Body Politics and the Crafting of Citizenship in Peri-urban Lusaka

Ann Schlyter

Introduction

Full and active citizenship continues to be a conditional and elusive right for women in many African contexts. Globalisation, structural adjustment, and weakened states have threatened the rights that women acquired after centuries of struggle. The effects of neo-liberalism combined with policies of privatisation have proved to affect African women negatively. However, women have also taken advantage of the new political openings that occurred in the 1990s (Schlyter, 2002; Tripp, 2003). In theorising de-nationalised citizenship in our globalised context, Sassen (2002) suggests that these processes might create new spaces for women who, albeit with little power, can establish a presence in the public sphere, and through these arenas, direct claims on the state and other institutions. In Africa however, this debate appears increasingly problematic in the context of the unequal conditions not only between women and men, but also across society, between the rich and poor, and in the Southern African urban context, between residents of the formal city and those persisting in poverty in peripheral peri-urban areas.

This paper focuses on women's crafting of citizenship in George, a peri-urban area of Lusaka[1], drawing from longitudinal research undertaken there over forty years, from 1968 to the present. Over this long period, I have witnessed increasing poverty. In parallel, Zambia's economy has faced a dramatic decline in living standards[2]. Strikingly, in recent years, improvement of the national economy has not made any tangible changes to the lives of my informants in George. At the same time, despite a discourse of rights and citizenship, residents of George are in a concrete and political sense, further from the state and access to politics than in the past. In this paper, I explore this disjuncture, focusing on its gendered dimensions. While my original studies explored everyday life in relation to housing and urban policies, for this paper I have undertaken a revised analysis of my interviews and field note

observations using the concept body politics to better understand individual women's crafting of citizenship in their homes and neighbourhood[3]. A handful of families among which, the families of Mrs Mwanza and Mrs Nyangu, have been long-term informants throughout my research which involved more than twenty periods of fieldwork, lasting from two weeks to two months.

In line with feminist tradition, the concept of body politics implies taking the body as an entry point for political engagement. For the purpose of this study, the analysis focuses on Zambian women's agency in the everyday negotiation of their rights and political participation in George. The concept is also useful to analyse the ways in which political discourses construct individual and collective women's bodies and how state policies create, or do not create, space for women's agency (Harcourt, 2005). The first section of the paper shows how over time, both at national and local levels, policies have restricted rather than strengthened women's citizenship and how women in the community and at national level have struggled for access to the public sphere and the political world. The second section explores the insights provided by the employment of the concept of body politics in the everyday-life negotiations through which women in George have crafted their citizenship.

Citizenship and gendered body politics in African contexts

Classic liberal notions of citizenship place emphasis on the rights of individuals in relation to the state, as well as freedom from state involvement in the economy and in the family. Feminist scholars have criticised the universal notion of citizenship which, according to them, is built on a view of an abstract, disembodied individual. The assumption of equal opportunities for all citizens is blind to the gendered conditions created by the division between public and private. Women's participation in the public sphere has indeed been restricted. Equal treatment in the form of gender-neutral reforms seldom has the same impact on women as on men. Theories on citizenship therefore need to acknowledge the ways gender dynamics affect individual political participation and the impact of state policies on citizens (Philips, 1991; Lister, 1997; Gouws 2004). In this context, Miraftab (2006) suggests that the move is from an analysis of citizenship as a product of abstract rights to an understanding of citizenship "from below".

Until the last decade, research on citizenship in Africa focused on colonial legacy and post-colonial tensions between modernists with a largely liberal

notion of citizenship, and communitarians who define the ethnic group – not the individual – as the carrier of rights (Mamdani, 1996). In these debates, feminist scholars have pointed to the violation of individual women's rights that is built into communitarian citizenship through rights accruing to groups and the maintenance of customary law (Mahdi, 2006). However, modernist arguments about citizenship have been critiqued for having a masculinist and class-privileged normative subject that results in the exclusion of women on a variety of grounds, with sex being only one (Manicom, 2005).

In poor and donor-dependent countries like Zambia, debates about citizenship are often bound up in a language of 'development'. In these contexts, women's presence in the public sphere is supported through the terms of participation and empowerment. Yet, feminists have not only concluded that women and their concerns tend to disappear in the implementation of development programmes, but they have also warned that participatory development may actually silence women's voices, and confining women's political activities at community-level can be disempowering if it lacks involvement with the state (Jaquette and Staudt, 2006; McEwan, 2004). A feminist perspective indeed reminds us that definitions of citizenship need to pay close attention to the relationship between the public sphere and the everyday lived experiences in the private. Many women are restricted from entering the public sphere, and when they do, their activities tend to be classified as semi-private. In this context, Lewis (1999) notes that women's leadership tends to be conflated with family duties in ways that lead to the denial of women's public role.

Citizenship is crafted in a variety of ways; it is always gendered and situated in places and bodies (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Its body politics then is negotiated in homes and local settings as well as in relation to states and international agencies. Harcourt (2005) uses the concept of body politics in two ways. First, she refers to the feminist tradition of taking the female body as the entry point for political engagement. Second, she uses the concept body politics in her analysis of development discourses as they construct and produce women's bodies through discourse on 'women in development', 'gender and development', and women's empowerment.

I use the concept of body politics in this piece to reflect critically on the impact policies, reforms and interventions executed at various levels by institutions of the Zambian state have had on women's bodies in peri-urban areas such as George. While the concept body politics most often refers to the

power and control over women's sexuality and health, I also consider other issues which determine the most bodily qualities: a secure place to sleep, clean water, and sanitary conditions. Central to the lived experience of body politics are family politics which frame a woman's position in marriage, the control she has over her own sexuality and fertility, and over her home. This paper thus draws together two critical debates on gendered body politics and citizenship in peri-urban areas. The significance of place and local context is widely acknowledged in theory and the paper offers an empirically-grounded analysis of women's everyday negotiations of citizenship over a long period of time.

Women in Zambian national and local politics

The rules and practices which determine Zambian politics – particularly which bodies have access to which political contexts and resources – have changed quite dramatically, not only with decolonisation, but also with the change from a one-party to a multi-party system with the introduction of neoliberal policies under structural adjustment, and with the ever-increasing involvement of NGOs in urban development. This section traces the ways in which the Zambian state has organised the political scene, and thereby dictated the forms in which women have crafted their citizenship. In this shifting context, I reflect on how Zambian women have struggled for a presence in the public sphere and for representation in public office. While the middle-class women's movement flourished, illiterate women in poor urban areas like George had to find new forms for their agency.

Colonial resistance and nation-building

The anti-colonial movement in Zambia was successful in pursuing a peaceful transformation to independence. Women supported their men in the struggle, but the movement maintained patriarchal structures. Women who wanted to join, not just by giving support service to the men but in a public role, were only accepted by the movement if they had their husbands' consent. There were, however, exceptional women who fought for both national and bodily independence (Geisler, 2004). The colonial labour policy in Zambia, as in other countries in the region, was designed to supply mines and cities with male working bodies and to keep women's bodies in the rural areas to take care of the reproduction of the labour force. Customary law, as it developed in a dialogue between colonial power and traditional male leaders, determined the

position of women as perpetual dependents (Chanock, 1982). Since the 1950s, women were accepted in town as wives of permanently employed workers, but not as workers themselves. Criminalisation of informal shelters, beer brewing, petty trading without licence, and demonization of single women's sexuality – all contributed to keep women's bodies out of town. Many of the women who came to town found the alternative to live with a man, cook and clean for him, better than prostitution and beer-brewing (Epstein, 1981). The mutual dependency within a family group was for women in town exchanged with dependency on one man (Munachunga, 1989).

Independence in 1964 came with great expectations. People moved to cities freely and informal settlements grew rapidly. George expanded from a few construction workers' huts to a settlement of about 50,000 inhabitants in the mid-1970s. Women became citizens according to the constitution. However, customary law continued to be applied as family law, which meant that women lived with a restricted kind of citizenship. Women were allowed to vote, but once married they were not recognized as legally major persons. Women were symbolically represented as mothers of the nation and the Women's Brigade of the ruling United Independence Party (UNIP) urged women to fulfil their destiny of motherhood and condemned abortions, unmarried pregnancies and contraceptives. Uncontrolled, unmarried women were construed as a threat to society. In the early seventies the Brigade supported a campaign against unaccompanied women in public, making it difficult for women to work in the cities (Schuster, 1976). Moral codes on women's behaviour thus proved to be a major obstacle to women's full and active citizenship. The number of women leaders in party politics was too small to make an impact (Schuster, 1976; Nalumango and Sifuniso, 1998). In practice, the Women's Brigade was dominated by the wives of UNIP leaders. They mobilised market women to act as supporters of their husbands. Schuster (1976) describes the Women's Brigade as very coercive to women in the peri-urban markets. Lorries came to transport the women to demonstrations, with party organisers threatening those who did not join.

Many years later I asked Mrs Mwanza, who had been a UNIP party member, about moral campaigns and compulsory participation in dancing demonstrations. She did not remember any moral campaigns and claimed that she had always been happy to participate in demonstrations. Only to leave her compound for some hours was for her an adventure and she enjoyed the dancing and singing. She did not admit that there had been any threats, only

that some marketeers might have been reluctant to participate as they needed to attend to their stalls.

The one-party state and women's local organisation

In the 1960s, Mrs Mwanza and her husband – both members of UNIP – built a small mud house in George compound. The party organised people in sections of twenty houses and each section elected a chairman, a chairlady and a youth leader. While the chairmanship enhanced the status of men, for women however, there were double messages. A chairlady was elected to represent women and she had to stand up in meetings and argue, in spite of the ruling tradition that required a moral woman to lower her eyes and be silent in front of men. Although the common men in George accepted women's participation in principle, they nonetheless wanted their wives to stay at home. Consequently, women who were heads of households were over-represented among the chairladies. They had the double burden of being breadwinners and mothers, but they were relieved from the duties of a wife to serve and obey her husband.

Mrs Mwanza attended the meetings in the party section, but she accepted the position as chairlady only after her husband had left her. As such Mrs Mwanza engaged in a variety of social activities, helping to arrange burials, organising support from the community for individual households in need, and giving advice in domestic conflicts. In the late seventies, George was legalised and upgraded in a participatory process in which the party played an important role and which enhanced its legitimacy in the area. Male leaders worked in the road planning group for instance, while the women were ascribed a mobilising role. Mrs Mwanza recalled that "we chairladies participated in mobilising people to come to the project meetings". Women participated in the meetings and were allowed to voice their concerns, but in no record or project report have gender differences in priorities been recorded. Among my informants it was clear that women wanted water and a clinic whereas men wanted roads and street lighting.

The 1980s was a decade in which structural adjustment programmes were implemented rigorously. There was a decline in household income and access to urban services (World Bank, 1994). The removal of food subsidies and introduction of fees on school and medical services had dramatic effects in the poor urban areas. Prices rocketed, the nutritional state of children declined significantly and many people could not afford medical costs. Nationally, more

than forty per cent of children under five years suffered from malnutrition (Malatsi, 1995). In George, according to the 1990 census, one girl in five and one boy in eight had never attended school because parents could not afford the formal and informal school fees. The urban services provided during the upgrading of George were also not maintained.

UNIP lost support, as would any party that fails to deliver wealth or services. Mrs Mwanza resigned from her post as chairlady. She explained her decision: "People do not take time to go to meetings. They say that there is just talk and talk and nothing ever happens. And they are right". Nevertheless, she and many other former chairladies continued the social work they were previously undertaking, but this time on an informal basis without the support of the party. During the campaign ahead of the 1991 national election, Mrs Mwanza withdrew from all activities that could be related to the party for fear of violence (which never occurred) but also because she, albeit still loyal to UNIP, could understand that people wanted a change. The Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) won a landslide victory.

Women in multi-party politics

During the years of the one party UNIP state, non-governmental organisations could not prosper, but a few such as Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and Zambia Association for Research and Development (ZARD) managed to organise professional women. Although there were not many members, they were very active (Ferguson, 1995). With the promise of a democratic election in 1991, the number of women's organisations increased rapidly and in the liberal climate after the election, their numbers continued to rise. Although the women's groups lost the struggle for the legal applicability of customary law to be repealed in the new constitution in 1992, they nevertheless managed to set up and consolidate the Non-Governmental Organisation Coordinating Council (NGOCC) (Sifuniso, 2005).

While the new party, MMD initially supported women's rights, its leaders soon continued the tradition of praising caring mothers and obedient wives. Ahead of the 1991 election, under pressure from the National Women's Lobby Group, all parties declared that they supported women candidates, but in practice women candidates were badly treated. In the end, few women stood for election to parliament (Geisler, 2004). Furthermore, in the local and national elections in 1992 and 1998, women candidates were asked for the consent of their husbands and some were sexually harassed and given a variety

of labels from 'frustrated spinsters' to 'whores' (NWLG, not dated). The result was a mere five per cent women in the new multi-party parliament. Women's representation remained low in local government. Following the 2002 local government elections, only four per cent of the councillors were women. The figure increased slowly to 14 per cent in the 2004 national elections (GIDD, 2008). A proposal to reserve thirty per cent of all seats at all levels for women was rejected by the parliament (ZARD/NGOCC, 2004).

Women's difficulties were amplified as ministers, MPs or councillors in local government (Kapwepwe, 1992; Kimberly and Ferguson, 1995). A study of women in local government shows that women councillors felt that they were not treated as equals by the men in the council and as many as three-quarters reported sexual harassment. An additional problem was that women councillors reported that their spouses were not supportive of their position. A woman councillor suggested that "men support men and women also support men" (Kimberly and Ferguson, 1995:12). Women candidates were lacking support, not only from spouses and the men in their parties, but also from the public – at least it was so in George. Few men or women in this locality would vote for a woman to represent their interests at city or national level. Mrs Mwanza argued for instance, that "we poor people need a strong man to talk for us; no one listens to a woman". Nonetheless, I found a difference in attitudes between men and women in George: women informants were more positive towards women's representation than the men were.

After a massive lobbying campaign, a National Gender Policy was adopted in 1997. Continued advocacy by the women's movement with support from development agencies led to a Strategic Plan for Action for the National Gender Policy which was adopted in 2004 (SARDC/WIDSA and ZARD, 2005). All of these activities and policy discussions were however unknown to the women in George.

Community work and NGO involvement

In George, people initially expected the new party to fill the local party posts of branch and section leaders. However, two years after the election, they appeared resigned to the fact that MMD did not intend to sustain neighbourhood-level community organisations. Mrs Mwanza complained: "Today there is nowhere to go and discuss our problems. Our councillor – I do not think he lives in George". There were women's groups in churches, "but no organisation for all of us around here. I miss our meetings although I still have

many good friends among the neighbours". During the one-party period, the local party organisation had functioned as the lowest level of local government – a structure in which women participated. To fill the gap that the closure of the party local branches left and to create a local partner for dialogue, the Lusaka City Council established Resident Development Committees (RDCs), which were non-party political bodies designed to coordinate development activities at neighbourhood level. Just like in the previous party organisations, men and women were elected in approximately equal numbers. The lack of trust in women's political strength and fitness for involvement in national and local government politics was obviously not evident at the community level. This can be explained by the view that work in RDCs was unpaid community work and such activities were considered to be elderly men's or women's work. For women, the RDCs provided a space in which they could participate. Yet, relatively few women were engaged. Although the one-party structure can be regarded as over-organised, with elections of leaders from every group of twenty houses, the RDC covered a huge area with many inhabitants[4].

In the late 1990s, the Zambian state withdrew from responsibility for delivering services in peri-urban areas such as George. International agencies were invited to support urban services and the RDCs were supposed to help to coordinate all the NGOs within their area. When the water system in George was upgraded by the water company with support from Japanese aid, a new opportunity as tap leaders opened up for women. A tap leader had the responsibility to turn the water on and off and to collect water fees. They were allowed to keep 20 per cent of the collected sum. Hence, the work was rewarded, although the sum was too small to live on. Tap leaders are organised by the RDC – but not within the political structures – and they play a central role in the community (Carlsson and Erlandsson, 2006). In other projects, NGOs organised women to maintain urban services, to support AIDS victims and home-based carers, and to improve environmental conditions. A multitude of non-governmental organisations – both national and international – offered support to and sought support from women in peri-urban areas like George. In practice, the mainly illiterate women in George participated actively in community work organised by a variety of development organisations. In contrast, the large number of new women's rights organisations that increased in the 1990s, have been dominated by educated women resident in more affluent urban areas.

Two issues of concern to women of all classes are inheritance rights and

domestic violence. Through these issues, the middle-class women's movement managed to connect with women in George where the destitution of widows continued in spite of an inheritance law of 1989, which granted the widow twenty per cent of the matrimonial property and life-long occupancy rights of her home as long as she did not re-marry. Ten years later this law had not been applied in the Matero local courts where people in George turned to. Another five years later, thanks to campaigns by the national women's movement, the law was applied and women in George were informed about the law and their rights.

Body politics and the everyday negotiation of citizenship in peri-urban Lusaka

The body is an important resource around which women strategise their life course. The first challenge is to stay healthy and alive and to do so, they have to negotiate their sexuality, fertility and family relationships. With the common view of a decent woman as submissive to her husband, a woman has to negotiate space for agency. She works for an income and for the community. Her citizenship emerges as firmly grounded in these bodily negotiations and in everyday life experience. This section draws on the re-analysis of the narratives of women in George, focussing on different aspects of these women's body politics and revealing new layers of their embodied struggle for citizenship.

The living body

In 1995, at the age of thirty-five, Mrs Nyangu separated from her husband and moved to a rented room with her three children. She took the step to leave him and an economically secure life when she found out that he was having relationships with other women. "According to custom, a wife should not complain if her husband looks for a second wife". She said, "I was angry and jealous, but should have endured if not for the risks. I want to live, to see my children grow up". Few women can negotiate safe sex within marriage. Some years later Mrs Nyangu revealed that her husband had also been violent when she refused sex without a condom as she was aware of his "playing around". She moved because she feared for her life not only because of HIV/AIDS, but also because of his brutal violence.

The most basic condition for a woman's continued agency is to stay alive, and the price for this is often sexual abstinence. However, HIV/AIDS is not the only threat to life. There are many different threats to life imposed by

the extreme poverty in which almost two-thirds of the population in George are living. Undernourished, many women are tired and have little energy to engage as active citizens. How burdensome a situation becomes depends on one's body and its health. Nonetheless, most women in George are actively engaged in household and community.

The sexual body

Women's sexuality is acknowledged in the public discourse. In the early 1990s, in the files at the Matero local courts I discovered that a wife's lack of sexual satisfaction was regarded as a valid reason to divorce. At the same time the protocols revealed strong expectations on a woman, that she should endure practices like "dry sex" in order to "please the man". Girls were informed about sexuality in initiation ceremonies according to custom, although adapted to urban conditions. Mrs Mwanza confided that they were a group of women who arranged the ceremonies. "The girls are secluded in a room. Ideally the seclusion shall continue for one month; we here in town, we do it in a week. One or two of us elderly women are always with the girls teaching them how to behave and how to please a man". Girls were not supposed to ever talk about this, but some women did later in life, often critical of the message of submission in this 'training'. At forty years of age Mrs Nyangu recalled that "we learned how to move in bed and how to use herbs for dry sex, but most importantly we were told to endure pain, be patient, not to complain and above all, to show respect for our mother-in-law. Now when looking back, I can see that I learned submission and obedience which has restricted my life". A wife is not supposed to deny her husband sex; there is no legal provision for spousal rape or wilful infection with HIV/AIDS (World Bank, 2004). Until now, the law supports the view of a wife's body as the husband's property.

In the mid-1990s, when I conducted a study specifically of youth, sexual pleasure had become a life-threatening activity. But propaganda for abstention from schools, clinics and churches did not stop youth from being sexually active, especially as young men's ideas of masculinity were strongly connected to sexual activity. While the boys boasted about "moving around", the girls in contrast denied that they were sexually active, but admitted that if they wanted to keep a boyfriend, they were often put under pressure to engage in sexual relations. Girls were restricted from moving in public space and attending meetings, especially after dark; they were not allowed by parents, or they stayed home by their own choice or, some explained, because

of fear of sexual violence. Adult women faced parallel restrictions in public either by their own choice grounded in fear or due to their husband's decree. The risk of sexual violence works to seclude women and makes many public commitments difficult to undertake.

The fertile body

An urban Zambian woman in her late forties had, in the 1990s, given birth on average to seven children. More recent figures indicate a decreasing fertility rate in urban areas (CSO, 1996; ZARD/NGOCC, 2004)[5]. Demographers have linked high under-five-mortality rates with high fertility. In the year 2000, the under-five-mortality in Lusaka was as high as 139 in 1000 births (UNDP, 2007). Until recently in George, frequent pregnancies were neither planned nor talked about as a problem. In a marriage, a woman could not say no; children were bound to come, they were understood as given by God. The most serious problem some women entrusted in me was childlessness. Motherhood was empowering, in contrast, infertility almost always led to divorce. The clinic offered no help, so childless women were left to consult traditional healers.

Recently, after reading a report about illegal abortions, I have had to rethink my impression that in George children were always welcome. Now I suspect that abortion has been an issue withheld from me by my informants, although they discussed many other sensitive issues with me. More than 200 cases are received daily in the gynaecological department at the University Teaching Hospital in Lusaka, and a third of the beds are occupied by patients with abortion-related problems (Chiwama, 2009). In general, women in George did not know that Zambia has liberal legislation that allows abortion for socio-economic reasons. When I told a nurse aid at the George clinic, she did not believe me. "We were blessed with many children", Mrs Mwanza recalled in 2006. Only during the last decade I have heard women in George speak about the benefits of spacing births. Family planning has been offered at the George clinic since 1972. However, during my visits there in 1996 there was only one NGO working with family counselling at the clinic. The organisation had no contraceptives but propagated a system of identifying "safe days". Only married women were welcome and they told me, until early 1990, only with a husband's consent.

In 2006, a nurse estimated that sixty per cent of the women in George compound used the service (Brolin and Johansson, 2006)[6]. Many women went to the clinic on their own initiative without a husband's knowledge, but they

feared their husband's anger if they took the contraceptive injection without his permission. Interestingly, Brolin and Johansson (2006) found no changes in power relations between husband and wife where couples used family planning. On the contrary, they suggest the reverse: husbands could make their wives take the injection and thereby retain power over childbearing.

Long periods of breastfeeding are common in George. If a sibling does not arrive, mothers may sustain feeding for up to three years. Breastfeeding without proper food however makes many mothers weak and tired. Yet, they acknowledge that it is the best way to keep their child alive. Since having fewer children would have a positive effect on women's health and free up some of their time, this could increase the possibilities for women to engage in neighbourhood and public issues. However, husbands, and not children, were singled out as the main obstacle to women's participation in the public sphere.

The disciplined body

Many men in George claimed that a wife's body belonged to her husband. They did so with reference to tradition, payment of bride price and the Bible. For these men, household headship meant they were the owners of all property and in charge of all decision-making. In the 1980s, I learnt that many married women in George challenged men's interpretation of family and household headship. They saw themselves as major persons and wanted joint ownership and decision-making. At the same time, both women and men believed that violence within families increased when and because women claimed the right to share power. However, among the young men I interviewed in the mid-1990s, there were other trends of thinking as well. Some boys argued that their future wife should be their best friend and they should discuss everything and decide jointly. Most boys wanted a wife who they could consult before taking decisions, and nobody defended domestic violence in serious interviews. In informal group interviews however, boys humorously said "of course, a wife needs to be disciplined".

Young girls in George with little or no education did not openly challenge men's demand for control. However, girls in secondary school like Mrs Nyangu's daughter, had a very different attitude: "If I do not find a man who treats me as an equal, I will not marry at all". Sadly, a more recent national study found that as many as two-thirds of all women felt that a husband was justified beating his wife if she went out without telling him, argued with him, cooked

bad or late food, or refused to have sex with him (World Bank, 2004). During 2002, more than half of all Zambian women reported being beaten – most often by a husband, a former husband or partner (SARDC/WIDSA and ZARD, 2005). It is difficult to directly compare these figures, but they both reflect an ongoing gender struggle in which many women have claimed rights and many men have resorted to violence in response. "Women are getting cheeky" said a man in the early 2000s, allocating 'blame' to poverty that forces men to allow women to work outside the home, and to international organisations which he suggested, "put ideas in the heads of women".

Even when a wife finds domestic violence unjustified, she has learnt to endure and never to openly complain; wives should never talk about being battered (Brolin and Johansson, 2006). "As a chairwoman it happened that battered neighbours came to me for refuge, but what could I do? Clean their bruises, and if the couple had a marriage councillor in town, I could ask him or her to talk to the husband", reflected Mrs Mwanza. Many women have internalised the view that violence can be justified. It is not only people in George who understand domestic violence as a private issue. The Zambian penal code also does not provide for protection against domestic violence (World Bank, 2004). Under threat of violence if they are not able to combine wifely duties with engagements outside the home, the limited engagement of married women in community issues and politics thus becomes understandable.

The working body

Although most married women in George are dependent on their husbands, they also work hard to generate an income. In fact, less than one in five Zambian households are headed by women, but women are the main breadwinners in a much larger number of households. The dominant view posits that a good husband earns money and takes decisions, whereas if a wife is earning, this should never be admitted in public. Incomes are seldom pooled. None of the women I interviewed in George had any notion of their husband's salary. Most wives received an allowance from their husbands. This was however largely insufficient to properly feed the family, which was the main and symbolically important responsibility of wives.

Forty years ago, women cultivated food crops everywhere in and around the settlement. Now that land is no longer accessible because of urban growth and densification, self-grown crops have become marginal. Still, some

elderly women like Mrs Nyangu's mother, take a bus out of town and pay rent to cultivate some land. More women work long hours retailing foodstuff at the market and others like Mrs Mwanza, have a stall outside their home. Some, like Mrs Nyangu, make a better income by trading in used clothing. "Food for work" is a concept that has been used by some non-governmental organisations. A road in George for instance, was blocked with a sign "Caution – women at work". About twenty women were improving the road and digging storm-water ditches while just as many men stood around watching them. They were husbands waiting for the food delivery. When I asked one of them why he was not working, he said that "women work for food – men work for money". The problem was that there was no work for money to be found. Men's reluctance to do community work relates to their identification of unpaid work as 'women's work', and therefore as a threat to their masculine identity.

Uneducated women in George have a weak position at the labour market, but an early urban study also blames husbands for women's unemployment. "Many wives are unemployed because their husbands would not allow them to go to work for money" (Munachunga, 1989: 150). In 2006, Mrs Nyangu believed that the situation had changed somewhat, but not much since her husband still refused to allow her to seek wage employment. He had reluctantly approved of the home-based enterprise she had developed, where she bought used clothes, fixed them up and sold them. Sometimes organisations recruited volunteers and people joined in order to contribute to the community, but also with a faint hope that their work would give them a chance to find paid work. The water project, implemented in the late 1990s was one such example. For some – mostly men – the voluntary work resulted in proper employment at the water company, whereas others – mostly women – were recruited as tap leaders, which required their daily presence at the taps for a low reward (Carlsson and Erlandsson, 2006).

In spite of unsupportive husbands and the demands of housework, particularly the never-ending struggle against mud and vermin, many women found time to engage in community issues. They did not expect future jobs or money, they were just proud to do something for their community (Wiechowska, 2007). At the same time, these choices may be understood as a risk management strategy; in the absence of public social security systems, the friendships created among workmates in voluntary work complemented active networking with relatives and neighbours for mutual support in times

of crisis. Indeed, whether paid or unpaid, women work long hours for the benefit of their families and time constraints restrict their possibility to engage in community work. Nonetheless, many women still give their time for the joy of working with friends and for the good of their community. Unpaid engagement in community work is in reality a practice that constitutes women's citizenship in George.

The propertied body

In their modern interpretation of custom, men in George largely consider married women to be in their custody and by default, themselves as the sole owners of matrimonial property. The only property having some value in George is people's houses. A man in a household is seen as the owner of the house regardless of how much a wife may have contributed to its construction and the sustenance of the family. Although he never contributed to the upbringing of their seven children, Mrs Mwanza was nevertheless grateful to her husband because he left his family in the house and moved to start a new family elsewhere. Mrs Nyangu had contributed to the house she and her husband had built, but had never considered claiming half of its value when she left her husband and moved to rented rooms. In 2006, she said that if her business was continuously successful, she hoped to be able to buy a house in the next two years. With ownership follows a permanence that is important for consolidating networks both among customers and neighbours. With extra rooms, she would employ someone to help wash and mend the clothes before selling them. She could also earn an additional income by renting rooms, instead of paying rent. Other women who owned houses emphasised the ensuing security in old age – they were able to offer space to a son, daughter or relative in exchange for food and some service.

Women's weak position in relation to property becomes most obvious in the destitution of widows, a phenomenon that is quite prevalent in George. Married women face insecurity because of the possibility of losing their home in cases of separation, divorce or widowhood. This could be an explanatory factor of married women's relatively low participation in community work; women living with security of tenure can be assumed to be more likely to engage work for neighbourhood improvements. However, women tap leaders in the water project contradict this assumption – most of them were heading their households, but they were renters as well as owners (Carlsson and Erlandsson, 2006). Overall, the degree to which women are active citizens

seems to be shaped primarily by husbands and not by women's status as homeowners or tenants.

The ageing body

Old people are usually described as dependent and in need of care. Ultimately, people who live until a very high age reach a stage when they find themselves in need of nursing. However in George, elderly women are the providers of care. In 2006, Mrs Mwanza shared her house with her daughter-in-law and six grandchildren. Over a period of fifteen years, she had nursed her six HIV-infected daughters and had witnessed their passing away one by one. Two of the daughters had been married, but they moved back home when they needed care. In contrast, her son who also passed away, had been nursed by his wife. NGOs active in HIV/Aids care reported that "husbands do not normally look after their wives, but bring her mother or other female relatives to look after the wife. On the other hand, when the husband is ill the woman is expected to nurse him until he dies" (ZARD, 1996: 46). Mothers and wives provide care with rudimentary assistance from the clinic and from non-governmental organisations.

Many widowed women faced destitution and were forced to leave their home upon the death of their husband. Although they knew that modern law gave them the right to remain in the house, they nevertheless gave in to the claims of relatives of their husbands because they wanted to maintain good relations for the sake of the children or were afraid of being accused of witchcraft. Indeed, to be the surviving spouse or just to be old, were grounds for suspicion. In their old age women in George hoped to be served, to "sit and eat", but instead many elderly find themselves as the main breadwinners of large families that often include able-bodied sons. Like Mrs Mwanza, many old women are responsible for nursing sick family members and taking care of grandchildren. With such demands it is almost impossible to take on public responsibilities. Yet, many elderly people are active in community work. Elderly women beyond child-bearing age have more liberty to speak and move around in public, and they face much lower risks of being sexually harassed. Although elderly women often complain of a lack of respect from young people, they are listened to in structures such as the Residential Development Committees, and they are the pillars in churches and civil society organisations. Although continuously facing many demands, older women continue to participate in everyday activities as citizens.

Conclusion

Zambian women have been made symbols of the nation, but are denied full access to national agency. They have been offered a limited form of citizenship constitutionally as well as in practice. Women who have tried to penetrate the political arena have, in many fierce ways, been reminded that their bodies are inappropriate. Although the political analysis of the first part of the paper is read through a gendered lens, a deeper understanding of women's agency and its restrictions is offered in the second part, in the reflection on women's body politics in poverty-stricken homes in George on Lusaka's peri-urban edge. Drawing on women's own reflections on their body politics and agency, I argue that many restrictions to women's active citizenship are rooted in the private sphere, shaped by patriarchal household relations, and the practical ways in which neighbourhood, city and national politics are organised. Although women's unpaid work and social networking cements community, it is not recognized as political work, neither by the state nor by women themselves. At local level the one-party system of chairladies as developed in the 1970s provided women with a space in the public sphere, although their work hardly empowered their decision-making powers beyond very local social issues. This space for agency was however lost with the introduction of a multi-party system in the 1990s, which moved politics even further from most women. Only the few peri-urban residents (men and women) elected to the Residential Development Committee maintain direct contact with the city and national state.

Today there are numerous organisations that Zambian women can join and many women undertake voluntary community work in churches and non-governmental organisations. Nevertheless, in light of women's long-term experiences in George, Sassen's (2002) argument that globalisation produces spaces with new possibilities for women appears surreal. The experiences of these women do not meet her optimistic expectation that women's "presence" in the public sphere makes possible a politics shaped by claims that are increasingly directed at institutions other than weakened national states. Rather, the middle-class women's movements have been emboldened. Their objects are both non-state institutions such as donors and international organisations and the Zambian state, to which they continuously and sometimes successfully make claims. In contrast, women in George have found space to participate in the building of their community. Through community work, they have developed a strong sense of citizenship that emphasises

contribution to the common good rather than claims on the state.

Although a woman's right to her body should be the absolute foundation on which citizenship is built, it has so far seldom been included in analyses of citizenship. In increasingly impoverished peri-urban areas, negotiations for citizenship start with women's bodies and in the private sphere in homes, where women struggle for agency through everyday negotiations within their families. With poverty, a heavy workload and duties of nurturing and nursing, women's citizenship is constrained. These realities are shaped by and reflected in men's attitudes and their power to restrict women's public engagement and active citizenship. Generalised theories of global citizenship and of women's empowerment, however, write over these harsh and challenging realities.

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Endnotes

1. The studies have been published in a number of books, reports and articles. For a selection see Schlyter (1988, 1993, 1998, 1999, 2002, 2006).

2. The Human Development Index was lower in 1995 than in 1975. Zambia is the only country in the world to experience such a reversal of living standards (UNDP 2007).

3. When no reference is given to quotations or statements, these materials are taken from, or based on, my own field notes.

4. I do not have data of the boundaries of the RDC, but it approximately covers at least 50,000 inhabitants.

5. There are not any statistics for George specifically.

6. This figure seems high to me as so few of my informants used it, but times change fast.