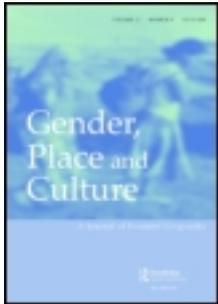


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History lessons for gender equality from the Zambian Copperbelt, 1900–1990

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This article explores the historical causes and consequences of gender divisions of labour in the Zambian Copperbelt. Male breadwinner and female housewife stereotypes appear to have emerged as a product of imported Christian ideologies, colonial–capitalist concerns and an economic climate that largely enabled men to financially provide for their families. Reliant upon husbands for status and economic support, many urban women had little conjugal bargaining power. Gender divisions of labour also meant that people lacked first-hand evidence of women’s equal competence in employment and politics, who they thus often underrated and overlooked. Such perceptions seem to have perpetuated women’s exclusion from prestigious positions – a pattern sustained by macro-economic circumstances in the early decades of Independence. Compliance with the gender status inequalities promoted in pre-marital traditional initiation thus became necessary to marital and economic security, as well as respectability, which was not previously the case. While there were exceptions to these trends, the historical record illustrates the interplay between patterns of resource access, internalised gender stereotypes and cultural expectations.

Keywords: colonialism; gender divisions of labour; gender status inequality; gender beliefs; Northern Rhodesia; Zambia

Introduction

The aim here is to identify lessons from historical shifts in gender beliefs and practices in the Zambian Copperbelt. Divided into five sections, this article first highlights the significance of economic interdependence between rural men and women in pre- and early colonial times. In the early colonial period (1920s–1930s), male domination of rural–urban migration gave women scarcity value and bargaining power in Copperbelt towns. However, these emerging freedoms had been thwarted by the late colonial period (1950s), due to colonial-Christian gender ideologies, legislative changes and women’s growing dependence on men for resource access. The fourth section documents how gender divisions of labour were perpetuated in the early decades of Independence (1960s–1980s), as men’s access to employment was largely assured. The rich copper deposits on the Zambian Copperbelt thus continued to be mined, managed and administered by men. Housewives’ resulting social isolation and economic dependence appears to have curbed their opportunities to collectively reflect on their circumstances, develop confidence in their capabilities and militate for change.

This chronology draws heavily on historical ethnographies. Such observations are rich in detail but cautious interpretation is warranted. Their attempts to discover an earlier, pre-

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colonial baseline may have been influenced by the colonial context in which they were situated (Moore and Vaughan 1994). In addition, women's accounts of pre-colonial practices may have been overshadowed by those of dominant groups (Wright 1983), as well as the paucity of African women in urban survey teams in Northern Rhodesia (Schumaker 2001, 211). This said, it cannot be assumed that Copperbelt women would have eschewed the portrayals others presented.

These ethnographies have been triangulated with my own fieldwork: life histories, group discussions and participant observation. Based in Kitwe (the largest Copperbelt city) between March 2010 and April 2011, I interviewed Zambian men and women from different generations and occupations – such as market traders, miners, magistrates and Members of Parliament. However, the foregoing analysis largely draws upon (and is thus more representative of) low and middle-income groups. These narratives must be recognised as constructions of the past, possibly biased by current beliefs and memory loss. Such concerns were addressed through the development of strong relationships of trust and understanding, with repeated interviews – in Bemba, the local language in which I became fluent. I also lived with families from across the socio-economic spectrum, though predominantly in a low-income, high-density township built during the 1940s and 1950s for African industrial workers.

These data have been analysed with a theoretical framework that understands sex-differentiated practices as resulting from internalised gender stereotypes, cultural expectations and patterns of resource access. Gender stereotypes can be either descriptive (i.e. assumptions about the traits of the typical man and woman) or prescriptive (how men and women should behave). Even if an individual does not personally endorse these gender beliefs, they may still be motivated to comply by the presumption that others do and will evaluate their conduct in accordance with cultural expectations. These two concepts are drawn from Ridgeway's (2011) explanation of the persistence of gender status inequalities in the USA. She further argues that gender stereotypes about differing competencies are infused with value judgements, such that stereotypically feminine and masculine traits are not equally appreciated. Because men are often seen as more competent in socially valued domains, they are thus deemed more worthy of status, respect, esteem and influence. In addition to these gender status beliefs, this article also explores the relative significance of men and women's access to resources.

The pre/early colonial period (1920s–1930s)

Matrilocal protection, matrilineal importance and economic interdependence in rural areas (1920s–1930s)

Most urban Copperbelt residents came from matrilineal, Bantu ethnic groups, especially those of Northern and Central Zambia (Mitchell 1956). The earliest accounts of this area are found in Audrey Richards' ethnographies of the Bemba ethnic group. Other migrant-sending communities (e.g. the Kaonde, Lozi, Ngoni and Tonga) seem to have been similar in some but not all respects. These differences will be noted.

In pre-colonial times, Bemba men's political strength depended heavily on the fertility of their sisters and matrilineal kin. With no means of storing wealth (due to practices of shifting cultivation), their power consisted in the right to demand labour services. Thus, relative to patrilineal ethnic groups, Bemba women enjoyed high status, with parents welcoming the birth of girls, as potentially able to bring male labour to their village and reproduce the lineage (Richards 1940).

With matrilocality, men moved to their wife's village at marriage. Instead of paying significant bride-wealth, a son-in-law would perform bride-service, working under the authority of his wife's kin (Richards 1940; for similar practices elsewhere, see also Lovett (1997, 174) on the Lakeside Tonga in Northern Nyasaland, a nearby labour reserve; and Wright (1983, 74–75) on the Tonga in southern Northern Rhodesia). Control over wives was gradually awarded to husbands, who acquired status as their families grew. However, it was not difficult for dissatisfied Bemba women to initiate separation, since there were no high bride-wealth payments to be returned (Chanock 1998, 146; Richards 1940; see also Crehan (1997, 106) on the Kaonde in North-Western Northern Rhodesia).¹

A husband might acquire permission to relocate with his wife to his natal village. But wives enjoyed the option of returning with their children to their own matrikin where they might have children with other men, thereby expanding the labour force. Although a wife was supposed to obey her husband as household head, matriliney limited his rights, authority and control. A wife was not tied or beholden to one particular man (i.e. her husband) since familial authority was dispersed between matrikin and spouses. Further protection was provided by Bemba customary law (Epstein 1981, 109; Richards 1940, 86).² However, her brother and lineage would still claim extensive rights over her children (Richards 1940, 33; see also 90–93 on ostensibly hierarchical aspects of gender relations).

Bemba men and women (as spouses and kin) were economically interdependent (Richards 1940, 22, 85; see also Crehan 1997, 105, 148–149 on the Kaonde; and Gluckman 1987, 179 on the Lozi in Western Province). Although there were gender divisions of labour, women's work was considered to be of equal importance as that of men. Responsibility for food production gave women status since it facilitated reciprocity between kin (Powdermaker 1962, 158, 193; Richards 1995, 25; see also Colson 1951, 104 on the Tonga).

The protection and cooperation normatively afforded by matrilineal and conjugal ties were not predetermined, however. It depended upon on-going activation, such as through the exchange of services (Moore and Vaughan 1994). Nevertheless, such structures seem to have enhanced women's scope for social respect and status. Richards (1940, 91–94) notes that in this context of economic interdependence and kin support,

The Bemba woman is never considered . . . as the possession of her husband . . . in the sense that an Englishman does, or did, consider his wife as belonging to him, or as the South African Bantu speaks of his wife as though she were his property . . . Thus in lieu of a fixed pattern of dominance and subjection between husbands and wives, such as the formal teaching of the Bemba girls would suggest, there seems to be every kind of contradiction between the norm and the actual behaviour, and between the relative status of married persons of different rank, different ages and different stages in the marriage relationship.

Richards elaborates that the position of women was not static. Bemba women obtained authority with age, childbirth and particularly as grandmothers (1940, 22–23). Thus, gender roles and relations do not appear to have been determined by traditional marital teachings but were instead dynamic over the life course, shaped by a woman's perceived value (to her kin and husband) in a context of matrilineal and conjugal economic interdependence. Socio-economic changes ensued when Northern Rhodesia was officially claimed as a British colony in 1923, having been acquired by the British South Africa Company in the 1890s for mineral prospecting. By 1930, four large mines had been established on the Copperbelt.

Demographic change and women's economic opportunities in urban areas (1920s and 1930s)

To ensure the supply of wage labour for copper exports and finance territorial administration, a head tax was imposed on adult males. The colonial government also

restricted rural livelihoods (Weeks et al. 2007, 15–16). While men dominated rural–urban migration, women also travelled to the Copperbelt: some became successful entrepreneurs and accumulated significant capital. Others accrued incomes through employment in hospitals, small-scale trading, beer-brewing or vegetable gardening. With economic independence from men, urban women gained greater control over their lives (Chauncey 1981, 143). One claimed, ‘Many educated women I know . . . say we will leave a man, we have our own salary now, we can bring up our own children, we will do better without’ (Parpart 1986, 152). However, one of the largest sectors – domestic service in European settler homes – was closed to women since colonisers considered them promiscuous (Hansen 1989). Most women were thus economically dependent on men’s wages (Epstein 1981, 57; Parpart 1986, 152, 1988, 118).

Crucially though, urban women were not tied to a particular man, at least not in the 1930s. In this decade, when the ratio of men to women was 2:1 (owing to male dominance of urban migration), women found new partners with ease. Many would divorce rather than endure abuse. Accordingly, men were generally keen to provide a higher standard of living for their wives or else risk losing them (Chanock 1998, 208–209; Chauncey 1981, 152; Parpart 1988, 118–119).

By entering into temporary alliances with urban men, women found greater autonomy. Some fled villages in order to avoid unsatisfactory marriages, harsh toil and rural elders’ control of their reproductive and productive labour (Parpart 1986). Other women arrived in the Copperbelt as obedient wives but changed with urban influence, as they learned of alternative possibilities. The urban situation thus enabled the realisation of what one colonial observer based in the Northern Province in the 1930s termed ‘the growing desire of native women for a more independent status’ (Ault 1983, 183). This early-to-mid-colonial period thus enabled ‘the weakening of patriarchy . . . women were demanding their rights within marriages and asserting their right to break off unsatisfactory marriages either informally or through the courts’ (Parpart 1988, 117–119).

The mid-to-late-colonial period (1940s–1960s)

Resistance to women’s growing autonomy in the mid-colonial Copperbelt (1940s–1950s)

Women’s autonomous initiatives were thwarted by a subsequent backlash in the mid-colonial period. Rural elders increasingly resisted the rural–urban migration of independent women and the urbanisation of marriage because this undermined their control of young men’s labour services. Accordingly, provincial reports in the 1930s identified the ‘new independence and self-assertiveness of the young women’ as a major concern of rural African male elders (cited in Chanock 1998, 211; see also Ault 1983, 184–185; Chauncey 1981, 155–157; Epstein 1981, 65–66, 283–284).

The colonial government was also worried. Following the Great Depression, where two-thirds of the Copperbelt workforce became redundant between 1929 and 1931, the Government was concerned about urban control. It came to oppose female urban migration and the growth of Copperbelt families, fearing this would create costly social responsibilities and undermine social stability (Ault 1983, 194; Chauncey 1981, 157–158; Parpart 1988, 121).

Christian concerns also featured in this backlash: missionaries sought to impose insoluble, monogamous marriage by denying divorce to Church-members. Churches also promoted female subservience and modesty (Chanock 1998, 151–152, 159, 193; Parpart 1988, 133; see also Mizinga 2000 on Southern Zambia). The emerging African Christian

elite feared that ‘bad girls’ would prohibit their respectable status in colonial towns. In order to distance themselves from sexual immorality, this elite supported rural repatriation ‘not only of out and out harlots but also of divorced and unattached women in general’ (Chingola court report cited in Parpart 2001, 279).

Religious influence was compounded by legislative changes, when British officials accorded male chiefs judicial authority to define ‘customary law’. In 1944 the mines granted Africans married accommodation only upon production of a marriage certificate from the woman’s home area – thereby restoring rural elders’ control. Even when Urban African Courts subsequently came to authorise such proceedings, they always insisted on the consent of kinsmen, bride-wealth payments and heavy fines of adulterers. Divorce was only granted reluctantly, after prolonged consultations (Chanock 1998, 207–208, 212–214; Epstein 1981, 110; Mitchell 1956, 4).

To control wayward women, divorce was made less desirable, such as by preventing women from taking their children with them upon separation. African elders also supported higher bride-wealth prices (to be returned to the husband upon divorce) in order to make marital dissolution unaffordable. Such moves were supported by the colonial government and Copperbelt men, willing to pay more to prevent women from being ‘proud and cheeky’ (Chanock 1998, 175–178, 215–216). Bride-wealth remittances, rather than bride-service, were also encouraged by urban wage labour. It was difficult for men to arrange the prolonged periods of absence from urban employment that were necessary to undertake bride-service for their rural in-laws (Chanock 1998, 180; Richards 1940, 57, 78).

There is disagreement over the extent to which urban courts ‘invented’ tradition. Epstein (1981, 109, 279, 283–284, 305–306) maintains that the procedures and principles mandated by African urban courts were merely following existing customs. However, Chanock (1998, 35, 45) contends that some elements were manufactured. Epstein defends his case by showing that judges and litigants invoked the same body of norms. However, in my opinion, this does not show that litigants held the same beliefs as judges, for they may have just been strategically invoking those norms that they thought the courts would recognise – as appears to be the case for married women plaintiffs (Parpart 1988, 127).

Moreover, certain elements do seem to have changed, such as the shift from bride-service to bride-wealth.³ The increasing amount of bride-wealth payments seems associated with fathers’ increasing powers over children and husbands over wives. While higher payments may not have changed the meaning of contracting a marriage (Moore and Vaughan 1994, 160–164), they do seem to have constrained women’s exit options as their families were reluctant to return their bride-wealth (Chanock 1998, 175–181; Richards 1940, 78–80; Mizinga 2000).

However, few women were deterred from marriage, since its legal importance also increased over time. Unmarried women were deemed to have no proper place in town and some were forcibly repatriated to their villages (Chanock 1998, 193; Parpart 1988, 121). Fear of repatriation led many women to remain in unhappy marriages, rather than request a divorce (Epstein 1981, 117, 281–282, 313).

Women also had a financial motivation for marriage registration. They did not have access to municipal housing or rations from mining companies in their own right but only upon production of a marriage certificate (Mitchell 1956, 4). Most women were thus economically dependent on men, given the limitations of their own livelihood options (Hansen 1997, 28, 40; Parpart 1988, 123). With the increased legal and financial importance of marriage in towns, more people registered (Parpart 1988, 121).

Women fighting back in the mid-colonial period (1940s–1950s)

Drawing on the urban court records of the 1950s, Parpart (1986, 1988) argues that women fought back to regain the ‘autonomy’ enjoyed in the 1920s and 1930s. Some women maintained economic independence through beer-brewing and prostitution. Others protected themselves against the event of conjugal breakdown by secretly keeping savings in friends’ and relatives’ houses or investing in social networks to secure reciprocity. While the vast majority of women lived with a man in the 1950s, many eschewed binding marriage registration in favour of informal liaisons, where exit remained possible. Although chiefs repatriated unmarried urban women to rural areas, they would often escape pre-emptively or return clandestinely. Subversion became so common that urban courts were resigned to abandon the policy of repatriation in 1953. But while some sought to preserve their cherished autonomy, many women had other desires, such as for social respect – which required compliance with Christian-colonial prescriptive stereotypes.

Christian-colonial norms of propriety in the mid-colonial period (1940s–1950s)

The British colonial regime expected women to be dependent housewives. For example, one girls’ boarding school was established on the Copperbelt with the explicit moral mission of creating ‘town-bred girls who can become good wives and mothers in an urban environment’ (quoted in Parpart 2001, 278). From the 1930s to 1960s, mining companies sought to stretch miners’ low wages by training their wives in domestic skills: sewing, hygiene, laundry, handicrafts, cooking, and sometimes reading and writing. Gender divisions of labour were thus prescribed, as part of a moral–colonial–capitalist mission. Furthermore, women’s domestic roles became devalued in the market-based economy. Food preparation was denigrated from honour to duty, thereby eroding the status women previously accrued.

Colonial–capitalist ideologies about ‘good housewives’ were communicated by mining companies, churches, government social welfare and the media: “‘the European way-of-life” [was] a standard or scale of prestige’ (Mitchell 1956, 15; see also Ferguson 1999, 168–169, 175). These gender divisions of labour were adopted by the emerging elite, who sought to mark their social position and impress others. The rest of society aspired to keep up (Epstein 1981, 71, 75; Kallmann 1999; Parpart 2001, 280–283). With men keen to acquire respect and Christian missions’ prescriptive stereotypes being increasingly accepted, women were progressively assigned an exclusively homemaking role. For most Copperbelt women in the 1950s, their days largely revolved around their husband and his working hours, in recognition of his ‘new status as breadwinner and master of the household’ (Epstein 1981, 70; see also Chauncey 1981, 150; Powdermaker 1962, 188–190). Many women sought to secure respectability by accepting their husbands’ orders and only associating with reputable women (Parpart 2001). More subversive behaviour may have been discouraged by their limited exit options, stemming from the stigma of divorce. In the 1940s and 1950s, marital stability became increasingly critical to respectability, for both the urban poor and emerging elite alike (Epstein 1981, 257).

Although marriages stabilised during this mid-colonial period, there were class-based differences: women with wealthy husbands were less likely to divorce, since they derived significant financial benefits from marriage, in comparison with poorer women. Even if they did seek divorce, their families were often unsupportive – reluctant to return their high bride-wealth. Accepted freedoms permitted within marriage also varied by class. The urban poor, unlike the emerging elite, deemed it acceptable for women to frequent beer halls, though not to drink to excess, chase men or neglect their duties as housewives (Parpart 2001, 281).

Women's economic dependence on husbands in the mid-late colonial period (1950s and 1960s)

While women were encouraged to care for the labour force, government restrictions and fines constrained their income-generating activities (such as beer-brewing and prostitution). Such obstacles were imposed in order to entrench women's economic dependence upon, and commitment to, male employees – thereby preserving social stability and cohesion (Chauncey 1981, 136, 149; Epstein 1981, 57, 116, 309–310; Glazer 1997, 144; Parpart 1986, 1988, 122; Powdermaker 1962, 151, 192). Like European authorities, many Africans were opposed to women being wage earners. Men with working wives might be mocked and shamed, since this signalled failure to live up to prescriptive cultural stereotypes (Epstein 1981, 58; Harries-Jones 1975, 156).

As a result of these colonial, capitalist and patriarchal desires, 'the economic aspect of the woman's role had been diminished under urban conditions' (Epstein 1981, 68, 116). Very few women worked outside the home (Chauncey 1981, 150; Hansen 1989, 121, 130–134; Powdermaker 1962, 188–190). Such characterisations are also evident in collective memories of this period. While contemporary narratives do not provide reliable evidence of what actually happened (since few of my participants actually lived during this time), they nonetheless provide valuable insights into popular representations of earlier generations. For example, Markus, a 45-year-old garage owner and mine engineer, explained contemporary gender divisions of labour with reference to past stereotypes:

The way I see things myself, it's more of a historical issue, engraved in people's veins, because men were coming out to work in town. It became a law that a man should be moving up and down, even after they moved their wives here, they still just suffered in the kitchen, saying 'He's going to the mine'. And remember, when we go through the mining regulation, it's now that the government has changed the rules, there never used to be a woman underground... We had a woman surveyor working underground, she had to be exempted by law, so you can see there are some deterrent factors which make women the way they are now.

Women's economic dependence was perpetuated by gender bias in education, which may have in turn reflected labour market expectations. John (22, funding his secondary education through piece-work and church sponsorship) explained,

In those days back, men are the only people whom the government of this country were regarding as the strong compared to women. And men were regarding themselves that they think wiser than women. Women were not allowed to study further because they were thinking that women will get married but men are the one who studied hard and got advanced in the education so that in return they can marry and look after the family properly... A long time ago, there was a rule where they said that only men would go and work while the women are supposed to remain at home to look after the family.

This description, echoed universally in my Copperbelt sample, is supported by quantitative data and ethnographic accounts (Epstein 1981, 155; Powdermaker 1962, 199–201; see also Mizinga 2000, 68 on Southern Province). For example, Gloria (66) married at 15, when her father died and no one would support her. The Catholics sponsored her brothers' education but not her own. She narrated, 'They didn't count us women historically. We were suffering' (translated).

Gender divisions of labour meant that many women became dependent on their husbands for respect as well as resource access. Epstein (1981, 75) observes,

Women were not able to seek achievement and the esteem of their fellows in the same ways that had become possible for men. A woman's status in town, and more particularly a wife's, rarely rested on what she had achieved through her own efforts but was in most cases refracted

through her husband. To impress her own importance on another she might thus proclaim, 'BaMuka Chief Clerk?' (Don't you know that I am Mrs Chief Clerk?).

With a weak fall-back position, women in the 1950s commonly remarked that they would put up with a lot to preserve their marriages. Epstein (1981, 67, 109–110, 120, 313–314) notes that,

In circumstances where employment was necessary to survival, and few jobs were available to woman, the husband immediately found his position enhanced... [Upon finding a job and accommodation] he was master of the house... he could lay claim to a power and an authority over the affairs of the household that were not part of his customary role... a wife was obliged to defer to her husband in all things.

Some husbands controlled their wives by telling them what to do and forbidding certain actions, constantly reminding them of their economic dependence and derivative status (Epstein 1981, 339). The salience of gender stereotypes is further revealed by female students' essays, collected from a single-sex government boarding school. In describing their fantasies, 73% of these middle-class girls wished to be men, envying their privileges, power, strength and bravery (Powdermaker 1962, 187–188).

The majority of my participants similarly described their parents and older generations as observing gender status inequalities. This included symbolic displays of hierarchy (through unpaid care work, food allocation and kneeling when serving food); women being stereotyped as less intelligent and being overlooked in household decision-making. BanaMwimba⁴ (a 41-year-old market trader, selling dried sardines at Kitwe's central market, though formerly a housewife) explained,

Historically women were oppressed. If you cook a chicken there were specific parts reserved for the father [meaning husband]. There was nowhere for women to be going to... Women of previous generations didn't talk at home. Those who spoke were men... Their husbands didn't permit them to sell because they were providing for them. If one marries one has to listen to one's husband. So she can't sell. Some men were proud; others just wanted to make their wives suffer. She can't speak, she can't make a decision. Men didn't have confidence in their wives [translated].

However, Ferguson (1999, 180–181) has disputed this portrayal of domestic patriarchy in the late colonial period. He suggests that Copperbelt women in fact expected a 'considerable measure of social and sexual independence'. But Ferguson does not refer to specific evidence corroborating this claim, only mentioning Epstein's (1981, 112) observation that some women fought back when assaulted by their husbands and would 'give as good as they got'. However, such retaliation does not prove that Copperbelt women were not oppressed by their husbands. Furthermore, Ferguson himself recognises that to achieve independence, women had to be 'willing to brave divorce and domestic violence' (1999, 180). Given the price of this independence, it is not clear to what extent Ferguson contradicts my findings. If the only alternative to domestic patriarchy was violence and/or divorce (which was heavily stigmatised), BanaMwimba's suggestion that Copperbelt women were 'oppressed' (*ukutitikishiwa*) during the mid-late colonial period seems plausible. Also, since Ferguson largely draws on discussions with male mineworkers (36), his narrative might be biased by their particular perspectives.

Women's social relationships and political participation in the late colonial period (1950s–1960s)

While men's work, trade union and leisure activities facilitated the formation of relationships outside the neighbourhood, Copperbelt housewives were often socially

isolated. 'Most women on the township had no communal or social role, and their work was restricted to the household . . . which was a drastic change for them' (Powdermaker 1962, 188–189).

Some women neighbours developed close relations, though these were often transient and unstable, owing to a (pre-1950s) colonial policy which discouraged Africans from permanently residing in urban areas (Epstein 1981). Furthermore, these urban social networks paled in comparison with women's earlier kin-based support in pre-colonial villages and men's access to industrial jobs (Epstein 1981, 166–179; Glazer 1997, 147; Parpart 1986). Being house-bound, with multiple children and a heavy burden of domestic work, many women became dependent on their husbands for company in the mid-to-late colonial period (Epstein 1981, 118–120, 260–261).

Solidarity and collective action amongst women was also impeded by their economic dependence upon men (Parpart 1986, 156). Inter-female aggression (between lovers, co-wives and matrikin versus nuclear family) over the scarce resource of male support became pervasive (Glazer 1997; Powdermaker 1962, 157, 164, 167, 207–214). However, many women were still politically active in support of their husbands' livelihoods. For example, miners' wives supported men's struggle for higher wages during the 1950s (Parpart 1986). There was one exceptional case of women spearheading their own action: 2000 women demonstrated against the municipal beer monopoly in Lusaka in 1954. They wanted to be allowed to brew beer so that they could provide for their families (Hansen 1997, 40).

The independence struggle did legitimate some new (short-lived) opportunities for women (Geisler 2004; Parpart 2001). However, few husbands allowed their wives to desert their domestic duties or work with other men, lest they risk being labelled a fool by their friends. While the United National Independence Party (UNIP) did create a respectable space for women's political participation, in the form of the Women's Brigade, this was generally limited to supporting men's endeavours: by providing food, housing and financial support for the movement (Harries-Jones 1975, 31–32, 100; Geisler 2004, 24).

The early decades of Independence (1960s–1980s)

Gender divisions of labour in the early decades of Independence (1960s–1980s)

The 1969 Census puts Kitwe's working African population at 36,017 men and 3283 women (CSO 1973, 8). The definition used excludes non-remunerated productive activities, such as small-scale urban agriculture. Largely undertaken by low-income women, this made a significant contribution to domestic consumption, yet did not generate income (Rakodi 1988, 511). By disregarding such labour, Zambian censuses are likely to have underestimated women's productive activities. Also, by categorising workers according to their 'main occupation', censuses overlooked those homemakers who also undertook market-orientated activities (Benería 1981). This said, census depictions were largely corroborated by my participants, who often described their mothers and wives as previously being 'housewives'.

Some subsequently mentioned their mother's home-based enterprise, e.g. selling tomatoes. This belated acknowledgement reflects a broader tendency not to recognise or appreciate low-income women's work in earlier decades. Furthermore, such income-generating activities generally paled in economic significance to men's waged labour. Nationally, women's share of formal employment also remained low, only rising marginally from 6.3% in 1975 to 7.7% in 1980 (CSO 1986, 30–31). Typical female

occupations in the formal economy included nurse, midwife, teacher, air hostess, secretary, clerk, journalist, broadcaster and other forms of office work (particularly in the public sector) (Schuster 1979, 22, 73, 77). By 1980, women constituted 38% of primary school teachers and 24% of secondary school teachers (ZARD 1994, 35, drawing on data from the Ministry of Education). Besides these more conventional careers, some women entered the judiciary: as magistrates, judges and lawyers (ZARD 1994, 53). Clearly women were working in the public sphere, though outnumbered by men.

Women's paucity partly reflects legal restrictions: bans on underground employment, night-work in industry and employers' provision of housing/housing allowances to married women. Women's remuneration was also limited by repeated absenteeism (due to children's sickness or pregnancy) and refusal of men's sexual advances (Glazer Schuster 1979, 69, 74–75). Female employment was also curbed by employers' preferences, such as for male domestic workers (Hansen 1989, 232). In addition, leaders of the ruling UNIP's Women's Brigade stressed that women's role was to serve both husband and nation, in accordance with Christian prescriptive stereotypes about the good wife (Geisler 2004, 24, 91–93).

A global fall in copper prices in the mid-1970s triggered macro-economic decline in the *Zambian Copperbelt* – resulting in job losses, wage cuts, inflation, consumer shortages and riots in the subsequent decade (Ferguson 1999; Larmer 2007). However, this decline does not appear to have triggered major ruptures in gender divisions of labour and stereotypes – my participants maintained that this only happened later with economic restructuring in the 1990s (Evans 2012). In the 1970s and early 1980s at least, Government increased borrowing to maintain consumption levels, with continued support for male employment and public welfare provisions. Few families felt compelled to push for women's employment. As Helen (44, an elected Local Government councillor whom I lived with in a low-income compound) explained of her adolescence in the 1970s,

A long time ago... my mother was selling at the Green Market, there were very few women selling. The majority of women didn't know about selling. They were depending on their husbands because their husbands had jobs – they were working in industries, industries were all over... There was free education and medical care... Historically women were oppressed. Even if she was educated, men would not want that person to go and work, they just wanted her to be a housewife. She cannot participate in anything: in political parties, you cannot go at the market and sell, because her husband will be feeling shy, 'Why is she selling? It looks like I'm not keeping her very well'... A long time ago women were very oppressed because men didn't want a woman to do things... to work or have her own money [translated].

We did not know we would suffer in the future, that's why we married young. In the past things were cheap [translated]. BanaNyawa (41, married, runs a teashop in the market with her daughter)

The society, they were saying a girl's place is in the kitchen, so my mother was a full time housewife, sometimes selling tomatoes at home but not going to the market. Women had no chance of doing what they think they can do, especially going far away to do their business, they were not allowed. BanaMutale (39, domestic worker, never married)

These narratives reveal multiple influences. Some women grew up assuming men would provide for them. Others sought their own incomes but were constrained by cultural stereotypes, whereby men's status and pride was contingent on household provision. Furthermore, men's economic opportunities largely enabled them to fulfil their normative role of breadwinner.

With urban Copperbelt men dominating formal employment in the late 1980s, Ferguson (1999, 194) observed that,

With little access to employment, and formidable obstacles in the 'informal sector', a woman's ability to live in town at all might depend on her ability to form a relation with a husband or lover. Housing on the Copperbelt is normally allocated to men, often by virtue of their status as employees... And even if a woman did manage to find housing on her own, she would have a very difficult time earning enough money to support herself.

The consequences of society-wide gender divisions of labour (1960s–1980s)

Participants tended to describe women as being historically preoccupied with 'small issues' (relating to their roles as housewives), relying on men (who alone were 'strong') to solve more important matters, through public engagement. Because unpaid care work was devalued, many former housewives (now market traders) explained that they previously thought themselves less intelligent than men and so would follow their suggestions in community politics and at family funerals, e.g. regarding burial arrangements and asset redistribution. Society-wide gender divisions of labour appear to have perpetuated gender stereotypes and status inequalities.

Economic dependency ensured that many women both feared losing their husbands and staying with them, enduring violence (Schuster 1979, 126–130). My participants stressed that housewives' social isolation inhibited their exposure to alternative ways of living and opportunities for collective reflection. Some explained this point with reference to a Bemba proverb: 'a child who doesn't travel praises their mother's cooking' (translated). For instance, gender-based violence was widely perceived as normal. This is exemplified in the following conversation with Gloria (66, a divorced caterpillar trader):

Gloria: My husband used to beat me. If he came from wandering and you ask him what he was up to then he would beat you... [I didn't tell anyone] It's a secret of the house, you can't say anything... I used to pray about the suffering so that he might change... I didn't have any friends; I just stayed at home...

Alice: What did you think about your husband's behaviour?

Gloria: We were oppressed, you perceive it to be normal, but it's not good [translated].

However, some working-class housewives do appear to have publicly questioned gender status inequalities. When 3000 miners' wives demonstrated in 1981, in relation to the withdrawal of credit for mealie meal (the staple food), they booed the company directors and expressed resentment of sexual exchange for such necessities (Hansen 1984, 237).

Meanwhile, the gender stereotype that only men could be economically self-sufficient meant that women traders were often suspected of resorting to alternative means of support. Interviewed female traders repeatedly stressed that 'we are not prostitutes' (Schuster 1979, 116–117, 120). This pre-emptive defence indicates their presumptions and related anxieties about cultural expectations, i.e. how they would be perceived and judged by others.

In this historical period, when only a minority of women demonstrated their equal competence in socially valued domains,⁵ people often lacked exposure to disconfirming evidence of their gender stereotypes. Many older participants recalled that they previously presumed that women could not ascend to the highest echelons by their own merit and so regarded them as 'prostitutes'. Because female vanguards in male-

dominated domains were not commonly perceived as role models, they did not create a positive feedback loop.

Such denigration may have been due to countervailing interests. Feeling threatened by their husbands' female colleagues, housewives may have sought to undermine working women's respectability through accusations of inappropriate conduct. In addition, seeing a woman performing the same job as themselves countered men's gender status beliefs and bruised their egos (Glazer Schuster 1979, 74). Men could also have been blind to disconfirming evidence of their gender stereotypes if their self-esteem was rooted in the belief that they were superior to female colleagues.⁶ To make sense of apparent contradictions to gender status beliefs, men may have consoled themselves by denying that their female colleagues had advanced by merit.

Gender divisions of labour also led people to doubt and resist their attempted incursions into politics. Strong outspoken women were often beaten, chastised or reprimanded by their embarrassed kin – cognisant of cultural expectations. By witnessing others being treated according to stereotypical beliefs, people learnt what kind of behaviour was necessary to avoid social sanction. These cultural expectations, even if not personally supported, thus acted as what Ridgeway (2011, 162–163) terms 'the implicit rules of the gender game in public contexts'.

Many husbands felt that they were supposed to be household head and so were uncomfortable with their wives entering politics. Again, with little first-hand evidence of women's efficacy in politics, it was often assumed that they only ascended through sexual favours and were hence labelled 'prostitutes' – by men and women alike (see also Geisler 2004, 191). Many female politicians reportedly experienced marital problems and instability (Ferguson et al. 1995, 9, 13–14). The few women who did successfully become parliamentarians in the early 1990s were mostly divorced or single (61%) (9).

Male participants primarily stressed supply-side causes of women's paucity in politics. They insisted that women in the 1970s and 1980s tended to follow men's endeavours rather than initiating their own political activities. Women's 'passivity' was attributed to them being largely unaccustomed to speaking out for themselves, so lacking self-efficacy. Mike (42, a grassroots political activist and onion wholesaler) commented:

Women used to say 'Only a man can do it, only a man can do it, only a man can do it' [translated].

The paucity of women in prestigious positions appears to have been self-perpetuating. During the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, women accounted for only 3–8% of elected MPs (ZARD and SADC 2005, 25). Notwithstanding these obstacles, feminist concerns were publicly raised in the 1980s, culminating in the Inheritance Act in 1989. This activism was largely on the part of elite, urban women (Geisler 2004).

Drawing on conversations with male miners in Kitwe in the late 1980s, Ferguson (1999, 194, 196–198) recounts that such men often resented women:

With both earning power and the control of housing so overwhelmingly concentrated in the hands of men, women's economic strategies were necessarily largely focused on ways of gaining access to male-controlled resources... Workers thus have increasing perceived themselves to be struggling to survive economically, all the while surrounded by a sea of grasping, ever-needy, mostly female dependants... A political economy of misogyny thus begins to become visible: with shrinking real wages, besieged from all sides with demands, workers felt panicky and taken advantage of by what could sometimes seem like greedy women who did not understand or care about their problems.

One of my own participants, Matthew, gave a similar account. He used to be formally employed in the mines but was retrenched in 1987 and so turned to selling vegetables in

the market. Business was unreliable. As life became more difficult, they sold household assets and rented a smaller house. He portrayed his spouse, a housewife, as being frustrated by the paucity of his financial contributions. Equally exasperated, he beat her.

Ferguson (1999, 167) also notes that economic crisis pushed more women into income-generating activities (e.g. small-scale trading). Yet his narrative implies that their efforts were apparently rarely recognised by men. Research undertaken in low-income areas of Lusaka in the early 1990s likewise indicates that women's financial contributions were largely unappreciated. Even when women contributed to and claimed joint ownership of matrimonial property (thereby contesting cultural stereotypes), their husbands tended to see themselves as sole owners and their wives as dependents (Schlyter 1999, 10). Hansen (1997, 103) observed that growing female labour force participation only 'aggravated the built in tensions in the conjugal domain without transforming rights and claims in a manner that rewards women for their work efforts in their own right'.

In my own research, former housewives who had joined the labour market during the late 1980s or early 1990s similarly denied that this had immediately impacted men's gender status beliefs. This is consistent with research from more economically developed countries, which finds that people's gender stereotypes may influence the interpretation of information. People may dismiss contradictory cases as exceptional, not as disconfirming evidence of their presumptions about the traits of the typical man and woman. Gender status beliefs may thus persist, notwithstanding women's increased access to resources (Ridgeway 2011).

While women's employment rarely appears to have undermined the cultural expectations by which they were commonly evaluated in earlier decades, it did improve their financial autonomy. This enabled them to independently provide for themselves and their children (or at least procure small items such as food and clothing). Even if husbands endorsed gender status beliefs and desired a deferential wife, the financial security of working women in earlier decades was not contingent upon their compliance with these stereotypes. (That said, there may have been other reasons to submit, such as to secure marital peace). By contrast, financially dependent homemakers were often portrayed as having to obey their husbands in order to secure his economic support. Some such men were said to withhold essential funds in a bid to maintain conjugal power and control.

Employed mothers' displays of economic independence and small spaces of autonomy seem to have been significant for their children. Middle-aged sons and daughters of women in paid work (from across the class spectrum, i.e. market traders and magistrates alike) more commonly (though not universally) espoused gender egalitarian beliefs, which they attributed to their mother's demonstrated financial self-reliance, strength and confidence. Through prolonged exposure, they tended to perceive flexibility in gender divisions of labour as disconfirming evidence of gender stereotypes. While historically uncommon, maternal employment does appear to have been influential for this minority:

My mother was a very strong woman, very courageous, oh my god. She inspired me. She did what the men were doing, men's things, things women weren't expected to do... Here is a woman driving a tractor, she buys a bus, she drives it herself. She was very daring, not scared of anyone, except God. [As a politician and businesswoman] she could face anyone: rich, poor, man, witch, priest. She was frank. Rebecca (Cabinet Minister)

Sometimes us women we used to fear, [thinking] 'I can't stand in front of men and talk'. [But] when I was young I used to stay with my grandmother, who said, 'What a man can do, a woman can do'... I don't have to depend on a man; I have to depend on myself... I don't

feel shy when I'm talking . . . When I was growing I wasn't growing with my father . . . I saw that my mother [a teacher] and grandmother [a market trader] were strong. The behaviour of parents is very important. Grace (40, trader and treasurer, overseeing the construction of the largest church in the Copperbelt)

Prominent figures were also cited by middle-aged women whose parents had (rather unusually for the time) encouraged their labour market aspirations. Anne (a miner) recalled that

Every time [Professor] Nkandu Luo was on TV my father was saying, 'One of you should be like her!'. That woman has been a role model to most of us women in Zambia, not really to become a medical doctor [like her] but to be financially independent.

This evidence points to the significance of exposure to a woman demonstrating equal competence in a male-dominated domain and also associating with others who praise that incursion (thereby shifting views about cultural expectations). As shown above, the latter condition was seldom met in the early decades of Independence: other outspoken women recalled being chastised by their communities. Thus while there were always a small minority who eschewed gender stereotypes, in thought and practice, change did not beget major change in earlier decades.

Traditional teachings

It has been argued that gender status inequalities partly resulted from gender divisions of labour. An alternative hypothesis emphasises the influence of 'tradition', as taught during premarital initiation. This was most famously documented by Audrey Richards (1995, drawing on research from 1931–1933) and continues to be practised.⁷ *Icisingu* initiation ceremonies tend to promote gender status inequalities in marriage (Geisler 2000, 66–67; Schlyter 1999, 106; Rasing 2001, 146, 153). The instructions do not appear to have changed over the decades – this was maintained by elderly women and evident in the similarities between my own experience of *icisingu* and that depicted by Richards.⁸ *Banacimbusa* (traditional counsellor) BanaNkonde (55) prescribed as follows:

You must make yourself pliable. The man is the head of the house: one must follow what he says . . . If you leave you will find exactly the same thing. Don't leave, you must stay . . . A woman has the right to speak but not to use strong words; she must be calm when explaining . . . If he refuses you must follow. If the man scolds, the woman must return to the ground [both figuratively and literally, by kneeling] . . . Through this way of speaking you will live harmoniously [translated].

Many of my participants attributed women's endurance (*ukushipikisha*) within unhappy, hierarchical marriages and their proclivity to passively follow others' directives without considering, articulating or pursuing their own desires during the early decades of independence to these teachings. The normative weight of *banacimbusa's* instructions may have been augmented by urban housewives' social isolation, which limited their awareness of alternative, possibly more enjoyable ways of living.⁹ For example, some recalled that they used to be privately critical of gender-based violence, yet presumed that everyone else thought it permissible, as they had been led to believe by the traditional teachings. The dearth of opportunities for collective reflection for those who did not work or congregate in the public sphere may also account for historically limited social support for abused women.

Even if urban housewives did develop more egalitarian aspirations and critique traditional teachings, their ability to renegotiate conjugal relations may have been constrained by their limited exit options. Indeed, even though the instructions appear

similar across history, women's compliance seems to have varied across time with their changing patterns of resource access. Recall that in an earlier context of economic interdependence and matrilineal support, Richards (1940, 94) noted, 'there seems to be every kind of contradiction between the norm [i.e. patriarchal teachings] and the actual behaviour'. It was only in the mid-colonial period when women could only access resources through one particular man, their husband, that the latter gained the power to enforce gender status inequalities.

Conclusion

This article has examined the historical development of gender divisions of labour. Women's employment in the public sphere was previously impeded by colonial labour market policies and legislation. The prescriptive stereotypes of male breadwinner and female housewife were encouraged by colonial-capitalist ambitions, as well as Zambian aspirations for middle-class status – secured by emulating white people. These class markers were increasingly copied because they were perceived and promoted as fashionable displays of modernity. Furthermore, with relatively secure access to employment in the early decades of Independence, men could comply with these cultural expectations and secure respect as breadwinners without sacrificing economic security. Hence many denied their wives' employment.

Gender divisions of labour seem to have shaped gender status beliefs and inequalities. Men monopolised valorised, better remunerated productive activities. Women's earnings and unpaid care work were largely unappreciated, regarded as 'supplementary' at most. With limited first-hand evidence of women demonstrating equal competence in socially valued domains, people tended to stereotype men as leaders. Female vanguards in politics and employment were often referred to as 'prostitutes'. Partly due to their paucity, onlookers assumed that women could neither be economically self-sufficient nor ascend to the highest echelons by their own merit. Thus notwithstanding this small minority who rejected gender stereotypes, in thought and practice, these frontrunners do not appear to have catalysed positive feedback loops in the early decades of Independence. Although some became privately critical of gender beliefs, they may still have eschewed male-dominated domains due to concerns about cultural expectations. The latter may have persisted amongst socially isolated homemakers, who typically had less exposure to (and opportunity to collectively reflect upon) alternative ways of living.

Besides these beliefs, gender status inequalities were also shaped by patterns of resource access. In the early colonial period, demographic circumstances enabled women to bargain for better treatment, as they were not permanently dependent upon a particular man for resource access. Subsequently, however, women's access to resources (in the form of multiple potential partners who might support them) waned: urban sex ratios evened up over time, monogamy became a prescriptive cultural expectation and women's direct access to income (through employment) remained limited. This limited women's capacity to renegotiate conjugal relations and motivated their compliance with traditional teachings. However, patterns of resource access do not appear to provide a full explanation of gender status inequalities. For even when worsening economic insecurity pushed more women into small-scale trading, their efforts were largely unrecognised, at least in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Gender status beliefs lagged behind. Also, the patriarchal backlash in the mid-colonial period indicates that women's growing access to resources had not changed men's gender beliefs, only their ability to enforce them.

The argument put forward in this article is that gender status inequalities reflect not just patterns of resource access but also gender stereotypes. These historically persisted due to gender divisions of labour, which limited popular exposure to and critical reflection upon a critical mass of women demonstrating their equal competence in socially valued domains. Although some women defied cultural expectations, these were typically perceived as deviating from (rather than providing disconfirming evidence of) gender stereotypes.

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Notes

1. Note that polygamy was rare amongst the Bemba, unlike the Southern Bantu ethnic groups, such as the Tonga (Richards 1951, 181).
2. See also Gluckman (1987, 180) on the ease of accessing divorce amongst the (bilateral) Lozi. By contrast divorce was historically impossible for Tonga women (Colson 1951, 229).
3. Nonetheless, it is important to note that this shift was not universal because not all Copperbelt residents hailed from areas that previously practised bride-service. Many Tonga in Southern Province (matrilineal and patrilocal) and Ngoni to the East (patrilineal) practised bride-wealth instead (Barnes 1951; Colson 1951, 126; though see Wright (1983), who contests this claim, pointing to men's construction of history). Mizinga (2000) and Wright (1983) nonetheless maintain that the economic value of Tonga bride-wealth increased under colonialism – echoing Copperbelt trends).
4. *Bana* means 'mother of'. I have used this respectful prefix when participants introduced themselves to me in this way.
5. For the consequences of a society-wide flexibility in gender divisions of labour, see Evans (2011, 2012).
6. Ridgeway (1997, 222–223) argues that people's 'self-interest makes them more cognitively resistant to disconfirming information' of their stereotypes.
7. Rasing (2001) found that initiation was widespread, at least amongst her participants (Catholic women with formal jobs in nearby Mufulira). The vast majority of informants in my own research similarly seemed to take it as given. Other research differs, however. Rural participants to Moore and Vaughan's Zambian study (1994, 171) maintained that *icisungu* is uncommon and were reluctant to detail their own initiation. However, their efforts to downplay its prevalence may be symptomatic of their unwillingness to discuss the topic (see Schumaker 2001, 127).
8. I was invited to participate as a *nacisungu* (initiate) by a *banacimbusa* (my host's closest female friend) presiding over the initiation of two betrothed sisters in our low-income compound. She was keen for me to learn. The initiation consisted of a month's private training and then an overnight event to show the sisters' readiness for marriage to their female in-laws and gathered married women. The training detailed conjugal obligations, just as Richards previously documented (1995, 140). There were also similarities in symbolic behaviour in the overnight event: we *banacisungu* were veiled by a large cloth as we crawled into the room of assembled married women. We also used our mouths to grab domestic emblems (e.g. a cooking stick), and underwent a series of physically excruciating challenges to demonstrate our readiness to fight for our marriages. However, in contrast to Richards' descriptions, sexual dancing was a central part of the overnight event. This may indicate the increased perceived importance of securing one's husband's attention through his sexual satisfaction; though it does not detract from my central point that the taught message appears to have remained constant over the twentieth century.
9. See Evans (2012) on the consequences of association through women's paid work in the public sphere.

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ABSTRACT TRANSLATIONS

Lecciones de la historia en igualdad de género desde el cinturón de cobre zambio

Este artículo analiza las causas y consecuencias históricas de las divisiones laborales de género en el cinturón de cobre zambio. Los estereotipos de los hombres como sostén

económico y las mujeres como amas de casa parecen haber surgido como un producto importado de las ideologías cristianas, las preocupaciones coloniales-capitalistas y un clima económico que en gran parte les permitió a los hombres proveer económicamente a sus familias. Dependientes de sus esposos para su estatus y sustento económico, muchas mujeres urbanas tuvieron poco poder de negociación conyugal. Las divisiones laborales de género también significaron que las personas se quedaran sin evidencia de primera mano de la competencia igual de las mujeres en el empleo y la política, a quienes por lo tanto a menudo subestimaron y pasaron por alto. Estas percepciones parecen haber perpetuado la exclusión de las mujeres de puestos prestigiosos – un patrón sostenido en circunstancias macroeconómicas en las primeras décadas de la independencia. La aceptación de las desigualdades de estatus de género promovidas en la iniciación prematrimonial tradicional se volvió por lo tanto necesaria para la seguridad marital y económica, así como para la respetabilidad, lo que anteriormente no era así. Aunque había excepciones a estas tendencias, los registros históricos ilustran la interacción entre patrones de acceso a los recursos, estereotipos de género internalizados y expectativas culturales.

Palabras claves: colonialismo; divisiones laborales de género; desigualdad de estatus de género; creencias de género; Rhodesia del Norte; Zambia

赞比亚铜带省的性别平等历史课

本文探讨赞比亚铜带省中性别劳动分工的历史性导因与后果。男性做为负担生计者与女性做为家庭主妇的刻板模式的出现，是外来基督教意识形态、殖民资本主义考量以及经济环境广泛地让男人得以在经济上支持家庭的产物。诸多城市女性因为依赖丈夫的身份与经济支持，因而少有婚姻谈判的权力。性别劳动分工同时意味着人们缺乏女性在就业与政治平等能力的第一手资料，女性因而经常被低估或忽略。这样的观感，似乎已贯穿并续存于女性被排除在具有名望的地位之外——一个由独立早期数十年的大尺度经济境况所维繫的模式。顺从于婚前传统仪式所提倡的性别身份不公平，因而成为确保婚姻与经济安全及获得尊敬的必要条件，而这在过去却并非如此。儘管这些趋势有其例外，但历史纪录却描绘了资源获取模式、内化的性别刻板印象以及文化预期之间的互动。

关键词：殖民主义；劳动性别分工；性别身份不平等；性别信仰；北罗德西亚；赞比亚