goods like batteries, brushes, torches, buckets and knives. Mpatso's gossip centred on the fact that Martha

could not do any teaching from the Bible, as she could not read. Martha said Mpatso had also said she had not dressed smartly on the first day of the meeting. 'I am worried' Martha said. David said it was rudeness caused by jealousy (*nsanje*). 'We'll send you to school. You'll read, you'll write. They are jealous. We don't want this!' Martha agreed with her husband, addressing herself to me. 'You hear Dan? I will learn, I will go to school.' The following week, when everyone else was away from the house, I heard Martha in another room, stumbling over the words in her Chichewa Bible, practising reading aloud.

*Mutuality in marriage. Knowing Martha and knowing David.*

This chapter concerns Martha's efforts to get David to buy her a new skirt and blouse following the women's meeting. I describe some of Martha's past, as well as briefly reviewing some ideas to do with gender and kin relations in the social landscape of the Central Region, in order to try to make some sense of the discussions that went on between Martha and David. There was an important discourse or ideology of male provision and female dependence in Chimtengo and the surrounds. While Martha talked about the responsibility of her husband to provide for her, she also maintained friendships with other women in the village and the church that were important sources of support and sociality for her. In the chapter I look at Martha and David's marriage in the context of her relationships with other women in the family and in Chimtengo, and in the context of her relationships with women in the Pamtunda churches. Southern Baptists have emphasised the role of the pastor's wife in leading the women in Baptist churches (Longwe, 2011 p. 239-246) and Martha held a leadership position, as a kind of influential 'First Lady' (Soothill, 2007 p. 155) amongst the women in the Pamtunda churches. What she did was a reflection on David as a pastor, and it is the mutuality of Martha and David's interests in this respect through which their discussions about the blouse and skirt can best be understood.

What I am able to write in this chapter is, as in the other case-based chapters in the thesis, tied to the relationships that developed during my time in Chimtengo.



As was the case with David, it was only by getting to know Martha that the significance to her of different ideas and institutions, like male provision, marriage, the Church became more apparent. When I first arrived in the village I saw relatively little of Martha. She spent most of her time around the back of the house whenever David and I were sitting inside or in front of it. The back of the house was where the *'kitchen'* was, the cooking fire that was covered halfway through my stay by Chimtengo Three's old iron roofing sheets. When Martha brought food into the house for David and I she always genuflected as she set it down, before quickly retreating to eat outside with her daughters. Things changed as time passed, my assurances that I was interested in talking to her, and that I was not disappointed by my living arrangements, putting Martha at greater ease. Our conversation developed as my Chichewa improved, and a couple of months into my stay I was joining Martha sitting on the floor around the back of the house by the kitchen. There I could hear and share in some of her talk with women from Chimtengo or the Pamtunda churches, and be party to the discussions she had with David. Martha also joined David and I to eat and to talk in the evenings.

Whilst Martha and I came to know each other better as persons through my time in Chimtengo, as persons we remained situated in relationships. These were constraining as well as enabling. My relationship with David was particularly significant in this respect, the chapter indicating the extent to which I came to know Martha through him. Knowing about Harold and Sunday helped make sense of David's doubts over his Christian convictions when Sunday got ill. Getting to know his brothers helped to make sense of David as well. Here I show how I came to understand Martha through some of the other people she related with (Werbner, 1991, Hastrup, 2005 p. 183, cf. Chernoff, 2003, Niehaus, 2012, Staples, 2014), through the ebb and flow of her conversations with David, and with female relatives and church members. Taking into account all these relationships cast a relative light on the significance of ideas of male provision and female dependence to Martha, and suggested her importance as a patron or 'First lady' to other women.

Getting to know Martha better pushed my analysis up against some of the limits that I introduced in chapter one, to do with the relational nature of the person (Strathern, 1988, Taylor, 1990, Taylor, 1992, Englund, 1999). There were aspects of Martha's person that remained unclear to me situated as I was in the relationships I developed with David, and other people in Chimtengo and Pamtunda. These kinds of indeterminacies were familiar to Martha and David too, their discussions and debates over the blouse and skirt suggesting the doubts they could each experience doubts with regards to the interests of the other. Despite their many years of marriage Martha could not know exactly how David's relationships influenced him, nor could David know exactly how Martha's relationships influenced her. They maintained their marriage in the face of these uncertainties.

### ***Histories of gendered relations***

#### *Gender Relations amongst the Chewa*

The history of gender and kin relations amongst the Chewa given in chapter two provides an important backdrop to this chapter. That history suggests that it is gender, more than kinship, in terms of a jural structure at least, that has informed how Chewa have understood their identity and relatedness over time. The relative significance of gender is reflected in the ongoing importance of a discourse of male provision and female dependence in the Central Region and Malawi more widely over the last century. What it has meant to be a man or a woman has always been closely tied up with marriage, 'amuna' meaning both 'man' and 'husband' and 'amkazi' meaning both 'woman' and 'wife'. But, while expectations about what it has meant to be a husband or wife appear to have changed, discourses about gender have remained more consistent over time.

Through the colonial period the ways in which Chewa kin related to each other varied (Marwick, 1965, Mair, 1951). Quite how much variation existed before the arrival of the British is open to question (Mair, 1951 p. 118), but a particular point of contention during the colonial era seems to have turned around the

responsibilities and relations of men and women as brothers and sisters or husbands and wives. Max Marwick writes of men feeling 'torn' between providing for their nuclear families, and their sister's children (1965 p. 181-182). While scholars like Marwick tended to construe variation as evidence of the beginning of an inevitable shift toward patriarchy from matriarchy under a capitalising economy, recent evidence from across Malawi suggests that in fact kinship practises have remained varied (Englund, 2002a p. 55-56, Peters, 1997b, Peters, 2010).

The ideology of male provider and female caregiver has however persisted in Malawi through the twentieth century (Verheijen Zokokov, 2013). Whether as husbands, brothers, fathers or uncles this idea has located men as the providers for and authorities over women, whether as mothers, wives, sisters, daughters or nieces. At the same time, there is also substantial evidence to demonstrate the ways in which women and men have circumvented these ascribed gender roles. The evidence stretches back to before the middle of the twentieth-century at least (Verheijen Zokokov, 2013, Bryceson, 2006, Peters, 2010, Peters, 1997b). Verheijen Zokokov argues for Southern Malawi that the ideal of male provider and female caregiver, as husband and wife, has persisted in the presence of diverse practices because men and, perhaps more surprisingly, women, find it in their interests to maintain the ideal. Husbandly responsibility is 'a burden that women continue to lay on men's shoulders because they think that this is to their advantage' (2013 p. 207), even as they also provide for themselves through other relationships<sup>85</sup>. Verheijen Zokokov notes various instances where women exchange help and support amongst themselves, as friends and as mothers and daughters (2013 p. 203). The fact that women give support to other women and, in some cases, have been found to provide support to men, suggests women are

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<sup>85</sup> Han Seur (1992) argued very similarly in his study of gender and agricultural change amongst the Lala in Zambia. Traditionally matrilineal, Seur draws out what changes introduced during and after the colonial era have meant for Lala women. As old 'norms' were shaken married women were able to pursue various 'strategies to create space for themselves and their projects' (1992 p. 256). Lala women were not therefore 'uncritical defenders of matriliney' (1992 p.7). Diana Jeater (1993) and Elizabeth Schmidt (1992) have made similar points about the complexities of the connection between socio-economic change and gender relationships in their histories of Zimbabwe.

not simply 'dependent' on male provision, even if they might imply that they are. During the time I was in Chimtengo, relationships of interdependence with other women appeared to be an important part of Martha's life, in the presence of a prevailing discourse in the village of male provision and female dependence.

### *Martha's history*<sup>86</sup>

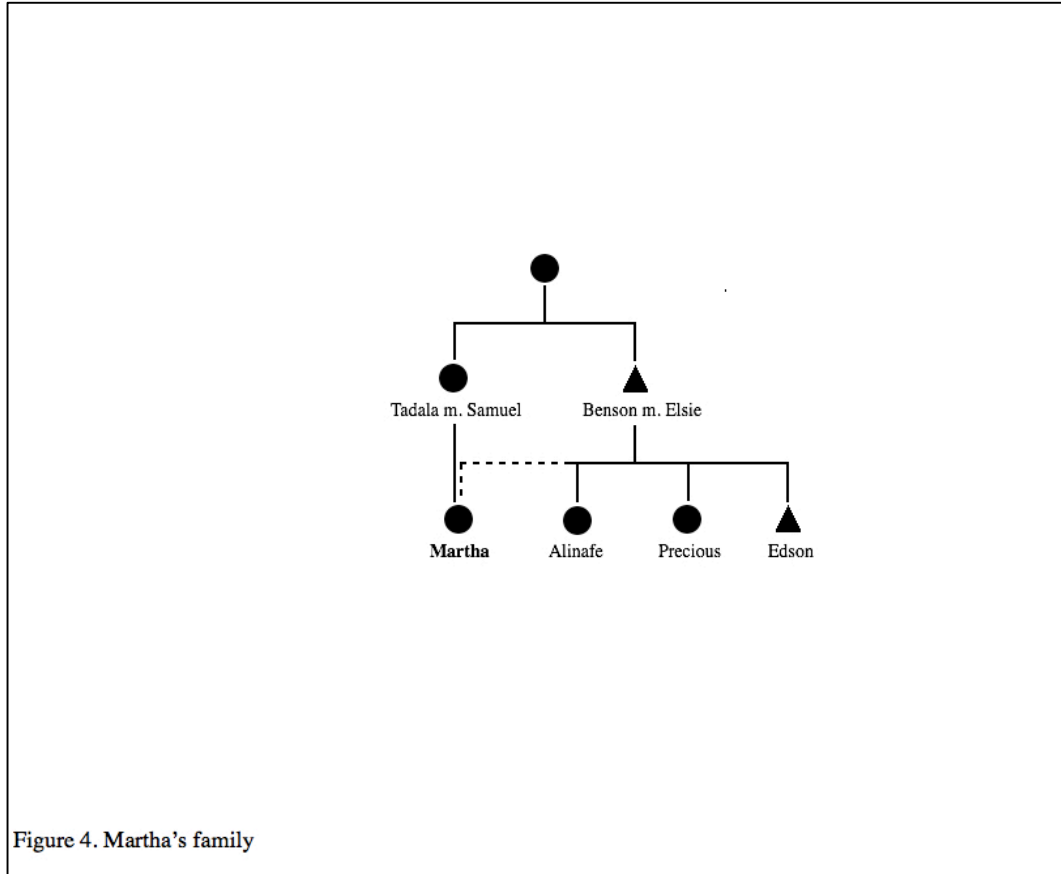
Martha's connection to her grandmother, Elsie Benson, was particularly significant to her. Martha had been an orphan (*amasiye*)<sup>87</sup> from infancy. She had first told me that she was born in Kambuzi, a village about fifteen minutes walk from Chimtengo (Map 3. p. 33), in 1973. Later she said she had actually been born in a village near Mtete, the village where David had been born, but had moved with her mother Tadala as a baby after her father Samuel had died. Tadala had been married virilocally and so returned 'home' to her mother's village, Kambuzi, after Samuel's death. Shortly after she returned to Kambuzi, Tadala also died, whereupon her mother's senior brother (*atsibweni*), Benson Phiri, took Martha in. Martha was brought up with Benson's other children, Precious, Edson and Alinafe (Figure 4.). Precious, Edson and Alinafe had all gone to school, but Martha said she had not. She did not explain why. Having not really known them, Martha did not talk about her parents, nor did she say much about Benson, who had died some years before my arrival in Chimtengo Kubwalo. Martha mainly talked about Elsie, who was still alive and living nearby. She referred to Elsie as her 'grandmother' (*agogo*), and described her as the one who had cared for (*-samala*) her when she had been growing up in Kambuzi. This

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<sup>86</sup> I did not conduct life history interviews with Martha as I did with David. My Chichewa was not good enough to interview Martha early in my stay and later on interviewing seemed to jar with the kind of relationship I had developed with her and rest of the family. In contrast to her husband, when I did try to get her to tell me the story of her life Martha spoke of little more than basic facts. Keesing (1985), in his article on the way Kwaio women produced autobiographies cautions against assuming this kind of 'mutedness' implies that women have no stories to tell, or that they are 'subordinate'. While Martha did not say much in response to my direct questions, the other forms of evidence I gathered show that she was far from being 'subordinate' or 'mute'.

<sup>87</sup> The term orphan (*amasiye*) was applied to all children who had no parents to care for them. It did not mean that none of their parents were alive. David, for example, described James Khumbo as an orphan despite the fact that both his parents were still alive. James was living with David only because neither of his parents took him into their new nuclear families following their divorce.

connection had remained important through to the time that I came to Chimtengo.



Martha met David when he first came to Pamtunda church after his conversion at the funeral of his friend Isaac in 1993. Although she had not gone to school, Martha had been attending Pamtunda church for some years by the time David became a Christian. Kambuzi was Pastor Moyo's home village and although not part of his extended family Martha was one of the many people from the village that started going to Pamtunda in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the church had experienced its most rapid growth. Neither Elsie, nor any of the rest of Benson Phiri's family had gone to Pamtunda, but Martha said they had not stopped her from going either.

Martha and David married in 1994 after a year of courting (*chibwenzi*). When I talked with her about the period, Martha remembered it as a 'good time', but referred to the prosperity of the village under Chief Chimtengo Three, rather

than her marriage to David, by way of an explanation. The marriage process itself had left something to be desired. Memory, Limbani Kaso's wife, and Loveness, MacDonald's Mwale's spouse (Figure 1. p. 40) had told me, with some glee, that David and Martha had had to elope rather than get married in church. Martha tutted when I mentioned what the women had told me. Later David explained to me that Chimtengo Three had not wanted to support the expense of a church marriage<sup>88</sup>, nor pay bride price (*chiongo*) so he had had to 'howl like a dog' - '*uwa galu*' - and elope (*-chita chikumu*) to force his grandfather's hand. '*My grandfather would not support a wedding so I had to elope. What could I do?*' David asked me sheepishly. When I asked whether she had wanted to come and live in Chimtengo, rather than have David come to Kambuzi, Martha explained that '*virilocal marriage (chitengwa) is just what we do now*'. She said that she '*did not have any problems*' (*kunalibe mavuto*) with moving to Chimtengo and living with David there. Both Martha and David agreed that Elsie and Benson Phiri and the rest of Martha's kin in Kambuzi had approved the union with Chimtengo Three and David's other elders with little problem, once Martha had moved with David to Chimtengo.

David and Martha lived as part of Chimtengo Three's household for a year following their marriage, a time during which they '*learned*' their different responsibilities as husband and wife<sup>89</sup>. David tried to find a job in Lilongwe, and worked for Chimtengo Three in the village. Martha remembered that at that time her husband had '*moved around a lot*' (*-yendayenda*), while she had started to '*bear children*', and work in the home. The couple's first child, Mary, was born at the end of 1994, followed by Tamandani in 1996, and Fatsani in 2000. In 2000 Chimtengo Three also asked if David would take care of his orphaned infant step-grandson, Ganizani. Martha said she and David had agreed that they would treat the boy as their own, '*our child*' (*mwana wathu*). By that point David and Martha had been living in their own house, built near to Chimtengo Three's (Map 2. p.

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<sup>88</sup> Church marriages involved paying a fee for a marriage certificate, and giving a leg of goat meat and cash to the pastor officiating the service.

<sup>89</sup> This was the same kind of probationary period Harold and Ethel went through in David and Martha's household after their marriage in 2000. Mair describes the practice taking place in her account of Chewa marriage and kinship in the 1940s and 1950s (1951 p. 111).

33), for several years. David had also given up on trying to find a job in Lilongwe. Martha explained that the late 1990s and early 2000s had been a difficult time as Chimtengo Three's businesses had declined, and her husband had struggled to find money: '*David had no job, there was no money then, lots of children but no money.*' It was at that point that David began to train to be the pastor of Pamtunda.

Few strong links between Martha and her kin in Kambuzi appeared to have persisted after Martha's marriage to David, through to the time that I arrived in Chimtengo. Martha did not visit Kambuzi very much despite it being only a short walk from Chimtengo (Map 3. p. 33). A strong affective connection still however existed between Martha and her grandmother Elsie. Martha's sister Alinafe, who had been living alone with Elsie since Benson had died, passed away soon after my arrival in Chimtengo. Elsie subsequently moved from Kambuzi to live with Edson, who had married uxorilocally in Kwamhango village (Map 3. p. 33). Elsie told me that Kambuzi was not her '*home*' village, the village of her own mother, and rather than move back there where she now knew few people, she had preferred to move in with her son's family, and be close to Martha and David, who she described as '*my children*' (*ana anga*). Elsie and Martha exchanged visits to each other's homes at least once or twice a week, Martha regularly going to see how her grandmother was. From time to time Martha and David also sent their youngest daughters, Rachael and Hannah, born in 2005 and 2007 respectively, to stay with Elise overnight in the hut she occupied at Edson's homestead.

Elsie often brought stories to our house of how Edson was struggling to care for her and the rest of his family. Martha also regularly came back from her visits to Edson's talking about how her brother was failing to look after Elsie, telling David '*Grandmother has no food*', or something similar. Edson's house had an iron roof, but was small. He farmed a wet garden and sold tomatoes from it, but did not cultivate tobacco or have any livestock. It was during their discussions about supporting Elsie that Martha and David indicated the history that existed between the women, the way that Elsie had cared for Martha after she had been

orphaned as a child. Listening to the conversations that Martha and David had about Elsie, and what they said about her history with Martha, suggested that the couple's relationship had to be made sense of not only through ideas about male provision and female dependence, but also in the light of Martha's relationships with other women. Whilst her relationship with Elsie had the longest history, there were many other connections that Martha maintained, and which did not extend along the lines of formal kin relations. These existed between her and women in Chimtengo and in the Pamtunda churches. They had their influences on her marriage to David, while also being influenced by the marriage relationship.

### ***Martha's marriage and friendships***

*'It's a man's job to go away and find money'*

On one of the many days I spent at home with Martha, too tired to go with David to visit a church, or run errands in Chimsika with one of the boys, I asked her why it was that the majority of women living in Chimtengo rarely left the village and the immediate surrounds. Martha replied, *'it's a man's job to go away and find money, women stay at home and look after the children. We have to do the work at home. Cook, sweep.'* The statement reflected the discourse of male provision and female domesticity that prevailed in Chimtengo and the surrounds, and also what Martha and David spent much of their time doing day to day. Martha did all of the cooking, cleaning, childcare and other domestic tasks around the house. Her responsibilities extended to preparing the household's maize as well, removing the kernels from the cobs and taking it to the mill to be ground to make flour. She did a lot of cultivation in the fields during the rainy season, much more than her husband, although less than most of the other wives in Chimtengo<sup>90</sup>. David was able to pay for more *ganyu* than other people, and so

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<sup>90</sup> As I noted in chapter two, the division of activity along these gendered lines has been observed elsewhere in the Central Region and in rural Malawi more widely. See, Peters 2010 p. 188, Davison 1993, Englund 1999 and Bryceson 2006 180-182 and 194.



both he and Martha worked in the fields less than other couples in the village. When she did go to the fields Martha often worked side by side with *ganyu* labourers, overseeing and sometimes paying for their work, albeit with money David gave her. Unlike most of the other women in the village, during the time I was there, Martha earned no money herself through *ganyu* or business.

Martha could be critical of her husband's provision of cash for her and their household. David's work as a pastor was the main way in which he brought money into the household. He spent less time in the maize fields than his wife because of his work, which often took him to churches and other villages far from Chimtengo, or to Lilongwe for meetings with John Moyo and other pastors, and missionaries. Not long after the women's meeting at Pamtunda where Mpatso Mwala had gossiped about Martha, David went to a meeting in Lilongwe with Moyo about a visit that was to be made to Malawi by some American missionaries later in the year. When he came home he explained to Martha that he would go back to Lilongwe for a Pastors' Fraternity meeting the following day. Pastors' Fraternity meetings gathered many pastors from across all the Protestant denominations in the Central Region. They were a good opportunity to '*meet people*', David explained. Martha was not impressed, '*Tomorrow? To town today, to town tomorrow? You are just burning money going around and around, (-yendayenda) David. There is no money here at home.*' David listened to his wife, sighed, and agreed he should not travel to town again as it did cost a lot of money. Although his work as a pastor was distinct from *ganyu*, which was the kind of work most other men Chimtengo did David nonetheless fell subject to the same criticism they experienced over their ability to provide for their wives.

Martha not only affirmed the ideal of masculine provision in the context of the household, but also joined other women in the village in complaining about the failings of their husbands with regard to their provision for their families. Loveness MacDonald frequently sat with Martha as they did their domestic work. Her husband, MacDonald, made most of his money selling charcoal in Lilongwe. He went once a week, which was relatively often. Loveness regularly complained to Martha that MacDonald didn't care (*-samala*) for her. One day Loveness began

to criticise her husband as she and Martha were preparing *mpiru*<sup>91</sup>. 'MacDonald is saying he does not have any money again' Loveness said. Martha suggested MacDonald was 'lying' (*-nama*), given that he had only just been to town to sell charcoal the previous day. Loveness continued, using some of the same language Martha had used to describe David when he had gone to Lilongwe, 'he just travels around and around all the time (*angoyendayenda*)... he doesn't even give me soap'<sup>92</sup>. When Loveness was passing later in the day Martha called out to ask if MacDonald had given her any money. Loveness clapped her hands and opened them, palms up, to indicate she had received nothing from her husband. Martha turned to me and said, 'Ah, Loveness, she is a good woman, but MacDonald, he has not even got her a pair of shoes'<sup>93</sup>.

Around the same time, Martha made a criticism of David's provision to her. Chiso John, James Khumbo's sister, who lived near Kasungu (Map 1. p. ii), had come to Chimtengo Kubwalo for a couple of days to see her brother, wife and their new baby. Chiso John greeted Martha and Loveness while they were sat pushing maize kernels off their cobs by David and Martha's granary. David was preparing to go to Lilongwe for another meeting and he only had a brief chat with Chiso before pedalling off on his bicycle towards Chimsika and the tarmac road to Lilongwe. The harvest had just finished in Chimtengo and as David disappeared into the distance Chiso commented to Martha on the size of the household's granary, and the number of sacks of groundnuts they had harvested; David must be a 'big famer' (*chikumbi*). The suggestion prompted Martha to snort and complain about her husband. She gestured towards Harold's much larger granary saying that it was rather her brother-in-law that was the 'big farmer'. 'David just wanders around?' (*Angoyendayenda?*) suggested Chiso John, 'Yes', Martha agreed, 'he just wanders around, "to town!", "to town!", that's all he says.

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<sup>91</sup> *Mpiru* is a mustard leaf that was grown widely in local wet gardens to eat as a relish.

<sup>92</sup> It has been argued that soap has special significance in relationships between men and women in Malawi, and elsewhere in Southern Africa, its provision by men a special sign of care and affection for women (Verheijen 2013 p. 169, Swidler and Watkins 2007 p. 147-151, Burke 1996).

<sup>93</sup> On another occasion Martha had told me how having shoes was an important mark of prosperity amongst women. She said that this had only been a relatively recent development, since 'Achina', the Chinese, had flooded local markets with cheap plastic pumps. Not much before 2000, Martha said, going barefoot (*latalata*) was perfectly respectable for a women. This was not the case any more.

*His travelling there burns money, while we here at home have nothing.* Loveness and Chiso John nodded, before holding forth on similar problems that they had with their husbands.

### *Maintaining friendships*

The links Martha maintained with women like Loveness were important to her as sources of sociality and support and her relationship with David, including her criticism of him as a provider, has to be understood in the context of these relationships. Martha was conscious of how her husband's decisions about household resources would be seen by other people in the village. Shortly after he had decided not to go to the Pastors' Fraternity meeting in town, David told me he would sell a goat to get some money for transport and to pay for other expenses around the home. Martha looked surprised when a man from Chimsika came to look at the goat David was thinking of selling. I asked David if he had told Martha about his plan. He said I should ask her myself. When I did, Martha explained, *'it is the first I have heard about it'*, before questioning David loudly from the house, *'What will people think David? To sell a goat? Ah! They will think we are proud (-nyada)'* Goats had special significance as animals that were slaughtered to share at communal events, and selling them for cash could be interpreted as a sign of selfishness<sup>94</sup>. David was silent as Martha questioned him about what people in the village would think, in the end brushing her off saying *'Do not complain'*. Martha went back to sweeping up in the house.

David went ahead with the sale of the goat despite Martha's misgivings. The following day while David was in town Martha complained to me about the fact he had sold it. *'David just thinks of missionaries and going to town. He does not think of the people close around, here at our place'*. Martha's comments around the sale of the goat referred to his provision to her, but not in a direct or

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<sup>94</sup> Boucher describes the importance of sharing beer as a way in which the Chewa have historically affirmed relations of interdependence and mutual support (2012 p. 9). People in Chimtengo and the surrounds asserted though that no communal event was complete without alcoholic and non-alcoholic beer (*mowa* and *thobwa* respectively), and without goat meat to share.

straightforward way. Martha was involved in important relationships of mutual support with women like Loveness Limbani and Memory MacDonald, and David's actions had implications for those relationships. Martha was conscious of the need to try to balance the different relationships that were important to her, that which she had with her husband, but also those she had with women in the village. David's sale of the goat threatened the latter because of what they suggested about the resources David and Martha's household had, and the way that they were using them.

While Martha had received care from her grandmother Elsie earlier in her life, it was she herself that appeared to be the focus of requests for support (*thandizo*) and care (*chisamalo*) while I was living in the village. Despite the discourse of male provision that they advanced, most women did some *ganyu* in the village and the local area, in order to earn some money directly<sup>95</sup>. Requests to do *ganyu*, and offers of help (*thandizo*) with labour, for which women could expect maize in return, were frequently exchanged amongst women themselves, and were not just made of men. Being part of one of the two wealthiest households in the village, Martha often received offers of help, and requests for *ganyu*. As well as Loveness MacDonald, Memory Limbani and Esnarth Mitambo both regularly petitioned Martha. As family (Figure 1. p. 40), Memory Limbani and Loveness MacDonald's requests were always made and understood as help. What Esnarth Mitambo offered Martha shifted between help and *ganyu*.

Whilst not regarding one another as family, there was a strong affective connection between Martha and Esnarth that, like Martha's relationship with Elsie, had a history. Martha explained to me how she had known Esnarth ever since she had moved to Chimtengo in 1994, much longer than she had known Loveness or Memory, who had only been living in the village for about five years.

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<sup>95</sup> Beer brewing and petty trading were widely undertaken by women in other villages and in Chimsika, but women in Chimtengo Kubwalo did not undertake these activities while I was there. The other pressures on their time, and the relatively low rate of pay for local *ganyu* meant they did not earn as much money as their husbands. Bryceson notes for the Central Region as a whole that lower wages were paid to women *ganyu* labourers than to their male counterparts when she did her research (2006 p. 194).

Martha was fond of Esnarth, who always had good stories and jokes; *'She always makes me laugh'* Martha told me once after Esnarth had made a joke at my expense, claiming I had promised her a bucket of maize. As I had stuttered a reply to Esnarth, Martha had come to my defence, and both women had started laughing. Esnarth did no farming of her own, but relied entirely on *ganyu* work to support herself and her household, which she headed alone. She had become part of Chimtengo Kutsidya and not Chimtengo Kubwalo when the village had divided but this had not stopped her maintaining a relationship with David's family. Esnarth told me that she *'depended on David, and depended on his grandfather before him'*. In practice though it was to Martha that Esnarth most often made her requests, playing on the affection that existed between the two of them.

Although Martha was the subject of requests for help and *ganyu* work more than she ever made them herself, the value Martha placed on the relationships she had with Esnarth and the other women made it difficult for her to refuse them. Martha regularly accepted offers of help, getting David to agree to give them some maize in return, or cash on the occasions where Esnarth's work was considered *ganyu*. Martha could though also appear reluctant to use the household's maize, and the cash that her husband earned, to support the women. She was more hesitant about offers of help than *ganyu* work. What could be claimed in return for help was less clear than for *ganyu* and, as has been observed of women elsewhere in Malawi (Davison 1993, Peters 1997b), Martha was concerned about what accepting help would ultimately oblige her to give to her helpers in return. Normally Memory, Loveness and Esnarth asked for maize, but quite what quantity of maize their help merited was nearly always a source of debate between them and Martha<sup>96</sup>.

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<sup>96</sup> Communal agricultural labour may always have been rare amongst the Chewa, and was certainly uncommon when Englund was working in the Central Region in the 1990s (Englund 1999 p. 149-150). Davison (1993) argues that women in Southern Malawi have continued to prefer to farm using the labour of their own household, in order to avoid claims upon their produce from members of their wider kin group (also see Peters 1997b p. 204).

Not reciprocating women's help as they saw fit, or not giving them work at all, left Martha open to accusations of showing a lack of care; she could be criticised as exhibiting '*stinginess*' (-*mana*) or '*pride*' (-*nyada*). When Martha rebuffed their requests, Memory, Loveness and Esnarth argued Martha could really afford to help them, given the wealth of her household. Esnarth, who could be particularly vocal in her in her debates with Martha, regularly accused her of '*stinginess*' when Martha refused her work. Memory Limbani defined Martha as '*bwana*' to me because of the fact that Martha would decline her offers of help, exhibiting her '*pride*' in not using her wealth to care for others less well off than herself. Memory went on to say that Martha was also a *bwana* because she did no *ganyu* herself and did not '*work in the field very much*'. Memory said Martha was not as bad as Harold's wife Ethel, who did no farming at all. She told me all this on one of the occasions I visited her and Limbani at their home. Back at David and Martha's I asked Martha why she did any subsistence agricultural labour at all when Harold's wife Ethel did none. Martha cited the perceptions of the village, '*I do not want to be seen to be proud (-nyada)*'. She explained that she did not want to have happen to her what had happened to Ethel. Ethel was known in the village for being very stingy, and few women visited her. '*I don't want that*', Martha told me, '*just sitting at home, just silent (-fatsa)*'.

Martha's marriage with David, and her emphasis on his provision, needs to be seen in the context of the relationships she maintained with women like Elsie Benson, Loveness, Memory and Esnarth. Martha was not simply David's dependent, but was involved in exchanging different kinds of care and support with other women, and her complaints over what she received from David were linked to those relationships. The content of Martha and David's discussions in the household helps to illustrate this point further. Martha always pressed David to agree to give her grandmother maize, or cash, whenever Elsie was in need of them, reminding her husband of the how her grandmother had cared for her when she had been younger, providing her with food and treating her as her own child along with Precious, Edson and Alinafe. Whilst he was sometimes reluctant, and required persuasion, I never saw David refuse to help Elsie, even during the hungry season when the household's resources were at their most stretched. On

one occasion during the hungry season I asked David why he had agreed to give Elsie some maize, even as he refused church members and other people from the village. As Martha put a bundle of maize on her head and walked towards Kwamhango village to give it to Elsie, David explained his decision. *'Elsie is a good woman... she cared for Martha when she was young'*.

While Martha always tried to get David to agree to help Elsie, her efforts to get him to support other women either directly, or through her, were less consistent, suggesting the relative importance of the different relationships she maintained. Although they gave her little in the way of material support relative to that which she gave them, Martha valued the company of Loveness MacDonald, Memory Limbani and Esnarth Mitambo, the talk and joking she enjoyed with them. She did not want to end up *'just silent'* like Ethel Harold. At the same time her marriage to David and the welfare of their household was important to her too. As well as pressing David to provide for the women she knew, Martha often told her husband that she was refusing their offers of help, and that he should do likewise. She would explain that Esnarth Mitambo, or one of the other women was *'just begging'* (*angopempha*) and that the help they would provide her with would not match up to what they requested in return. In the hungry season Martha reminded her husband of the need to retain enough food in the household to feed themselves, asking him repeatedly, *'what will we eat here?'*, when he was tempted to support one of the village women, or a church member.

In the light of these conversations, Martha's public criticism of David's ability to provide for her can be understood as a way in which she could defer the requests that she received for help. Criticising David amongst women in the village enabled Martha to continue to maintain her valued relationships with them, whilst also retaining enough food and other resources to be comfortable with her husband and her own children at home. Like her comments and questions about the sale of the goat, Martha's criticisms of David amongst women in the village showed Martha was trying to manage important relationships in the village alongside her relationship with her husband.

Whilst he did not go along with her wishes regarding the goat, David valued his wife and the way in which she helped him make sense of the decisions that he faced. As the other chapters in the thesis show, David discussed with Martha most of the major decisions he made. When people asked him for support with food or money, or when he wanted to purchase something expensive, David would talk about it with Martha. He discussed the move to Chimsika with her, what to do about Sunday's illness, and my own request to stay in their household. While many of Martha and David's conversations took place around me, like their exchange over the sale of the goat, many others took place between them in the privacy of their room at night. I knew these conversations to be important, because on several occasions David went to bed resolved on one course of action and got up the following morning with a different one in mind. He would explain his change of plan saying something like, '*I talked with Martha*', or '*Martha she refused to go along with that plan*'. In particular he credited his wife for the way in which she reminded him of the way his decisions would be perceived by other people in the village. Shortly after he had sold the goat, he told me that Martha had told him the same thing she had said to me about his decision. '*Martha she says I should pay more attention to people here in the village, not to missionaries or people living far away from here.*' David concluded, '*Martha is very wise.*' Given that Martha also protected me from the claims of other people in the village, like Esnarth, I could not but agree with him.

Han Seur writes in his study of the Lala of Zambia, 'the character of social and economic relations between the members of nuclear families and households... cannot be seen in isolation from wider networks' (1992 p. 287). Unlike in Seur's case, in which matrilineal kinship networks appeared important, the wider networks Martha was situated in did not appear to follow the lines of a particular kinship system, in the formal, jural sense (Carsten, 2004). They are perhaps better described simply as friendships, based on affective connection and mutual support. Although she did not earn any money during the time I was in the village, Martha was not just David's dependent, at least in any straightforward kind of way. Her criticisms over his provision to her were not just about her support alone, but also about her ability to engage in the exchange of support



and help with women to whom she had important affective connections, like Elsie Benson, Loveness MacDonald, Memory Limbani and Esnarth Mitambo. Each of these had their relative significance against the other, and against her marriage to David. Their significances were implied in her conversations in the household with David, and in the village with the women. Seen in the light of all those exchanges, Martha's criticism of her husband's provision can be understood as a way of deferring requests upon her from the women, as well as a way of getting him to provide for her and for them. Her relationship with David played into her position as a woman who could provide support to other women in Chimtengo.

David's comments about what Martha did and said had the effect of deferring expectations on him, something that he recognised and valued. The management of the relationships that Martha had in the church was also of significance to David. The case of the blouse and skirt is best seen not simply as an example of Martha's dependence on David but of the mutuality of Martha's interests with David's in the context of the other relationships that she maintained in the village and the church.

### ***Mutuality and 'dual-sex' leadership in the Pamtunda churches***

#### *Martha as a 'First Lady' of the Pamtunda churches*

Martha had many relationships with women at Pamtunda, and with women at the other churches that David pastored. I never heard Martha give her testimony of conversion, or describe the sweep of her life with the kind of Christian telos that David did. When I asked her about it she said matter-of-factly that she had been baptised when she started going to Pamtunda. Her Christian belief was important to her though and she used it to make sense of events that had happened in her past. Like her husband, she had suffered several bouts of debilitating illness through her adult life that had kept her '*grounded*', unable to leave the house, for weeks on end. Martha described these to me at various points through my stay in the village, often prompted by the sicknesses of others,

like Sunday. Martha credited her recoveries to God, and during my time in the village, she regularly suggested, often independently of her husband, that we should pray to God for help in difficult circumstances, and praise Him in instances where our requests were answered or when provision appeared unexpectedly. What Martha did in these respects was an important part of the basis for her relationships with women in the Pamtunda churches.

David's ordination as Pamtunda's pastor had important implications for Martha as it meant she became the leader of the women in the churches. Southern Baptists have not traditionally ordained women but the Baptist Mission in Malawi (BMIM) did place significance on the position of the church leader or pastor's wife (Longwe, 2011 p. 280-287)<sup>97</sup>. The role involved being a good homemaker, but was not restricted to activities in the domestic sphere. Longwe describes BMIM missionaries' wives leading Bible studies and other activities for women in the new BMIM and BACOMA Baptist churches in the 1960s and 1970s (Longwe 2011 p. 244). The wives of the first Malawian Baptist pastors were encouraged to do the same, and the national Union of Baptist Women in Malawi (*Umodzi wa Amayi Abaptist ku Malawi*) was founded under the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA) in 1975 (Longwe 2011 p. 256)<sup>98</sup>.

Over the years Martha had been able to attend several 'Pastors and Wives' or 'Leaders and wives' training courses with David that, like the older BMIM teaching Longwe describes, appear to have emphasised the important role of pastors' wives in Baptist churches<sup>99</sup>. Run by missionaries from America, the Pastors and Wives trainings featured teaching about the appropriate roles for pastors and their wives at home and at church. From what David told me, and

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<sup>97</sup> In Chimsika there was an Assemblies of God church that had a female pastor, but I did not meet any female Baptist pastors during my time in Malawi. The literature on Pentecostal Churches in Africa suggests that they have generally been more willing to ordain female leaders than mission churches (Soothill 2007 p. 3, Lauterbach 2008 p. 131).

<sup>98</sup> Women's meetings and groups are common in other churches operating elsewhere in Africa. See, for example, Soothill 2007 p. 2-4, on Pentecostal women in Ghana, and Gaitskell, 2000, on Methodist women in South Africa.

<sup>99</sup> Longwe writes that women were not included on pastor's training courses by BMIM in the 1960s and 1970s, but have been so since. They are involved in the trainings in the role of wives, rather than as pastors (2011 p. 280-287).

from what I read of the materials Martha and he were given at the courses<sup>100</sup>, the teaching established that the pastor, a man, took responsibility for church leadership overall, and leadership in the home, while his wife supported him, working amongst the churches' women. The trainings appear to have encouraged what Soothill, in her work on Ghanaian Pentecostal churches, has described as 'dual-sex' leadership (Soothill, 2007 p. 154). Baptist pastors' wives are not 'big women', pastoring congregations themselves, but rather what Soothill labels 'first ladies', whose influence amongst female congregants is connected to their husbands' position and supports them in it (Soothill, 2007 p. 155-157). Soothill describes the prevalence of 'First Lady Syndrome' beyond the church in Ghana, mainly in the sphere of national politics (2007 p. 80-81). In Martha's case, her status as a first lady in the Pamtunda churches reflected her position amongst women in Chimtengo village as well. What Martha did for women in the church was similar to what she did for women in the village<sup>101</sup>.

David received requests for help and prayer from both men and women in the churches, but women, unlike men, did not come to him exclusively. Martha also received requests from women for material support, advice and prayer at home in Chimtengo, and made visits to the homes of Pamtunda church women to pray with them there. She was however able to visit people far less than David because of her responsibilities and work at home, and because she could not ride a bicycle, which meant every journey she made took her much longer than it would her husband. Martha explained to me that she made the effort to visit other women from the churches, particularly when they were experiencing difficulties, because it was the '*Christian thing to do*'. Once Martha received a visit from a woman from Kangude Baptist church whose husband, a deacon of the church, had left her and married another woman. David had counselled the man

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<sup>100</sup> David had a number of pamphlets that he had kept from trainings over the years, some of which I was able to read parts of.

<sup>101</sup> Soothill argues the power of first ladies derives from historical discourses of gender complementarity in Asante society (2007 p. 80-81). There is not scope to trace an equivalent discourse here, although some of the matrilineal features of Chewa society that I described in chapter two would suggest that the importance of 'first ladies' in Malawi may have historical roots that stretch beyond the church.

that he should not divorce his wife, and told him that it would be difficult for him to continue to attend the church if he did. The meeting had not however seemed to have had the desired effect, and now the man's wife, Mercy, had come to ask Martha for help. Martha sat with Mercy for a couple of hours, asking her where she was now living and how her children were getting along. Mercy was staying at her family's village, but was short on food. Martha gave Mercy some maize and assured her as they parted that she would pray for Mercy and her children.

As well as regularly visiting other women, receiving visits, and going to church on a Sunday, Martha led the Pamtunda women's choir. She very much enjoyed the choir, dropping her work or giving it to one of her daughters, before bathing and going up to Pamtunda to meet the other choir members every Thursday afternoon. Several times she went to practise even as David requested she stay to do something for him at home. Martha was disappointed on the occasions when only a few other women turned out. The choir performed on Sundays at Pamtunda and visited other churches as well. Often their performances were greeted with whoops of approval and Martha would come home saying with satisfaction, '*We sang very well.*' Other times, when they had been out of tune or women had forgotten their parts, Martha would complain, and blame their poor singing on the fact that so few women had come to practice the previous week.

Martha had a committee that helped her to lead and support the women at the Pamtunda churches. The committee was similar in its make-up to the committee that David had to help him run the all the Pamtunda churches, and included a treasurer, a secretary and several other members with different responsibilities. The main reason the committee met was to organise the one or two-day meetings for women in the Pamtunda Baptist Churches who were part of the Baptist Women's Union. Martha and the rest of the committee were all members, and there were at least another one hundred women who were part of the Union across the Pamtunda churches. Women who were not members of the Union, but had aspirations to join, also attended the women's meetings. Membership required a woman be a strong Christian, and to have learned selected Bible verses by rote. Membership was conferred at larger meetings of the Baptist

Women's Union that took place in Lilongwe. The women, who gave to a treasury that Martha and her committee controlled, funded trips to the Lilongwe meetings themselves, as well as paying for the food and other expenses incurred by their own women's meetings. David expressed his envy when, after the women's meeting that I attended, Martha said the women's treasury totalled more than MK 10,000 (30 USD). Given the general poverty of the churches, I expressed surprise at the figure. Martha explained that I shouldn't be shocked, '*men just play with money, but us women, we work together*'<sup>102</sup>. The money would go towards the women's trip to the national Baptist Women's Union of Malawi meeting at the end of the year in Lilongwe.

Working together, maintaining relationships with the women in the Pamtunda churches, was not straightforward. While, as in other Malawian Baptist churches (Longwe, 2011 p. 256)<sup>103</sup>, Martha was automatically entitled to the leadership of the Pamtunda women because of her marriage to David, the effectiveness with which she led was subject to critique, as Mpatso Mwala's gossip at the April women's meeting indicated. It was Martha's inability to read and preach from the Bible<sup>104</sup>, and her dress, that were the focus of the gossip that Martha had heard against her during the course of the meeting.

Soothill writes that the pastors' wives she got to know in Accra in Ghana depended on their husband's position to varying extents. Some wives were more dependent than others, who led meetings, preached and even wrote books on theology and Christian living. Although in the latter cases their position as a 'First Lady' still derived from their husband, the 'spiritual services' (Lauterbach, 2008 p. 108) these wives could mediate themselves gave them status and power

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<sup>102</sup> This statement resonates with the critiques made of men by women outside of the church, suggesting that it is not just through Southern Baptist theology that women explain their saving as part of the Women's Union, but in reference to gender relations in wider society as well.

<sup>103</sup> Gaitskill (2000) notes that this was also the case amongst the Methodists she spent time with in South Africa.

<sup>104</sup> Longwe writes that historically women in BACOMA Baptist Churches tended to be less well educated than male members (2011 p. 275-280). This reflects a general gap in educational achievement in Malawi that dates back to the work of the early mission churches across the country. Educational achievement has equalised amongst young people in recent decades (UNICEF 2015).

amongst women, and men, in the church, at more of a distance from their spouses (Soothill, 2007 p. 155). Soothill writes that, like Martha, pastors' wives gave out material support to female members of their husband's congregations as well. Women not only expected their pastors' wives to give to them, but also to demonstrate their capacity to provide through the way they dressed and conducted themselves (Soothill, 2007 p. 158). Martha's comments on the gossip at the women's meeting at Pamtunda indicated the way in which she understood the relationships she had with the churches' women to depend on more than just her marriage to David. The Thursday after the women's meeting Martha did not go to choir, telling me she was still worried about the gossip she had heard against her. When he saw she was not going David said she should not be 'embarrassed' (*manyazi*). Martha however remained at home.

#### *Martha's importance to David's ministry*

David valued what Martha did as the leader of the women in the Pamtunda churches, seeing her work in the church as a part of his own success as a pastor. During my time in Malawi I did not meet a single Baptist pastor that was not married. Pastor Moyo's wife was heavily involved in working for the church. Another pastor David often worked with, Pastor Moses, also had a wife who took an active part in running their church. When David and Martha had discussed Martha going to school, following her worrying about Mpatso Mwala's comments, David had mentioned that Moses's wife had also been illiterate, but had now passed out of form four, the end of secondary school. '*She reads the Bible in church now*' David explained to me. In the same conversation David mentioned that Moses also had a car and that he wanted one too. This was not just because having a car would make all his travelling around easier, but also because it would enable him to take Martha with him on all the visits he made and trips he took. David did not want Martha to have to do *ganyu* or to work in the fields, but neither did he just want her to stay at home and run the affairs of the household. What he really wanted was for her to be more involved in church, as pastor's wife and leader of the women there. '*Martha should come with me to visit churches*', David explained, '*but it is too difficult on the back of a bicycle*'.

As much as Martha thought church important, she often found that there were pressing tasks to do at home or in the fields, and did not go to Pamtunda on a Sunday. David did not like it when his wife did not go to church, protesting that she was the *'pastor's wife'*, and asking, *'what will people at church think?'* In response Martha would normally just list her tasks for the day to her husband, *'wash your clothes, carry the maize to the mill, prepare the lunch...'* On a couple of occasions Martha also tried to avoid going to the funerals of women from the Pamtunda churches. In both cases the deceased had attended a distant church, a walk of half a day or more, and were from families that Martha did not know personally. David though pointed out Martha's position and its responsibilities to her. *'You are the leader of the women, Martha, you need to go'*. Martha reluctantly agreed<sup>105</sup>.

Martha's position as the leader of the women at Pamtunda derived from her marriage to David. However, the quality of the relationships she maintained in the church, and in the village, relied upon other things as well, namely her ability to provide women with material and spiritual support. Her dress and level of education reflected on her capacity to do these things and deficiencies in these respects caused her to worry about her relationships in the church. These relations appeared important to Martha as much for reasons of simple sociality as for the status they inferred upon her as pastor's wife, a 'First Lady'. She enjoyed going to choir practice and the women's meetings and the fact that she could not meet the expectations of the women threatened Martha's enjoyment of these activities. As she had said in reference to her relationships with women in the village, she did not want to end up *'just sitting at home, just silent'*.

The case of the blouse and the skirt indicates the way in which, like her relationships with Elsie Benson, Loveness MacDonald, Memory Limbani and

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<sup>105</sup> Martha's leadership role was the main point around which David and Martha's discussions about these funerals turned. On other occasions, David talked more generally about how it was important to go to funerals to deflect any suspicions of involvement in the death. This imperative to attend funerals is noted in other studies of the Chewa (Rangeley 1948 p. 50 and 61 Van Breugel 2001 p. 223).

Esnarth Mitambo, Martha managed her relationships with women in church through her relationship to David. It also suggests how Martha had to manage her relationships with women in the village alongside those she had in the church as well. Just as he valued what Martha did for him in Chimtengo, David valued his wife's work in the church as well, and had an interest in making sure she succeeded as the leader of the Women's Union. Their debates over Martha's blouse and skirt suggested Martha and David both understood the mutuality of their leadership of the Pamtunda churches.

***'I want a new blouse and skirt'. Negotiating mutual interest.***

*Seasonal pressures*

Things changed in Chimtengo and the surrounds after the harvest in May. Prior to that time, many of Martha and David's discussions with each other had been to do with the support of hungry villagers, relatives and church members, people like Esnarth Mitambo, David's sister Tionge, Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo, and deacons like Wiseman Nkhoma. Martha had kept reminding David throughout the period *'not to forget grandmother Elsie'*. In June there was some relief as households' granaries filled with maize, and the Monday market in Chimsika filled up with people looking to spend cash made from the sale of tobacco, groundnuts and other crops. People visited each other to discuss plans for weddings (*zikwati*), memorials (*zipitala*)<sup>106</sup> and church revival meetings (*msonkhano wa chitsitsimutso*). Martha and David's discussions turned accordingly to focus on the support (*thandizo*) they should give to up-coming communal events, and to more expensive kinds of purchases, like a new blouse and dress for Martha. Their discussions over Martha's new outfit suggested the

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<sup>106</sup> *Chipitala* were large communal events that took place between the months of May and September. *Chipitala* were held in commemoration of deceased individuals and, whether for a Christian or a non-Christian, centred on the construction and dedication of a grave marker. Rapid burials in the area around Chimtengo, normally within three days of a death, meant that it was unusual for such memorials to be erected on the interment of a corpse. Only when enough support had been gathered by the deceased's friends and family could a *Chipitala* take place. This was often several years after the funeral.



complexity of her position, the fact that she had important relationships with women in the church, and in the village, that she managed through her marriage to David. The case also suggests that Martha and David recognised the way in which his success as a pastor was also dependent upon her work amongst the women at the Pamtunda churches.

One day in June Sunday stopped to chat with Martha, David and me outside the house. Conversation got on to Harold, who had sold his tobacco crop at the start of the month. 'Ah he is destroying money' Sunday said, 'He threw away MK 15,000 in three days'. 'How?' asked Martha, surprised. 'He went to a chief's installation and gave 5000 kwacha (15 USD), a memorial, 5000 kwacha, a wedding, 5000 kwacha... destroying money.' Subsequent conversations revealed that it was difficult to avoid giving as Harold had done. It was a necessary requirement of being a big man. David talked about how he needed to provide a crate of *Coke* and *Fanta*, at a cost of MK 4800 (14 USD), at the installation of another chief<sup>107</sup>. It was, he said, the 'proper thing to do' (*khalidwe la bwino*). There were expectations on Martha as well. Women were expected to bring maize and other foodstuffs to events like weddings. When Loveness MacDonald came back from a wedding she and Martha spent several minutes discussing how 'embarrassing' (*manyazi*) it was that one of Loveness MacDonald's sisters had failed to bring any maize to the celebration. A week later Martha gave a chicken to Elsie so she could take it to a wedding. When David complained about what Martha had done, Martha repeated what her grandmother had said to her, that giving a chicken was the 'proper thing to do' (*khalidwe la bwino*), and arguing that Edson had no chickens himself. David admitted that it was good that Elsie should be able to provide a chicken at the funeral.

As well as discussing what to give to others, Martha and David also discussed what they wanted to get for themselves around this time. David had his eye on a new suit from one of the Chinese stores in Lilongwe, 'I want to look smart when

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<sup>107</sup> The Traditional Authority had made the chief of Kwamhango village a Group Village Head and the installation ceremony was happening in August. The Traditional Authority, District Commissioner and the Member of Parliament were all rumoured to be attending.

*the missionaries come and when I go to the installation of Chief Kwamhangho. I do not want to be embarrassed in front of them.*' He thought a new suit might cost about MK 10000 or MK 15000 (30 or 45 USD)<sup>108</sup>. More ambitiously, David talked about the prospect of buying a motorbike, and solar panels for his house. *'I'll be able to get around more quickly, and I can take Martha on the back'*, David explained one day over our breakfast tea. He went on that a car would cost over a million kwacha (3000 USD) but a motorbike perhaps only around 250,000 MK (770 USD). David had asked me repeatedly since my arrival in the village whether I might buy him a car at the end of my time in the village. I had always said a car was too expensive for me to afford. I could not therefore help but feel that a motorbike was not just something David was hoping to purchase himself in the coming months, but also something that he hoped I might get for him at the end of my stay.

Martha did not look convinced listening to her husband talk about the motorbike, nor was she impressed by the idea of a solar panel. When David had finished talking about the cost of all the different components, panel, converter and wiring, totalling around MK 65,000 (200 USD), Martha let out a snort, *'That is burning money David.'* David explained that he hoped he would be able to run a business, people paying money to use the electricity to charge their phones, saving them the journey to Chimsika to charge their phones there. Martha was still not convinced.

While Martha was not impressed by her husband's ambition to buy a motorbike and solar panels, she had always been happy about the thought of getting a car. While she often defended me from the petitions of women like Esnarth, Martha also pressed me with her husband, particularly over buying them a car. When I asked Martha what she would like over our tea, she brought up the idea of a car

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<sup>108</sup> Harri Englund remarks on the importance of dress as a marker of identity amongst a new class of NGO worker that has emerged in Malawi since the 1994 multi-party elections (2006 p. 90). Going further back, Marwick writes that the 'middle class' that emerged amongst the Chewa in Zambia in the first half of the nineteenth-century marked themselves out in part through their European dress (1965 p. 47). For an extended discussion of the importance of dress and the way it has marked and transformed identities in Southern Africa, see Karen Tranberg Hansen's work on clothing (1994, 2000).

again. She also spoke about wanting a new outfit. *'Me myself I like the idea of a car, but I also want a new blouse and skirt, like Mpatso Mwala's. I will wear it to go to the weddings, Chief Kwamhango's installation, and the church revivals. Yes, I want a blouse and skirt.'* She did not mention wanting to learn to read and write. Although back in April she and David had been quite vehement that she would go to school, and Martha had practised her reading shortly after the women's meeting, there had been no subsequent discussion of the idea, at least that I had heard. Schools had just closed and would not open again until September but, when I asked over breakfast, Martha cast doubt on whether she would go at all. There was, she explained, *'too much work for her to do at home'*.

Having said this Martha went on to describe the kind of blouse and skirt she wanted. It would, like Mpatso Mwala's, be from a tailor in the Old Town area of Lilongwe, not from one in Chimsika. There was a tailor near the bus station that a friend had told her was particularly skilled. The fabric would come from one of the shops in Old Town as well. The blouse and skirt would be in a new design, the latest fashion. Martha made it clear that the skirt would be long, and that the blouse would have shoulders. She did not want the kind of short skirt that she had seen had become popular in town. Those made women look like *'prostitutes'*. David had been listening to his wife, and chuckled and nodded in agreement at her final remark. He did not though make any commitment to get Martha a new blouse and skirt.

A week later, Yamikani Misozi, the wealthiest man in Chimtengo after David and Harold, brought a new ox cart to the village. Like Harold, Yamikani had sold his tobacco crop at the start of June. He had chosen to invest most of the money in the cart. Carts cost around MK 100,000 (300 USD) from the workshop in Chimsika. Yamikani would hire out the cart to those who wanted to transport goods, as well as using it to carry his own maize and other loads. The purchase caused much comment in the village. Sitting at Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo's house, looking across at the cart at Yamikani's, Harold, David and Chimtengo Kubwalo agreed that it was not well made. *'The shaft is not straight'*, commented Harold, who also owned an ox cart. *'Yes, and the axel is a cheap one'*, commented

Kubwalo, *'it will break soon enough'*. David agreed, *'He's thrown away his money there'*. Martha saw things differently. At home later that day she and her eldest daughter Mary were also talking about the cart. Martha said to Mary, *'He has money Yamikani, they are expensive, ox-carts'* her daughter replied *'Ah money, Yamikani has planned well there, the cart will earn him more money, but here at ours... no money.'* Martha nodded and added, *'Yes, here at ours, nothing'*. It was a few days later that Martha offered Chiso John and Loveness her critique of the way her husband was spending money.

Unlike Yamikani Misozi, and Harold, David did not grow tobacco, citing the amount of work and investment the crop required whenever I asked him why. Consequently, by late June he had not received the cash windfall that they had obtained. The months of June to September were prosperous for David rather because of the missionary visits that took place during the period. While he looked to me for assistance, David's plans to buy a new suit, a solar panel, and perhaps even a motorbike, were also set upon the hope that he would get some money from foreign missionaries as gifts for translation work. It was difficult however for David to predict exactly what money he might receive from the missionaries. The week following Chiso John's visit, David went to Kasungu for a few days to translate for American missionaries who were working with a friend of his named Kandodo. Kasungu is about one hundred kilometres from Chimtengo (Map. 1 p. ii), and the journey cost MK 4000 (12 USD) one way. David came back two days later. *'The missionaries and Pastor Kandodo didn't even give me any expenses'*, he said almost as soon as he had greeted the family. David had had to borrow some money from a friend in Lilongwe to make the last stretch of the journey to Chimtengo. *'It was embarrassing'* (*Manyazi*) David said. Martha chided her husband as she set down his *nsima* and beans in front of him. *'You are just going to and fro (-yendayenda)'*. David turned to me and agreed, *'Martha is right Dan, I am too mobile'*.

Martha was not pleased when the following week David expressed his desire to work with some other missionaries, connected to Pastor Moses, who were arriving in Malawi in mid-July. In the group were some men who supported

Pastor Moses with monthly cash payments. Once before David had himself received 200 USD in cash from the same group for a week's translation work. He was therefore more confident that this would be a profitable trip, and that it would benefit Martha and his family. Martha was not sure. The missionaries were working in Dedza, a similar distance from Chimtengo as Kasungu (Map 1. p. ii). David would be gone for a week. Martha was silent as David packed a bag the night before he was due to leave, speaking only monosyllabically to tell him where his shirts were. She was quiet the following morning as well. I walked away from the village with David for a short while. As we walked David told me that Martha had been '*worrying*' (-*dandaula*)- '*There is only a little money at home now*', David sighed, '*But what can I do?*'

When he got back a week later David was much more upbeat than after his trip to Kasungu. The mission had been '*well supported*'. They had spoken to many people about God, and hundreds had come out to watch the '*Jesus Film*'. David had his food and transport paid for, and when he had complained about being cold at night one of the missionaries had bought him an extra blanket<sup>109</sup>. David pointed at it spilling out of the top of his backpack. The only blot on the trip was the fact that David had not been paid on the spot for any of the translation he had done. He said the missionaries were leaving the money with Pastor Moses in Lilongwe and he would collect it there the day after next.

At this point Martha cut in, '*I have not been to town for ages David, and I want my skirt and blouse.*' David refused to take her, saying the meeting with Moses would take up all of his time. Martha was quiet following David's refusal, and remained so as she went about her sweeping and cooking with the girls the following morning. After she had done her chores she sat with the girls, and Loveness MacDonald, who had come over to join them. Martha spoke volubly about how she '*wanted a blouse and skirt*' but her husband was '*refusing*' (-*kana*) to take her to town. Loveness MacDonald compared Martha's situation to her own, pointing

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<sup>109</sup> July is the coldest time of year in Malawi, and Dedza, a highland area, is known across the Central Region for being particularly cool.

out the fact that MacDonald had *'failed'* (-kanika) to buy her shoes. The women bemoaned how men just *'played'* (-sewera) with money. The conversation was an example of how the relations Martha maintained with women in Chimtengo overlapped with her management of relations with women in the church and with David. Having seen Martha, as he put it, *'complaining'* (-dandaula)<sup>110</sup> like this with Loveness and his daughters for the whole morning, David went back on his previous decision and agreed to take her to town and get her a blouse and skirt. Old Town was a long way from Pastor Moses's house in Lilongwe so David rang Moses to try to get him to come and meet him and Martha in Old Town with the money from the missionaries.

*'Martha looks beautiful'*

I went along with David and Martha the following day, riding my bicycle whilst Martha sat on the back of David's. We met the tarmac road and caught a lift into Lilongwe. As we walked from the bus station towards the tailor's shop in Old Town David complained loudly to me, *'Martha, she wants expensive clothes, a 6000 kwacha (18 USD) skirt! Blouse - the same. Aish!'* Martha did not make any acknowledgement of her husband and pressed on through the crowds towards the tailor's. When we got there Martha chose her fabric at a nearby stall and was measured. David whispered to me loudly, *'Ladies, they destroy money - they want lots of clothes'*. Martha continued to ignore her husband. While we were at the tailor's Moses rang to say he couldn't meet David and give him the money. David sighed, shook his head and then haggled over the deposit for the skirt and blouse with the tailor. He ended up paying several thousand kwacha. The tailor said they should come and pick up the finished items in a week's time.

After David had handed over the money to the tailor we looked around the Chinese stores in Old Town for a suit for David. Martha said they were all smart looking, but without any money from the missionaries, and having paid the

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<sup>110</sup> According to Paas's (2009 p. 81) Chichewa-English dictionary, *Kundandaula* means both to worry and to complain. In the thesis have chosen the translation of the word that seems most appropriate based on the particular context in which the Chichewa word was being used.

deposit on Martha's skirt and blouse, David could not find one he could afford. *'these suits... 12000 kwacha (36 USD), ah I have no money Dan.'* I did not buy David a suit despite his complaint as I had already paid for some school fees and transportation in the previous month, as well as buying some food for the household while David had been in Dedza. It was for these reasons that I did not contribute towards Martha's skirt and blouse either. David acknowledged that I had indeed *'done a lot in the family'* when I felt pressed to defend why I was not helping out as he searched for a suit. We ended up looking at second hand jackets in the Old Town market. There was a three button one with one odd button for MK 1500 (4.50 USD). *'I'll look smart in this - a big man'* David said, holding it up. Martha wondered out loud about her husband's taste. The jacket was tan, not black, and had an extra pocket. *'Three pockets?'* she asked her husband. *'I'll look smart'* David insisted. Martha conceded she could at least sew a better matching button on. David bought the jacket and we headed back towards the bus station.

On the bus back to the Chimsika turn off, Martha and David discussed how the money from Pastor Moses's missionaries would be spent, when eventually David got hold of it. David was continuing to wonder whether it would be enough to buy a motorcycle. Martha, though, vetoed the idea. While she liked the idea of travelling with David in a car, a car could carry other people as well, while a motorbike could not. *'If we finished a revival meeting at 5pm in the evening, and we left just the two of us on your motorbike, with everyone else on foot, people are likely to complain about us - they will say "they are proud now (-nyada)'"* David admitted his wife had a point, telling me in her hearing that, *'You hear Dan? My wife is a wise woman'*. David went on talking to Martha about the solar panel instead, which she was also still dubious about, but more willing to consider him purchasing than a motorbike.

About ten days later Martha got her blouse and skirt. David went to Lilongwe to see Pastor Moses and picked up the clothes at the same time. He was not very happy when he came back, saying that there was no money with Moses from the missionaries. Moses said he had never been left any. David said that he had asked Moses if he had rather spent it himself, but Moses had continued to deny he had

been left anything for David. David's plans for solar electricity and a new suit would have to wait. David had used the rest of the money that he had with him to pay the balance on Martha's skirt and blouse. David had been telling me all this while Martha was trying on the clothes inside. When she came out of the house wearing them, all her daughters, who had gathered waiting to see, crowded round their mother. They pulled at the unusual ruffles and hems, cooing that the dress was the latest style. Looking up at his wife from where he was sat David said, *'Martha, she looks very smart now.'* Martha herself was asking Mary whether the dress was too tight round her midriff, but admitted to David that the tailor had done a good job, *'He is good isn't he? I look very smart now!'*

A couple of weeks later Martha was sitting next to me in her new blouse and skirt at a church revival. In front of us, arrayed across a dusty field were several hundred people from the Pamtunda Churches. Many Baptist Women's Union of Malawi members were in the crowd. They, and the deacons and other church members had been meeting for two days already for Bible teaching, baptisms, choir competitions, and to proselytise in the area where the revival meeting was taking place. David, on the other side of Martha, was now beginning the final service of the meeting. He was wearing the tan jacket with three pockets onto which Martha had sewn a new button a few days before. David invited Martha to lead the opening prayer, which she did. The rest of the service proceeded as normal. Later in the day as we walked home together, David, Martha, the children and I reviewed the events of the revival. Martha and David commented that one deacon had preached particularly powerfully on Saturday, and that he was becoming a strong Christian. The children mainly chatted about a controversy in the judging of the youth choir competition. Halfway home, David asked Martha, *'You saw Mpatso Mwala at the revival? What did she say about your clothes?'* Martha replied, *'Yes I saw Mpatso, she asked me where I had the skirt and blouse made. She said, "You are looking very good Martha"'* David said, *'And so she should'* He then asked me, *'Martha looks beautiful, yes, Dan?'* 'Yes' I agreed. Martha huffed at us both reprovingly and told us to stop but David was smiling and continued to complement her as we walked.



## ***Conclusion***

This chapter has considered Martha's relationship with David in the context of some of the important relationships she maintained. While Martha did not earn money herself while I was in the village, she was not simply dependent on David. Her assertions of an ideal of male provision have to be understood in conjunction with her exchange of support and help of different kinds with Elsie Benson, and other women in Chimtengo and the Pamtunda churches. These relationships had their histories, the help Elsie had given Martha when she had been a child having a strong influence on their relationship during the time I lived in Chimtengo. Whilst the other women who came to Martha for help had not given her care in the past as Elsie had, Martha enjoyed their company and did not want to risk being left '*silent*' and alone, by failing to give the women support. In this sense Martha's concerns were as much about maintaining a fundamental level of sociality as they were about having high status as a 'first lady' in the Pamtunda churches (cf. Soothill, 2007).

Her marriage to David enabled Martha to support other women but it also allowed her to obviate some of the demands that the women placed on her as well, her criticism of David's provision inferring limits on what they could expect of her. These criticisms also had the effect of lessening what might be expected of David himself. Martha indicated on several occasions that she was mindful of what his decisions might mean for the both of them, and not just her. She also showed how she took my presence in her household into account as she made decisions. David recognised what his wife did for him in these respects, and depended on her judgement.

The case of the blouse and skirt illustrates the mutuality of David and Martha's relationship. Martha, and David, recognised that what she did amongst the women in the church had its implications for his position as pastor. Their leadership of the Pamtunda churches was 'dual-sex', Martha was the first lady of the church by virtue of her marriage to David. Martha's influence was limited by her lack of education, and she was more reliant on her marriage to David for her

position than some other pastor's wives in other contexts (Soothill, 2007 p. 155-157, Lauterbach, 2008 p. 132). However, given her performance was a reflection on David's leadership of the churches as well, there was a strong incentive for David to support her as much as he could. Although somewhat reluctant, he was willing to forgo other investments, like a new suit of his own, which would have also contributed to his status in the church and elsewhere, in order to support Martha. In her place, Martha recognised that her husband needed to maintain his position too, for his benefit and hers, and advised him accordingly on his choice of suit jacket, as well as his purchase of a motorbike.

The chapter has shown the way in which relations external to a marriage play into it, and how marriage is a relationship through which women can further their interests beyond the marriage itself<sup>111</sup>. Martha's interests were tied to her relationships with David, and with Elsie Benson and other women in Chimtengo and the Pamtunda churches. Married for over twenty years, Martha and David knew the relationships that were important to the other, and how these mattered to them as a couple. However, David could not know as Martha did the relationships she had, and their significance to her. Martha had therefore to continue to convince her husband of their value, in order that he might understand her situation and how what he chose to do might affect her. As his own interests were also connected to his relationship to Martha, knowing about her and about the relationships she maintained was important to him. While Martha and David knew each other well, they retained their own ideas about what was in their best interests, and their decisions as a result were often only reached through discussion and compromise, and sometimes not agreed upon at all. Martha disagreed with the sale of the goat, and had to convince David that it was important, for him as well as her, to buy her a blouse and a skirt. Such instances suggest the limits to which Martha and David could know about each

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<sup>111</sup> There is a large literature that demonstrates this for Southern Africa and elsewhere (for example, Seur 1992, Moore and Vaughan 1994, Peters 1996a, 1996b, Jackson 2012). This work builds from older feminist scholarship from the late 1970s and 1980s that generally assumed the subordination of women through marriage, and explored how women bargained for their interests using 'weapons of the weak' (Scott 1985), from a position of structural disadvantage (Whitehead 1981, Rogers 1980, Kandiyoti 1988).

other, and know about the different relationships that made them and their marriage.

There were similar limits to what I could know about Martha and David. Deniz Kandiyoti writes in a critique of her own work on women '*bargaining with patriarchy*', that it is important that analyses of gender and marriage do not rest 'on unexamined assumptions about subjectivity and consciousness' (Kandiyoti, 1998 p. 146). But this begs the question of how to actually establish people's subjectivities, how to establish their interests. I try to show through the thesis how people's interests are connected to the particular relationships they maintain (Englund, 1999, Taylor, 1990, Taylor, 1992) and the way in which getting to know one person helps to make sense of another (Werbner, 1991, Hastrup, 2005 p. 138, cf. Chernoff, 2003, Niehaus, 2012, Staples, 2014). This has been a particular aim of this chapter. By looking at Martha, it is possible to say something about David as well. Equally, what I write about David in other chapters helps make more sense of what I have written about Martha here. Kandiyoti writes that perhaps 'the messiness of social reality has always exceeded the explanatory power of our conceptual frameworks and that this is all the more so in the area of gender' (1998 p. 147). This chapter has suggested that getting to know specific men and women's lives in detail makes some explanation of their relationships possible, even if indeterminacies of the kind to which Kandiyoti alludes remain.

## **Chapter Five. Genealogies of big men and the distribution of subsidised fertiliser in Chimtengo Kubwalo village.**

### ***Introduction***

#### *'A chief, but no maize'*

One day in March 2013, just before Sunday got sick, I was outside the back of the house chatting with Martha and David. Inside the storeroom I could hear Tamandani, their second daughter, scooping maize into a large basket. Tamandani came out of the house with the basket balanced on her head, telling her parents, *'I am going now'*. David and Martha acknowledged their daughter, and Tamandani moved off along the path through the trees that separated David's house from the larger part of Chimtengo. It was the middle of the hungry season in Chimtengo and the surrounds. Deacons and church members like Wiseman Nkhoma, extended family like Elsie Benson and people from Chimtengo village had all been requesting maize from David and Martha since January. I asked for whom this particularly large basket of maize was destined. David said *'To our chief, they have no maize at their house, and Dalitso is also complaining that he has no food at school'* Dalitso was one of Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo's sons, and was boarding at the government primary school in Chimsika<sup>112</sup>. David shook his head, *'A chief, but no maize for his family. It is not good. He needs help from me - I am the big man.'*

#### *Genealogies of bigness*

In this chapter I look at this episode in reference to the distribution of government-subsidised fertiliser that had taken place in the village several

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<sup>112</sup> Chimsika Primary was regarded as a much better primary school than those schools closer to Chimtengo. David was sending Ganizani there. As a government primary, the Chimsika School was free, but families had to support children themselves if they decided to board at the school.

months before in November 2012. I look at the important ideas in the social landscape that surrounded the distribution of the fertiliser, drawing in particular on the character of the 'big man' (*munthu wamkulu*) introduced in chapter two. I describe Chief Chimtengo Three's development as a big man, and how it fed into David's position in Chimtengo. The significance of Chimtengo Three's bigness in comparison to David's often emerged as David discussed his own provision of support and help (*thandizo*) to people in the village. I also describe some of Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo's biography, the way he had struggled to command bigness, before moving on to discuss how he negotiated the distribution of the government subsidised fertiliser with David. The aim of the chapter is to show how the fertiliser distribution was situated in longer histories shared by David, Chimtengo Kubwalo and other people in the village. These biographies, or genealogies, suggest why the idea of bigness had the kind of influence that it did in David's life, and helps to explain how he went about negotiating the distribution of things like fertiliser and maize with Chimtengo Kubwalo and other people in the village.

This chapter adds to chapters three and four by considering the extent to which the idea of being a big man helped David make sense the decisions that he faced, and ameliorated uncertainties in his life. David frequently referenced Chief Chimtengo Three's bigness when he was making decisions about who to support in the village; he saw himself as his grandfather's forebear in a genealogy of bigness and dependence. David however was living in different circumstances to Chimtengo Three, maintaining his bigness along different 'paths' (Vincent, 1971) or 'avenues' (Lentz, 1998). He was a pastor, not a chief, and did not have the kind of capital his grandfather had had. Where his grandfather had been the preeminent big man in the village, a '*very big man*' (*munthu wamkulu kwabasi*), David worked out his bigness alongside other big men, including Harold and Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo. The sense that he was a big man like his grandfather helped David make sense of what to do about fertiliser, maize and other things, but only in conjunction with these other specific circumstances and relationships. David's ideas about bigness, informed by memories of his

grandfather, were in this sense rules of thumb. They gave him a sense of what to do and what to expect of others, but not much more.

The chapter shows more of the kinds of limits and uncertainties I faced as an ethnographer trying to make sense of David's life. His sense of being a big man did not structure the biography David gave me in our early interviews (cf. Niehaus, 2012, Staples, 2014). The interviews and my first weeks in the village made the importance of church to David obvious, but the significance of being a big man in the village only became apparent as my time in Chimtengo went on. Although I got a sense of David's relative wealth as soon as I arrived, the nature of his relationship to Chimtengo Three, and the contemporary relationships through which he managed his bigness only became apparent in time. Just as getting to know Martha, Harold, and others helped me to understand David, so too did getting to know Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo. Learning about David's memories of Chimtengo Three and getting to know Chimtengo Kubwalo though my months in the village enabled me to make some sense of why David did what he did about the subsidised fertiliser, and why he gave maize to Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo.

### ***The genealogy of David's bigness***

#### *The Chewa big man*

Histories of the Central Region in the pre-colonial era suggest chiefs were unrivalled as the big men of those times, the heads of villages of several extended families, and, in some cases, over groups of villages<sup>113</sup>. Chiefs combined wealth in people and material wealth in their position as the 'owners' of their villages (Rangeley, 1948 p. 6). They were also privileged as the conduit for

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<sup>113</sup> From the sparse evidence available it seems Chewa around the present day Central Region had once been integrated hierarchically into a kind of kingdom with a paramount chief. From the end of the 1600s however the society became more egalitarian, the 'budding off' of new villages and larger, loosely affiliated chieftaincies occurring frequently (Rangeley 1948 p. 6, Langworthy 1972, Marwick 1965 p. 19-27).

communication with the *Gule Wamkulu* and, by extension, the spirit world (van Breugel, 2001 p. 136, Rangeley, 1948 p. 20-21, Marwick, 1965 p. 163-164). Chiefly succession was not, however, strictly hereditary, male and female elders (*mandoda* and *atchembele* respectively) selecting a chief based upon discussion of prospective candidates' characters (Marwick, 1965 p. 119, Rangeley, 1948 p. 10). Installed by the elders, the chief had no 'divine rights' and their position always remained dependent upon the adequate fulfilment of their responsibilities towards their people, and on the support of their advisors (*ankhoswe*) in particular (Rangeley, 1948 p. 10, Marwick, 1965 p. 139)<sup>114</sup>. The position of the chief was in this sense, never attained for good, but maintained, tied up with their ability to negotiate and mediate with their advisors and people (cf. Sahlins, 1963, Médard, 1992).

Although at times characterised by coercion and violence, colonial rule did offer new possibilities for Chewa people to accrue wealth and status, presenting new avenues or paths to bigness at a distance from the institutions of chieftaincy and eldership. The introduction of smallholder tobacco cultivation by the British administration and the agreements signed with the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA) in South Africa over labour migration connected people in the Central Region into global economies (McCracken, 2012 p. 162-192, Crush et al., 1991 p. 37). For many prosperity came to be defined through relation to these economies, as well as to relationships in their villages (McCracken, 2012 p. 162-192, White, 1987p. 146-199). By the 1960s and 1970s the Central Region had the highest peasant producer incomes in the country (Potts, 1985 p. 187, McCracken, 2012 p. 4, Kydd and Christiansen, 1982). Some senior chiefs became part of the developing 'middle class' too (Marwick, 1965 p.

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<sup>114</sup> As I wrote in the previous chapter, women could be chiefs, and people in and around Chintengo talked about how these women commanded significant influence, without ever describing them as 'big'. The picture painted by the literature on the history of female chieftaincy in Malawi is somewhat unclear. While he notes that female chiefs were relatively common around Nkhotakhota where he did his work on the Chewa, Rangeley (1948 p. 10) writes that male elders always advised them. For Southern Malawi Vaughan suggests the power of female chiefs in the past has been overplayed because of a failure to recognise the influence of male advisors over female chiefs (1987, p. 125). Pauline Peters (1997b) argues however that such traditions of male authority were invented during the colonial era as Malawian men jockeyed for power under the British, who favored patriarchal chiefly institutions.

47), involved in the colonial administration after indirect rule was instituted under the District Authority Native Ordinance of 1912 and the Native Authority Act of 1933. Whilst indirect rule implied that chiefs could rely on the power of the protectorate administration to buttress their position, many Native Authorities in the Central Region found there was relatively little financial or military support for them from the colonial capital Zomba (Map 1. p. ii) (McCracken 2012 p. 222-230). This being the case, the extent to which they could ignore their people and elders to become, in Mamdani's (1996) words 'decentralised despots', is debated (McCracken, 2012 p. 225, White, 1987p. 179-180, Eggen, 2011 p. 317, Swidler, 2013 p. 324)<sup>115</sup>.

*Chief Chimtengo Three, a 'very big man'*<sup>116</sup>

The successful management of labour migration and relationships at home in the village was at the heart of David's grandfather Chief Chimtengo Three's bigness. Chimtengo Three was born Stanley in Chimtengo in 1918, the son of Chief Chimtengo Two's sister. He married but received no formal education prior to leaving for work in South Africa, sometime in the late 1930s. Stanley managed to prosper working in South Africa through the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, whilst at the same time maintaining good relations with people in Chimtengo through the provision of regular cash remittances to them. Stanley occasionally came home, but never for very long and often sent money via other means. So effective was he at maintaining his relations in the village that the elders declared Stanley the new chief while he was still abroad in South Africa. Stanley's elder brother

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<sup>115</sup> Jane Collier (2004) argues against Mamdani in her work on chieftaincy in the Pacific, writing that the power of chiefs there rested more on their people than on the colonial government. Peter Geschiere (1993), writing before Mamdani published his work, shows for Cameroon how particular chiefs can take advantage of the same colonial system in different ways from place to place and period to period. This kind of variation is something McCracken (2012 p. 222-230) describes for Malawi, writing that chiefs closer to the colonial capital Zomba found themselves in a different position to chiefs further north.

<sup>116</sup> This history was, like most presented in the thesis, gathered in bits and pieces. David gave a few details about his grandfather in our early life history interviews, but they were subordinated in favour of his narrative of his life as a Christian. He, and other people in Chimtengo mostly referred to Chief Chimtengo Three when negotiating help and support. I have combined these references in this section for the sake of narrative clarity, but do try to indicate some of the contexts in which the different pieces of Chimtengo Three's story emerged.



Pondani (Figure 3. p. 94) acted on his behalf while he was away. Pondani used his brother's money to buy cattle, and invest in his own home and the homes of other relatives. Agnes Msindiza, David's aunt, still lived in Pondani's house. Once, she told me she regretted the fact it no longer had the iron roof that it had done in Pondani's day. Agnes, along with several other people in the village, also recalled that whilst many men had migrated for work from Chimtengo, none had sent back as much money as Stanley, nor stayed away for so long. *'He was a very hard worker'*, Agnes explained to me.

When Stanley returned from South Africa in 1972, he took up the chieftaincy proper as Chimtengo Three and used his savings to enter the 'Master Farmer' (*Chikumbi*)<sup>117</sup> programme and to start several small enterprises in the village. Through farming and his other initiatives, which included planting the blue gum and bamboo wood lots, and investing in hundreds of egg laying chickens, Chimtengo Three amassed a large amount of wealth. People in the village remembered that he had been able to buy a car, a Landrover according to David. They also remembered that Chimtengo Three had used his wealth to continue to provide for people in the village, as well as for relatives and acquaintances living elsewhere, like David and the rest of his siblings in Mtete. The poorer members in the village, like Esnarth Mitambo and Bill Bonasi, who relied on *ganyu* for their livelihoods, told me wistfully that labour had always been plentiful during the time of Chimtengo Three. Often these memories were drawn up during their negotiations with David or Harold over *ganyu*. *Ganyu* workers, and David and Harold, described Chimtengo Three to me as having been a *'very big man'* (*munthu wamkulu kwabasi*), not just in the village but in the area around as well. David told me on several occasions that *'He helped many people'*. Although he often referred to the importance of doing so as a Christian (see chapter six),

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<sup>117</sup> This programme was begun under the British and continued after independence. It favoured a small number of Malawian farmers who already had capital by providing them with subsidised agricultural inputs, equipment and training (see Mapila et al. 2010 and McCracken 2012 p. 251). People in Chimtengo remembered that Chimtengo Three got an ox plough from the programme that allowed him to farm a far larger area of land than most other people. I saw no ploughs when I was in the village and Englund writes he did not come across any in Dedza in the 1990s either (1999 p. 146). While peasant producer incomes in the Central Region were higher than in the Southern and Northern Regions by the end of the 1960s, inequality was also greater. The Master Farmer programme was at least partly responsible for this.

David also referred to his grandfather when he talked of giving support to Bill Bonasi, Chimtengo Kubwalo, or his extended family.

Despite his apparent success at managing the different relationships that made him big, it had not been as easy for Chief Chimtengo Three to do this as some narratives of the village's history implied. While many in Chimtengo remembered the 1970s and 1980s fondly as a time when *ganyu* and support (*thandizo*) were plentiful under Chimtengo Three, not everyone remained quiescent in the face of the inequality that existed between the wealthy chief and the rest of the village<sup>118</sup>. When Pondani died in the late 1970s, Chimtengo Three claimed a large portion of his elder brother's wealth in the discussions of the inheritance at the funeral. Chimtengo's claim on the inheritance angered Pondani's son Aleke Pondani. Pondani, as well as investing in the village, had managed to develop a thriving shop in Chimsika using his share of his younger brother's remittances. Aleke kept the shop and moved into it, away from Chimtengo, and threatened to kill Chimtengo Three for taking the rest of the inheritance, the livestock and other possessions Pondani had amassed in Chimtengo. No harm came to Chimtengo Three, but the sides of the family remained estranged for a long time. Pondani's shop was still running when I came to live in Chimtengo and it was there that Aleke's son, Jimmy, told me the story of what had happened between his father and Chimtengo Three. Aleke had died in the 1990s and Jimmy said he had only started talking to Chimtengo Three and David again around the year 2000. When I spoke with David about the story, he confirmed it and mentioned that others had been '*jealous*' of Chimtengo Three as well. Chimtengo Three had maintained his prosperity in the face of this jealousy. On another occasion, Harold told me that people had resented the chief's wealth, but that Chimtengo Three had '*just gone ahead, working hard*'.

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<sup>118</sup> Bill Bonasi and many other people in the village were barely old enough to remember the 1970s and 1980s under Chimtengo Three. It must be assumed that older people passed on such recollections. There was an overarching narrative shared by everyone I spoke to in Chimtengo Kubwalo that the prosperity of the village had risen, and fallen, with Chimtengo Three's own fortunes.

The evidence of Chimtengo Three's former prosperity was scattered around his old house (Map 2. p. 33), iron roofing sheets, a rusted engine block, tangled old chicken cages, and odd broken pieces of furniture surrounded its fallen walls. The objects prompted Harold and David's recollections of their grandfather's decline. It was after Malawi's multi-party elections in 1994 that Chimtengo Three's bigness began to unravel. He had continued to prosper throughout Kamuzu Banda's time in power, even as many other Malawians suffered from increasing poverty through the 1980s (White, 1987 p. 232, Chirwa, 1996 p. 625-630, Englund, 2002a p. 47). Banda continued to subsidise some Master Farmers like Chimtengo Three, even as small holders and international labour migrants were forced into badly paid jobs on Malawian tobacco estates owned by the President and members of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP)(Chirwa, 1996 p. 624, Kydd and Christiansen, 1982 p. 366). When the MCP lost the 1994 multi-party elections, agricultural subsidies were removed<sup>119</sup> and the party's paramilitary wing, the Malawi Young Pioneers (MYP) was disbanded (van Donge, 1995, Harrigan, 2003 p. 853-854, Englund, 2002a p. 52 and p. 174). As a result of the restructure of subsidies from central government, Chimtengo Three's businesses and farming activities suffered through the 1990s, the family finding that it was difficult to make a profit without the subsidies available to them during the Banda era. Many of Chimtengo Three's livestock were also stolen; Harold and David blaming the thefts on the disbandment of the MYP who they said had always provided '*security*' (*chitetezo*) in the area around Chimtengo (cf. Englund, 2002b p. 13, Englund, 1996). Chimtengo Three had been good '*friends*' with the local MYP cadre.

It was not just the support of the MYP that Chimtengo Three lacked during the 1990s. Chimtengo Three's first wife and their child had died while he had been away in South Africa but when he returned he married a woman named Tiyamike, and had several children with her. David explained Chimtengo Three

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<sup>119</sup> Despite post-1994 structural reforms and a new constitution, money continued to accrue to elites in national government. Networks of clientelism in the national government were more fragmented than they had been under Banda, but essentially members of President Bakili Muluzi's administration derived rents from national development projects in much the same way as Banda's supporters had done (Cammack 2011, Englund 2002b).

had seen '*that educating children would mean he could support himself in the future*', and sent all his children to school. Curious about where his children now were, I asked David whether they or any of the other children Chimtengo Three had sent to school, had been able to support the chief in the 1990s and early 2000s. David said that most of the children that Chimtengo Three had supported through school, including his '*real*'<sup>120</sup> children, did not reciprocate when he had started to struggle during the 1990s. David said one in particular, a grandson of Chimtengo Three, had made a big success of himself in Lilongwe during the period. He '*bought a house and a car... but gave no support to the village*'. David shook his head sadly as he said this.

His investment in the maize mill in the village (Map 2. p. 33) had been an attempt by Chimtengo Three to cut the losses he had incurred through the 1990s. He sold his car, chickens and most of his remaining livestock to buy the mill. The chief died in 2007, shortly after the mill became operational. Although his status was diminished Chimtengo Three was still a very big man on his death. Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo and David remembered that '*many people*' flocked to his lavish funeral. Pastor John Moyo, who had been amongst the guests, also described to me the scale of the occasion. Several people arrived in cars from town and the Traditional Authority attended. David said he was a '*special friend*' of Chimtengo Three. I went to around ten funerals during my time in the village and no more than two cows were slaughtered for any of these. At Chimtengo Three's funeral I was told around a dozen cows were killed and their meat shared around the many guests.

Chimtengo Three had managed the profit from migrant labour with his relationships in the village well enough to become village chief and establish a prosperous livelihood in Chimtengo on his return from South Africa. But he did not adjust well to the changing conditions of the 1990s. Although he had seen the importance of educating his younger relatives in the 1970s and 1980s, planning

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<sup>120</sup> David used this term when he wanted to describe a relation based on biological connection rather than on affect. For a discussion of conceiving of kinship in these different ways see *After Kinship* (2004) by Janet Carsten.

ahead, most of them offered him little help when he needed it most. Unable to find a job in town, David was one of the few younger relatives, along with Harold and Limbani, who helped Chimtengo Three in the village towards the end of his life.

### *David's bigness*

Chimtengo villagers recognised their crops, cash and possession of lots of other 'stuff' (*katundu*) as making David and Harold the rich men, *olemera*, or *mabwana*, of the village. The brothers could avoid these pejorative labels by distributing their wealth to other people in the village and the surrounds (cf. Booth et al., 2006). David and Harold were identified as big men because they did this, using their wealth to give support and *ganyu* work to poorer dependents. People often described me as a 'big man' too, David himself denying he was 'big' in comparison. David mostly did this when he was trying to get me to give him support in one way or another. I in turn often played on the fact I was unmarried to defer requests made of me, marriage being the other important criterion of bigness that David, Harold and other big men in the area around Chimtengo all met. The history of Chimtengo Three's relationship to David helped to make sense of why being big was important to him. As memories of Chimtengo Three emerged, as part of contemporary debates about help and support (*thandizo*) in the village, the significance of David's relationship with his grandfather became clearer.

When I first arrived in the village and David had shown me around his homestead, I had asked him how he had come to possess his wood lots, maize mill and cows. David referred to his relationship with Chimtengo Three, saying 'my grandfather, he loved me too much'. David pointed out the closeness of his house to the dilapidated remains of Chimtengo Three's home as evidence of their close affective relationship (Map 2. p. 33). Like Martha did with Elsie Benson, David also referenced the fact that he had called Chimtengo Three 'agogo', 'grandfather', as a sign of the quality of their relationship. For his part, David said Chimtengo Three had called him 'my child' (*mwana wanga*). It was because of

this affective connection and the help he had given the chief, that Chimtengo Three had instructed that David receive the inheritance he did<sup>121</sup>. The capital made David, along with Harold with whom the inheritance was shared, the richest man in Chimtengo.

David told me in one of our life history interviews that he had been born in 1972, in Mtete, where his mother Dissy, the daughter of Chimtengo Three's sister Mwati, had married his father Kaso Dimi in 1961 (Figure 3. p. 94)<sup>122</sup>. David remembered that it was Kaso's failure to send him to school in Mtete that Chimtengo Three cited as the reason for bringing him to Chimtengo. David explained, *'My Grandfather supported me through all my school... My father did not have enough money so my grandfather said, "it is better if this child goes to school. I can assist him."'* The move was not straightforward, Kaso wanting his children to work to support the family. David said Dissy had encouraged him to return to Chimtengo - *'to our village'* - to be with his grandfather there. David eventually left for Chimtengo in 1983, by which time Chimtengo Three had already been sending money to Mtete for his schooling there.

Even though in the narrative of his life story David mainly emphasised the role of God and John Moyo, his education, paid for by Chimtengo Three, was another important factor in enabling David to become a pastor. Chimtengo Three also supported David in the difficult period after David had finished school, and before he became a pastor. In the 1990s, opportunities to earn money in the Central Region did not match up to those that had existed during the 1960s and 1970s, of which Chimtengo Three had been able to take advantage (Englund, 2002a p. 52, Englund, 2002c p. 139)<sup>123</sup>. As David struggled to find a job in

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<sup>121</sup> David noted that Chimtengo Three's children were not so interested in the inheritance that was located in the village as they now lived in town and other places further afield. Despite this, and Chimtengo Three's instructions, David and Harold both said the discussions about the inheritance had been long and laboured.

<sup>122</sup> David explained that the reason he was the first born, even though he was born more than ten years after Dissy and Kaso had married was because the couple had lost several children in their infancy during the 1960s.

<sup>123</sup> Some labour migration abroad continued to take place in Malawi in the 1990s but it was no longer the attractive option it had once been (Chirwa 1996 p. 638). Violence against foreign workers in South Africa still flares up regularly (BBC 2015). These episodes were known of in

Lilongwe, Chimtengo Three continued to support him and his young family. David told me. *'At that time I was not standing on my own, I just worked for my Grandfather.'*

The number of NGOs in Malawi grew significantly though the 1990s, becoming important paths to wealth and connection for some people in the country (Englund, 2006, Swidler and Watkins, 2009, Watkins and Swidler, 2012). When *World Vision* started working in the area around Chimsika during the 1990s, David, with his Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE), successfully applied to be a volunteer. But, although David received per diems for *World Vision* events and trainings, he was clear he was always a *'volunteer'* with *World Vision* and never received a salary<sup>124</sup>. Mission churches had offered wealth and status to people in the Central Region, a path to bigness, since the early colonial period (McCracken, 1968, Pike, 1968 p. 133, McCracken, 2012 p. 282-303) and after *World Vision* left Chimsika around 2005, it was the Baptist church that provided David with forms of connection and support, his education enabling him to train to be the Pamtunda churches' pastor.

The inheritance and education David had received through Chimtengo Three provided a material basis for David to become a big man in Chimtengo and the surrounds after his grandfather's death, but the memory of Chimtengo Three's support to him, and of the support he had given others was also important to David as an inspiration or example. David rarely mentioned his father Kaso Dimi. Kaso died during my fieldwork, but as I was away from Chimtengo at the time, I did not attend his funeral. Afterwards, when we visited Mtete to see his remaining relatives on his father's side, David showed me a tiny house where he explained Kaso had lived since David's mother Dissy had died in 2006. David said dismissively that after his father had his cows stolen in the mid-1970s he had

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Chimtengo and discussed while I was in the village. The violence, along with the price of visas and passports combined to put people off trying to go to find work in South Africa.

<sup>124</sup> Swidler and Watkins (2009 p. 201 and 2012 p. 1191) and Englund (2006 p. 87-90) have observed that salaried roles with NGOs like *World Vision* are generally reserved for people with tertiary level education, although the hope of employment with an NGO, no matter how 'remote', is still held by many rural Malawians (Watkins and Swidler 2012 p. 210).

'not done anything', and failed to care for any of his children. By contrast, David regularly talked about the way that he took his *'example'* from his grandfather when deciding how to give support to people in the village; the way Chimtengo Three had *'helped many people'* in the past. Although he had not gone to South Africa, and was not chief, David saw himself in a specific genealogy of bigness from Chimtengo Three. This genealogy guided what David gave to whom, and what others requested of him.

David received a lot of claims on his resources. This was particularly true during the hungry season<sup>125</sup>. I had discussed with David when I arrived in Chimtengo the added pressure he would come under given that I was living in his household. He admitted *'people will think I have money because you are here'*, but also told me not to worry; he was used to these kinds of requests, being a pastor and a big man. Some individuals that I knew well, like Esnarth, came to me for help directly, but most made their requests of David, who then asked me on their behalf. From January to April, when people's grain stores were emptying and little *ganyu* was available, David received requests, perhaps at a rate of one every other day for help (*thandizo*) with food. It was not only church members and deacons that came to David, or family, but people from Chimtengo and the surrounding area too. One man who came for help a lot was Fletcher Mackson, an itinerant *ganyu* worker recently returned with his pregnant wife Bessy to live in Chimtengo Kutsidya after working for several years on tobacco estates across the Central Region. Fletcher was Esnarth Mitambo's brother. Like Esnarth, Fletcher had relied entirely on *ganyu* labour to support himself and his family through his life. He told me as the hungry season began that he was *'depending'* (*-dalira*) on David for work. While my presence influenced the way people like Fletcher related to David during the hungry season, their interactions also made clear the continuing importance of Chimtengo Three.

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<sup>125</sup> Megan Vaughan (1987) suggests in her book on the 1949 famine in Malawi that such times of shortage cast social relationships in a particularly sharp light.



Soon after Fletcher had told me he was depending on David, Bessy gave birth. Martha, who had herself been declining requests for help from Bessy, said the birth was bad timing, as there was no more *ganyu* to be had and food was getting scarce. A few days later Fletcher came to the house. David was in town and I was at home alone. *'My wife is sick, so is my child, the people at the health centre in Chimsika say they need to go to Central... I need help from the big man. I have no money to pay for transport.'* I said he was welcome to wait for David, but that I had to go and meet someone in Kwamhango village. When I came back a couple of hours later Fletcher was still waiting. Shortly after I returned Fletcher saw Harold coming back from his wet garden and set off for his house, the house, as he put it, of *'the other big man in our village'*.

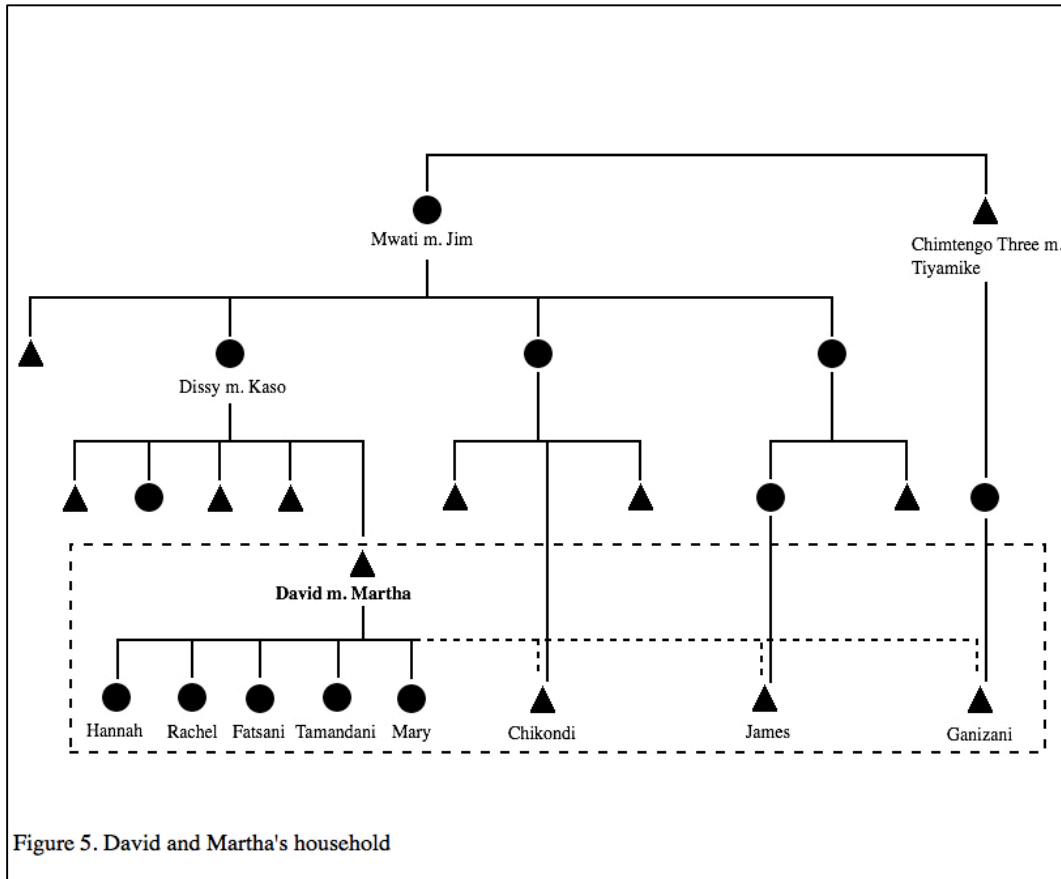
Subsequent episodes further revealed how Fletcher and David made sense of their relationship in reference to a specific genealogy of dependence. I had told David about Fletcher's predicament when David had come home. David had then spoken with Harold, who explained he had given Fletcher money to get to the hospital. Harold said to David and I that Fletcher was *'in serious trouble'*, as he had just one plate of maize left. David said he would try to help, and provided Fletcher with small bowls of flour and maize periodically over the following weeks. When David gave Fletcher some *ganyu* toward the end of the hungry season, he explained to me that he tried to help Fletcher and Esnarth Mitambo because they and their parents had worked for Chimtengo Three. When Fletcher was finished with the work, he came back to discuss his pay. David offered him MK 500 (1.50 USD), which by local standards did not seem unfair<sup>126</sup>. Fletcher however complained that David was being *'stingy'* (*-mana*), and that he had a family to feed. He referred to David as his *'uncle'* (*atsibweni*) as he pushed David to pay him more. The discussion went on for several minutes until David agreed to add an extra MK 100 (0.30 USD). As Fletcher Mackson walked away I asked David why Fletcher had called him uncle. David said;

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<sup>126</sup> As I wrote in chapter two, a day's work making ridges in a field near Chimtengo normally earned a pieceworker up to MK 1000 (3 USD).

*'Fletcher, he worked for my grandfather Chimtengo Three. Myself I try now to support them. You see yourself, many people, they have faith (chikhulupiro) in me. They want ganyu, maize. They depend (-dalira) on me.'*

Bryceson suggests that increased economic differentiation amongst rural people has led to *ganyu* contracts in the Central Region becoming increasingly bereft of their 'relational content' and 'welfare orientation' (Bryceson, 2006 p. 198). David and Fletcher's exchange does not however suggest that labour relations between *ganyu* workers and larger farmers have become completely commoditized or impersonalized. Englund (1999) writes that in Dedza in the 1990s, *ganyu* marked and reproduced important idiosyncratic, affective relationships between particular patrons and their dependents. There it was morally important for patrons to provide for the welfare of their dependents. As in Englund's Dedza case there were always people in and around Chimtengo looking for *ganyu* (1999 p. 151), and David could have paid someone less than he paid Fletcher to do the work that he gave him. Fletcher's ability to obtain work was just a matter of his engagement with David in 'the micro-politics of everyday life' (cf. Englund 1999 p. 151) either; Fletcher had been back in Chimtengo for only a few months, having been away for years working elsewhere in the Central Region. What mattered were David and Fletcher's respective places in a longer shared genealogy of dependence. The way David made sense of his bigness was shaped by this genealogy; giving support to Fletcher Mackson, Esnarth Mitambo, Bill Bonasi and others was one way in which he took his '*example*' from Chimtengo Three.



David talked about his relationship with Chimtengo Three as an important influence over his support of his adopted son Ganizani as well. David did not regard Ganizani as a member of his extended kin group, like James Khumbo and Chikondi Amon, the other boys he had taken into his household. Ganizani was the step-grandchild (Figure 5.) of Chimtengo Three, the grandchild of his second wife Tiyamike from her previous marriage. When Ganizani's parents had both died, Chimtengo Three asked David to care for him. He had been in David's house for twelve years when I arrived in Chimtengo, since his infancy. A very bright boy, he spoke the best English of anyone I encountered in the local area, David aside, and had topped his class in Chimsika primary school. David often remarked how he *'loved Ganizani too much'*. He also called him his *'child'* (*mwana wanga*) despite pointing out to me Ganizani was not one of his *'real'* children. David by contrast did not refer to Chikondi or James as his children, even though he recognised them as closer kin than Ganizani in a formal, jural sense. David compared his care for Ganizani with that which Chimtengo Three had given him. It troubled him that he was not living up to his grandfather's example. Thinking

about the move to Chimsika and what Ganizani would do David had said 'He [Chimtengo Three] looked after so many people. I take my example from him; I try to support people as well... Ganizani has no where else to go; I know he will not continue his schooling if he is not part of my household.'

For David, not providing as a big man was worrisome for more than one reason. Firstly, accusations of pride (-*nyada*), stinginess (-*mana*) and injustice (*alibe chilungamo*), called into question his position as a big man in an uncomfortable way. These worries bore comparison with Martha's concerns about being 'silent' and 'alone' at home. David described feelings of 'embarrassment' or 'shame' (*manyazi*) on several occasions when he failed to provide adequately for his dependents<sup>127</sup>. Accusations of pride and stinginess were also regarded as potential precursors to acts of witchcraft. Sungi Msisya, who David said had bewitched Sunday because of his own pride, was one of the many people who had come to David's house for food during the hungry season. She was also one of the many who had been turned away without anything, although David himself did not link his denial of food to Sungi to her witchcraft. Englund writes that migrants to Lilongwe in the 1990s remained tied into providing material support to their rural villages. He suggests the sense of pressure derived from fears about becoming the target of witchcraft (Englund, 2002c p. 152)<sup>128</sup>. Despite his insurances that God would protect and help him, David admitted that fears and worries, kept him up at night. He would sometimes tell me that he had been awake all night thinking about what to do about Fletcher and Bessy, or Ganizani, or Martha, or members of his churches.

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<sup>127</sup> Marwick (1965 p. 224) writes that the Chewa where he worked had an 'acute sense of shame' (*manyazi*), strong enough to cause people to kill themselves. Whilst *manyazi* concerned people in Chimtengo and the surrounds, it did not seem to describe so grave a feeling as that which Marwick describes. For that reason I think it is perhaps better translated as 'embarrassment' in most instances in the thesis.

<sup>128</sup> Englund (2002, p. 152) observes that richer people can and do attack the poor through witchcraft. Witchcraft is therefore not best thought of as a 'weapon of the weak', nor is worry about witchcraft best thought of as a preserve of the wealthy alone. Max Marwick, writing on how Chewa people came to terms with increasing economic disparity in their villages in the first half of the twentieth century, quotes an interlocutor. "Some people kill a fellow human being... on seeing him possess good things. They do not feel well in their hearts, and they simply want to kill him, saying, "He is very proud." (1965 p. 97, also see van Breugel 2001 p. 224-228).

David was one of the wealthiest people in Chintengo and the surrounds, a position that was based upon his position as a pastor in the church and the wealth he had inherited from Chintengo Three. The way he made sense of his bigness and who he should support as a big man was informed by specific biographies and genealogies that could be traced back to Chintengo Three's time as the biggest man in Chintengo village. Looking at these biographies and genealogies in conjunction with Chintengo Kubwalo's history helps explain David's support of the Chief with maize, and the way the pair negotiated the distribution of subsidised fertiliser.

### ***Chintengo Kubwalo, David and the Farm Input Subsidy Programme***

#### *Chintengo Kubwalo's struggle for bigness*

Chief Chintengo Kubwalo's status as a big man in the village was open to question. His position had its historical roots. Much of this history was told to me by Chintengo Kubwalo over a series of conversations we had during my time in the village. He had been born in Chintengo and he guessed that he was in his fifties, putting his date of birth sometime in the 1960s. He had not attended school and had worked his family's land in the village until he went to labour elsewhere at the start of the 1980s. Chintengo Kubwalo had reached adolescence just as migration abroad had become difficult for people in the Central Region and he never ventured beyond the country's borders for work. He told me he did *ganyu* in Malawi, labouring on government development projects and on tobacco estates around the Central Region. In 1983 he was working at Paskulu, an area the other side of Lilongwe city from Chintengo, several hours travel by bus. At Paskulu he met a woman named Doris and brought her back to Chintengo as his wife. After marrying Chintengo Kubwalo lived in Chintengo farming land given to him by his parents. Chintengo Kubwalo and Doris had seven children over the following two decades. All but the eldest boy and girl, who had both married elsewhere, were living in Chintengo with Chintengo Kubwalo and Doris when I arrived in the village.

Chimtengo Kubwalo became chief of the village in 2007, on the death of Chimtengo Three. Following tradition, the elders of Chimtengo met to discuss (*-kambirana*) the succession on the day of the funeral. They decided that it would be *'doing justly'* (*-chita chilungamo*) for the chieftaincy to move to another family in the village, other than Chimtengo Three's and with this in mind selected Chimtengo Kubwalo. It was David that told me this first; he had been involved in the discussions, along with Harold and the village's elders<sup>129</sup>. David said to me that he had not wanted the chieftaincy as he was committed to his work as a pastor. Harold told me he had not wanted to be chief either - it was *'hard work'*, with *'little profit in it'*. When I talked with Chimtengo Kubwalo about David's description of what had happened when Chimtengo Three had died the chief agreed with it, but emphasised he had not wanted the role, like Harold, citing the kind of work it involved - *'to a case, to a case, you just go around and around'* (*kumlandu, kumlandu, mungoyendayenda*). His wife Doris cut in to say she remembered the day well when her husband was told that he was to be made chief. Pointing at their house, outside which we were sat, she said Chimtengo Kubwalo had vehemently refused to accept the chieftaincy, shouting his refusals at the elders and David and Harold from behind his locked door. Eventually he was persuaded to come out and accept the role<sup>130</sup>.

The position of chief did have its advantages and privileges as well as its burdens. As there had been in the past, there were opportunities to gain status and wealth - to be a big man - as the head of a village. Whilst people in Chimtengo emphasised the *'work'* of chieftaincy, what was also recognised, if spoken about less, was the fact that chiefs received a monthly MK 5000 (15 USD) stipend in

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<sup>129</sup> David mentioned Panjira Mbvuto, Bester Mkanda, Tatu Bonda, Thokozani Bonasi and his aunt Agness Msindiza attending the meeting. He said there were a few other elders present as well, they had since died.

<sup>130</sup> Englund (2002a p. 141) writes that denials like Kubwalo's are expected demonstrations of modesty amongst potential Chewa chiefs, a point that resonates with Marwick's suggestion that Chewa have historically had to have had good *'character'* (*khalidwe*) as much as appropriate lineage connections in order to become chiefs (1965 p. 118).

their role as the lowest agents of the government's executive hierarchy<sup>131</sup>. In this capacity Chimtengo Kubwalo and other chiefs acted as the official conduits for development projects from government and NGOs into villages<sup>132</sup>.

By far the most significant of these was the yearly Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP). The FISP was initiated by President Bingu wa Mutharika in 2005, its stated purpose to provide subsistence farmers with fertiliser at a discounted rate, in order to relieve food insecurity and poverty across Malawi (Chirwa and Dorward, 2013, Lunduka et al., 2013). When I was in the village, Mutharika was still remembered fondly for initiating the FISP; *'He was a good leader, he gave us fertiliser'* Chimtengo Kubwalo told me. Given that subsidised fertiliser was seen as so crucial, the popularity of FISP and of Mutharika was unsurprising. In Chimtengo, as Englund remarked of villages in Dedza in the 1990s, the use of fertiliser *'represented the essence of successful farming'* (2002a p. 174). When I asked Fletcher Mackson and Bill Bonasi why they had pursued *ganyu* throughout their lives, rather than trying to farm for themselves, they both explained that farming was not worth attempting unless they had fertiliser. The price of the input meant they would probably never start. I heard several other people in the village, including David, describe farming without fertiliser as *'worthless effort'*.

The reason Chimtengo was now three villages with three chiefs, rather than one, as it had been under Chimtengo Three, was to do with the FISP. In the area around Chimtengo, chiefs were central to the distribution of the FISP fertiliser. When talking with a church member about the prospect of their becoming a chief in another village, David exclaimed, *'you should do it - you will control fertiliser'*, an allusion not only to the importance of fertiliser but also to the power village

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<sup>131</sup> An important caveat to this is that chiefs only received their MK 5000 after having been officially registered at the District Commissioner's office in Lilongwe. Kubwalo, having officially taken Chimtengo Three's place was registered and received his MK 5000 each month. Chief Chimtengo Kunjira and Chief Chimtengo Kutsidya had not yet started to receive their stipend.

<sup>132</sup> While McCracken suggests Banda forged links with Central Region chiefs and supported them (McCracken 2012 p. 446), other observers write that across the country in general the *de facto* influence and authority of chiefs improved in the multiparty era in the absence of the pervasive influence of the MYP and MCP (Eggen 2011 p. 317-326, Cammack, Kanyongolo and O'Neil 2009 p. 7-8, Swidler 2013 p. 325).

chiefs in the FISP. Historically Chewa have 'budded off' from their chiefs when they have felt that they are not being served well by the relationship (Rangeley, 1948 p. 6). Chimtengo's division under three chiefs was explained to me in relation to historical tensions in the village and the surrounds, but also as the result of the desire of different factions to control subsidised fertiliser for themselves under the FISP.

David told me that during the discussions about the destination of the chieftaincy, a villager named Kadango Msaka had come to the elders with half a dozen other men and said they would refuse to have Chimtengo Kubwalo as their chief. Although they argued, David said there was not much he, Harold and the elders could do. Unbeknown to them Kadango Msaka had been working with (*-gwirizana*) some other local chiefs to get support for his own chieftaincy. David explained that one local chief in particular, the head of Kwadzonzi village (Map 3. p. 33), had been '*at war*' with Chimtengo Three for years, '*jealous*' of his success. Supporting Msaka was the latest of many attempts by Chief Kwadzonzi to destabilise Chimtengo<sup>133</sup>. A month after Chimtengo Three's funeral another group broke off with similar support from Chief Kwadzonzi and other local chiefs. Kadango Msaka became Chief Chimtengo Kutsidya, whilst the leader of the second faction, Grimson Sauka, became Chief Chimtengo Kunjira.

While David acknowledged the role of Kwadzonzi in the break up of Chimtengo, he put greater causal emphasis on the '*greed*' (*ubombo*) of the Msaka and Sauka factions, and the fact they '*wanted to control fertiliser*'. David brought this point up every time I asked about the division of the village. When I asked Chimtengo Kubwalo about the division he also blamed the FISP and Msaka and Sauka's greed, '*They [Kutsidya and Kunjira] were causing trouble over the fertiliser, they thought that they would get more if they had their own village.*' I did not spend much time with Chimtengo Kutsidya or Chimtengo Kunjira, but when I did get a

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<sup>133</sup> When I asked, David said he had used the term '*war*' as a figure of speech, no physical conflict had ever broken out between the villages. Mostly it had manifested in court cases over land, Kwadzonzi and Chimtengo villagers making claims and counter claims on different fields over the course of decades.



chance to ask them why they had broken off from Chimtengo Kubwalo they both said they had wanted to get '*more fertiliser*'. Unsurprisingly though they did not talk about '*greed*', but rather the size to which the village had grown under Chimtengo Three, and the need to obtain more fertiliser to meet the needs of all the people living there.

If Chimtengo Kubwalo's entrance into the chieftaincy had been difficult he did not appear to have become better off since. I was curious at the start of my stay that as a chief he was not doing better for himself. Chimtengo Kubwalo and Doris's house was always in good repair but was only slightly larger than most of the other dwellings in the village. Most of the chiefs in the villages immediately around had larger, better houses, although Chimtengo Kunjira's or Chimtengo Kutsidya's were not any larger. Both David and Harold's homes dwarfed the chiefs'. Chimtengo Kubwalo's house was also roofed with thatch rather than more expensive iron sheets (Map 2. p. 33 and Figure 2. p. 58). When I arrived in Chimtengo, Chimtengo Kubwalo had a bicycle and a few fowl, but no larger livestock. He drew his monthly government stipend of MK 5000 (15 USD), but still sold charcoal in Lilongwe and took part in government improvement works when they happened in the local area<sup>134</sup>. His wife Doris did *ganyu* in the village and the local area to help support the household. A couple of people in the village mentioned to me when they saw her returning from the field that this was something of an '*embarrassment*' for the chief, who should be able to keep his wife without her having to do *ganyu*. It was widely discussed in the village that Kubwalo regularly took loans (*ngongole*), to cover his spending and meet his family's needs.

There were several reasons for Chimtengo Kubwalo's ongoing money problems, other than a lack of opportunity to work earlier in his life. His family were not particularly wealthy and had not inherited anything from Chimtengo Three,

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<sup>134</sup> These works were labelled *ganyu* by people in the village, and supervised by local chiefs for the District Commissioners Office, which paid the labourers a few thousand kwacha for several days work (5-10 USD). The most common labour was the grading and maintenance of local dirt roads.

David and Kubwalo explaining that, customarily, material inheritance did not follow with the inheritance of chiefly office. Chimtengo Kubwalo had not been particularly close with the old chief and so did not stand to gain anything for reasons of affect as Harold and David had done. Moreover, it became apparent as my time in the village went on that Chimtengo Kubwalo was not very good at managing his money. He did not invest much in productive capital, agricultural inputs or equipment, but instead bought consumption goods like clothes and food. The loans that he took to furnish many of these purchases had high interest rates that demanded repayment<sup>135</sup>. People explained to me that, whilst Chimtengo Kubwalo was chief and had various sources of income, he frittered money away being '*careless*' and '*playing*' (*-sewera*) with it. Chimtengo Kubwalo himself recognised his weakness. Once, when he was slightly drunk after going to a beer party, he told me a story about a man who had come into some money but had '*done nothing*' with it; Chimtengo Kubwalo detailed a long list of things, '*tea, beer, meat, shoes and clothes*' that the man purchased, until eventually his money ran out. '*That man, he ate it, he ate his money*' Chimtengo Kubwalo concluded. When I asked whom the man was Chimtengo Kubwalo looked ahead and said '*He is me*'.

His habits made it difficult for Chimtengo Kubwalo to offer support (*thandizo*) to people in the village. Fletcher and other poorer people never went to Chimtengo Kubwalo for *ganyu* or help, as Fletcher's comment about Harold being '*the other big man*' in Chimtengo, aside from David, had implied. Chimtengo Kubwalo frequently turned to Harold and David for help himself. He would come to the house to ask after David, or send one of his boys to get David to come to his house to discuss one issue or another. It was rare for two or three days to pass without this happening. Chimtengo Kubwalo was illiterate and needed David's help to read the forms and instructions related to programmes like FISP. When his bicycle was forcibly taken from him in lieu of a large debt that he had failed to

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<sup>135</sup> *Support* or *help* (*thandizo*) was different from the provision of loans (*ngongole*). The latter described transactions that were mostly in cash and involved more formal terms of repayment. The word was used to describe the credit given by NGOs or government as part of agricultural extension programmes, as well as to describe transactions between small-scale lenders like the shopkeepers in Chimsika from whom Chimtengo Kubwalo often borrowed money.

pay back to a shopkeeper at Chimsika, Chimtengo Kubwalo borrowed David and Harold's bicycles to get to court cases or other meetings and discussions away from Chimtengo.

Court cases were sometimes called against Chimtengo Kubwalo himself, brought by frustrated creditors or other people to whom he owed money. Chimtengo Kubwalo would press David and Harold to join him at these. They were often reluctant. Following a memorial in the village, Chief Chimtengo Kunjira argued with Chimtengo Kubwalo over the amount he had paid the *Gule Wamkulu* that had danced there. Chimtengo Kunjira said that Chimtengo Kubwalo had not paid the portion of the fee that he had promised he would contribute. Chimtengo Kubwalo came to David's to discuss the situation the day before the case was due to be heard. After greeting David and I, Chimtengo Kubwalo asked David to come to the case to give him support, and to help pay any fines he might be obliged to hand over. Later that day, after nightfall, I saw David leaving the house in the direction of Chimtengo Kubwalo's house. When I asked David where he was going at such an unusual hour, he told me with a sigh, '*Kubwalo has that case. He wants me again, me the big man.*'

Such incidents like the case over the *Gule Wamkulu* dented Chimtengo Kubwalo's status. He struggled to turn wealth in materials into the kind of wealth in people that could make him a big man in the context of the village. The possession of his bicycle in lieu of the repayment of his debt prompted comment and criticism from Chimtengo Kubwalo villagers that I was able to hear. David and some other men were gathered together watching a village football game when the news about the bicycle emerged. They all shook their heads, sighed and grumbled, '*Our chief!*' (*mfumu athu!*), '*What has he done now?*' (*wachita chiyani?*), '*This a great shame to him*' (*akuchita manyazi kwambiri*). It was yet another example to them in a long line of episodes that demonstrated Chimtengo Kubwalo's inability to handle money. Later that day, at home around the cooking fire, Martha and Tamandani talked about what had happened, citing Chimtengo Kubwalo's lack of a treadle pump as further evidence of his failings as a chief. Treadle pumps were foot-operated pumps, used for irrigation of wet gardens. More efficient than

using watering cans, they were sold at a discounted rate by an NGO during my time in the village. David and Harold both bought a pump, but Chimtengo Kubwalo could not afford one and regularly tried to borrow one or other of the brothers' pumps to use in his wet garden. Martha alluded to this saying, '*Some people have treadle pumps, but he, a chief, he has nothing.*'

### *Negotiating the 2012 Farm Input Subsidy Programme*

What Chimtengo Kubwalo did have was control over the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP) coupons. As September 2012 had ended and the weddings, memorials and missionary visits that had followed the harvest were left behind, people in Chimtengo Kubwalo increasingly talked about how they would get hold of fertiliser in time for the planting season in early December. They were taken aback when news of the new prices for fertiliser began to filter through from Chimsika: a fifty-kilogramme bag was selling for MK 15000 (46 USD). People recalled better times. Chimtengo Kubwalo told me that in '*the time of Kamuzu Banda, fertiliser was only fifty kwacha for a bag - available on loan, good loans that we paid back no problem*'. Those days were long gone, but the jump in price from 2011 to 2012 had still been substantial<sup>136</sup>. Harold said in September 2011 the price for a fifty-kilogramme bag of fertiliser had been only MK 8000 (25 USD). Everyone else I asked remembered the same.

People began to reassess what they could afford in the light of the new price. Limbani Kaso had expected to be able to buy two bags with the money he was earning doing *ganyu* for the Chinese. '*Now the money will just get me one bag of fertiliser*', he told me. Lloyd Bonasi, Bill Bonasi's brother, who had described his large pig to me as '*a pig for fertiliser*' (*nkhumba ya feteleza*), still hoped he might be able to sell it for enough money to buy two bags. A younger man with a young

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<sup>136</sup> In an attempt to stabilise the national economy following its dramatic decline in the last years of Bingu wa Mutharika's presidency, Joyce Banda's government devalued the kwacha by 33% in May 2012 (BBC 2012). This move, and subsequent inflation, was responsible for the dramatic change in the cost of fertiliser and other goods during the time I was in the village. People in Chimtengo bemoaned how the kwacha had '*lost its power*' (*kuchepetsa mphamvu*) since Joyce Banda had become president.

family, Lloyd Bonasi was hoping to farm tobacco for the first time in 2012, making his need of fertiliser even greater than it would have been otherwise.

David worried too. He did not grow tobacco, but in order to match the quantity of maize his household had grown the previous year, which had been just sufficient for their needs given all that they had felt obliged to give away, he would still need seven bags of fertiliser at a total cost of around MK 105,000 (323 USD) at the new prices. This amount of money would never come to him through the tithes and giving of his churches, and it was unlikely he would get it from missionaries now that the rainy season was drawing near. David explained, *'I always have a problem with support this time of year. I have people - missionaries - who give me money, but not at this time.'* David had received a significant gift from a missionary called Bob Miller in August 2012. He had however used it to buy the remaining iron sheets he needed to roof his house, and there was little money left to spend on fertiliser. I assured David that I would help him to buy fertiliser, but David, knowing how cheap it was, pursued FISP fertiliser through Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo nonetheless.

The importance of fertiliser and its high cost meant that even for the richer men in the village like Harold and David, the chance to buy fifty-kilogramme bags on the FISP at the subsidised rate of MK 500 (1.50 USD) each was too good to be missed. At the very end of September, the whole of Chimtengo Kubwalo, and the other Chimtengo chieftaincies, decamped to the Traditional Authority's office at Chimsika where they sat for the whole day waiting to register their names to receive FISP coupons. Chimtengo Kubwalo explained to me that he believed the village would be allocated more coupons the more people registered. Last year they had been allocated twelve coupons for the sixteen households that had been living in Chimtengo Kubwalo at the time. A couple of days later I saw Kubwalo leaving Limbani's house, as I was coming to chat with Limbani's family. Limbani was not there, having gone back to work with the Chinese in Lilongwe, but Memory explained to me that Chimtengo Kubwalo was now starting to discuss with people how the coupons he expected to get would be *'shared out'* (-gawa) in the village. A few days later David came back from a visit to Chimtengo

Kubwalo's house, telling me that, *'I have been to see my friend [Chief Kubwalo]... to ask him to remember me when the fertiliser comes out.'*

In their detailed study of the programme, Chirwa and Dorward (2013) outline the official guidelines for the distribution of subsidised fertiliser under the FISP. In its most recent iteration<sup>137</sup> Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security staff and village members are meant to identify the village's neediest households at 'open meetings' following the village's registration for the programme (Chirwa and Dorward, 2013 p. 105-106). It is these households that receive coupons that they then exchange, with the requisite payment, for fertiliser. In recent years, each complete coupon has been made up of a voucher for NPK fertiliser, and a voucher for Urea fertiliser<sup>138</sup>. To redeem both bags a MK 1000 (3 USD) payment is required on presentation of the coupon, MK 500 (1.50 USD) each for the Urea and NPK.

Chirwa and Dorward (2013), and other observers (for example Lunduka et al., 2013 p. 570), suggest that these guidelines are rarely followed in practice. They give evidence that chiefs across Malawi have been far more prominent in the distribution process than the official guidelines imply they should be, being closely involved in distribution the Central Region in particular (Chirwa and Dorward, 2013 p. 105, Lunduka et al., 2013 p. 570). In his ethnographic description of a fertiliser distribution in the Southern Region Oyvind Eggen (2012) describes how he observed chiefs redistribute subsidised fertiliser after it had been brought back to their villages. Rather than remaining with the poorest households, identified previously at community meetings with extension workers, a 'new principle of distribution in most cases involved equal distribution to each household... Some chiefs gave more to households with larger farms, considered to be 'in need' of more fertilizer.' (2011b p. 10).

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<sup>137</sup> Dorward and Chirwa (2013) note procedures have changed several times since the programme began in 2005 under the Bingu wa Mutharika government.

<sup>138</sup> There are also vouchers available for hybrid maize and legume seed (Chirwa and Dorward 2013 p. 183-193).

No community meeting with an extension worker happened in Chimtengo, and discussion and negotiation over the eventual destination of the subsidised fertiliser continued through October as Chimtengo Kubwalo waited to receive the village's coupons from the Traditional Authority. David went to see Chimtengo Kubwalo again. Having exchanged greetings conversation quickly turned to the price of fertiliser, both men bemoaning its rising cost - now up to nearly MK 18000 (55 USD) at some vendors in Chimsika. David then asked Chimtengo Kubwalo about his wet garden, where the chief was growing maize. When Chimtengo Kubwalo said his maize was healthy David turned to me and said, *'He is a big man our chief, he has maize.'* Chimtengo Kubwalo immediately questioned me, *'Me Dan? Is a man who farms maize a big man? No, me, I am not a big man. But David - now he is a big man.'* David shook his head and launched into asking Chimtengo Kubwalo about getting maize seeds. He had heard that free hybrid seeds might be available under the FISP that year. *'Give us seeds chief, we at our house, we've no seeds.'* Chimtengo Kubwalo replied saying, *'No, this year we will have to buy them [seeds and fertiliser], we're headed for problems.'* David did not accept this, *'Buy how Chief? I myself, I want thirty kilogrammes of maize seed, how can I buy that? I fear for us this year.'* Chimtengo Kubwalo continued to deny that he would be able to get David free seeds until the conversation eventually tailed off when Doris brought us some *nsima* to eat.

At the start of November Chimtengo Kubwalo found me at home alone. He said that David and Harold and many other people had been to see him, asking for his support with subsidised fertiliser, but that he had still not received coupons from the Traditional Authority, *'I am worried, the government, they are late distributing coupons this year.'* Turning to face David's house, Chimtengo Kubwalo asked me about a visit that had been made to Pamtunda by a group of American missionaries at the start of September, after Bob Miller had come in August. The group had bought the Pamtunda churches some black plastic sheets so that they could waterproof the thatch roofs of the churches before the start of the rainy

season<sup>139</sup>. The missionaries had said they were specifically for the use of the churches. Chimtengo Kubwalo asked if it was true that the missionaries had brought the plastic sheets and whether any of them still remained with David in his house. This was not the first nor the last time that Chimtengo Kubwalo asked me questions about the resources David had at his disposal. I tended to just say what I knew as, despite David's best efforts, what he got given by missionaries normally became known in the village sooner rather than later. I said that it was true that the missionary team had brought the sheets and that some of them were still stored in David's house waiting for church deacons to come and collect them. *'Ok good. I will take mine'* Chimtengo Kubwalo said, before offering me his goodbyes and walking off.

A couple of days later Chimtengo Kubwalo started moving around the houses in the village; he had been told by the Group Village Head<sup>140</sup> how many coupons the village would receive and was now firming up plans of how they would be divided amongst the households in the village. He arrived at our house around lunchtime and explained that the village had been allocated twelve coupons, the same as the previous year, but that he would give two to David, provided he share one of his four bags with another household in the village, Mvula Imani and his wife's. This allocation of three bags would give David nearly half of the total amount of fertiliser he needed at a cost of just MK 1500 (4.50 USD), far less than the MK 54,000 (165 USD) it would have cost at market price. David would also get a voucher for five kilogrammes of maize seed and one for some legume seed. David agreed to the chief's suggestion.

Chimtengo Kubwalo then said *'Please give me my plastic papers'* at which point silence descended in the room. David looked out the window and Chimtengo Kubwalo out of the door. They stayed like this for some moments before David

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<sup>139</sup> Black plastic sheets were widely used as waterproofing between the layers of grass on thatched roofs. They were one of the investments people often made following the harvest in May. Enough sheeting to cover a house cost several thousand kwacha, enough to roof a larger church building much more.

<sup>140</sup> The Group Village Heads sat between Village Heads and the Traditional Authority in the local chiefly hierarchy. See chapter two on Chiefs and big men.



asked if Chimtengo Kubwalo knew the day that the village would go to ADMARC<sup>141</sup> to get their fertiliser. Chimtengo Kubwalo said he did not. The pair then exchanged a few brief words of parting and Chimtengo Kubwalo left.

A few days later, worrying about how he would get enough money to buy the fertiliser he needed, irrespective of whether he got some from the FISP or not, David decided he would go to Lilongwe so that he could send some emails to some missionaries he knew and ask for their support. I had said that I would buy some fertiliser for David after the FISP distribution, but David felt that he might be able to get some support from the missionaries as well. David was also concerned that he had not heard from Bob Miller since he had flown back to the US. I was going to Lilongwe to rest and write for a few a days. David who, in his words, was still *'learning about computers'* wanted me to help him write some messages to missionaries and see if there were any emails for him from Bob Miller. The day before we were due to go however, Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo sent word to David that he wanted him to attend a case he was hearing in the village the following day. On hearing Chimtengo Kubwalo's message, David tutted, *'he wants a big man'*. David said he would not go, *'I am going to town to look at my emails'*. By evening David had however appeared to change his mind, *'On Monday, I will just leave you at the tarmac road, because our Chief wants me at the case... I should go to demonstrate respect'* (-chita ulemu). In the morning, as I was preparing my bicycle to cycle to the tarmac road to catch a ride to Lilongwe, David wheeled out his bicycle next to me. *'I am coming with you. I will not go to the case'*. Slightly surprised, I asked David whether this meant he was not going to pay his respects to Chimtengo Kubwalo. *'I will go tomorrow'* David replied.

I stayed in Lilongwe for a week after David left me there, and came back to Chimtengo to find that Chimtengo Kubwalo had received the FISP coupons and handed them out around the village. David showed me the two that he had received, explaining that the fertiliser had started to be distributed from

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<sup>141</sup> The Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC) was one of several parastatal organisations that implemented the FISP across the country. Here David was referring to the ADMARC warehouse in Chimsika.

ADMARC in Chimsika. It would be Chimtengo village's turn any day. I asked David if Chimtengo Kubwalo had taken some of the churches' plastic papers. David said 'yes', but then said, *'I gave him the old ones that we pulled off the roof of the girls' house.'* When I left the village David had been rebuilding the small house in which his daughters lived next to the main house in which he and Martha had their room. The sheets on its roof were old and torn.

The following week I went with Chimtengo Kubwalo's villagers to get their subsidised fertiliser from ADMARC in Chimsika. They waited and queued all day, before finally hauling the sacks of fertiliser onto the back of Harold's ox cart, and strapping the rest onto bicycles. It was evening when I got back with David. He promptly sent one of his four bags off to Mvula Imani's house, on fulfilment of the agreement he had made with Chimtengo Kubwalo. Sitting down tired, David told me that at ADMARC he had found out that the previous day Chimtengo Kubwalo had sold one of his FISP coupons, and one that he had promised Yamikani Misozi, in order to pay back a debt<sup>142</sup>. *'Yamikani is very angry. Our chief wants me to come talk to him but I am staying away. I think Harold is going. It is bad to sell coupons. His [Chimtengo Kubwalo's] family will not have enough maize next year, they will face hunger and come to me, the big man.'*

### **Conclusion**

*'That man he ate it, he ate his money... He is me'*, Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo had told me. Chimtengo Kubwalo's debates with David over the FISP fertiliser illustrated how the chief's struggle to command bigness had its effects shaping David's own status. Some of the biographical or genealogical details that David mentioned to me through my time in Chimtengo revealed why being a big man was important to him, and suggested why he made the decisions that he did. His grandfather Chief Chimtengo Three had provided help to many people, including

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<sup>142</sup> Figure 2. p. 58 shows the distribution of the twenty bags of fertiliser that Chimtengo Kubwalo villagers obtained in the 2012 FISP. The bracketed numbers note the bags that would have been purchased had Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo not sold the two coupons that he did.

David, and David saw himself as having inherited similar responsibility to support people like Fletcher Mackson and Ganizani. But the conditions surrounding David's bigness were not the same as those of his grandfather. David did not have the same economic resources as Chimtengo Three, nor was he Chimtengo village's chief. Chimtengo Kubwalo's connection to David was important to the chief because David could provide him with ongoing support with cash and other things, like plastic sheets, which helped the chief to maintain the kind of status that he himself admitted he found difficult to hold on to. On his part, David needed Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo's support, especially with FISP fertiliser, in order to maintain his position as a big man.

The continuing importance of the big man through changing circumstances and relationships has been described in work on other African contexts. Writing in the early 1970s, Joan Vincent describes how big men in Gondo Parish in Uganda took advantage of new opportunities, or 'paths', to forge relationships and accumulate wealth in the colonial economy, away from their families and villages (1971 p. 231-255). Many found employment in the cotton economy, others in the army. They were able to use wealth accrued in those positions to establish political support back in the Parish. More recently Carola Lentz (1998) has written about big men in northern Ghana, who pursued quite different 'avenues' to bigness. One big man mainly relied on the trappings of traditional authority, chieftaincy, another on those of the colonial state, while yet another built his bigness from working in as a mine captain. Karen Lauterbach (2008) meanwhile has used the idea of big men to develop her analysis of Ghanaian Pentecostal pastors (also see Bayart, 1993 p. 141, Maxwell, 2000b p. 476). She suggests in a period of economic decline, comparable to the one Malawi has experienced since the late 1970s, pastorship became a path to bigness in Ghana, in place of, for example, a civil service career.

I write more about Lauterbach's argument the following chapter. Here though the important point to take from her work, and from Vincent and Lentz's, is that men have continued to mediate support to build status and influence as big men through changing socio-economic conditions. Whether as a chief, a pastor or a

civil servant, big men have continued to attempt to keep up the wealth in people and wealth in resources that constitute them as big men. Bigness, as Sahlin's observes, 'takes time and effort' to establish, but, 'to hold it, still more effort' (1968 p. 292). The chapter has indicated the different ways in which of Chimtengo Three, Chimtengo Kubwalo and David established and maintained their bigness in Chimtengo. Although he found inspiration in the memories he had of Chief Chimtengo Three, David had to work out his bigness in the midst of contemporary conditions and relationships, his relationship with Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo being one of the more significant.

It is in its treatment of the relative importance to David of being a big man that this chapter threads in with the main theme of the thesis, that is with understanding the way in which he made sense of who he was and the decisions he should take. David's memories suggested that cases like the distribution of the FISP were instances in longer histories, episodes negotiated in the light of what had gone before. These histories gave David some sense of what he should do and what he should expect. He correctly concluded that Chimtengo Kubwalo would need food having sold his FISP coupon, and that the chief would come to him for it. At the same time, the worry David showed over the FISP fertiliser suggested that his place in a genealogy of bigness provided him with only limited assurance. David's worries and vacillations over the negotiation of the fertiliser indicated the relative strength his bigness had, and the influence of Chimtengo Kubwalo on it. David was constrained by his particular relationship with the chief (Strathern, 1988, Taylor, 1990, Taylor, 1992, Englund, 1999), his bigness, like his marriage, having to be maintained in relationship. As much as David appeared to want to emulate the old chief, working out what he should do was not simply a matter of referring back to what his grandfather had done in the past.

In this sense the chapter also indicates more of the limits of ethnographic methods and analysis. My long-term presence in the village, watching and listening as everyday life unfolded, allowed me to perceive something of the importance of David's memories of Chief Chimtengo Three to his sense of who he

was. These memories of Chimtengo Three's bigness did not really emerge in our early interviews, where his Christian testimony structured the sweep of David's life story. (cf. Niehaus, 2012, Staples, 2014). Instead they became apparent as David used them to weigh up and resolve decisions that confronted him as he lived his life. The chapter has shown that David has to be understood not only in reference to his grandfather and his bigness, but in conjunction with contemporary conditions and relationships as well. While these conditions and relationships prompted his recollections, they were not the same as those that his grandfather Chimtengo Three had lived with. In this sense, Chief Chimtengo Three's life was another rule of thumb, or heuristic device through which David understood his life, and another life and relationship through which it was possible to understand David. David told me he took his '*example*' from Chief Chimtengo Three but, influenced by contemporary conditions and relationships, it would be inaccurate to suggest that David was a big man, just like his grandfather.

## **Chapter Six. 'He is a special friend': mediating support from a short-term missionary.**

### ***Introduction***

#### *A gift of bicycles*

*'We will be giving Pastor David four bicycles for him and his leadership team to give out to deacons in your churches. Each deacon getting a bicycle will pay 5000 kwacha (15 USD), so that with all the money from these four bicycles you can buy another.'*

Bob Miller was speaking to around one hundred people inside Pamtunda Church. The congregation was made up of deacons and other leaders from the different Baptist churches that David pastored in the area around Chimtengo. Over the previous week David had called them to come to a service with Miller and his mission team. The team's visit to Pamtunda was part of a longer two-week trip to Malawi from Arkansas, in the United States, where Miller and the other men on his team attended a Southern Baptist Church. Miller paused and dabbed his brow with a hanky as his translator explained what he had just said. There was a burst of applause from the congregation, but David was anxiously conferring with Pastor John Moyo, who had come out to Pamtunda from Lilongwe with Miller and the team. David and Moyo stopped Miller as he tried to go on, explaining to the translator in Chichewa that he should reemphasise the fact the bicycles were not 'free' (-ulere), but that each deacon selected to receive a bicycle would have to pay MK 5000 (15 USD) in order to get it. As the translator explained this to the congregation, David and Moyo told Miller in English why they had interrupted. Miller nodded, saying that it was an important point, before continuing himself. In the evening after the service David said to me, *'these bikes are a problem' (njingazi zovuta)*.

### *Worry and hope in the face of uncertainty*

In this chapter I fill out some of the details of David's predicament over the bicycles by describing some of the ideas through which David tried to make sense of it. First I give some of the history of the Southern Baptist Convention's mission in Malawi, and of Pamtunda Baptist church itself. What went on during and after Bob Miller's visit needs to be understood in the light of the past; the history focuses on the institutional organisation and material relations of the Baptist churches, adding to the description in chapter three of their theologies of salvation and spiritual gifts. Following the history section I describe how David, and his deacons, expected missionaries to give them material help, as big men and strong Christians. Missionaries were by contrast mostly keen to avoid giving '*hand-outs*' for fear of promoting dependence. Bob Miller had however proved to be somewhat different in his practices, becoming what David described as a '*special friend*' over some years. The fact that Miller had proved different caused David some uncertainty over the bicycles. He knew that most missionaries would not like him to give them out for free, but Miller was special, and might react differently, despite what he had said in the service at Pamtunda. David worried, but the uncertainty of the situation also allowed him room to hope that giving the bicycles out for free might not mean the end of his relationship with Bob Miller.

In an article on short-term mission of the same kind that brought Bob Miller to Pamtunda<sup>143</sup>, Zeher argues that pastors are 'brokers', 'intermediary individuals'

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<sup>143</sup> Short-term mission is a relatively recent phenomenon, distinct from historic long-term mission work. Offutt defines Short-term Missions 'as groups of people who take trips with religiously motivated objectives' that unlike pilgrimages, 'tend to have a... practical orientation.' Offutt writes that most trips last one or two weeks only (2011 p. 797). Coming out of the field of missiology, Zeher suggests most studies of short-term mission offer normative analyses of the effectiveness of missions against criteria set by sending organisations and churches. I refer mainly to a smaller, more critical literature here, including Zeher (2013), Moodie (2013), Offutt (2011), Wuthnow (2009), Wuthnow and Offutt (2008) and Birth (2006), when describing short-term mission.

mediating the socio-cultural differences between their congregations and missionaries (2013 p. 132, cf. Offutt, 2011). His ability to speak English, his knowledge of missionaries' Christianity, and of some of their other socio-cultural registers, put David in a position to do this kind of brokering<sup>144</sup>. But his experience of missionaries had also taught David that they were not all the same, they did not, for example, inevitably refuse to give hand-outs. David knew that getting know particular missionaries better could reveal these differences, as it had done in the case of his special friend Bob Miller. The main point of the chapter is not so much that David used his knowledge of missionaries' Christianity and other socio-cultural registers to broker between them and the members of his churches, but that there were limits to which those ideas could predict what missionaries did. I try to show how this indeterminacy gave David cause to worry, but also cause to hope.

In taking hope as a theme, this chapter adds to what I have written about David's uncertainties and doubts in the other chapters in the thesis. In them I have indicated the relative importance to David of being a husband, big man and strong Christian, by looking at how those ideas structured some of the decisions that he made. I have suggested their limits as heuristic devices, that David experienced doubt and uncertainty even as he made decisions involving people and situations that, on some levels at least, were familiar to him. I have not put this case study last in the thesis because David's relationships with missionaries had a preeminent importance to his life, structuring what he did to the exclusion of his other relationships. Rather this chapter suggests the way David's decisions emerged from particular conjunctions of relationships (Sahlins, 2004, Niehaus, 2012), different ideas and institutions in the landscape providing only a guide to his action, rather than determining it. Mostly I have focused on the way in which this indeterminacy caused him to worry. What this chapter shows is that sometimes uncertainty gave space for hope as well. The fact David could not be

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<sup>144</sup> There has been relatively little written about pastors as brokers, but there is a larger literature on brokers in the development industry. Important work includes Olivier de Sardan (2005), Lewis and Mosse (2006), Mosse and Lewis, Rossi (2006), Mosse (2005a), and, on Malawi specifically, Watkins and Swidler (2012).



sure of what would happen over the bicycles meant he could hope for the best, as well as fear the worst (cf. Whyte, 1998 p. 224-232).

### ***Baptist church histories***

#### *The Southern Baptist Mission in Malawi*

Long-term missionaries from the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) attempted to advance the tenets of the Baptist church throughout their time in Malawi. In chapter three I looked at their theologies of salvation and spiritual gifts, here I focus on Congregationalism. The SBC is a large group of American Baptist churches that was established in the middle of the nineteenth century. The first SBC missionaries to Malawi did not however arrive in the country until 1959, two American couples moving to Blantyre (Map 1. p. ii) from Zimbabwe where they had been working for the SBC mission there. These first missionaries taught people to start and lead their own churches. They did not establish mission stations of the kind the CCAP and Catholic churches had begun at the turn of century, but taught small groups in their homes and villages (Longwe, 2011 p. 36-37). This strategy derived from the principle of Congregationalism that held that individual churches should direct their own affairs independently of a larger ecclesiastical hierarchy. Reflecting this egalitarianism, the SBC have recognised only two ordained religious offices, those of pastor and deacon<sup>145</sup>. The SBC has advised against the ordination of women but, befitting its overriding belief in the autonomy of individual congregations, allows churches to make their own decisions in this respect. The ordination and selection of pastors and deacons, and their financial support, are all the responsibility of individual churches too. Decisions in these areas, as well as those to do with points of theology, and over membership in the Southern Baptist Convention, are made on the basis of the results of votes by a church's members<sup>146</sup>.

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<sup>145</sup> Deacons can also be unordained.

<sup>146</sup> The congregationalism of the SBC means that it is somewhat risky to generalise across affiliated churches. What I write about SBC theology and practice is taken from SBC statements, agreed at annual Convention meetings. Although not binding, these resolutions are influential

The SBC missionaries worked in a varied religious landscape as they established their mission in the 1950s and 1960s (McCracken, 1968 p. 200-201, McCracken, 2012p. 348-349, van Breugel, 2001)<sup>147</sup>. When one couple in Blantyre, LeRoy and Jean Albright, moved to Lilongwe in 1960, they worked with members of the Providence Industrial Mission (PIM), an independent Malawian denomination whose founders had been educated at Baptist seminaries in the US during the early 1900s (Shepperson and Price, 1958). Independent churches like the PIM had not had much direct missionary support. They had a history of self-sufficiency and, in the case of PIM, of radical political action as well. John Chilembwe, who famously led the first major revolt against British rule in 1915, was a PIM minister (Shepperson and Price, 1958, White, 1987 p. 120-145). With respect to their self-sufficiency, the PIM churches were more like the kind of congregations the SBC missionaries wanted to start, different from the more hierarchical CCAP and Catholic churches that formed the other main features of the church landscape in Lilongwe and the Central Region at the time. Identifying the PIM churches as Baptist churches, the Albrights used mission money to help the PIM construct church buildings. Subsequently, several PIM members left the church to work with the Albrights to found new Baptist Churches, the first of which was established in Lilongwe by the end of 1963. Both Christians from the PIM and new converts were trained at a Bible school on the same site from 1966. More SBC missionaries arrived in Lilongwe to teach at the school in the late 1960s, becoming part of what was by that point officially recognised by the SBC International Mission Board as the Baptist Mission In Malawi (BMIM).

Some PIM churches, worried about losing their independence to SBC missionary oversight, had refused to work with the Albrights when they had arrived in

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amongst the churches. Some records of the resolutions are available on the Southern Baptist Convention Website, [www.sbc.net](http://www.sbc.net). As I wrote in chapters three and four, although I met no female Baptist Pastors in Malawi, I encountered plenty who practised spiritual gifts, contrary to SBC resolutions. The variation that exists between Malawian Baptist Churches and SBC churches, as well as amongst them, is an important caveat on what I write about them through the thesis.

<sup>147</sup> Anthropologists have shown the ways in which Christian missions elsewhere in Southern Africa established themselves through other pre-existing religious institutions and ideas, and the ways in which these affected the form and development of the missions (Maxwell 1999, Maxwell 2006b, Comaroff and Comaroff 1997).

Lilongwe (Longwe, 2011 p. 34). The fact that others did work with the BMIM implies some were less concerned about this, desirous of relationship with the missionaries and of the help they could offer. As I have described through the thesis, giving and receiving help or support (*thandizo*) has been important for a long time in the Central Region. Catholic and Dutch Reformed missionaries, arriving in the Central Region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were sought out by local people in the hope that they would provide political and material support against their neighbours and the colonial administration encroaching from the south. The way in which this support was given shaped the development and growth of the missions at that time (Pretorius, 1972 p. 366, also see Englund, 2002a p. 43-44).

Longwe writes that the leaders of the churches the BMIM had helped to found quickly became unhappy with the institutional separation of the churches and the mission, and the missionaries' Congregationalist ideal of self-sufficiency and autonomy for individual congregations (2011 p. 69-72). The leaders complained about the fact that BMIM policy did not permit the use of mission funds to support them, beyond initial financing for training, church construction and the purchase of Bibles. No money was available for ministers' wages. Ministers could earn money translating for the BMIM missionaries, but only a little of this work was ever available. Longwe writes the sense of injustice amongst the ministers was exacerbated by the fact that most of the new Central Region churches were in poor rural areas with congregations that could not support a pastor through their tithes. The SBC missionaries lived comparatively comfortable lives in urban Lilongwe, whilst most of the Malawian pastors had to rely on subsistence farming to support themselves (Longwe, 2011 p. 68-70, p. 386).

The tension between the Malawian church leaders and BMIM missionaries showed itself in two moments at the end of the 1960s, the first being the departure of LeRoy and Jean Albright from Malawi. Longwe writes that the Albrights' success in the Central Region, where the growth of the church had overtaken that of the Southern Region, had been due largely to the couple's willingness to work with PIM churches and offer on-going financial support to

Malawian ministers from their own wages (Longwe, 2011 p. 61-67). When it came to light that the Albrights had essentially been paying a wage to one of the leaders of the Lilongwe Baptist church, many of their fellow BMIM missionaries questioned the apparent contradiction it posed to the Congregationalist principles of the SBC. BMIM policy in this respect subsequently hardened and, despite the protestations of many of the Malawian church leaders, the Albrights decided to resign from the BMIM, leaving Malawi at the end of 1969.

The second event that marked the tensions between the BMIM and the ministers was the establishment of the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA). Shortly after the Albrights' departure, BMIM leaders asked the Malawian Church pastors to form their own convention registered with the Malawi government as a separate organisation from BMIM. The BACOMA constitution that was outlined and agreed in 1970 was very similar to that of the Southern Baptist Convention. Individual churches were free to enter or leave BACOMA at their own discretion, and the elected leaders of BACOMA would have secretarial functions only. Each congregation within BACOMA would remain responsible for its own financial support. Longwe writes that the BMIM missionaries felt that getting the ministers to establish a Convention separate from the BMIM would promote the autonomy of the churches, whilst the church leaders felt that establishing the Convention would strengthen their own hand in bargaining for support with the BMIM (Longwe, 2011 p. 68). Given these conflicting aims, the establishment of BACOMA did not represent much of a *détente* between the ministers and BMIM. Disagreements between BACOMA and BMIM over the use of BMIM resources continued to emerge periodically after the establishment of BACOMA and resonate with the details of the case study later in the chapter.

#### *Pamtunda Baptist Church - founding and development*

By 1979 BACOMA counted 211 churches and 13,000 members on its register. In 1969 there had been only 90 churches and a total of 5077 members associated

with BMIM (Longwe, 2011 p. 73)<sup>148</sup>. Longwe writes that this growth in the size of BACOMA was largely due to a series of evangelical crusades that took place during the 1970s. The BMIM felt able to support the crusades without creating the kind of dependency in BACOMA ministers that they had been trying to avoid since they had arrived in Malawi (Longwe, 2011 p. 75-76). They funded the events and supported some new converts to start their own churches where the crusades had taken place but largely pulled back from giving further material support thereafter, encouraging the new churches to join BACOMA. The crusades themselves, the first of which took place in Blantyre in 1970, were large events that lasted several days and normally attracted hundreds of people. They featured large-scale chorus singing and preaching by BMIM missionaries, specially invited American speakers, and Malawian ministers, who also worked as translators for the Americans. After the event in Blantyre the crusades normally took place in rural parts of the country, from where BACOMA continued to draw most of its membership (Longwe 2011 p. 74-77).

It was at a Baptist Crusade near Chimsika at the start of the 1970s that John Moyo became a Christian. Moyo remembered that the event had gone on for several days and that there had been American missionaries from the BMIM at it who had preached in Chichewa. He was impressed that the missionaries had also overnighted in tents, something that they no longer did. Moyo told me that before the crusade he had gone to the *Gule Wamkulu* and enjoyed getting drunk on spirits (*kachaso*). Following his conversion and baptism at the crusade he stopped drinking and watching the *Gule Wamkulu*, and started getting together each Sunday near his family's house with his brother and two other men who had been converted at the crusade. During a BMIM follow-up visit to the area the group got word to the missionaries that they wanted to start a church. Moyo said that BMIM missionaries subsequently came each Sunday to teach the nascent congregation. At the missionaries' invitation, Moyo attended the Bible School

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<sup>148</sup> The latest statistics for Malawi from the Baptist World Alliance, an association of national Baptist conventions and other Baptist church groups, show that in 2012 BACOMA numbered 1,400 churches and 45,000 members. Other smaller groups of Baptist churches are also listed, although not the group led by Pastor John Moyo (Baptist World Alliance 2015).

they had established next to Lilongwe Baptist Church. Having not gone to school he was educated first in literacy and then in Baptist theology. He did not move permanently to Lilongwe, the BMIM requiring him to continue to work at the church, which was officially founded in the mid 1970s and named Pamtunda after a nearby hill. Although his own family did not stop him from pursuing his training and work at Pamtunda, and several relatives joined the congregation, Moyo remembered that there was resistance from many of the chiefs who supported the *Nyau* in the villages that surrounded the church (Map 3. p. 33). Moyo said it was because of the wide proliferation of *Nyau* in the area that at the end of the 1970s Pamtunda church numbered only around twenty people.

The 1980s saw the 'Pentecostal wave' start to move across Southern Africa (Gifford, 1998). There had been Pentecostal churches in Malawi for decades but as in other countries in the region, the Malawi Assemblies of God and other churches only grew significantly in number and size in the latter part of the decade. Moyo had moved to Lilongwe in the mid-1980s to lead a BACOMA Baptist church there. He described to me how he started dozens of new Baptist churches during the period. Some were in the area around Pamtunda, which during the 1980s had grown to between one and two hundred members, Martha amongst their number. Moyo told me that as he had worked as part of BACOMA he had been increasingly attracted by what he saw in the Pentecostal churches, especially their emphasis on gifts of healing, glossolalia and prophecy that were not encouraged by the SBC or BMIM. He cited his desire to see these things practised in his church as his reason for leaving BACOMA around 1990. The Congregationalist constitution of BACOMA meant that leaving was relatively easy. Most of the churches Moyo had been involved in starting, including Pamtunda, where his brother was now pastor, followed him out of the convention as well.

The relative influence of pentecostalism in the churches Moyo led is possible to discern in their organisational structure, as well as their practise of spiritual gifts. David became pastor of Pamtunda at the end of the 1990s after Moyo's brother had departed to start a new church elsewhere. David told me this shortly

after I arrived in Chimtengo, when he was still trying to convince me that I should be a missionary to the church. In our interviews he explained he had been part of the congregation at Pamtunda since his conversion in 1993. After he had given up trying to find work in Lilongwe, around 1995, had been voted successively into the posts of treasurer, secretary and deacon on the Pamtunda church committee. Voting of this kind reflects the egalitarian congregationalist ideals of the Baptist Church (Longwe 2011 p. 434-435). David's selection as pastor however happened somewhat differently. He explained that in 1999 Moyo, his '*Spiritual Father*', had '*chosen*' him to be the Pastor at Pamtunda, and the leader of the other Baptist congregations Moyo had started in the area. David accepted Moyo's offer to be Pamtunda's pastor and he visited Lilongwe sporadically over the following eight years in order to receive training there. Having completed his studies, David was ordained by Moyo in front of the congregation at Pamtunda in 2007. He had proudly showed me photos of the day soon after I arrived in Chimtengo, pointing out Moyo stood next to him and the large crowd of Pamtunda church members assembled before them.

David's entrance into ministry resonates with what Karen Lauterbach writes about pastors' growth or progression in Kumasi in Ghana. There, senior pastors themselves select successors and leaders in their churches, these junior pastors and ministers describing their patrons as '*Spiritual Fathers*' (2008 p. 117). Lauterbach suggests the relationship between these senior and junior pastors is as important as that which exists between the junior pastor and their congregation, marking out a spiritual genealogy and in so doing giving the junior pastor status and authority in his church (also see Soothill, 2007 p. 3).

If his installation as the Pamtunda churches' pastor bore resemblance to Pentecostal practice, other aspects of the life of David's churches reflected more their Baptist history. When I arrived in Chimtengo David told me he had sixteen churches. I visited ten of them throughout my time in the village, other than Pamtunda itself. All the churches were called 'Baptist' churches - 'Pamtunda Baptist', 'Chileka Baptist' - and all the congregants I spoke with identified themselves as Baptist Christians- '*Baba*' for short. Sunday services started with a

Bible study<sup>149</sup> before a main service that featured choruses sung from copies of the Baptist Hymnal '*Songs of Victory*' (*Nyimbo za Chigonjetso*), originally written for the crusades in the 1970s (Longwe, 2011 p. 77). Whilst songs were generally sung enthusiastically, accompanied by clapping and dancing, and prayers were offered loudly, there was not the glossolalia, or healings associated with Pentecostal church meetings in the services at the Pamtunda churches. Every two years each church held an election for its church committee, a group which consisted of one or two lay deacons, a treasurer, a secretary, a church development officer and leaders of women's and youth groups. At an election I saw votes were cast publically with raised hands, although those present were encouraged to shut their eyes or look down while an officiating deacon from another church took a count. A similar election took place amongst the deacons to decide the make up of David's own committee, and amongst the women in order to decide on the members of Martha's.

Pamtunda and the other churches were extremely poor; giving at Pamtunda averaging only around MK 970 (3 USD) per week through the time I was in the village, and hitting a low of MK 150 (0.50 USD) one week in February in the hungry season. The monies collected from tithes were spent on various things. Only Pamtunda and three other churches had iron roofs, the rest of the congregations meeting in bamboo and grass lean-tos or mud and thatch buildings. Church tithes were put towards improving or maintaining these structures. They were also given as contributions towards the funeral expenses of dead church members and as assistance to members of the congregations who were sick. Some money came to David as pastor. Sometimes he blamed his deacons for withholding it, but he felt that the overriding problem was the poverty of his churches. '*In Malawi people cannot support a Pastor*', David told me after a 'Paper Sunday', a special service that took place once a year with the

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<sup>149</sup> As I noted in chapter three, emphasis on Bible study has been a particular characteristic of Southern Baptist churches, which tend to emphasise that revelation comes through reading the Bible, as opposed to coming through 'spiritual gifts' like prophecy.



specific purpose of raising extra money in the churches<sup>150</sup>. Neither David nor his churches received financial help from the BMIM or BACOMA, but they did get some sporadic support from short-term missionaries.

From the 1980s onwards the number of BMIM missionaries in Malawi had begun to dwindle, continuing to fall through the 1990s and 2000s. At the time of my fieldwork there was just one BMIM missionary couple left in the Central Region and they were not due to be replaced after their retirement, scheduled for the following year. Researchers have argued that the form of international Christian missionary work has changed substantially since the end of the 1980s, new communication and transport technologies making short-term mission trips of less than a month increasingly popular, relative to longer-term postings (Wuthnow and Offutt, 2008, Wuthnow, 2009). Swidler and Watkins (2012 p. 199) and Hannan (2012 p. 34) mention that short-term missionaries are frequent visitors to Malawi. It was through such short-term visits that Moyo and his churches had primarily connected with foreign missionaries after they left BACOMA. Moyo had already received some financial support from missionaries outside of BMIM whilst he had been part of BACOMA, and he continued to maintain relationships with many of these individuals after he left the convention. Most of the missionary teams that he received in Malawi and took to churches like Pamtunda were from American Southern Baptist Churches that were willing to continue to work with him despite his departure from BACOMA.

In the next sections I look in more detail at the short-term missionaries that came to Pamtunda and at the deacons of the Pamtunda churches. Along with the overview of the establishment and contemporary organisation of Pamtunda that I have just given, what follows suggests the shape of the predicament that David faced over the bicycles. It describes the different ideas to do with support and dependency that the deacons and missionaries had, and how these influenced David's decisions. Ideas about bigness and being a strong Christian were

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<sup>150</sup> Paper Sundays were an innovation from Pentecostalism, David explaining that Assemblies of God churches, the main Pentecostal denomination in Malawi, were '*very rich*' so Baptist pastors had started trying to raise money in similar ways to them.

important to the deacons and David, but these did not sit comfortably with the ideas that the short-term missionaries had about the support of the Pamtunda churches. As in the other chapters in the thesis, my purpose here is not so much to trace out groups of 'actors' as to try to make sense of what David did as a person situated in certain relationships, relationships that made him who he was.

### ***Deacons and missionaries***

#### *Deacons - expectant dependents*

Church deacons were all men, 'deaconesses' being the leaders of the women's activities in the churches. The deacons were generally strong (-*limba*) Christians, who had been attending church for some time. They varied in age; there were those who remembered the revivals of the 1970s and others that were barely in their twenties. All were married with children. The role required that they be literate in Chichewa in order to teach and read the Bible at services, and so most of the deacons had progressed at least into secondary school, although only a few had completed it. The relative standard of education amongst the deacons was marked by the fact that only one deacon amongst the sixteen churches spoke any English<sup>151</sup>. None of the deacons belonged to the very poor, itinerant class described in chapter two. Two were chiefs, and two others engaged in some petty trade in Chimsika. These men, like the rest of the deacons, relied on farming as their primary means of subsistence. A few deacons, particularly those who had been filling the role for a long time had received some limited theological training, either on courses of a few days at one of the bible schools in Lilongwe, or from missionary teams on day trips to the churches in the area around Chimtengo.

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<sup>151</sup> English is taught at all levels of the Malawian public school system, but is also the language of instruction at secondary level. The quality of English spoken by many secondary school graduates I got to know suggests that in practice instruction often continues to be given in Chichewa at secondary school.

The furthest of the Pamtunda churches from Chimtengo was around fifteen kilometres distance, more than two hours on bicycle and foot, much longer at times in the rainy season. Many of the churches were nearly as far and as a consequence of this, the farming he had to do, and his other responsibilities in Chimtengo, David did not visit all of his churches each year. Although their physical distance from Chimtengo and the egalitarian nature of the Pamtunda churches' organisational structure imply that the deacons could operate with some independence from David they did not do so in practice. Rarely did more than a couple of days pass without a deacon or a message from a deacon arriving at David's house.

David derived his position amongst the deacons through their recognition that his ordination by Moyo as a Baptist minister meant he could conduct important functions that they could not conduct themselves. He could baptise people, an action that amongst the Pamtunda churches, as in most Baptist churches, signified a person's conversion, their being 'born again' as a Christian. David was also the only person in the churches who could conduct Christian marriage ceremonies for members. There were other kinds of knowledge that the deacons' recognised David possessed, that they themselves lacked. David's help to the deacons involved what Lauterbach describes her Ghanaian pastors doing, 'mundane... problem solving, counselling and giving advice' (2008 p. 131). For David, this extended from direction over how to run a Sunday service, to answering questions over proper conduct for Baptist Christians, through to giving tips about where to buy a cheap phone in Lilongwe, and advising on the wisdom of trying to find work in the city. David was also respected for the spiritual assistance he provided to the deacons and congregants, although, as I discussed in chapter three, not many people, deacons or otherwise, came to him to ask for prayers for healing or deliverance.

The material resources at David's disposal were important to the deacons and contributed to his status amongst them. Most of the deacons did not come anywhere near to matching the wealth David held in his cattle, the wood lots and other possessions. At one point during the hungry season the oldest of the

deacons, Godfrey Gondwe, came to the house. Godfrey was leader of Chimsika Baptist and had been involved in the Baptist church in the area since the 1970s. He remembered the crusade at which Moyo had been converted. Godfrey asked David for flour as he and his wife had run out. David said he could only think about it as he was under pressure to help other people as well. Fletcher Mackson and his wife Bessy were asking David and Martha for support, as were Esnarth Mitambo, Loveness MacDonald and Memory Limbani. Elsie Benson also needed food. It was at this point in the year that Sunday had got sick as well. A few days after Godfrey had come, and after Martha had told David they couldn't spare any more maize, David gave Godfrey MK 2000 (5 USD) to buy some maize at Chimsika. He had borrowed the money from a friend in town. David, sometimes with money that I gave him, helped several other deacons and church members with maize or cash through January, February and March, despite the pressure on his household's resources from kin and other acquaintances.

The deacons wanted David to bring short-term missionaries to the Pamtunda churches, and the missionaries to give material help to them and their churches. Like other kinds of broker in Malawi and elsewhere, David's ability to speak English, his knowledge of foreign cultures and 'styles', and his connections, put him in a better position to meet and relate with missionaries than his deacons (Cohen, 1985, Schoss, 1996, Watkins and Swidler, 2012). The deacons, especially the older ones like Godfrey Gondwe, did have some experience of missionaries, even if they could not communicate with them like David could. They sometimes criticised the visitors for their '*pride*' (-*nyada*), evidenced by their reluctance to give help, despite being obviously wealthy people. The criticisms appeared similar to those that the BACOMA pastors had had of BMIM missionaries several decades earlier.

David sympathised with the deacons' point of view, but he was not spared criticism himself. Once when I was with him in Chimsika, we skirted around a long path I had not been on before. When I asked David why we had come the way we had, he said it was because he had seen Godfrey Gondwe in the market and that Gondwe would '*complain a lot*' (-*dandaula kwambiri*) if he saw us. David

said he had not taken a visiting missionary to Godfrey's church the previous month: *'Godfrey will ask, "why didn't you bring him to us [at Chimsika Baptist Pastor?]"* The issue of missionary support was raised at meetings between David and the deacons. When we visited one, Master Ndlovu, he asked David about a missionary, Joyce Deans, from Texas, who had visited in 2009 and *'planted'* (-*bzala*) his church. Ndlovu said they needed money at the church. David explained,

*'Joyce hasn't answered anything [phone calls or emails], Pastor Moyo said so too. You know the missionaries just plant churches, but support? No. Kangude Church<sup>152</sup> are also complaining to me about the same thing.'*

Throughout David's explanation, Master Ndlovu kept quietly saying *'but still... but still... but still Pastor'*, indicating his expectation that there was in fact something David could do about the situation.

These episodes do not reflect a belief amongst the deacons in a Congregationalist-style independence, but are evocative of other ideas in the social landscape of Chimtengo and the surrounds, particularly to do with the importance of providing help (*thandizo*) to people as a big man (*munthu wamkulu*). One day during the hungry season I was sat with Bill Bonasi outside David's house. Seeing yet another deacon arrive for David, Bonasi shook his head and said, *'being a pastor is like being a chief'* (*kukhala Abusa, kukhala amfumu ndi chimodzimidzi*). He subsequently explained he had said this because both chiefs and pastors are expected to help (-*thandiza*) their people,<sup>153</sup> as big men.

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<sup>152</sup> Kangude Baptist was a church that Joyce Deans and the group she was part of had planted in 2009.

<sup>153</sup> Sometime later I was talking about David's travails as a pastor to a friend in Lilongwe who had lived in a village until his twenties. A Baptist Christian himself, he used the same comparison as Bill Bonasi; David's problems were similar to those of a chief. Lauterbach develops the idea that Pastors are a kind of big man in her work on Pentecostal Pastors in Ghana, and she draws the same comparison between them and chiefs as my friend and Bill Bonasi (2008 p. 30). Also see Maxwell (2000b p. 476) and Bayart (1993).

This is not to say that the difference between David and his deacons, and missionaries, was based on the 'traditional' ideas of the former and the Christian ideals of the latter, but that their respective Christianities were lent specificity by their respective contexts. More often than not, David and the deacons explained that giving help and support was a sign, along with regular prayer and church attendance, of being a Christian person, a '*strong*' believer. The difference that structured relationships between them and the missionaries was about the conceptualisation of Christianity more than over a set of 'traditional' Chewa ideas and a Christian set of ideas (cf. Scherz, 2014). In this vein, Harri Englund writes that Malawian Christians in the Chinsapo township of Lilongwe believed 'Mutual dependence is a moral condition where the acts of assistance (*chithandizo* in Chichewa) and 'care' (*chisamalo*) are crucial to defining people as born-again Christians'. The Christians Englund spoke with questioned the Christianity of a resident American missionary who would not give their churches material support (2001 p. 235). The critique was not so much based on the idea that the missionary was working with a different set of ideas or morals from their own. Rather what they said was based on the understanding that, as someone who was part of the same Christian moral system, the missionary should give help and support.

Bill Bonasi's comparison of pastor and chief suggests something of David's vulnerability as a pastor. The egalitarian social structure of the Chewa has traditionally meant that chiefs have faced, as Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo did, the 'budding off' of their villages (Rangeley, 1948 p. 6). The congregationalism of the Baptist Church, and of David's churches in particular, meant that David faced a similar possibility. When he had been selected by Moyo to be pastor, a deacon of one of the other churches, Lexton Chibwana, stopped working with John Moyo, and took his church under the leadership of another Baptist pastor in Lilongwe. Neither Moyo nor David were able to do anything about Chibwana's move. If David did not help his deacons as they thought he should, they could find a new a pastor, with their own missionaries to support themselves and their church.

That his deacons might leave him and take their churches with them was of serious concern to David. As his testimony showed, David felt strongly about being a pastor and his work in Pamtunda and the other churches. Karen Lauterbach writes that the pastors she spent time with articulated their work as a 'calling from God' (2008 p. 112). As she and others have observed, this sense of identity is achieved not only through the kind of 'call' David described in his life story, but also through a pastor's relationship to their congregation, the services the pastor provides and the 'gratitude, respect and appreciation' the congregation shows in return (van Dijk, 1999 p. 79). Put simply, David could not be a minister if he had no one to minister to. While the efficacy of the 'spiritual services' David administered, particularly his prayers for healing, did not seem so important to his position as pastor, the mediation of material support did. The demand on David to help the deacons, particularly through connecting them with missionary help, and the threat that they might leave him, sat uncomfortably with the ideas the missionaries themselves had about the kind of support they should give as Baptist churches, a dissonance that was at the heart of David's predicament over the bicycles.

#### *Short-term Missionaries - reluctant patrons*

About eight US missionary teams came to Pamtunda and the other churches David led during the fifteen months I lived in Chimtengo. He went to Lilongwe at least as many times again for '*pastors' trainings*' or meetings with missionaries there. The members of the teams that came to the Pamtunda churches were largely like the American Baptists that Kevin Birth describes visiting in the Caribbean on short-term trips: '*men with careers*' (2006 p. 498, cf. Priest and Priest, 2008). The missionaries were largely middle-aged; some worked as ministers in their churches in America, whilst others were just church members. There were, amongst others, forestry workers, IT technicians and teachers. There were no women on the teams that I saw first-hand during my stay in Chimtengo, but I was told they regularly came on missions as well. None of the missionaries I met spoke Chichewa. The missionary teams were all from Southern Baptist Churches in Southern and mid-western US states, some from

the same congregations, others from across different ones. Of the teams that reached Pamtunda none numbered more than four people, but several were part of larger groups of twenty or more missionaries that broke up to visit different areas of Malawi or the Central Region after their arrival in the country. Most told me their trips were of between ten and fourteen days, plus travel from America, which could amount to a round trip of four days, at a cost of around three thousand dollars.

Most short-term teams came to Malawi in the cool, dry winter months of June, July and August, during the summer holidays in America. Once Martha described the period as the '*missionary season*' - the '*nyengo ya mishoni*'. Missionary visits to the Pamtunda churches were one of the many kinds of large communal events that took place in the winter months, when there was less work in the fields and more money in people's pockets. Missionaries did come to Malawi during the rainy season, but these groups largely stayed put in Lilongwe city, not risking the treacherous conditions on the muddy roads around villages like Chimtengo. The short-term missionaries that did want to reach the Pamtunda churches, whether in the dry or in the rainy season, would be driven from their guesthouse or hotel in Lilongwe for an hour or so along the tarmac road out of the city. John Moyo, or the other pastor or interpreter that invariably accompanied the teams would know when to turn off the tarmac onto the dirt track leading to Chimsika and which eventually reached Pamtunda and Chimtengo (Map 3. p. 33). At the end of the day this journey would be reversed so that the missionaries could get back to their accommodation in Lilongwe before nightfall.

Whilst the trips the missionaries I met made were all of a month or less in length, Offutt (2011 p. 807) has observed that such brevity does not necessarily preclude ongoing relationships between missionaries and the churches they visit. Whilst some of the missionaries who came to Pamtunda had never visited Malawi before, others had visited the country, and specific churches like Pamtunda, repeatedly over the course of a decade or more. In several cases, returning missionaries kept in contact with events in Malawi and at Pamtunda through email exchanges with Moyo and David. An accountant for a large multi-



national corporation on his second trip to Malawi and to Pamtunda described to me how he would like to stay longer in Malawi and work as a resident missionary, but the pressures of work and family life in the US would not permit him to make more than one trip of a couple of weeks every year or two. Other short-term missionaries expressed similar regrets to me, and envy at my own long-term residence in Chimtengo.

Through my own observations, what they told me, and what was detailed on their websites and blogs, I was able to establish the missionaries who came to the Pamtunda churches did a mix of three things during their visits: proselytisation, training for the leaders of churches and material giving. These activities were similar to those that the BMIM had undertaken in Malawi during the 1960s and 1970s. The missionaries did not engage directly in building projects, primary healthcare, or in running activity camps for youths as other short-term mission teams have done elsewhere (cf. Priest, 2007, Villón, 2007, Priest and Priest, 2008, Offutt, 2011, Zeher, 2013). Attempts that I saw at proselytisation took place over several days, the missionaries going to and from Lilongwe each day. Accompanied by translators, including David, they would walk around the villages speaking to people there, break for lunch, and do the same in the afternoon. Another strategy was to show the 'Jesus film', projected after dark on a large temporary screen in a village. These showings attracted large audiences for the missionaries to preach to. If enough converts were made the missionaries would plant (*-bzala*) a church, and leave it in David's hands. It was through this process that most of the newer Pamtunda churches had been established.

If training was taking place at Pamtunda the missionaries asked David to call together his deacons and other leaders at the church, where they would teach for the day on topics such as 'Christian HIV/AIDS counseling', 'Financial Support for Pastors' and, as I noted in chapter four, 'Leaders and wives in ministry'<sup>154</sup>. When

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<sup>154</sup> These titles are taken from training pamphlets David had been given by missionaries and kept hold of over the years.

the missionaries stayed in Lilongwe David, and occasionally some of the deacons, or Martha, travelled there for the trainings. Many of the training sessions that I saw bore resemblance the 'ritualized practices' of trainings popularised by NGOs in Malawi and elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa. There were flip charts, skits or dramas, and, by the standards of the village, lavish lunches and dinners with meat and sodas (Watkins and Swidler, 2012 p. 208, Englund, 2006 p. 70-98, Smith, 2003).

The material assistance missionaries gave to the churches varied between teams and between missionaries individually. Some did not give anything to David or his churches. After David had shown him the site where a congregation wanted help (*thandizo*) to build a new church with an iron roof, Stan, a first-time missionary to Malawi from Louisiana, admitted to being moved by the need that he saw. He told me that he would however not give anything because of his anxiousness about creating '*dependence*' amongst David's churches. This concern was common amongst the missionaries and set limits on how most missionary teams that did provide material support to the Pamtunda churches went about doing so. The US Pentecostal missionaries Englund met in urban Lilongwe had the attitude that the BMIM had, that they would only provide building materials, to encourage "'self help" and "responsibility"' amongst Malawian churches (2001 p. 248). It was over this policy that Malawian Pentecostals criticized their American missionary counterparts for not practising their faith properly. Similarly, missionary teams to the Pamtunda churches had in the past funded the roofing of churches with iron sheets on the condition that the churches build the walls themselves. Teams that had planted churches also left Bibles and tracts for them. A small number of bicycles and hoes had also been given to David and the deacons in the past to assist them with their church work and subsistence farming. What virtually all the missionaries shied away from however were regular gifts of cash, the kind of gifts that David and the deacons really hoped for.

It was because of the manner of their material giving that the deacons and David, often described the missionaries as '*proud people*' (*-nyada*). At one meeting David drew nods and expressions of approval from the deacons present when he

articulated *'the big problem'* that the deacons, and he himself faced with their churches and with the short-term missionaries they received.

*'The big problem with our ministry is that we do not have a few big men. Just two or three. Pastor Moses, he was lucky, he has some. They each give him 12000 kwacha [37 USD] each month. We ourselves have none. But God is good, I believe that he will help us with or own big men.'*

As I indicated above, David's use of the term big man here should not lead to the conclusion that the difference between the missionaries, and David and the deacons, was structured by 'traditional' Chewa ideas as opposed to Christian ideas, in a straightforward way. As often as not, David described missionaries who did not give as *'not Christian'*. I have tried to illustrate through the thesis the seriousness with which David, and others, took their faith; they were not just 'putting it on' in an attempt to get money from short-term missionaries. At the same time, the idea of bigness was also a powerful one in the area around Chimtengo, and used to explain the relationships between lots of different kinds of patrons and dependents, not just chiefs and villagers. David and the deacon's Christianity reflected this. Whatever the exact genealogy of the idea<sup>155</sup>, David and the deacons held that the missionaries *should* use their obvious wealth to support them and their churches.

The organisational structure of his churches and of the missionary groups' own congregations meant that David was relatively free to end connections with some missionaries, in favour of pursuing relations with others. He did not seem trapped as a dependent of particular missionaries. Coming from different SBC churches in America, all the missionaries that came to Pamtunda were fairly independent from one another and so David had a degree of flexibility to stop working with one and not risk his relations with others. The bits and pieces of support that David did get from the missionaries mattered to him; receiving one,

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<sup>155</sup> Scherz (2013) uses the term genealogy to describe the complex provenance of contemporary morals in Buganda, the different influences that have fed into them through time. These include Christian ideals, but also 'traditional' Buganda morals.

two or three hundred dollars once every year for translation work made a big difference to his household. It could be distributed amongst his deacons and amongst other dependents as well. But, just as his own deacons might look elsewhere if he did not provide help to them, David sometimes concluded several times during my stay that there were certain missionaries it was not worth working with in the future because of the lack of help they offered him. His resolution to stop working with the group that visited Kasungu, which I mentioned in chapter four, was just one of several he made in the time I stayed with him. Of course, given that missionaries only came once a year or less, it was difficult to know if David followed through on these decisions or not.

David persisted in his efforts to get to know different missionaries because he recognised that they were not all entirely the same. Although most did not give much in the way of help, worried by the idea of creating dependency, there did exist big men missionaries, strong Christians like those that supported Pastor Moses, who might be willing to supply significant ongoing financial help to David and his churches. He was, to borrow Englund's (2001) phrase, on a hopeful '*quest for missionaries*', the kind of missionaries that would give him and his churches the support he felt was proper. After my stay in Chimtengo I became something of the kind of supporter David wanted, but this was still a long way off happening when Miller's team visited, David and I both being unsure of how our relationship would develop in the year ahead of us. At the point that he visited Pamtunda Bob Miller was the closest David had come to finding his ideal missionary big man. Knowing something of the nature of their relationship is key to making sense of why Miller's donation of the bicycles posed David the dilemma it did, and to understanding how David decided to deal with it. David knew that Bob Miller was different to other missionaries, but was not sure how different. This uncertainty caused him to worry, but also to hope, when it came to the bicycles.

### ***Mediating bicycles***

### *Bob Miller's visit*

Miller and his team came to Pamtunda one afternoon in mid-August. Pastor Moyo helped Miller organise the visit, calling David several times in the week beforehand, and several times again in the morning immediately prior to their arrival at the church. David took most of the latter calls surrounded by a group of his deacons whom he had called to Pamtunda early to help prepare for the event. The first thing they discussed was where they could get hold of a goat to feed the missionaries. The deacons did not have enough money to buy a goat, so David sent one of them to get one from his house. Following this, David set out the order of the service, dictating to Pamtunda's secretary who wrote it down in a school exercise book. First there would be a welcome song and everyone would walk out to meet Miller and the team as they arrived. Then there would be an opening prayer and introductions, followed by more songs and preaching from the team. The meeting would end with a closing prayer before everyone ate. The missionaries would have goat and rice, the rest of the congregation beans and *nsima*. The deacons nodded along as David spoke and, finished with planning, they all sat around to await the team's arrival.

By the time the team reached the church it was near midday and around one hundred people had filled Pamtunda to wait for them. There were four other American men with Miller and they, along with Moyo, David and some of the deacons, sat on plastic chairs at the front of Pamtunda. The team settled themselves as David began the service, one taking photos, a couple rubbing sanitiser gel between their hands and another two reviewing some notes. The congregation made themselves comfortable on the floor, men on one side and women on the other.

The service proceeded largely as David had said it would. After a deacon had given an opening prayer and David had introduced the visitors - as '*abale athu*' (*our relatives*) - a series of choruses were sung. Church choirs performed some of these, while others were sung by the whole congregation. One member of Miller's team then delivered a talk of about an hour, about the biblical basis for

tithing to the church. This was followed by a testimony from another member of the team. The testimony was the story of how the man had converted to Christianity - been 'born again' - following a youth spent smoking drugs and getting into fights. It bore comparison to the testimony David had told me of his own conversion and the congregation nodded along as Miller's friend spoke. As in other short-term missionary visits that have been observed by researchers, Miller's team appeared to recognise the form of the service at Pamtunda, bowing their heads in prayer with the rest of the congregation, and tapping and clapping along to the songs (Offutt 2011)<sup>156</sup>. The second member of the team to speak opened his sermon talking about the happiness it gave him to worship at Pamtunda in the same way that he did in America.

After the testimony and second sermon Miller himself stood up to talk. At the start of the service, David had alluded to the fact that Miller had visited Pamtunda before, and Miller now described more fully his biography and his history with Pamtunda and David. Miller and the rest of the team were from Southern Baptist Churches in Arkansas. Miller was not a pastor but a Highway Patrol man, and had first come to Malawi in the early 2000s as part of another team from his church. On that visit he had come to Pamtunda with Moyo. At that time David had been leading the church, but had not been ordained. Miller described how David had asked him repeatedly for a phone, complaining that he could not lead the church without one. Miller said he had refused David, not knowing who he was and not wanting to just give a '*hand-out*', as he put it. David was smiling and nodding as Miller narrated the story. Miller said in the end, tired of David's pestering, he had given in and arranged with Pastor Moyo to get David a mobile phone. Miller concluded the story saying '*I have not regretted it since*'. Miller went on to describe his subsequent visits to Malawi, made at least every other year since the first. Each time he came to visit David, Miller said he found more churches had been planted, more people converted, and that whatever had been given to David's churches had been used as he had intended it to be.

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<sup>156</sup> Amongst Pentecostals 'spoken spiritual biographies', have also been suggested to act like shared languages between Christians who do not share cultures or languages (Martin 1990 p. 178, Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001 p. 8).

Miller and his teams wanted to get, as he put it, '*as rural as we can*' in Malawi, proselytising and bringing '*spiritual helps*' away from urban areas. Miller continued by mentioning what his teams, on behalf of his church in Arkansas, had given the Pamtunda churches over the years. They had provided building materials, hoe blades and Bibles. They had also left a few bicycles, to help David and the deacons to get around to the different congregations. It was at this point that Miller described the plan for the four bicycles the team would leave after their current trip. After David and John Moyo had interjected to reemphasise that the bikes were not being given for 'free', Miller explained that asking for the money was a way of encouraging the church members to support themselves; the small payments for each bicycle could together be used to purchase another. Miller said the initiative had been very successful in a couple of the other Malawian churches he was involved with. Miller closed his speech by reemphasising how he and his teams' primary goals in coming to Malawi and churches like Pamtunda was to proselytise and to provide '*spiritual helps*' - Bible teaching and training to leaders - rather than provide material assistance.

As he went to sit down, Miller shook David's hand and embraced him. David offered his thanks and thanks on behalf of the church to '*brother Bob*' (*achimwene Bob*) and the rest of the team before closing the service in prayer. A flustered deacon then appeared, sent by the women in the kitchen to tell David that the *nsima* was not yet ready. The congregation sang hymns while they waited. One deacon stood and told his testimony, about how he had left behind marijuana after being baptised. By the time the food was ready the service had been going on for about four hours and everyone seemed tired. Neither Miller, nor the rest of the team, touched much of the food. Miller did not eat. The other team members opened some cans of chicken salad and ate it with crackers. David, Moyo, the driver and I ate the goat and rice. About 4.30pm, keen to be back on the tarmac road before nightfall, Miller and the team signalled to David and Moyo that they would like to leave. David drew Miller aside for a brief conversation out of earshot of the rest of the missionaries, before seeing him, Moyo and the rest of the team off in their minivan.

*Bob Miller: a 'special friend'*

The morning after the team's visit, David revealed more about the nature of his relationship to Bob Miller. As we drank breakfast tea he told me that when he had drawn Miller aside as the team had been leaving, he had asked Miller for MK 20,000 (62 USD). Miller had given it to him on the spot. Miller had also told him a fifth bicycle, free of any fee, would be left for David himself. I expressed surprise; I hadn't thought SBC missionaries gave that kind of support. But David, quite matter-of-factly, said that it was not the first time Miller had given him a gift of money on a visit to Malawi. He explained that most of the iron roofing sheets that he was about to put on his house had been purchased with money from Miller, at a total amounting to around 100,000 kwacha (310 USD). David said that the MK 20,000 (62 USD) Miller had given him was for the purchase of the remaining iron sheets he needed to complete the roof. Looking around the living room David pointed out all sorts of other items that had been given to him by Miller. There was a broad-brimmed sun hat, an expensive penknife, a backpack, some shirts, and the old mobile phone Miller had mentioned, which no longer worked. The first goats of David's herd had been brought with money Miller had given him in 2007. David had also received two bicycles free of charge since he had known Miller.

As he was speaking, David reflected some of Miller's own sentiments from his speech the previous day, describing Miller as a '*special friend*', distinguished from other American missionaries by his repeated visits to Pamtunda, and his willingness to regularly support David personally. David described more of their shared history, anecdotes about travelling to other parts of Malawi, long journeys '*chatting*' and eating '*quarter chicken and chips*' from filling station cafés. The affective connection, noticeable between two men the previous day, emerged as David told these stories from his past. Amongst the short-term missionaries Miller was something of an exception for David. The problem for David was that whilst Miller was willing to be a patron to him personally, Miller's support for the churches with the bicycles had been designed to prevent their



dependence upon him. The bicycles had been given along the lines that US missionaries normally gave to the Pamtunda churches.

The following day, the same day Miller and his team flew back to the US, David and his committee met to discuss who amongst the deacons in the churches should receive a bicycle. All of the committee already owned their own bicycles, and they agreed, referencing a stipulation Miller had made, that the new bicycles should go to deacons that currently did not have one. No one suggested that David should forfeit his new bicycle for this reason. The committee discussed which of the leaders that did not already own a bicycle had the furthest to travel in course of their church duties - getting from home to their church or from their home to meetings at David's house or Pamtunda. They also talked about who were the '*stronger*' (-*limba*) Christians in the churches, who had been '*worshipping*' and '*praying*' (-*pemphera*) regularly. David led the discussions. He vetoed some suggestions but agreed with others. When after a couple of hours a consensus was reached David concluded the meeting listing off the names of the four leaders who would receive bicycles: Chisomo Solomoni, James Banda, Wilson Kamphiri and Chikumbutso Chitani. All were middle-aged men and, apart from James, were leading churches distant from Pamtunda. James was a deacon at Pamtunda, but one of its longest running members and had been voted a deacon for many years in succession. Like the other men selected James was regarded by the committee as a strong Christian.

The bicycles arrived in the village a couple of days after the meeting on the back of a truck that Miller had hired for the purpose before he had flown back to the US. David kept the bikes in his house while he contacted the church leaders to whom the committee had agreed the bicycles would be given. He emphasised to each that they should not forget to bring the MK 5000 (15 USD) in payment for the bicycle: '*Don't forget that money, five thousand kwacha...*' Around this time David told me a story from Miller's previous visits to Malawi. The visit the year before, Miller had given a church a lot of money to build a new building. Miller had also given money to its pastor for personal support, as he had done to David. Coming back however, Miller and his team found no progress on the church

building - *'no implementation'* David said - and the pastor unable to account for the money. *'Bob stopped all his support for that pastor. He is still not working with him now.'* The nature of David's phone calls to the deacons and the story suggested the worry that was playing on David's mind about what might happen over the bicycles.

None of the deacons brought the MK 5000 (15 USD) on the day that had been arranged for them to come collect the bicycles at David's house. Chikumbutso Chitani brought MK 1000 (3 USD), Wilson Kamphiri brought MK 2000 (6 USD) and James Banda MK 1500 (4.50 USD). Chisomo Solomoni brought nothing. David was irritated - *'what shall we do now then?'* he asked the men. David reminded the deacons of what Miller had said about the monies they paid contributing towards the purchase of another bicycle, and about the importance of always using their help (*thandizo*) in the way the missionaries intended. He told them the story about Miller that he had told me and warned that Miller might not come to Pamtunda anymore if they didn't buy a fifth bicycle. Discussion (*zokambirana*) ensued. The deacons protested that MK 5000 (15 USD) was a lot of money and they had not had much time to get it together. David continued to complain, asking them if they did not really have more money with them. This back and forth continued for over an hour until eventually David agreed to let the deacons take the bikes on the understanding that they would pay the rest of the money for them as soon as they were able. He got me to write down each deacon's name and the amount they had paid, before pocketing the piece of paper. A photographer David had arranged for from Chimsika then took a photo of the deacons holding their bicycles. David said the photo would serve as evidence of *'implementation'*. After the deacons left I asked David about the fact none had paid in full - *'its not good, Bob, he might ask questions'* David replied.

None of the deacons paid any more money for their bicycles. At first, David resisted spending the payments they had made to him, but eventually gave in when he needed to cover a short fall in Ganizani's fees for boarding at school. A month after Miller's visit David found out that Wilson Kamphiri was taking his

congregation under the leadership of Pastor Chibwana. When I asked why he would do this having just received a bicycle David speculated that Wilson Kamphiri wanted '*more power in the church*'. Chibwana only had three different congregations, rather than sixteen. Some time later David heard that Chisomo Solomoni was using his bicycle for business in Lilongwe city. As a result of all his travelling, the church that he had led was no longer meeting regularly. David bemoaned both of these developments, but said there was little he could do about either of them, other than trying to find a new leader for Chisomo's church. David called Pastor Moyo about Wilson Kamphiri's church but Moyo said there was nothing he could do. He continued to periodically ask James Banda and Chikumbutso Chitani to give him the remainder of the money they owed, but they always maintained they had no money to give. After a couple of months David let the matter drop.

Two weeks after David gave out the bicycles to the deacons he took the photo he had had taken to Lilongwe where he had it scanned and sent to Bob Miller in an email. The email did not mention that the extra bicycle had not been purchased. David did not hear back from Miller after they had sent the email with the photo. David tried to contact Miller, emailing him repeatedly over the course of several months. David also asked Pastor Moyo if he had heard from Miller, but Moyo said he had not. The trips to town cost David a lot of money, and interfered with his involvement in other important things that were going on at the time, like the distribution of the FISP fertiliser in Chimtengo. On the occasion that David had decided to come to town to check his emails, rather than go to Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo's court case, David remarked to me that he was worried about Miller. As we left the Internet café, having found no emails from him, David said, '*Bob did not reply, I am not enjoying this*'. Straight away he went on, '*But I believe he will, he is a special friend*.'

More than six months after Bob Miller had left Malawi, he sent a reply to David. David read it to me at home in Chimtengo having had the email printed out in Lilongwe. Miller greeted David, Martha and his family. He explained there had been bereavement in his family and so he had got behind on his Malawi

correspondence. He would not come to Malawi that year, but perhaps the following. He would certainly visit Pamtunda again. He did not mention the bicycles at all. Having finished reading the short message, David said, *'I knew he would reply. Bob, he is a special friend'*.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has looked at the way that David faced up to his uncertainties over the bicycles and how he found reason to hope that his relationship with Bob Miller would go on. David made sense of what to do about the bicycles in reference to two sets of ideas that did not sit comfortably together. On the one hand, he felt a responsibility as a big man, and a strong Christian, to support his deacons. On the other hand, David recognised that just giving the bikes for *'free'* (*-ulere*) was not generally the kind of action that was well regarded by Southern Baptist short-term missionaries like Bob Miller, because of their congregationalist ideas of self-sufficiency, the desire to avoid *'hand-outs'*. Miller's team's visit suggested that they and the Pamtunda members shared Christian practices, ideas and doctrines; the forms of their testimonies of conversion were, for example, very similar. Yet the dissonance in how they thought about help and support suggests the limits to which their Christianity could be thought of as a shared structure, its limits as 'a hard cultural form' through which they could engage with each other (cf. Appadurai, 1996 p. 90, Robbins, 2003 p. 223, Offutt, 2011 p. 805). There were differences in their respective beliefs about the appropriate form and significance of giving (cf. Scherz, 2014 p. 113-114), which had their links to the contexts in which they practised their Christianity.

Despite giving the deacons the bicycles without full payment, and subsequently spending what money he had been given for them, David hoped that his relationship with Bob Miller would continue. This hope derived from the fact that David had found Miller to be somewhat different to other short-term missionaries. David brokered between missionaries, and his deacons and church members. As well as their Christian ideals, David knew many of the other

cultural registers and styles of the US missionaries (Watkins and Swidler, 2012, Lewis and Mosse, 2006, Mosse, 2005a, Rossi, 2006, Olivier De Sardan, 2005). While this chapter has shown that David's ability to relate with missionaries was based on this knowledge, it has also shown that David recognised that not all missionaries were the same. He attempted to get to know individual missionaries, in the hope that they might turn out to give support differently to the majority of their number. David hoped that they might be more like Pastor Moses' supporters, big men who would support him and the Pamtunda churches with significant, regular financial assistance.

Whilst most of Bob Miller's support to the Pamtunda churches had been structured to avoid fostering dependence, David had seen that he was also willing to give to him in a different manner. It was this that made Miller a '*special friend*'. David knew enough of Bob Miller's past to believe Miller might not end their relationship if David did not get payment for the bicycles. David's worrying and discussions with his deacons over the bicycles showed however that David was not that sure about just how different Bob Miller was. He had after all recently stopped another pastor's support for doing something similar to what David was contemplating doing with the bicycles. This uncertainty over what Miller might do prompted David to worry, but also allowed him some space to hope. When in the end Bob Miller did get in touch, and did not follow up about the bicycles, David treated it as further evidence that Miller really was special, different to most missionaries that he had encountered.

In focusing on the hope uncertainty could permit, as much as the worry it engendered, this chapter has presented something of a reverse to the other case chapters in the thesis, which have mainly detailed David's experience of the latter. Susan Reynolds Whyte writes with regards to illness that hope is, like worry, part of living with uncertainty, rather than a signification of its resolution (Whyte, 1998 p. 224). Even though David was hopeful over Bob Miller, this did not mean he did not try to resolve the uncertainties surrounding what he had done about the bicycles. He wondered, discussed, and questioned, sending emails repeatedly to Bob Miller over the course of months, at considerable cost

to himself. Given the distances involved, it was harder for David to learn about Miller than it was for him to get to know about Martha, Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo or other people in and around Chimtengo. Over time though David had established some degree of certainty about what Bob Miller was like, the nature and importance to him of Christianity, and associated ideas about the provision of material support. The way the episode of the bicycles turned out gave David further confidence about what could expect from Miller, and a better idea of how he should act with regards to him in the future.

This chapter has also indicated the importance of being a pastor and big man to David, the way in which it structured his relationships with his deacons, church members, and with short-term missionaries like Bob Miller. By making this chapter the last case study chapter in the thesis I am not however trying suggest that David's position as a pastor had preeminent importance to his life. Miller's visit happened early in my stay in David's household. Over the year that followed I got to know David and some of the other people he related with much better. As I noted in the previous chapter, his struggle over what to do about the FISP was tied up with the relations with missionaries that I have described here. Getting a sense of a fuller range of David's relationships, and their conjunction in different situations in his life, suggested the relative significance of different ideas to him (Sahlins, 2004, Niehaus, 2012). Watching what David did over time, from situation to situation, cast further relative light on what was important to him, what he did in some cases sometimes belying what he did in others, and what he said about himself (cf. Niehaus, 2012, Staples, 2014).

## Chapter Seven. Uncertainty and the limits of analysis.

### *'I changed my mind'*

When I visited him in November 2014 over a year after the end of my first stay with his family, David was still living in Chimtengo Kubwalo. I had remained in touch with him in the intervening period through regular phone calls. They were mostly short and David was often cut off as a result of the poor mobile phone coverage in the village. The paucity of our conversation meant that I was very interested to see what had changed in the village for myself, and to talk in person with David, Martha and other people there. In particular I wanted to hear why the move to Chimsika trading centre, which David had talked about so regularly throughout my previous stay, had not taken place. I was aware from our exchanges over the phone that David and his family were still in Chimtengo, but I had not got very far in ascertaining why this was the case. A few days into my stay in the village, as we walked to look at his wet garden, I asked David why the move had not come about. David sighed. *'I changed my mind. You know Dan, I have a big family, its just not possible to live in the trading centre.'* Ganizani, who David had suggested he would try to send away from his household in order to make the move to Chimsika, was still living with David. Ganizani featured prominently as David continued to explain why he, Martha and the rest of his family had remained in the house in Chimtengo Kubwalo.

*'I tried to move Ganizani. He went to Area 25<sup>157</sup> to his sister there, but she did not support him. I was so upset when I heard what was going on, so I called him back here. I was touched; there were tears in my eyes. Ganizani has no other relatives to care for him, if I chase him away from my family that is it for him... He has got no one else. My grandfather Chimtengo Three, he gave school fees to his children. It affected me a lot to see Ganizani not going to school [in Area 25]. It is a heavy thing being a big man Dan. It is only God who will meet all the needs I see.'*

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<sup>157</sup> The numbered 'areas' into which Lilongwe is divided for the purposes of urban planning are commonly used to describe where people live.

### ***Continuing uncertainty***

This thesis has looked at how David made sense of the decisions that he had to make. In doing this it has indicated some of the limits of what he could know, and the doubts and uncertainties that he experienced. David recognised that who he was rested on the relationships that he maintained. All of the chapters, but particularly chapter four, which described Martha's relationship with David, have suggested the ways in which the decisions David took were tied up in the relationships that he was invested in. There was a mutuality to people's interests. Failing to give care (*chisamalo*) or support (*thandizo*) to others could therefore have serious consequences for David. Developing and maintaining relationships, 'wealth in people', was a means to obtain status and power. David did this and was a big man in the context of Chimtengo village and the Pamtunda churches. Many of his concerns were to do with developing that position. Having relationships was however important in a more fundamental sense too; it was about having a basic quality of life. Martha suggested this much when she said she did not want to end up '*just sitting at home silent*' like Harold's wife Ethel, because she had not provided adequate help to women like Memory Limbani, Loveness MacDonald and Esnarth Mitambo.

Although there was a powerful onus on people to maintain relationships through the exchange of help and support, the exact lines along which this support should be mediated were less clear. Institutions like family, village and church, and ideas about what it meant to be big, or a man or a woman, or a Christian or a non-Christian, helped people understand what they should do for each other. These institutions and ideas made up the social landscape of Chimtengo Kubwalo and the surrounds. By following him through the course of specific events, the thesis has indicated the extent to which they helped David make sense of the relationships he had and the decisions he faced. In many cases they appeared to be mutable, useful as rules of thumb, but giving David only a sense of what he



could expect from others and of what he should do himself. The way David responded to Sunday's illness did not fit easily with his identity as a strong Christian, Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo did not act as the chief of a village should have, and Bob Miller was a 'special friend', who did not behave towards David like most American missionaries.

This is not to say that social life in Chimtengo Kubwalo and the surrounds was completely fluid, lacking any kind of order. As the behaviour of particular people was assessed against different ideas, to do with gender or religion, for example, these otherwise abstract concepts gained their relative meaning and force as social structures. But, without more detailed knowledge of particular persons, the specific significance of these ideas to those persons could not be ascertained, leaving David and other people in Chimtengo Kubwalo facing uncertainties about the courses of action they should take.

Biographical information helped David make more sense of what he should do in different situations, allaying some of his uncertainties by giving him a better sense of how certain ideas and institutions mattered to different people, including me. Although he tried to learn biographies and personal histories, the information was nonetheless limited in the assurances that it could provide him. The history David told me of his own life, a narrative of faithful belief in God in the face of ill health and unemployment, did not sit easily with how he reacted to Sunday's worsening illness. David was uncomfortable about the disjuncture between what he had told me and what he did in practice, avoiding my questions about his vacillation over Sunday's treatment. By contrast, the biography or genealogy of bigness that David and others in Chimtengo spoke of influenced what David did and played into his negotiations with Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo over the subsidised fertiliser. The intensity of David and Chimtengo Kubwalo's discussions indicated however that there still were limits to the extent to which that genealogy influenced their actions. Despite their extensive personal knowledge of each other, David and the chief could not be sure exactly of what the other would do. Similarly, whilst his close relationship with Bob Miller gave him reasons to hope that Miller would remain in contact with him after he had

given away the bicycles to his deacons, David also experienced doubts about whether this would in fact prove to be the case.

In all the episodes in the thesis, David acted as best as he saw fit, given what he did know, living with uncertainties and hoping things would work out for the best. What happened over the move to Chimsika suggests how David had to respond to issues that his decisions created, when things did not work out as he had hoped they might. One of the limits of the approach used in the thesis has to do with time; there is inevitably a 'cut' made at the end of an event and case study analysis can therefore make it difficult to show how certain resolutions prompt subsequent dilemmas and decisions in people's lives (Strathern, 1996, Englund, 2002a p. 29). In this way case study analysis can reify certain relationships and resolutions, imbuing them with importance that they may not appear to possess when seen in the context of subsequent events spread over a longer period of time (Englund, 2002a p. 29). My concern with personal histories, and the extended period I spent living in David's house, have allowed me to indicate the way his relationships played out over time, and as a consequence, something of the relative significance of the ideas and institutions on which they were based. Keeping in touch with David after I left the field allowed me to follow-up what he did about the move to Chimsika, and to see how the decision he had made about Ganizani prompted him to further action as he had felt the effects of what he had done.

David did not appear sure about the idea of moving to Chimsika when he had first raised the idea with me in September 2012. The change was an attempt to rearrange his valued relationships in a way that he thought might be best, but he could not be sure how the move would actually work out in practice. Being in the trading centre would make it easier to communicate with missionaries like Bob Miller, entailing the prospect of more support and help coming to David's household, the Pamtunda churches and perhaps even Chimtengo village. His relationships with people in the Chimtengo and in the Pamtunda churches were important to David, for reasons I have suggested through the thesis, and he did not want to cut himself off from them. Although he welcomed the idea of

putting more distance between himself and Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo, David did not want to weaken links to the chief and the village by moving any further away than Chimsika, like into Lilongwe for example. Such a move would be *'dangerous'* as David had put it when he had talked about the way Pastor Moyo had gone to live in Lilongwe, without keeping a house for himself in Kambudzi, his home village. David was also reluctant to send Ganizani away from his household in order that he, Martha and his daughters might make the move to the trading centre. David had wondered what he could do about the boy, remembering what his grandfather Chimtengo Three had done for him, as he had stood with me in his field of termite-infested maize.

When I returned to Chimtengo it seemed that it was David's relationship with Ganizani that had been the issue over which the move to Chimsika had faltered. Sending Ganizani away was part of a broader effort on David's part to make his household smaller. David had sent Sunday to live with Harold just after I arrived, and helped James pay his bride price to get married and establish his own household in Chimtengo. Chikondi finished his final year at Chimsika Secondary School after I had left Chimtengo, and David had subsequently encouraged him to look for work in Lilongwe. Chikondi had explained that he was struggling to find work during a couple of brief phone conversations we had while I was in the UK. He was though still staying in the city by the time I visited the village in 2014. Around the same point Chikondi had gone to look for work, David had also tried to remove Ganizani from his household by sending him to Ganizani's sister's home in Area 25. While I had been in Chimtengo Ganizani, David, and other members of the family had talked about how this sister had never really done anything for Ganizani, leaving all of his care to David. *'She is very stingy (-mana)'*, David had explained. However, as Ganizani had no other relatives and, in his early teens, was felt by David to be too young to fend for himself alone, it was to his sister's that Ganizani had to go.

The thought that Ganizani might not be supported by his sister, particularly that he might not continue to go to school, had caused David to doubt whether he should send him away from Chimtengo. David was close to Ganizani, describing

him as a son during my time in the village. He would often say of Ganizani, *'I love him too much'*, not an expression he used to talk about any of his other adopted boys. David alluded to his affection for Ganizani as he explained to me why he had ultimately brought him back to Chimtengo after Ganizani had spent only a couple of months in Area 25. Although his sister had agreed to take him in, word got back to David that she was not looking after Ganizani well and that he was not going to school. *'Touched'* by this information, David acted to bring Ganizani back to Chimtengo, to have him live in his household again and go to school in Chimsika. He could not bear to see Ganizani uncared for. As he had done when he had first talked to me about moving Ganizani, David evoked the memory of his grandfather Chief Chimtengo Three when he explained to me his change of heart. He hinted too at his own struggles to provide for people as a big man in comparison. In the presence of these doubts about how he was acting David picked up another idea familiar from my first stay in the village. As we talked he turned to his Christian faith and the belief that God would provide for him and for those that he cared for. *'It is only God who will meet all the needs I see.'*

Changes of mind, questions, worry and discussions have threaded their way through the thesis, the outworking of the doubts and uncertainties that surrounded the decisions David made. The case of the move to Chimsika shows the way in which doubt could persist after David had made a resolution over an issue, and prompt new actions. While written-up case studies can imply closure, what happened to Ganizani suggests how the conjunctions of relationships and contexts from out of which David's decisions emerged were only fleeting, new information and influences prompting new deliberations and decisions. The institutions and ideas that were part of the social landscape of Chimtengo Kubwalo helped David and others work out what they should do, but the amount of assurance they could give people over the implications of their actions varied. As the case studies in the thesis have suggested, even with greater knowledge of persons in particular, there were still limits to what I and people in the village could foresee. David's reaction to Sunday's illness for example suggested the limited extent to which he could even know himself, his brother's worsening condition prompting him to actions that he found difficult to square with the

character of the faithful, strong Christian that he saw himself as. What David did about Ganizani implies similar limits to knowledge. David had suspected that he would find it difficult to send Ganizani away, but he tried anyway, only to find that his initial suspicions had been correct. I only knew the twists and turns of the story because David and I maintained our relationship beyond the period of my initial fieldwork, the longer-term view casting the significance of David's decisions in a relative light.

During my second visit to Chimtengo, many relationships in the village, Pamtunda church and the surrounds appeared to play out as they had done during my first stay in the village. In some senses, life continued in a predictable, ordered way. Memory Limbani, Loveness MacDonald and Esnarth Mitambo came to help Martha with the household maize; David made visits to see church members and pray for them and received visits from deacons asking for his help; Chief Chimtengo Three still called David and Harold to his house to ask advice or to borrow money from them. My stay in November 2014 lasted less than two weeks and, busy being rushed from church to church, and house to house to give greetings to people, I had little opportunity to record the kind of detailed observations and case studies that I did during my first stay in the village. I knew though from that time that the patterned relationships that appeared to be playing out around me were in many cases likely going on in the presence of considerable doubt and uncertainty; people discussing, questioning, hoping, trying things, seeing what happened and discussing them again. His knowledge of the social landscape of the village and the surrounds helped David to make his decisions and to maintain his relationships with other people. But there were limits to what David could ever know, and so he had to make decisions and live his life in the presence of uncertainty, bearing with doubts and continuing in hope.

### ***Uncertainty and ethnography***

I described in the introduction how, on my arrival in the village, I was largely dependent on theory, my reading of the history and anthropology of the Chewa, as I tried to understand what people did there. David had his theories about me as well, about what a 'white person' (*mzungu*) might be doing in the village. Mostly those ideas revolved around my being a missionary, short-term mission being the only reason David knew of for a white person to want to come to the area. As David and other people got to know more about me in particular they learnt that even though I was a Christian and went to church, I was quite different to missionaries, interested in Chewa language and culture and, moreover, willing to stay in the village for a long period of time. As time went by I got to know David, and Martha and other people, their particular biographies and histories nuancing how I understood who they were and the decisions that they made. Our relationships and actions towards each other were increasingly informed by what we knew of each other as persons in particular, rather than what we knew in theory. This is not to say that broader social structures ceased to matter; only that these had their relative limits to explain what people did, and that these limits became clearer as I got to know David and other people in Chimtengo better.

This way of doing anthropology is not new. The early positivist epistemology of the discipline, which treated cultures or societies as concrete forms to be studied objectively, was disrupted by the post-modern insight that these forms were contingent and constructed by individual persons, including anthropologists. The proposition presented a tension in the discipline to do with the extent to which it is possible to claim theoretical knowledge about a society when that knowledge is itself, however imperceptibly, contingent upon the relationships and contexts from which it emerges (Ortner, 1984). While anthropology quickly moved on from the introspective ethnographies produced as part of the 'literary turn' in the 1980s (Clifford and Marcus, 1986), anthropologists have continued to wrestle with the implications of the interconnection of method, evidence, and analysis in the discipline since that time (Ortner, 1984, Ortner, 2006). The consensus is that whilst ultimately the individual is incommensurable with the social, or the structure or system, the two are nonetheless mutually constituted

(Geertz, 1995, Hastrup, 2005, Ortner, 2006, Sahlins, 2004). As Sahlins writes, although individuals are not just functions of a 'Leviathan' social structure, they are 'put in a position to act' by their relationships, either in a more systematised or a more conjunctive fashion (2004 p. 154). Anthropological methodologies have taken account of this, on the one hand paying close attention to specific, contextualised persons, whilst also keeping a grasp of the fact that persons are made in relationships. It is only by getting to know people that it is possible to hold these concerns together in anthropological study (Hastrup, 2005, Niehaus, 2012, Staples, 2014).

Getting to know people, using either 'conventional', reflexive ethnographic methods or more coeval forms of biographic ethnography allows the ethnographer to begin to indicate the way in which institutions, ideas and more specific histories and contexts combine to influence people's sense of who they are and what they should do. As Susan Reynolds Whyte observes in her study of misfortune and illness amongst the Nyole in Uganda, as people attend to their particular predicaments, they refer to ideas and institutions in wider society, moving from the particular into broader social analysis (Whyte, 1998 p. 226). Biography and ethnography, all be it to different degrees, allow the subjects of the research to indicate the ways in which they think about their relations, and the way those relationships influence their actions and decisions in specific situations. By including these subjectivities in analysis it is possible for the ethnographer to at least to begin suggest the ways in which individual's actions feed into the social landscape they inhabit, even as they themselves are shaped by that landscape. Or, in Isak Niehaus' words, ethnographic fieldwork becomes 'a matter of engaging and interpreting lived social worlds... to narrate the interrelatedness of social contexts, historical processes, events, personal dispositions and states of mind' (Niehaus, 2012 p. 4). Though constitutive of it, what happens in the minutiae of life, in particular relations between persons, is inevitably unavailable to studies that take social systems or discourses as the subject of analysis. It is in their position, situated in particular relationships, that ethnographers develop knowledge, indicating how the individual and the event and the social structure are related, and play upon each other.

This study has indicated some of the limits to the connections ethnographers can draw in this respect through looking at some of the events of David's life in detail, and at the ways in which he tried to make sense of them. As David faced uncertainties about those decisions, I also faced uncertainties over my analysis of him and the things that he did. Getting to know David indicated to me how certain ideas and institutions were important to him. Ideas about being a big man and a strong Christian appeared especially significant to his sense of self, and to how he decided to help and support people. He had a testimony of Christian faith, a biography that played into his decisions. This narrative had a structure, an ordering telos that made sense of the progression his life as a whole. As the case of Sunday's illness indicated, the extent to which it explained how he dealt with specific, present predicaments was however open to question. David's Christian faith, and his bigness, did play into his response to Sunday's illness, his actions as a big man in the village, and what he did about Ganizani. They did so in situated, piecemeal ways, in conjunction with other influences. Although they provided some indication of why David did what he did, there were limits to the extent to which the ideas that David used to understand his life made sense of what he did about certain situations, at particular moments in time.

A related limit of ethnographic analysis, biographic or otherwise, has to do with the constitution of persons in relationships. (Strathern, 1988, Taylor, 1990, Taylor, 1992, Englund, 1999). David's relationships defined who he was and what he did. I have however only been able to suggest the ways in which this was the case. As well as getting to know David, I got to know other people who were important to him, his wife Martha, Chief Chimtengo Kubwalo and, to a lesser extent, missionaries like Bob Miller. As chapter four on Martha's relationship with David showed in particular, getting to know these people helped to explain David's actions. Invested in relationships with others, their interests were also his interests, this mutuality informing, amongst other things, the purchase of Martha's blouse and skirt, and Ganizani's return to Chimtengo. David's vacillation over many of his decisions can be at least partly explained as a result of his



inability to appreciate the other relationships that constituted the people he knew, and the significance of those relationships to them. The constant discussion that went on in his home and in the village, could only ever give David an impression of what the import of his actions might be for others and for him. I was similarly bound by my own particular position in relationships in the village. It was impossible to appreciate exactly how the full range of interests of the people that David knew played upon him and into what he did.

Recognising the limitations of time and relationship, ethnographers have argued that an 'uncertain' or 'pragmatic' ethnography is nonetheless a valuable form of social analysis (Whyte, 1998, Hastrup, 2005, Ortner, 2006, Niehaus, 2012). While allowing that attempts to explain how certain ideas or institutions influence how specific persons make decisions will always be partial, the pragmatic approach holds that at least heuristic connections can be drawn about what people do as part of the wider social systems to which they belong. In particular ethnographers have used pragmatic approaches to look at responses to illnesses and misfortunes that, because of the unpredictability of the events to which they are related, are difficult to explain in reference to prevailing social structures or patterns of behaviour. Involving themselves in the relationships and events at issue, ethnographers have been able to draw tentative conclusions about the way in which certain ideas develop their force to explain and structure social life (Lambek, 1993, Whyte, 1998, Niehaus, 2012). The anthropologist's particular position means that uncertainty always remains in the analysis, and that sometimes conclusions have to be reconsidered.

A pragmatic approach to ethnography bears similarities to the way in which people themselves try to understand the decisions they have to make. As Hastrup puts it, 'the qualitative nature of anthropology... reflects the quality of social life itself.' (Hastrup, 2005 p. 146). Through the thesis I have suggested that David and others that he knew engaged in an analytical process of questioning, discussing, doubting, and trying. Whyte describes the similarly pragmatic approach with which the Nyole she spent time with acted to make sense of the

misfortunes and illnesses they experienced, and the doubts they had to bear with as they did so.

'You face [the event] with purposes that are more or less explicit in your mind. You try, consider consequences, doubt, reconsider, revise your purpose perhaps, hope, and try again. In the process you may never achieve certainty, though you may gain some degree of security. Sometimes you simply have to accept uncertainty and live with it or try to ignore it...' (1998 p. 224)

From my position in David's household, following him in all of the important contexts of his life I was able to perceive some of the uncertainty and indeterminacies that surrounded his day to day decisions, as well as those to do with unforeseen events like Sunday's illness. Closely observed ethnography, enriched by David's own insights into the decisions he faced made it possible to perceive the relative influence of different ideas and institutions upon him. They appeared as heuristic devices, limited to different extents in the assurances they could provide. In the thesis I have indicated the contingent nature of rather mundane decisions, 'the emergent complexities of the everyday...' (Hastrup, 2005 p. 139). In the provision of *ganyu* labour, the purchase of clothes, David showed uncertainty and doubt. Given this it might perhaps be tempting to conclude that efforts to clarify knowledge and to explain why people act as they do are somewhat futile. But, while uncertainty is part of being a person, David's efforts show that through persisting in getting to know people, trying to make sense of things in the presence of doubts, it is possible to understand them, if only a little better.

## Glossary.

### *Notes on Chichewa grammar*

Chichewa relies heavily on compounds. Prefixes, infixes and suffixes are often added to word roots to express in a single word what is a phrase in English. For example, to say 'He just wanders around', the prefix for 'he', 'A-' is added to the infix that expresses 'just' or 'only', '-ngo-' and the verb root for 'wander', 'yendayenda'. The result is the word, 'Angoyendayenda'.

Verb and noun forms have a range of modifying prefixes and suffixes. Many root words can be made into both nouns and verbs depending on the way they are compounded.

Adjectives and adverbs tend to appear as separate clauses in sentences, although adjective root words are still modified by prefixes and suffixes, based on the noun that they describe. For example, the translation of 'strong Christian', uses the root for 'strong', '-limba' and adds the prefix for person singular, 'Wo-' to make the phrase, 'Mkristu wolimba'. The formal singular or plural version of the noun would modify the adjective differently, 'strong Christians' translating as 'Akristu olimba'.

### *Some Chichewa words used in the thesis*

Root words are given for compound verb, adjective and adverb forms, as they mostly appear in the text.

*-bzala* to plant

The formal singular, plural form of the noun is given followed by the informal singular form. For example, 'Agogo' is the formal singular form of 'grandfather' or 'grandmother', or the plural, 'grandparents', while 'gogo', is the informal singular. Some singular informal nouns lose their opening letter or syllable, when modified to the formal singular and plural form. For example, 'mfiti', 'witch', becomes, 'Afiti', 'witches'. Where they were both in the text I give both forms of the Chichewa. I only give the singular form of the English translation, presented as follows,

<i>Gogo/A</i>	grandfather, grandmother
<i>Mfiti/A</i>	witch

#### *Nouns*

<i>Banja/Ma</i>	family
<i>Bele</i>	matrilineal kin group
<i>Bwana/Ma</i>	rich person, boss, master

<i>Chibwenzi</i>	boyfriend, girlfriend, courting relationship
<i>Chikhulupiro</i>	trust
<i>Chikumbi</i>	big farmer, master farmer
<i>Chikumu</i>	elopement
<i>Chikwati/zi</i>	wedding
<i>Chipiliro</i>	perseverance
<i>Chipitala/zi</i>	memorial, gravemarker, memorial celebration
<i>Chisamalo</i>	care
<i>Chisomo</i>	grace
<i>Ganyu</i>	piecework, cash labour
<i>Gogo/A</i>	grandfather, grandmother
<i>Gule Wamkulu</i>	the dance associated with the <i>Nyau</i> society
<i>Kwacha</i>	Malawi Kwacha, Malawi's unit of currency <sup>158</sup>
<i>Manyazi</i>	embarrassment, shame
<i>Mbumba</i>	matrilineal lineage
<i>Mfiti/A</i>	witch
<i>Mfumu/A</i>	chief
<i>Mkazi/A</i>	woman, wife
<i>Mlandu/Mi</i>	court case
<i>Mphamvu</i>	power
<i>Mpingo/Mi</i>	church
<i>Mseche</i>	gossip
<i>Msonkhano wa Chitsitsimutso</i>	church revival meeting
<i>Mudzi/Mi</i>	village
<i>Mulungu</i>	god
<i>Muna/A</i>	man, husband
<i>Munthu Wamkulu/Anthu Aakulu</i>	big man, elder
<i>Mzimu Woyera</i>	Holy Spirit
<i>Mzimu/mi</i>	spirit
<i>Mzungu/A</i>	white person
<i>Ndoda/A</i>	male elder
<i>Ngongole</i>	debt
<i>Nkhoswe/A</i>	councillor, advisor
<i>Nsima</i>	maize meal staple
<i>Ntchembele</i>	female elder
<i>Nyanga</i>	sharp implement used for witchcraft
<i>Nyau</i>	secret society for Chewa men
<i>Sing'anga/A</i>	witch doctor
<i>Thandizo</i>	help, support
<i>Tsibweni/A</i>	uncle, the mother's brother
<i>Ufiti</i>	witchcraft
<i>Umodzi wa Amayi Abaptist ku Malawi</i>	Union of Baptist Women in Malawi
<i>Ziwanda</i>	evil spirits
<i>Zokambirana</i>	discussion, negotiation

<sup>158</sup> All dollar values quoted in the thesis were calculated using an exchange rate of 325 kwacha to the dollar. The dollar conversions in the thesis are approximate.

*Verb, adverb and adjective root words*

-bzala	to plant
-dalira	to rely
-dandaula	to worry, to complain
-fooka	to be weak
-kambirana	to discuss, to negotiate
-khlulupirika	to be faithful, act faithfully
-khulupirira	to be trusting
-limba	to be strong
-limbikitsa	to encourage, to strengthen
-mana	to be stingy or selfish, to act stingily or selfishly
-nyada	to be proud, to act pridefully
-pemphera	to pray
-pirira	to persevere
-samala	to care
-sewera	to play, to be flighty
-tamba	to cast spells
-thandiza	to help, to support
-ulere	to be free
-ulesi	to be lazy
-uwa galu	to howl like a dog, to elope
-yendayenda	to wander, to be aimlessly

***Acronyms in the thesis***

BACOMA	Baptist Convention of Malawi
BMIM	Baptist Mission in Malawi
CCAP	Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian
FISP	Farm Input Subsidy Programme
GVH	Group Village Head
MCP	Malawi Congress Party
MK	Malawi Kwacha
SBC	Southern Baptist Convention
TA	Traditional Authority
VH	Village Head

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