African Sociological Review 6,(2),2002, pp.71-97.

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Matriliny, Patriliny, and Wealth Flow Variations in Rural Malawi

Abstract

Literature on African kinship political economies suggests that under matriliny, wealth flow would be biased towards a matrilineal line in that children would engage in transfers with their maternal more than their paternal relatives. Under patriliny, the reverse would be the case. We explore these propositions using data from a sample survey of 1257 respondents in rural Malawi, 29 percent of whom were from a predominantly matrilineal ethnic group, 36 percent were from an ethnic group that is transforming from matrilineal to patrilineal practices, and 35 percent were from a patrilineal ethnic group. These data were complemented by qualitative interviews of 18 respondents from the matrilineal ethnic group, 20 from the transforming group, and 18 from the patrilineal group. Results reveal little evidence to support the propositions. We think that the increasing privatisation of production and consumption, that has over the years penetrated rural Malawi, has led to some individualistic tendencies among rural Malawians and weakened both matrilineal and patrilineal influence on people's wealth transfer behaviours.

Introduction

Descriptions of matrilineal and patrilineal descent systems suggest that wealth flows would follow different patterns. Under the matrilineal system, children would be transferring more of their wealth to maternal relatives than paternal ones. The reverse would be the case under the patrilineal system. This paper tests these propositions with the objective of contributing to our understanding of the role of kinship in family wealth transfers, focusing on whether patterns of and factors that influence wealth flows differ by kinship lineage definitions.

Wealth is defined here in the broader sense of money, goods, services, and guarantees (Caldwell 1976). We define kinship as the network of people with relationships and ties around common parenthood (Evans-Pritchard 1950; Fortes 1969; Keesing 1975; Levi-Strauss 1949; Stack 1974). The kin networks of ties are conduits for resource pooling and wealth exchanges; they are mechanisms through which people deal with problems they experience. The strong norms of filial support among the kin ensure that obligations are respected and acted upon (Douglas 1990; Peterson 1993; Agree et al. 2000).

Stronger ties between children and their maternal relatives characterise the matrilineal kinship system while under patrilineage stronger ties are between children and their paternal relatives (Mandala 1990; Phiri 1983; Miller 1996; also see Colson and Gluckman 1968; Raha 1989). These contexts of the matrilineal and patrilineal kinship systems have implications for wealth exchange processes among the kin in that each system has its own ideology, the 'room within which the kin manage their affairs and respond to concerns, and the pattern in the distribution of products of labor' (Poewe 1981: p.11). In this sense, that is, in its influence over the use of resources and products of labour, kinship has a political economy function. The matrilineal system has matriliny as its political economy while the patrilineal system has patriliny. Under matriliny, the precepts of a matrilineal ideology pattern kin relations, the use of resources, and the distribution of kin's products of labour. Under patriliny, the patrilineal ideology patterns the distribution of these resources and products of labour.

In this paper, we explore whether wealth flow is indeed patterned differently under matriliny and patriliny. Specifically, we address whether maternal relatives matter more than paternal ones in transfers under matriliny than under patriliny, and whether the reverse, that is, paternal relatives mattering more than maternal ones, is the case under patriliny. We approach the issue by contrasting transfers between respondents and their fathers, mothers, uncles, and aunts across three ethnic groups in Malawi: Yao, Chewa, and Tumbuka. The three ethnic groups are located in geographically different areas. The Yao are in southern Malawi, the Chewa are in Central Malawi, and the Tumbuka are in the north. The Yao follow matrilineal practices, the Tumbuka follow patrilineal practices, and the Chewa lineage system is transforming from a matrilineal to a patrilineal type. While the Yao (matrilineal) and Tumbuka (patrilineal) are our main comparison ethnic groups, the Chewa (transforming) provide an opportunity to examine the matrilineality and patrilineality of transfers in an ethnic group undergoing change.

In the next section, we describe matriliny and patriliny, then suggest expected transfer patterns for each kinship political economy[1]. Thereafter, we describe the data, and how they were collected and analysed. We then present our findings focusing on (1) differences in the amounts of wealth exchanged, (2) determinants of these transfers, and (3) driving forces behind the transfers across the three ethnic groups. We find little evidence to support the propositions that maternal relatives under matriliny and paternal relatives under patriliny significantly influence transfer patterns. We conclude that lineage systems have little influence on wealth transfers and think that this is due to the increasing individualistic behaviour emerging from the privatisation of production and consumption activities as capitalism penetrates rural Malawi.

Matriliny, Patriliny, and Wealth Flows

Wealth flow under matriliny and patriliny are supposedly patterned differently because of differences in children's allegiance to their relatives. Under matriliny, a family is an integral part of the wife's lineage rather than the husband's. At marriage, the husband moves over from his parents to live with his wife and her relations. The authority for distributing resources and the products of a family's labour is in the hands of the wife's brothers (the eldest takes the leadership role). These brothers are *nkhoswe* whose main responsibility is to ensure their sisters' families' access to production resources, healthcare, and general welfare. Children in a family have allegiance to their maternal relatives more than paternal ones. They will consult their maternal uncles (aunts in the absence of uncles) in various decisions, including those connected to wealth transfers more than paternal ones. Because of the closer bond with maternal relatives, children would thus be transferring more of their wealth to these maternal relatives than paternal ones. Such a bond exists among the matrilineal Yao ethnic group in Malawi. Succession in this ethnic group formerly passed down the line of brothers but later changed to passing 'direct to the eldest sisters's eldest son, or to the descendants of other sisters in order of seniority' (Tew 1950: p.10). Names are inherited from the maternal line. The brothers to sisters (maternal uncles) are *nkhoswe* of the sisters and their children (their *mbumba*). The eldest brother has a priority role in the welfare of the *mbumba*. In the strict sense, senior female kin are excluded in that they are in the *mbumba* group of the mother's brother. If there is no brother, the eldest sister in the family (eldest maternal aunt) takes over the *nkhoswe* role.

Among the responsibilities of *nkhoswe* are ensuring the 'good' behaviour of their *mbumba*, arranging marriages, ensuring that the *mbumba* have access to adequate land and other productive resources, looking for medicine when anyone of the *mbumba* is ill, and overseeing funeral arrangements when there is death among the *mbumba* (Mitchell 1956; Phiri 1983; also see Crehan 1997 for similar views on matrilineal kinship processes in Zambia). These responsibilities are mechanisms through which wealth flows. Husbands/fathers play a minimal role in these responsibilities mainly because their productive activities are under the control of the *nkhoswe*. For example, husbands produce their crops on land allotted to them by their wives' *nkhoswe* but have little control over the use of what they produce on this land. It is not surprising therefore that among matrilineal societies, a man achieves his status, recognition, and influence through his *mbumba* or as Mitchell (1956: p.136) puts it, 'a person identifies himself most closely with the members of his matrilineage from whom he expects most help and whom he, in turn, is expected to help'. Thus, the maternal line would be more influential in patterning wealth flow and such a flow would favour maternal relatives. Among the Luapula people in Zambia, for example, Poewe (1981: p.46) found that the matrilineal inheritance system ensured that wealth accrued to the matrilineage such that a man's control over

the labour power and products of his children and wife was frustrated. We expect therefore that under matriliny, children would be exchanging significant amounts of their wealth with maternal relatives (mothers, uncles, and aunts) more than with their paternal ones (fathers, uncles, and aunts).

The reverse would be the case under patriliny, that is, children would be exchanging more wealth with paternal relatives than maternal ones. The Tumbuka are an ethnic group whose political economy is characterised by a paternal ideology that gives tremendous advantage to the paternal lineage. At marriage, husbands remain in their villages of birth and wives move from their villages of residence to the husbands', a move that, as Tew (1950) remarks, involves changing their affiliation from their kin to that of the husband. A family becomes an integral part of the husband's rather than wife's lineage with children being the responsibility of the male line. The eldest male on the husband's line plays the role of *nkhoswe*. With inheritance going through the eldest son of the eldest wife in the family, children owe their loyalty to their father's line (Miller 1996). Whereas the *mbumba* are the main vehicle for achieving status among the matrilineal Yao, the bond between children and their patrilineage is a main way of achieving status among the patrilineal Tumbuka. Children have rights to their father's wealth to the extent that at the death of a father, the eldest son is in charge of the father's wealth (Tew 1950, also see Meinhard 1975 and Stafford 2000).

With their powerful influence, paternal relatives would be main beneficiaries of the wealth from children since the strong patrilineal affiliations engender firm control by paternal relatives over produced wealth and other products of labour in families. Thus, while children among the matrilineal Yao are expected to engage in wealth transfers mostly with their maternal line, children among the patrilineal Tumbuka would be engaging in wealth transfers mostly with their fathers, paternal uncles, and paternal aunts. We think that in an ethnic group like the Chewa, which is undergoing change from matrilineal to patrilineal practices, there would be more leaning towards the incoming patrilineal kinship system than the old matrilineal one.

The Chewa have historically been matrilineal in their practices[2]. *Nyau*, an exclusively male dance, has heavily influenced their kinship practices (Phiri 1983). By participating in the dance, husbands have been able to be above matrilineal authority. Through *nyau*, patriarchy was much more entrenched in Chewa matriliny than was the case for Yao matriliny.

Nyau, which was unique to the Chewa ethnic group, was just one of the factors that may have led to changes in Chewa kinship practices. Phiri (1983) suggests five other factors. First, the Chewa practiced cousin marriages, which meant that upon marriage, men did not have to change villages of residence drastically as cousins were mostly within the same village. Further, after some time of living in the wife's village and proving to be responsible, husbands could ask to take their wives and children to their villages of origin, a practice in

which the wife is said to have engaged in *chitengwa*. This led to increasing virilocal marriages. Second, the slave trade provided opportunities for further change in marriage practices. Female slaves were married virilocally as they were persons without *nkhoswe*. Taking advantage of the situation, lineage leaders obtained female slaves and married them to male members of their matrilineage. Men were thus able to build independent families. Third, matriliny changed because of the influence of patrilineal ethnic groups with whom the Chewa came into contact, particularly the Ngoni. Initially, as was their practice, the Ngoni successfully stamped their social system on the Chewa but as they stopped their war-like behaviour they moved more into Chewa practices. The result was a kind of dual kinship system as still seems to be currently the case. Fourth, missionaries emphasised the view that the husband is the head of the family. They also put the emphasis on paternal authority and control over children. Fifth, the hut tax introduced by the colonial administration way back in 1893, which men had to pay but not women, forced men to seek or be forced into outside employment where they earned income but also acquired new experiences and value systems. The introduction of cash crops like tobacco made men much more influential as they were the sole producers of these crops with women engaging mostly in the production of food crops.

As a result of these factors, the roles of a husband among the Chewa have changed. You do not find the wife's brother (*nkhoswe*) exercising as much control as it used to be the case. For example, 'fathers fulfill educational obligations more readily and willingly than the maternal uncle ... and as a result, the father's influence has grown correspondingly' (Phiri 1983: p.273). Although some matrilineal practices such as matrilocal marriages can still be found[3], it seems the Chewa kinship political economy has become significantly patrilineal. We thus expect children to be exchanging their wealth with paternal uncles, aunts, and with fathers more than their maternal relatives. Since matrilineal influences are still substantial, resource exchanges between children and their maternal relatives among the Chewa should be higher than among the patrilineal Tumbuka but lower than is the case among the matrilineal Yao.

Data and Methods

We use quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data were collected through a Family Transfers survey conducted in Malawi from June to August 1999. The survey was administered to a random sample of 717 ever married women and 540 of their husbands totaling 1257 respondents in three rural areas, one in each of the three regions of Malawi: Ulongwe in the southern district of Machinga, Mkanda in Mchinji district in Central Malawi, and Mhuju in Rumphi district of Northern Malawi. About 29 percent, 36 percent, and 35 percent of the sample was in each of the three areas respectively representing the matrilineal Yao, the transforming Chewa, and the patrilineal Tumbuka.

The survey explored wealth flows between respondents and their parents, parents in laws, uncles and aunts (paternal and maternal), fellow siblings, and their children aged 10 years or older. For purposes of this paper, we focus on respondents' exchanges with their fathers, mothers, uncles, and aunts. Since wealth flow measures are sensitive to time factors and specificity in people's involvement in exchanges (McGarry and Schoeni 1995), we used the agricultural calendar to be specific in our time references, asking respondents if they had given or received gifts since the beginning (October/November) of the1998/99 growing season. We were specific in how we referred to the particular relative. Instead of asking 'what did you give to/receive from your maternal uncles?' we first listed these uncles and made reference to each listed uncle asking, 'what did you give to/receive from _____?' making reference to the uncle mentioned by the respondent. The various valuable things, defined here as wealth, that people exchanged were given monetary values. Our dependent variable, wealth, is the total value of these goods and the actual money exchanged. Using ordinary least squares (OLS) estimates, we regress a number of variables on the amounts of transfers (wealth) given to or received from fathers, mothers, uncles and aunts (maternal and paternal) by ethnic group.

All measures are with reference to respondents. Based on the matrilineal ideology, we expect more transfers between respondents and their mothers, maternal uncles, and maternal aunts under matriliny, that is, among the matrilineal Yao, than is the case under patriliny, that is, among the patrilineal Tumbuka. Based on the patrilineal ideology on the other hand, we expect more transfers between respondents and their fathers, paternal uncles, and paternal aunts under patriliny than is the case under matriliny. For the Chewa who are changing from matriliny to patriliny, we expect more patrilineal processes, more paternal influence in wealth flow.

To shed more light on wealth transfer behaviour, in-depth semi-structured interviews of a random sample of 56 respondents (18 from the matrilineal Yao ethnic group, 20 from the transforming Chewa ethnic group, and 18 from the patrilineal Tumbuka ethnic group) from 37 households not in the sample survey were undertaken. Respondents were first asked to name the people to whom they give help and from whom they get help when they have any problem or concern. They were then asked to indicate who helped meet educational expenses for their children and when there was illness, death, or food shortage in their household since the start of the 1998/99 growing season (October/November 1998). They were further asked whom they helped in meeting educational expenses and dealing with illness, death, and food shortage. In each case, they were asked to explain why they helped the particular relative and why the particular relative helped them. We hoped to capture a maternal influence in the sharing of help in the matrilineal ethnic group, a paternal influence in the patrilineal ethnic group, and something in-between for the ethnic group undergoing change from matriliny to patriliny. Thus, the qualitative data

were expected to confirm our expected findings from the quantitative data, that maternal and paternal relatives influence wealth flows under matriliny and patriliny respectively.

We used the nudist program in analysing our qualitative data. This analysis involved a summary of the magnitude of helping each other among these relatives, specifically fathers, mothers, uncles, and aunts across the ethnic groups. After documenting the magnitude of helping each other, we analysed why the relatives helped each other, exploring reasons and driving forces for the exchange of help through describing case stories of households engaging in transfers, randomly picking a household to represent each of the three ethnic groups.

Results

We first present the quantitative results that show the amounts of exchanges and OLS estimates of the effect of a number of variables on these exchanges. Thereafter, we turn to qualitative data, which actually support the quantitative findings.

Quantitative Findings:

We start by exploring the size of transfers by examining the value of goods exchanged as tabulated in Table 1. Generally, respondents in the patrilineal ethnic group gave more to their parents, uncles, and aunts than respondents in both the matrilineal and transforming group; the patrilineal respondents also received more from these relatives than their counterparts (see upper part of Table 1). We note from these findings that there was higher level of gift-exchange among the patrilineal ethnic group than both the matrilineal and transforming ethnic groups.

We used the gift giving/receiving ratios (see the lower part of Table 1) to start examining whether the gift exchanges are biased towards the maternal or paternal lineage. We developed parents (fathers and mothers) to uncles or aunts gift giving/receiving ratios. The father to maternal uncles giving ratio was 1.40 for the matrilineal group – that is, for every MK1.00 respondents gave to the maternal uncle, they gave MK1.40 to the father. This ratio is 2.53 for the transforming and 2.63 for the patrilineal group. We expected the matrilineal ethnic group respondents to be giving to their maternal uncles more than to their fathers. This is not the case. Also, contrary to our expectations, matrilineal ethnic group respondents (as well as respondents in other ethnic groups) received much less from their maternal uncles than fathers: the father to maternal uncle receiving ratio was 2.37, that is, for every MK1.00 respondents in the matrilineal ethnic group received from their maternal uncle, they received MK2.37 from their father. The ratios for the transforming ethnic group and the patrilineal one were 1.09 and 1.32 respectively. There is a similar trend for the

Table 1: Mean value of gifts in Malawi Kwacha (MK)* respondents gave and received from parents, uncles, and aunts and gift-giving ratios by ethnic group

Relative	Gifts given by Respondent				Gifts received from Respondent			
	Matrilineal Group	Transforming Group	Patrilineal Group	All Ethnic Groups	Matrilineal Group	Transforming Group	Patrilineal Group	All Ethnic Groups
Value of Gifts:								
Father	88 (213)	134 (309)	168 (318)	132 (290)	116 (430)	110 (367)	164 (551)	129 (451)
Mother	120 (363)	135 (269)	258 (508)	172 (394)	75 (255)	101 (303)	115 (416)	98 (334)
Maternal Uncles	63 (167)	53 (161)	64 (171)	59 (166)	49 (132)	101 (376)	124 (311)	93 (305)
Maternal Aunts	38 (95)	58 (191)	71 (205)	56 (173)	61 (327)	45 (117)	81 (225)	60 (228)
Paternal Uncles	45 (124)	42 (153)	60 (146)	48 (143)	34 (114)	88 (614)	152 (786)	91 (585)
Paternal Aunts	43 (146)	53 (144)	81 (149)	58 (147)	38 (215)	42 (217)	90 (279)	55 (236)
Gift Giving and Receiving Ratios								
Father to Mat. Uncles	1.40	2.53	2.63	2.24	2.37	1.09	1.32	1.39
Mother to Mat. Uncles	1.90	2.55	4.03	2.92	1.53	1.00	1.42	1.05
Father to Mat. Aunts	2.32	2.31	2.37	2.36	1.90	2.44	2.02	2.15
Mother to Mat. Aunts	3.16	2.33	3.63	3.07	1.23	2.24	1.42	1.63
Father to Pat. Uncles	1.96	3.19	2.80	2.75	3.41	1.25	1.02	1.42
Mother to Pat. Uncles	2.67	3.21	4.30	3.58	2.21	1.15	0.76	1.08
Father to Pat. Aunts	2.05	2.53	2.07	2.28	3.05	2.62	1.82	2.35
Mother to Pat. Aunts	2.79	2.75	3.19	2.97	1.97	2.40	1.28	1.78

*The exchange rate at the time of the research was US$1=MK42. Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

Table 2: Descriptions, means, and standard deviations (SD) of independent variables explored in resource transfers across the three ethnic groups

Variable	Description	Mean			
		Matrilineal Group	Transforming Group	Patrilineal Group	All Ethnic Groups
Demographic:					
Age	Years in 1999	34.7 (10.8)	31.7 (9.4)	33.8 (10.6)	33.3 (10.34)
Sex	Dummy variable, 1 for female and 0 male	-	-	-	-
Marital status	Dummy variable, 1 if married, 0 if divorced or widowed	-	-	-	-
Residence proximity	Dummy variable, 1 if respondent and relative are living in same village, 0 if not. Only assessed for father and mother.	-	-	-	-
Kin ties:					
Surviving children	Number of respondent's children 10 years and older still alive	3.5 (2.6)	3.2 (2.6)	3.6 (2.8)	3.4 (2.7)
Surviving maternal uncles	Number of maternal uncles still alive	1.2 (1.2)	1.5 (1.3)	1.1 (1.1)	1.3 (1.2)
Surviving maternal aunts	Number of maternal aunts still alive	1.1 (1.3)	1.6 (1.4)	1.01 (1.1)	1.3 (1.3)
Surviving Paternal Uncles	Number of paternal uncles still alive	1.1 (1.3)	1.3 (1.3)	1.0 (1.1)	1.1 (1.3)
Surviving Paternal Aunts	Number of paternal aunts still alive	1.1 (1.3)	1.2 (1.1)	0.9 (1.0)	1.1 (1.2)
Socioeconomic Status:					
Household possessions	Bed + mattress + radio + paraffin lamp + pit latrine.	2.2 (1.2)	2.0 (1.4)	2.0 (1.5)	2.1 (1.4)
Livestock ownership*	Value in MK of cattle + goats + pigs + goats + chickens owned.	1333 (2396)	4015 (10150)	12489 (34586)	6066 (21522)
Education	Highest grade level attained	4.6 (2.8)	5.3 (2.6)	7.4 (2.2)	6.0 (2.7)
Health Status:					
Respondent	Health status on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 for very poor	7.9 (2.0)	8.3 (1.8)	8.2 (2.0)	8.1 (1.9)
Respondent's	health and 10 for very good health. Health status of				
Father	respondent's relatives assessed by the respondent.	6.9 (2.3)	5.9 (2.2)	6.7 (2.3)	6.4 (2.3)
Mother	Health status for uncles, aunts, and children are averages	6.0 (2.4)	5.9 (2.2)	6.2 (2.3)	6.1 (2.3)
Maternal uncles	for the number of surviving uncles, aunts, or children for	7.3 (2.2)	7.3 (1.9)	7.6 (2.0)	7.4 (2.0)
Maternal aunts	the particular respondent.	6.8 (2.2)	6.8 (2.0)	7.2 (2.0)	6.9 (2.1)
Paternal uncles		7.4 (1.9)	7.1 (1.8)	7.1 (2.0)	7.2 (2.1)
Paternal aunts		6.5 (2.2)	6.6 (2.0)	7.0 (2.1)	6.7 (1.9)
Children		8.6 (1.5)	8.6 (1.7)	8.7 (1.3)	8.6 (1.5)
Total sample size (n)		365	452	440	1257

*The exchange rate at the time of the research was US$1=MK42. Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

Table 3a: OLS unstandardized coefficients of respondent's giving to their fathers, mothers, uncles, and aunts by ethnic group

Variable	Respondent given gifts to:					
	Father	Mother	Maternal Uncles	Maternal Aunts	Paternal Uncles	Paternal Aunts
Demographic:						
Matrilineal Group	-86.4 (33.5)**	-14.7 (70.2)	-63.6 (45.9)	-23.7 (21.9)	-28.8 (15.0)	-52.1 (14.3)**
Transforming Group	-38.3 (30.4)	54.2 (53.8)	-19.4 (34.2)	-15.6 (20.9)	-41.2 (13.5)**	-51.0 (13.0)**
Age	0.1 (2.0)	3.6 (3.3)	—	2.01 (1.4)	—	—
Sex	-94.5 (27.6)**	-86.6 (50.0)	-53.3 (27.3)	-38.3 (18.4)*	-26.2 (11.7)*	-8.2 (11.2)
Marital status	8.2 (45.2)	64.3 (84.7)	—	—	22.9 (20.5)	14.9 (20.5)
Residence proximity	—	72.3 (46.0)	—	—	—	—
Kin ties:						
Surviving children	-2.1 (7.4)	-19.7 (12.4)	—	-6.2 (4.9)	—	—
Number of maternal uncles	7.8 (9.9)	—	34.4 (12.3)**	—	3.9 (4.3)	-0.5 (4.1)
Number of maternal aunts	-3.2 (9.5)	—	-16.8 (10.2)	-7.9 (7.6)	4.1 (4.3)	-2.7 (3.9)
Number of paternal uncles	19.4 (9.9)*	—	—	—	16.2 (5.6)**	5.6 (4.1)
Number of paternal aunts	-2.7 (10.4)	—	—	—	1.01 (4.7)	5.3 (5.0)
Socioeconomic Status:						
Household possessions	24.3 (9.1)**	40.7 (15.9)**	—	—	11.9 (4.0)**	9.4 (3.8)**
Livestock ownership	—	2.5E-03 (0.001)*	—	1.8E-03 (0.00)**	—	—
Education	—	27.4 (9.0)**	-7.9 (5.7)	—	—	—
Health Status:						
Respondent	6.0 (6.9)	10.3 (12.0)	12.4 (7.0)	—	—	1.5 (3.0)
Fathers	—	14.4 (9.6)	21.1 (5.2)**	7.9 (3.8)*	-4.2 (2.5)	3.3 (2.2)
Mothers	—	7.0E-02 (10.0)	-10.6 (5.6)	—	—	—
Maternal uncles	—	—	-7.1 (6.9)	—	—	—
Maternal aunts	—	—	—	—	—	—
Paternal uncles	—	—	—	—	-2.5 (3.1)	—
Paternal aunts	—	—	—	—	—	—
Children	—	—	-6.8 (9.8)	—	—	—
Constant	86.6 (102.7)	-421.9 (208.3)*	53.9 (118.0)	-6.5 (51.2)	27.8 (36.8)	2.2 (38.9)
Prob>F	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00
R^2	0.08	0.16	0.31	0.09	0.11	0.11
Sample size (n)	655	846	835	814	708	747

**p<0.01 and *p<0.05. Sex, marital status, and residence are dummy variables; reference categories for sex is male, for marital status is divorced or widowed, and for residence is respondent not residing in same village with relative. Reference ethnic group is the patrilineal group. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. A — means that if the variable was included, the model fit was compromised.

mother to maternal uncles, father to paternal uncles, mother to paternal uncles, and father to paternal aunts. These findings suggest that parents engage in gift exchanges with their children more than uncles and aunts regardless of the type (matrilineal or patrilineal) of ethnic group.

To further explore these unexpected findings, we ran OLS estimates on respondents' giving to and receiving from fathers, mothers, maternal uncles and aunts, and paternal uncles and aunts setting the patrilineal ethnic group as a control. Table 2 lists, describes, and gives means and standard deviations of independent variables by ethnic group we use in predicting wealth exchanges between respondents and their parents, uncles, and aunts.

These variables fall into demographic, socioeconomic, kin ties or affiliations, and health status categories. Research has shown the importance of these variables in predicting transfer behaviour (Peterson 1993; Agree et al. 2000; Weinreb 2000). We expected health status to be a critical factor in wealth flow because of the high incidence of AIDS in rural Malawi.[4]

The OLS estimates in Tables 3a and 3b reveal interesting findings[5]. Table 3a shows that patrilineal respondents (control ethnic group) gave more to their fathers and paternal aunts than matrilineal respondents when other variables are controlled for.

These patrilineal respondents also received significantly more from their fathers than their matrilineal counterparts as shown in Table 3b. What is of significant interest here is that matrilineal respondents do not give to or receive from their maternal uncles and maternal aunts more than their patrilineal counterparts as both Tables 3a and 3b reveal. Even more interesting, there are two main factors that significantly influence the flow of gifts. The first is the respondent's sex: women generally gave and received less than men. The second is the respondent's socioeconomic status, particularly in terms of household possessions. The more household possessions a respondent had, the more the respondent gave to relatives. Household possessions did not, however, significantly influence how much respondents received from their parents, uncles, and aunts (see Table 3b). In terms of health status, better health of the father allowed for more giving to maternal uncles and aunts.

We then focused on exchanges with fathers, mothers, and paternal aunts as these showed significant differences in gift exchanges with respondents across the ethnic groups (see Table 3a and 3b). For these relatives, we tested whether different factors influence gift exchanges in the ethnic groups. We found that sex and socioeconomic status, with household possessions still standing out, remained the main factors in gift exchanges in all the ethnic groups (Tables 4a-4c).

The quantitative results do not support the contention that matrilineality and patrilineality have any influence on gift exchanges or wealth flow. We use the qualitative information to find out whether there is any support for the quantita-

Table 3b: OLS unstandardized coefficients of respondent's receiving from their fathers, mothers, uncles, and aunts by ethnic group

Variable	Respondent received gifts from:					
	Fathers	Mothers	Maternal Uncles	Maternal Aunts	Paternal Uncles	Paternal Aunts
Demographic:						
Matrilineal Group	-534.3 (179.0)**	195.4 (89.6)*	-5.3 (57.0)	49.1 (51.7)	-111.5 (83.7)	-44.5 (26.1)
Transforming Group	-349.5 (145.2)*	-85.4 (75.7)	-70.7 (45.6)	-18.0 (41.1)	-48.9 (60.8)	-40.6 (24.0)
Age	—	-7.2 (5.3)	6.2 (3.6)	—	—	1.01 (1.4)
Sex	-263.3 (125.1)*	-52.8 (71.5)	-72.0 (42.8)	-37.0 (35.6)	-133.8 (52.4)**	-65.6 (20.6)**
Marital status	—	-332.5 (107.0)**	38.0 (76.0)	—	—	—
Residence proximity	—	-171.4 (64.0)**	—	—	—	—
Kin ties:						
Surviving children	—	12.0 (14.7)	-31.4 (12.0)**	5.6 (7.3)	9.5 (10.2)	-2.1 (4.8)
Number of maternal uncles	—	—	65.0 (16.5)**	27.7 (13.5)*	—	—
Number of maternal aunts	—	—	—	10.1 (14.4)	—	—
Number of paternal uncles	—	—	—	—	—	—
Number of paternal aunts	—	—	—	—	—	8.9 (9.5)
Socioeconomic Status:						
Household possessions	—	22.9 (20.3)	9.2 (13.6)	—	—	-6.5 (7.0)
Livestock ownership	-3.8E-03 (0.004)	—	—	—	—	—
Education	—	3.7E-02 (14.2)	1.3 (8.0)	11.9 (7.3)	—	—
Health Status:						
Respondent	-30.3 (33.4)	20.2 (17.1)	—	—	—	—
Fathers	23.6 (26.1)	13.1 (13.2)	15.9 (8.5)	—	—	—
Mothers	-9.0 (26.7)	-16.7 (14.1)	-10.1 (9.1)	11.9 (7.9)	—	—
Maternal uncles	-9.5 (30.9)	—	-7.0 (10.7)	—	—	—
Maternal aunts	—	—	—	17.5 (8.9)*	—	—
Paternal uncles	—	—	—	—	—	—
Paternal aunts	—	—	—	—	—	10.4 (4.6)*
Children	-115.5 (43.5)**	-23.7 (20.5)	—	—	—	—
Constant	1863.3 (496.0)**	766.5 (350.0)*	-152.8 (173.1)	-238.2 (105.7)*	151.1 (83.7)	30.4 (65.5)
Prob>F	0.03	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.03	0.01
R^2	0.19	0.24	0.15	0.06	0.02	0.04
Sample size (n)	654	843	835	814	708	747

**p<0.01 and *p<0.05. Sex, marital status, and residence are dummy variable; reference categories for sex is male, for marital status is divorced or widowed, and for residence is respondent not residing in same village with relative. Reference ethnic group is the patrilineal group. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. A — means that if the variable was included, the model fit was compromised.

tive findings, and to explore possible reasons for the lack of maternal and paternal biases in gifts exchange.

Qualitative Findings:

People exchange gifts with a wide range of relatives and friends. Asked to mention the people they help most, 29 of the 56 respondents mentioned friends, 18 respondents mentioned sisters, 16 mentioned mothers, 13 mentioned nieces/nephews/cousins, 12 mentioned brothers, 12 mentioned sisters-in-law, 10 mentioned mothers-in-law, eight mentioned children, and seven mentioned sisters-in-marriage. Although most respondents had fathers, fathers-in-law, maternal uncles and aunts alive, these were not mentioned very much as recipients of help. Only three respondents indicated to have helped fathers, four helped maternal uncles, and four helped maternal aunts. Of note, six respondents (three respondents in the transforming ethnic group and three respondents in the patrilineal group) indicated to have helped nieces and nephews, their *mbumba*, as a respondent remarked. In regard to receiving help, five indicated to have received help from their fathers, four from maternal uncles, and four from maternal aunts.[6] Of note again, six respondents (four from the transforming ethnic group, one from the patrilineal group, and one from the matrilineal group) indicated to have received help from their nephews/nieces. Most of the help exchanged between relatives and friends, across all three ethnic groups, involved everyday needs and chores. People helped each other in nursing the ill and taking them to hospital or traditional healers, buying drugs, providing some food, helping with household chores, and providing money to help with educational expenses. Of the 56 respondents interviewed, 28 reported to have helped others with food, 28 with money to meet educational expenses or take an ill person to hospital/traditional healer, 24 helped with nursing the ill, and 13 with various household chores. The main reasons for helping one another included compassion, obligation, and responsibility. Involvement in the exchange of help was very much contingent upon the socioeconomic status of the helper. The well-off economically tended to help relatives and friends more than those not as well off. What was quite surprising to us was that there was little variation across the ethnic groups in gifts exchanges between respondents and their fathers, mothers, uncles, and aunts. The following case stories seem to reveal why there was little variation in gift exchange processes among the three ethnic groups.

The first case we discuss is that of Mtosa, 41 years old, and his wives Nephie who is 36 years and Ebula who is 29 years from the matrilineal ethnic group. Mtosa has been married to his first wife Nephie for thirteen years and to the second for three years. In responding to his grief over the loss of his mother followed by death of his sister within a month, Mtosa's first wife agreed to a patrilocal marriage arrangement with the understanding that at some point in the future, they would move back to Nephie's village, that is, changing into a

Table 4a: OLS unstandardized coefficients of monetary transfers between respondents and their fathers by ethnic group

Variable	Given to Father			Received from Father		
	Matrilineal Group	Transforming Group	Patrilineal Group	Matrilineal Group	Transforming Group	Patrilineal Group
Demographic:						
Age	—	—	-12.9 (4.8)**	—	-13.4 (5.4)**	—
Sex	-84.5 (33.0)**	-127.7 (39.5)**	297.5 (77.6)**	-112.3 (54.1)*	-129.7 (54.3)*	-239.2 (107.4)*
Marital status	—	-93.5 (89.9)	103.5 (145.8)	—	—	—
Kin ties:						
Surviving children	—	-0.6 (8.6)	—	15.4 (10.6)	23.9 (16.6)	—
Socioeconomic Status:						
Household possessions	—	42.9 (13.9)**	76.7 (24.7)**	-6.6 (18.9)	—	-27.3 (36.0)
Livestock ownership	—	—	—	-9.2E-03 (0.01)	—	—
Education	—	-7.2 (7.6)	-28.0 (17.1)	21.8 (8.6)*	—	—
Health Status:						
Respondent	—	—	—	-22.2 (9.8)*	—	—
Respondent's						
Father	-4.1 (6.9)	-3.2 (8.4)	—	—	—	57.9 (22.5)**
Mother	—	—	-14.2 (15.4)	—	—	-32.1 (23.2)
Maternal uncles	—	—	-34.4 (19.4)	—	—	—
Paternal aunts	—	—	—	-10.1 (11.2)	—	—
Constant	169.5 (54.9)**	254.8 (125.4)*	1000.0 (323.7)**	307.2 (135.8)*	510.7 (140.1)**	264.4 (220.0)
Prob>F	0.04	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.02	0.01
R^2	0.04	0.13	0.21	0.33	0.04	0.07
Sample size (n)	177	263	215	176	263	215

**p<0.01 and *p<0.05. Sex and marital status are dummy variables; reference categories for sex is male and for marital status is divorced or widowed. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. A — means the variable was not included as it compromised the model fitness.

Table 4b: OLS unstandardized coefficients of monetary transfers between respondents and their mothers by ethnic group

Variable	Given to Mother			Received from Mother		
	Matrilineal Group	Transforming Group	Patrilineal Group	Matrilineal Group	Transforming Group	Patrilineal Group
Demographic:						
Age	0.9 (1.1)	3.3 (4.1)	-2.2 (4.7)	-1.0 (2.6)	-9.2 (4.2)*	—
Sex	—	-68.6 (47.8)	-305.3 (73.8)**	-59.0 (56.1)	—	1.07 (54.0)
Marital status	—	—	—	-325.0 (103.9)**	—	-355.6 (98.5)**
Kin ties:						
Surviving children	-8.3 (5.7)	-13.1 (13.5)	-7.4 (17.0)	—	13.4 (8.4)	—
Surviving maternal uncles	-6.0 (9.1)	—	—	—	—	2.0 (21.4)
Survival paternal aunts	—	—	—	—	—	33.0 (25.5)
Socioeconomic Status:						
Household possessions	24.1 (8.6)**	32.1 (16.1)*	70.7 (24.2)**	—	-41.9 (14.8)**	—
Livestock ownership	—	—	—	—	—	—
Education	8.2 (4.0)*	19.0 (9.3)*	22.8 (16.9)	-0.7 (9.4)	6.6 (8.5)	-9.7 (12.3)
Health Status:						
Respondent	—	15.0 (12.8)	19.9 (17.6)	—	—	—
Respondent's						
Father	-2.2 (4.8)	—	—	—	-6.3 (7.1)	—
Mother	-3.5 (4.6)	—	—	—	—	—
Children	—	—	—	—	-37.8 (11.3)**	
Constant	9.1 (56.9)	174.4 (170.8)	-11.7 (265.9)	464.6 (142.7)*	755.1 (154.6)**	484.9 (152.4)**
Prob>F	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.01
R^2	0.27	0.09	0.14	0.07	0.51	0.05
Sample size (n)	244	318	284	243	318	284

**$p<0.01$ and *$p<0.05$. Sex and marital status are dummy variables; reference categories for sex is male and for marital status is divorced or widowed. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. A — means the variable was not included as it compromised the model fitness.

Table 4c: OLS unstandardized coefficients of monetary transfers between respondents and their maternal aunts by ethnic group

Variable	Given to Paternal Aunts			Received from Paternal Aunts		
	Matrilineal Group	Transforming Group	Patrilineal Group	Matrilineal Group	Transforming Group	Patrilineal Group
Demographic:						
Age	—	4.7 (1.6)**	-2.1 (1.8)	—	7.3 (3.7)*	—
Sex	—	-6.3 (24.1)	-48.6 (29.0)	-134.9 (56.3)*	-54.7 (46.2)	-65.4 (38.5)
Marital status	—	36.8 (62.6)	70.4 (70.1)	—	-84.3 (76.7)	—
Kin ties:						
Number of maternal uncles	-15.0 (6.3)*	-4.8 (10.8)	—	39.7 (18.3)*	-6.4 (18.4)	43.4 (16.3)**
Number of paternal aunts	—	—	—	21.4 (10.9)*	10.1 (21.5)	—
Socioeconomic Status:						
Household possessions	—	—	30.6 (9.2)**	-27.5 (21.6)	—	—
Livestock ownership	9.7E-03**	3.9E-03 (0.002)**	—	—	7.1E-03 (0.00)**	—
Education	10.7 (3.6)**	5.6 (4.6)	—	—	—	—
Health Status:						
Father	14.7 (4.3)**	—	—	—	—	—
Mother	—	—	-9.6 (6.1)	-22.4 (10.9)*	9.9 (11.1)	-19.2 (8.7)*
Maternal uncles	—	14.6 (6.4)*	—	—	—	—
Paternal aunts	—	-3.6 (5.8)	-3.6 (6.4)	24.7 (12.8)*	—	-7.1 (9.5)
Children	13.7 (8.0)	—	—	—	-21.8 (10.4)*	—
Constant	-229.0 (85.2)**	-227.6 (106.6)	101.1 (118.5)	64.5 (113.1)	-13.4 (200.4)	-232.8 (83.6)**
Prob>F	0.01	0.00	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.00
R^2	0.62	0.17	0.11	0.15	0.24	0.09
Sample size (n)	226	308	213	226	308	213

**p<0.01 and *p<0.05. Sex and marital status are dummy variables; reference category for sex is male and for marital status is widowed or divorced. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. A — means the variable was not included as it compromised the model fitness.

matrilocal marriage arrangement culturally expected of them. After three years of their patrilocal marriage, Nephie reminded Mtosa of his promise to revert to a matrilocal marriage. Mtosa agreed to revert to a matrilocal marriage arrangement. He was in this marriage arrangement for four years then married a second wife Ebula on a patrilocal arrangement. He now has his first wife on a matrilocal arrangement and the second one on a patrilocal arrangement. He spends most of his time with his second wife at his village of origin. He remarked that Nephie is on a matrilocal marriage arrangement because her mother gets ill frequently and so she needs to be near her mother. As he put it,

> Nephie used to stay here in my village with me. Because her mother gets ill frequently, she requested that she goes back to her village of origin to be helping her mother. Hence, she asked me to go and build a house for her at her mother's place, which I did, and now she stays with her mother.

Based on Nephie's views, it seems Mtosa does not like the matrilocal marriage arrangement. He was unable to just get out of it after agreeing that he would revert to a matrilocal arrangement later. He thus opted for matrilocal and patrilocal marriages. Nephie feels that she will soon lose him as he does not help her as much as he used to.

Mtosa though sees himself as responsible for his wives and children but depends mostly on his female and wives' relatives to help with household chores and nursing care when his wives are ill. Both his first wife and second one were bed-ridden with illness for a continuous period of about two weeks in the 1998/99 agricultural season. In the case of the first wife, he relied on his mother-in-law to nurse her. This is understandable as they are in a matrilocal marriage arrangement. In the case of his second wife, he relied on his sister, perhaps because the marriage is patrilocal. In both situations, he was responsible for taking his wives on a bicycle to hospital for treatment. He indicated having received little help from the wives' uncles, fathers, and brothers as well as his own relatives (father and uncles).

Mtosa's wives indicated that they get help from their husband mostly when they are ill, and for items that need cash like salt, soap, and clothes. With regard to illness, the help mostly involves being taken to hospital or finding drugs. Mtosa confirmed that he is responsible for buying clothes for his wives; he also indicated that he is responsible for meeting educational expenses of his children and has received little help from anyone. The wives exchange help, particularly with regard to household chores and nursing tasks, mostly with their mothers, sisters, and female friends. For example, Nephie helped in nursing her mother and niece when they were hospitalized.[7] She had been nursing her mother in hospital when her niece got admitted. Her mother got discharged but she stayed on to nurse the niece, explaining that it was proper for her younger sister (mother of the admitted girl) to go home with the discharged mother while she stayed in the hospital, as she was the older one of the two. Nephie has two other sisters and two brothers but no uncles. The brothers did not extend

any help to her during the 1998/99 agricultural season. Nephie thinks they were busy taking care of their families. Although Ebula, Mtosa's second wife, has an uncle, she is more or less in a similar situation to that of Nephie in that she does not receive much help from her uncle.

No one in rural Malawi is without *nkhoswe*. During Nephie's marriage, her brothers acted as *nkhoswe*. Mtosa's maternal uncles were his *nkhoswe*. Ebula had her maternal uncle as *nkhoswe*. In line with Mitchell's (1956) remarks, these *nkhoswe* are involved in advising their *mbumba* about marriage, settling disagreements between the couples, and following through with divorce if the marriage cannot be saved from dissolution. They are also responsible for burial arrangements if death occurs. Parents play a similar role – they are counselors and guides with the actual expenses for all activities being the responsibility of the household. Of course the *nkhoswe* and parents do help if able but do not seem to be obligated. The nephews/nieces too do not seem obligated to help their uncles or *nkhoswe*. Mtosa did not help his uncle in the previous year nor did Ebula. Nephie did not give or receive help from her brothers (her *nkhoswe*) during 1998/99. We think the *nkhoswe* and parents among the matrilineal Yao ethnic group mainly play the role of counselors or guides, advising their *mbumba* or children what is expected of them but not responsible or obligated to meet any costs the *mbumba* or children incur.

Moving on to Briford and his wife Susan, respondents from the Chewa ethnic group in central Malawi that is changing from matrilineal to patrilineal practices, we find more or less a similar situation. Briford is 41 years old; his wife is 40 years. Their marriage is patrilocal. They both remarked that marriages used to be matrilocal but have changed recently to being more patrilocal. Asked to explain the reasons for the change, they suggested that people do not favour matrilocal marriage arrangements, 'it is out of date' as Briford put it.

Briford and Susan have five children. The oldest child is 20 years old and the youngest is eight years. They had six children. Their first child died when only three days old. They reported that it took three years for Susan to be pregnant again. Difficulties of getting pregnant are believed to have arisen because they had not followed the proper rites for burying the three-days old deceased baby. They consulted their *nkhoswe* about the problem, who helped them to identify a person who knew some traditional medicine to correct the situation. After taking the medicine, which Briford and Susan paid for, Susan was able to get pregnant again.

Susan mentioned sisters-in-marriage, sisters-in-law, sisters, and a brother who has a paid job as the ones who help her most frequently. The female relatives she mentioned mostly help with household chores especially when Susan is ill or has an ill member in her household. The brother sometimes gives her some money for various needs, especially to help in dealing with illness in the household. Briford mentioned mostly nephews, brothers, and friends as the ones who most frequently help him when he experiences problems. When ill-

ness strikes his household, he mainly relies on his sisters for household chores while he sees it as his responsibility to find money and take the ill member to hospital. His wife was bed-ridden with illness for a whole week during the 1998/99 agricultural season and Briford had to take her on his bicycle to hospital. Also, one of their children was seriously ill for some three weeks during 1998/99. Briford and his wife had to take the child to hospital. Many relatives came to check on how the child was doing especially when they came back but only Susan's brother and Briford's nephew provided some financial help.

Asked what happens when they have marital problems in their household, they both explained that they consult their *nkhoswe* (maternal uncles) as they did when Susan was unable to get pregnant. Briford remarked that the *nkhoswe* are mainly involved in marriage arrangements and problems, serious illness, and funerals. They hardly provide material or financial help. With regard to serious illness and death, their role is that of a counselor and guide. For illness, for example, they check on how an ill person is doing and suggest what the father and mother could do. With regard to funerals, they ensure that burial rites are properly followed. During Susan's problem about getting pregnant, for example, the *nkhoswe* helped to find the medicine but Briford and Susan paid for it themselves. We find therefore that wealth flow processes among the transforming Chewa ethnic group are similar to processes among the matrilineal Yao ethnic group.

Briford and Susan were quick to explain that it used to be the case that the *nkhoswe* provided significant material help; they also had a lot of say about what goes on in their *mbumba's* households. This is no longer the case. The father and mother are responsible for providing whatever is needed to take care of an ill one in their household or to bury the dead member, but extensively consult their *nkhoswe* and parents for counsel and advice. The *nkhoswe* as well as parents may help materially contingent upon their economic status. Extending the discussion to friends, Briford and Susan indicated that help from friends depends on the benevolence of those friends and how the beneficiary has been extending his or her help to the friends.

The situation among the patrilineal Tumbuka in northern Malawi seems to follow a similar trend. Husbands and wives are responsible for dealing with problems in their household with the *nkhoswe* (not uncles but parents in the case of this patrilineal ethnic group) playing the role of counselor and guide. Elita and her husband Geoffrey, respectively 38 and 44 years old, have five children. The oldest is 17 and the youngest is 3 years old. They also live with a 16 years old niece, Elita's brother's daughter. Elita's brother and wife passed away leaving behind a daughter who had nowhere else to live hence came to live with Elita's family.

With regard to household chores and nursing care when someone in the household is ill, Elita gets help from the mother-in-law mostly but also sisters, the niece, friends, and sisters-in-marriage. Recently, her father-in-law passed

away. The time he was ill, Elita and her husband took him to hospital. While her husband organised some money and transport, Elita was the main one responsible for various chores at home and at the hospital. It was not right for her mother-in-law to be 'running up and down', as she put it, with her around. At his death, Geoffrey and his brothers had the burden of ensuring that there was enough food for the mourners, and had to find money needed to buy the coffin and other things for burial. Elita, her sisters-in-law, and her sisters-in-marriage were responsible for preparing the food.

Elita has an interesting history. Both of her parents died when she was very young. She and her brother were taken care of by their maternal aunt. The aunt and her brother acted as *nkhoswe* during her marriage. Elita seems to be following the example of her aunt in taking care of her niece since the death of her father and mother. With no primary kin member on her side, Elita depends mostly on her husband, cousins, and friends for anything that requires money. Geoffrey, like husbands in the matrilineal and transforming ethnic groups, sees himself to be responsible for anything that demands money in his household including supplying the needs of his wife and children. He receives a lot of help from his brother, a priest, and another one who is an agricultural extension officer. He also receives frequent help from his maternal uncle who is a teacher. Geoffrey indicated that he did not receive much help from his father, except as a counselor or guide on how they were supposed to do something. The father was of course the *nkhoswe* and played a central role in Geoffrey's marriage and resolving any disputes between Geoffrey and his wife or brothers, but never provided material or financial help.

From the qualitative findings, we find little evidence of variations in the exchange of gifts among the three ethnic groups. We found that in all the three ethnic groups, the *nkhoswe* (and parents) are mostly involved in marriage arrangements, dealing with marital problems, serious illness, and death, not necessarily in terms of meeting expenses households incur but providing the needed guidance on how burial, for example, should be carried out. Husbands and their wives in each household are the ones responsible for the expenses or ensuring that things actually happen as expected. The *nkhoswe* as well as parents play more of an advisory rather than a decisional role in how wealth in their *mbumba's* and children's households is used. Also, it seems obligation, compassion, and responsibility are the foundational factors in people helping each other contingent upon the socioeconomic status of those involved in the exchange of help. A wealthy uncle is obviously expected to help materially when his *mbumba* are in need of that help. We also found that friends are a critical component in the exchange of help; most respondents exchanged significant help with friends.

We come to the conclusion that both quantitative and qualitative findings do not provide any convincing evidence that paternal relatives under patriliny (the case of the patrilineal Tumbuka ethnic group in northern Malawi) or maternal

relatives under matriliny (the case of the matrilineal Yao ethnic group in southern Malawi) play a significant role in wealth flows. We think that husbands and wives or primary household members, whether under matriliny or patriliny, make the serious decisions on wealth flows. We suggest that this is due to the increasing privatisation of production and consumption behaviour among households engendered by capitalism that is penetrating rural Malawi. We think that inherent in capitalism are mechanisms for diminishing matrilineal and patrilineal kinship influence over wealth flow.

Kinship, Capitalism, and Wealth Flow

Kinship is a relational term not only at the genealogical level but also at the code of conduct level, particularly in regard to sharing of food, labour, money, time, land, and services as people deal with problems and respond to opportunities (Holy 1996). While the genealogical aspect of kinship ties people on the basis of common parenthood, the code of conduct aspect of kinship ties people on the basis of what they share and struggle against. A father is genealogically connected to a son; the two are members of the same primary kin circle. They are also related in what they share and struggle against in producing necessities of life. They will therefore respond to each other's needs as deemed culturally appropriate. To this extent, genealogy is a source of obligation among the kin. Those related genealogically are obligated to ensure the well-being of each other. Among patrilineal ethnic groups, fathers and the paternal line of relatives may indeed be the ones obligated to ensure the well-being of their kin. Likewise, among the matrilineal ethnic groups, the uncles/aunts may be the ones with such an obligation. There may be change in who bears the responsibility for the well-being of kin, e.g., from uncles to fathers as is happening among the Chewa who are changing from matriliny to patriliny (Phiri 1983). For our argument here, it matters little who bears this responsibility. The critical factor is that they fulfill that genealogical obligation.

While genealogy is a source of obligation among the kin, fulfilling the obligations involves transfers. Engaging in transfers generally means following an expected code of conduct, that is, responding to the needs and requests of the kin as culturally expected. In terms of transfers, bad children are those who do not engage in transfers with their relatives. The children's transfer behaviour may be influenced by the bond they enjoy with their relatives contingent upon their resource base and views on what would be considered the most appropriate use of their resources. This children-paternal relatives link may indeed be the fundamental transfers leverage in patrilineal ethnic groups. The children-maternal relatives link may be the important leverage in matrilineal ethnic groups. Both leverages weaken with the advent of capitalism.

It has been observed that in societies not disturbed by capitalist social relations, goods and services tend to be distributed more or less equally and on the basis of need (Lenski 1966: p.46) with those in positions of authority facilitat-

ing the distribution of the resources and products of labour (Polanyi 1968). As capitalism enforces its ideals on society, social life becomes much more rationalised; exchange behaviour is driven by selfish goals involving calculations of rewards/benefits and punishments/costs rather than collective preferences.

We think that during the pre-colonial pre-slave trade era, the likelihood that parents, uncles, and aunts among patrilineal and matrilineal ethnic groups influenced their children and nephews/nieces' exchange of labour and its products in rural Malawi was high as the rationalisation of social life may not have been very high. Mandala (1984), for example, remarks that during the pre-slave trade era, egalitarian agricultural practices were common and the elders' control over the labour of the youth was firm among the Mang'anja, a southern Malawi ethnic group. Colonial imperialism in the 1800s introduced the cash economy, amongst other things, into rural Malawi, which essentially transformed the social landscape, bringing forth individualistic lifestyles as the rationalistic capitalist culture invaded rural Malawi. We think that capitalist practices in which behaviour becomes driven more by self-interest, have over the years been sabotaging collective processes. Giving and receiving behaviour is thus changing from being driven by collective preferences to increasingly being a private household matter. Parents as well as uncles and aunts end up becoming less decisional and more advisory in their roles over their children and *mbumba's* wealth. Resource use and the distribution of products of labour become more rationalistic. We think that the advent of capitalism into rural Malawi, characterised by the increasing production of cash crops like tobacco and cotton, wage labour as another means of livelihood, business ventures, and various forms of cash generating activities, is leading to an increasingly individualistic lifestyle and contributes to the weakening of the influence of parents, uncles, and aunts (maternal or paternal) over transfer decisions of adult children.

We think, in line with Godelier (1972) and Poewe (1981), that society indeed experiences various contradictions. Poewe (1981: p.120), for example, suggests that under matriliny, there is a contradiction 'between the increasingly individual or private nature of the forces of production [economic activities in the production of necessities of life] and the still communal or social character of appropriation' among the Luapula people of Zambia. We argue, in the case of Malawi, that both production and consumption are steadily becoming private activities; central authorities have less influence over individuals' activities. The introduction of the cash economy progressively encouraged private production activities, undermined communal appropriation processes, and compromised parents' and uncles/aunts' influence over their adult children, nephews, and nieces' wealth transfer actions. Mandala (1990) speaks of such influence of the cash economy among the Sena and Mang'anja people of southern Malawi when cotton was introduced as a cash crop and wage labour became an important means of livelihood. The tobacco cash crop brought about similar

contradictions among the then matrilineal Chewa ethnic group as men got more involved in tobacco growing leaving most of the food production farm work to women (Phiri 1983).

With specific reference to transfer decisions that people make, we think that as capitalism asserts its presence in rural Malawi, people increasingly embrace two contradicting sets of values. On one hand, they have to follow a code of conduct that affirms the authority of parents, uncles, and aunts in wealth flows, a code of conduct that would affirm communal appropriation processes. On the other hand, they have to follow a code of conduct that asserts private appropriation processes that capitalism engenders in which transfer behaviour is influenced more by rationalised choices rather than communal imperatives. From our findings, we think respondents are progressively embracing the private appropriation values and compromising on the communal ones hence the lack of fathers' and uncles/aunts' influence on respondents' transfer decisions. We suggest that over the years, fathers, uncles, mothers, and aunts have become counselors in transfer activities rather than the main decision-makers. We contend that the new system (capitalism) weakens the old one leading to declining influence of maternal as well as paternal relatives over wealth transfer behaviours of their adult children.

Poewe (1981: p.121) suggests that matriliny and capitalism accommodate each other among the Luapula people in that 'matrilineal inheritance remains the symbolic keystone of Luapula matriliny' even as capitalism has shored its presence. We do not think capitalism accommodates matriliny and patriliny in rural Malawi. Instead, it is encouraging a different set of values in the economic production and use of necessities of life, values that weaken matriliny and patriliny.

Conclusion

This paper has not been about whether matriliny gives greater power to women than patriliny or such other interesting gender related questions but on whether transfers are patterned differently among matrilineal and patrilineal societies[8]. To test the proposition, we examined wealth transfers among the matrilineal Yao, patrilineal Tumbuka, and the Chewa who are changing from a matrilineal system to a patrilineal type in rural Malawi, hoping to find that paternal relatives give and receive more from their adult children among the patrilineal Tumbuka ethnic group than the matrilineal Yao ethnic group, that maternal relatives give and receive proportionately more from adult children among the Yao than among the Tumbuka, and that the transforming Chewa are somewhere in-between. Much as the descriptions of matrilineal and patrilineal kinship arrangements suggest that transfer patterns would favour maternal relatives under matriliny and paternal relatives under patriliny (see works in Colson and Gluckman 1968; Holy 1986; Mitchell 1956; Poewe 1981; Raha

1989), we find no evidence for such a situation. Patterns of wealth flows under matriliny and patriliny are actually similar.

Why the similarity in wealth flow patterns? We think they arise because of capitalist values that have penetrated rural Malawi. The capitalist ideology, which encourages individualistic tendencies in transfer behaviour, is weakening the rather collective matrilineal and patrilineal ideologies. We argue against Poewe's (1981) point that capitalism accommodates matriliny (and, by extension, that it could accommodate patriliny). Because capitalism has different sets of values in the allocation and use of means of production from those of kinship political economies (matriliny or patriliny), capitalism may seem to accommodate these economies but essentially acts as a parasite that undermines the values of these kinship political economies replacing them with the class-oriented individualistic mode of production.

Notes

This research was supported by NIH RO1 HD37276-01, NIH P30-AI45008 and the University of Pennsylvania Social Science Core for AIDS Research.

1. Our description of matriliny and patriliny on the three ethnic groups under discussion in this paper (Yao, Chewa, and Tumbuka) draws heavily on works by Tew (1950), Mitchell (1956), Marwick (1965), and Phiri (1983). Mitchell's work on the Yao is extensive. We draw mainly on his 1956 book. Note: there is very little recent works on the various ethnic groups in Malawi hence the lack of more recent literature in our discussion.
2. The Tumbuka too were matrilineal until the mid 1800s when the Ngoni, a patrilineal ethnic group, conquered them and stamped its patrilineal practices on them (Tew 1950). Ever since, the Tumbuka have been patrilineal. Of note: the Ngoni fought the Yao but never really conquered them so as to significantly influence their kinship practices.
3. Schatz (1999), for example, reports that 72.7 percent of the Chewa in Mchinji District of Central Malawi follow patrilineal lineage processes and 33.2 percent of their marriages are patrilocal.
4. From the time the first AIDS case was diagnosed in April 1985 to the end of 1999, an estimated 70,000 people have died from the disease and about 760,000 people aged 15 to 49 years (15.96 percent of prime adults) are living with it in Malawi (UNAIDS 2000). The disease is striking the most economically productive age group (20-50 years), who are also the most involved in gift exchanges. We thought that this would compromise wealth flow from respondents, most of whom were between 25 and 45 years of age, to their relatives.
5. Comparing the matrilineal and patrilineal groups, we find that respondents in the patrilineal group tended to have more livestock wealth and attained higher education on average than those in the matrilineal group. This may explain the higher level of gifts exchange among the patrilineal than the matrilineal group as discussed earlier on.

6. The question asked in the qualitative interviews was who they helped most and whom they received help from the most. We were surprised that close relatives, especially fathers, mothers, uncles, and aunts, were rarely mentioned as sources and recipients of help. When we probed about whether they do not give or receive help from these relatives, one respondent remarked, 'one does not keep score of the help one gives to a father, mother, or uncle ... we are always helping them anyways'. This somewhat explains why there were few people in the qualitative interviews who indicated to have helped or received help from fathers, mothers, uncles, and aunts. In the quantitative survey, the questionnaire 'forced' respondents to indicate what they gave to and received from these relatives.
7. Nursing staff are so inadequate in Malawi such that relatives undertake a significant amount of nursing work (such as escorting patients to bathrooms and giving them baths) if they have a sick person admitted in hospital.
8. Crehan (1997) and Peters (1997a, 1997b) have made wonderful contributions to gender dynamics within patrilineal or matrilineal societies.We do not get into that discussion here.

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