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African Women Workers in a Changing World

Feminist Africa is Africa's peer-reviewed journal of feminism, gender, and women's studies, produced by and for the transnational community of feminist scholars. It provides a platform for intellectual and activist research, dialogue, and strategy. *Feminist Africa* attends to the complex and diverse dynamics of creativity and resistance that have emerged in post-colonial Africa, and the manner in which these are shaped by the shifting global and geopolitical configurations of power.

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Two issues are produced per annum, in accordance with themes specified in the calls for contributions.

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Editorial

Akosua K. Darkwah

This special issue on African women workers in a changing world discusses several themes that have long been the concern of feminist scholars with an interest in women's work: transnational capitalism and its implications for women's productive activities, the debilitating impact of land tenure arrangements in Africa on women's productive and reproductive responsibilities, as well as state actions and inactions in support of women's productive activity.

Transnational capitalism's interest in the African continent dates back five hundred years beginning with the slave trade through to the colonial project and is evident today in the principle of trade liberalisation embedded in the neoliberal project. Scholars who work from a feminist political economy perspective highlight how the activities of transnational capital impact the daily existence of women across the globe (Agenjo-Calderón, 2021). Those who work from an intersectional perspective acknowledge that whether or not women feel the positive impact of transnational capital depends on many other socio-demographic characteristics such as race and class.

Geographic location is also of crucial importance in this discussion as transnational capital's impact varies depending on where in the world it travels, with women living in postcolonial spaces impacted differently than those in other spaces (Desai and Rinaldo, 2016).

As Desai and Rinaldo (2016) point out, on the African continent, transnational capitalism's impact has been largely negative and African women are the ones who have borne the brunt of this negative impact. Evidence from the twenty-first century makes this abundantly clear. While transnational capital is not new to the African continent, its form has changed quite dramatically in the last two decades. Transnational capital has made major inroads into the acquisition of land on the continent. By the 2000s, the environmental and food crisis, coupled with the global financial crisis of 2008 led to a sudden and steady

interest in agricultural investments on the African continent (Cotula, 2011). As Moyo *et al.* (2012) remind us, these land acquisitions were by no means the first on the continent. The second wave became a century plus after European states had met and essentially carved up the continent for their purposes in the Berlin conference of 1884. This second wave of acquisitions is novel, however, to the extent that the actors involved in the process varied widely. In addition to the usual suspects from Europe, including Scandinavian countries (Boamah, 2011), as Moyo *et al.* (2012: 182) note, the second wave of acquisitions now includes "…non-Western, semi-peripheral competitors…" This new wave of actors from the non-West includes those from China and the Middle East. The United States of America (Cotula *et al.*, 2014) is also deeply involved.

The process by which these transactions take place has been the subject of much scholarly interest; the discovery, among other things, that in some places free, prior and informed consent is not sought from community members led to the concept of land grabbing, to reflect the exploitative nature of these transactions (Ahmed *et al.,* 2019). The states' complicity in facilitating land grabbing is evident in the lack of regulation to ensure appropriate procedures for acquiring large tracts of land within their borders that centre the needs and concerns of their citizenry. In places where large land acquisitions have taken place, women have been particularly worse off as they were often denied the rather paltry sums paid to the family heads or traditional leaders for lands lost (Tsikata and Yaro, 2014). Even when they did not lose land directly, they were likely to do so indirectly as male family members who were made landless as a result of land acquisitions then sought to take over the lands held by women in their families (Nyantakyi-Frimpong and Bezner Kerr, 2017). The economic impacts of these grabs were also enormous. Across the continent, scholars documented how incomes were lost and new livelihood options had to be found, often without much success (Schoneveld *et al.,* 2011; Feintrenie, 2014; Valbuena, 2015). The promise of large-scale land acquisitions was more mirage than reality.

Alongside the landgrabs, another aspect of transnational capital evident on the continent, spearheaded this time specifically by the Chinese, has been the search for raw materials to fuel the economic development of China. As the Chinese embarked on an expansionist project, they looked to the African continent for the raw materials to fuel their dreams. Raw minerals such as bauxite,

manganese, and gold have been a major source of interest, as has cheap labour to run large-scale companies such as textile firms (Lee, 2009). Scholars, in interrogating these aspirations, termed the Chinese as Africa's new imperialists (Cheru and Calais, 2010). The early years of Chinese incursions into the continent spawned a large body of work mostly critical of the Chinese presence on the continent (Manji *et al.,* 2007). A few voices, nonetheless, suggested that the nature of Chinese investment on the continent was as much an issue of Chinese self-interest as it was of African governments' poor governance mechanisms (Kragelund, 2009; Lee, 2009; Crawford and Botchwey, 2017).

In both the case of landgrabs and Chinese incursions into the continent, the state can be blamed for its neglect of the needs of its citizens even as it courted foreign direct investors. This behaviour of the state harkens back to the 1980s when neoliberal reforms began on the continent. Implemented through a series of structural adjustment programmes imposed on many African countries by the international financial institutions, these reforms included, among others, the removal of subsidies, the sale of state-owned enterprises and retrenchments of government employees, as well as the introduction of new taxes and non-traditional exports (Riddell, 1992). As with landgrabs, women bore the brunt of the structural adjustment reforms. This was evident in many ways. Concerning the retrenchments, for example, the principle that underlay them was "last in, first out". Given that women had entered the formal workforce last, a much larger percentage lost their jobs than men did. In Ghana for example, by the time the retrenchments were over, although only 21% of civil service employees were women, 35% of those who were retrenched were women (Haddad *et al.,* 1995: 892). In addition, the removal of subsidies, particularly in the health sector, meant that many families could no longer afford health care and had to rely on the women in their families for caregiving during periods of illness. Mothers, caught between their productive and reproductive responsibilities, delegated caregiving to daughters, who were then deprived of education (Assie-Lumumba, 1997).

For African women, the majority of whom work in the agricultural sector, the detrimental impact of transnational capitalism is evident in how it has reconfigured the world of work as they know it. Data from nearly a century ago makes it clear that African women have been actively involved in agriculture since at least the early 1900s. Baumann (1928) in his research on 213 societies across

the continent showed that agricultural tasks were shared equally between women and men in 55% of these societies and that, in 34% of the societies, women were the predominant actors in the agricultural sector. It was only in 11% of these societies that men were the main actors in the field of agriculture. These differences were based on location. In describing these geographic differences, Baumann (1928: 292) says:

> In the steppes and savannas of the Sudan and East Africa, the man shares with more or less energy in the work of hoe culture; he hoes the ground, sows, weeds, and harvests, alone or with his women folks. In the West African primeval forest, all he ever does is to clear the ground, and leaves all the rest of the work to the women.

The statistics from more recent times also point to the active involvement of women in the continent's agricultural sector. As Asmare *et al.* (2022: 1, 2) point out:

> …data from [the] Food and Agriculture Organization shows that women constitute approximately 50% of the agricultural labor force in Africa. According to [the] International Labour Organization, women account [for] almost half of the labor force in world's (*sic*) agriculture, representing 47% in Africa. As (*sic*) to Jacobs and Dinham, women in many countries of Africa make up a significant proportion of agricultural work; 90% of hoeing and weeding and 60% of harvesting and marketing.

Although the statistics vary widely from one source to the other, it is clear nonetheless that women continue to play a significant role in the agricultural sector on the continent. However, women's active participation in agriculture occurs in the context of much disadvantage. More than half of the land on the continent is held under customary tenureship (Errico, 2021). These customary arrangements are by no means egalitarian. As Whitehead and Tsikata (2003: 77) state:

> …men and women have rarely, if ever, had identical kinds of claims to land, largely because the genders have very differentiated positions within the kinship systems that are the primary organizing order for land access.

So, although women can claim access to land based on a variety of social relationships – wife and daughter among others – for purposes of cultivation, they rarely have control over the land. They do not own it and therefore cannot

transfer it to others (Whitehead and Tsikata, 2003). Often also, women only have access to poorer quality lands (Nyantakyi-Frimpong and Bezner Kerr, 2017). Given these existing realities, any external actors that seek to engage in economic activity requiring land on the continent simply impoverish women even further, as clearly illustrated in the articles in this volume that speak to these issues, specifically those on Mali and The Gambia.

In the first feature, Asmao Diallo, writing on women in Mali, discusses how private capital's incursions into land acquisition in rural Mali have dramatically transformed the lives of women in these communities. In addition to noting the economic impacts of large-scale land acquisitions, as has been done by many other scholars on the continent (Schoneveld *et al.,* 2011; Tsikata and Yaro, 2014; Nyantakyi-Frimpong and Bezner Kerr, 2017), Diallo goes a step further to point out the negative social impacts of these transformations (i.e., domestic violence, family disruptions, conflict and its ensuing sexual and gender-based violence) in an environment where women's household provisioning roles are heavily dependent on their access to land. She concludes by discussing the important ways in which the state could step in to ameliorate the circumstances of these women.

Similarly, writing on The Gambia in the second feature piece, Fatou H. Jobe discusses the impact of Chinese-Mauritanian fishmeal processing factories on women in The Gambia who have traditionally been the ones in charge of the processing and trading of fish. She discusses the lack of job opportunities for women in these factories even as the establishment of these factories on land to which these women had use rights displaces the female fish processors and disrupts the work of female gardeners. Using an ecofeminist and feminist political ecology perspective, she concludes that the activities of the Chinese-Mauritanian firms lead to dispossession and ultimately hinder the food security needs of households in The Gambia.

While the two articles on Mali and The Gambia illustrate how African governments' inattention to the potentially negative impact of transnational capital spells doom for African women, other changes on the continent in the last two decades are as a result of deliberate efforts on the part of the state to empower its citizens. Of particular interest in this issue and the focus of the second pair of articles is the transformative agenda underpinning the land

reform programme in Zimbabwe. The British colonised Zimbabwe from 1890-1980. Its more favourable climate vis-à-vis the West African sub-region led to settler colonialism, where the European settlers expropriated the best lands for themselves, routinely moving Africans off those lands to enable them to develop commercial farms. By the end of the colonial period, the 5,000 commercial farmers in Zimbabwe owned nearly half of the available land – 15 million out of 33.2 million – with 750, 000 African families left to share what remained (Thomas, 2003: 694).

The land reform programmes of the first post-independence government were an active attempt on the part of the Zimbabwean government to redistribute land in favour of the black Zimbabweans who had been denied access to prime lands for a century. The first of these programmes, which was in place from the time of independence until the 1990s, was developed as part of the Lancaster House Agreement that led to independence from Britain. A key tenet of that first reform programme was the principle of willing seller and willing buyer. Only 3,498,444 hectares of land were transferred between 1980 and 1997 (Waeterloos and Rutherford, 2004: 538). Recognising the slow pace of land transfers, a second reform programme known as the Fast Track Land Reform Programme was put in place in 2000. Premised on compulsory acquisitions, this programme has resulted in the transfer of thrice as much land; ten years after it began, 10,816,886 hectares of land had been transferred (Chiweshe, 2017: 19). In the fast-track land transfer scheme, the Zimbabwean state also made an effort to ensure that women, long denied land rights, could gain rights to land of their own. Munemo *et al.* (2022), in an earlier issue of this journal, find that women's land ownership has grown from next to nothing before the Fast Track Land Reform Programme to about 15% since the implementation of the programme.

The third and fourth feature pieces in this issue focus on the transformatory power of the fast-track land reform programme initiated by Robert Mugabe's government in 2000. This programme has not been without controversy. There has been much discussion about both the brutal nature of the takeovers, deemed illegal in some quarters, as well as its potential for radically transforming access to land in rural communities and thus improving the livelihoods of the millions who depend on the land for a living (Cliffe *et al.,* 2011). These two papers contribute

to the latter discussions by turning a lens on the impact of this reform on rural Zimbabwean women. Both papers provide a nuanced accounting of the impact of the land reform programme.

The first piece that interrogates the land reform programme in Zimbabwe is co-authored by Tom Tom and Resina Banda. These two authors focus on the Zvimba district of Zimbabwe and explore the transformatory power of the land reform by investigating the redistributive, protective, and reproductive outcomes of the land reform. They start by pointing out the fact that the transformatory potential of the land reform, with specific reference to redistributing land in favour of women, had been woefully inadequate. In their district of study, only four out of 56 farmers who had received land were women. In addition, these women had gone on to bequeath their lands to their sons, and not their daughters, thus turning the land reform benefits into a one-generation miracle. In terms of the protective outcomes of the land reform programme, the authors document that it has been worse, not better; workers have very long working days averaging 12 hours a day, in contrast with the 8-hour working day of the past and in addition, wages are low and paid sporadically and sometimes in kind rather than in cash. As a result, female farm workers cannot accumulate the capital required to undertake their social reproduction needs and have to rely on alternative, equally precarious livelihood options.

In the second piece on Zimbabwe, Newman Tekwa focuses his work on female farm owners as opposed to workers. He undertakes his study in a region in Zimbabwe where the percentage of women with A2 farms was twice the national average: Chiredzi district. He demonstrates that indeed in this district, thanks to the land reform programme, rural Zimbabwean women had been able to take on the identity of commercial farmers, an identity hitherto reserved for men. As commercial farmers, their incomes had increased; they were decision-makers on their farms, and they were purchasing farm equipment, particularly tractors. However, these changes in the productive arena had not been translated into changes in the reproductive arena. Women were still expected to be primarily responsible for the social reproduction needs of their households. A full third of the women, therefore, had a work day that was longer than 12 hours as

they had to combine responsibilities in their productive work with those of their reproductive work. Ultimately then, Newman Tekwa argues that the full transformatory potential of the land reform programme had not been achieved.

The fifth feature piece in this issue turns attention to the high unemployment rates on the continent and state (mis) efforts at addressing it. Africa is the world's most youthful population. According to statistics that Mulikita (2022) provides, two-thirds of Africa's population (70%) is under the age of 30. Even more striking is the fact that while the global average of children aged 15 years and younger is 25%, on the African continent, 40% of the population is under the age of 15 (Saleh, 2022). The youthful population find themselves having to wait for long periods before they can be gainfully employed and proceed to live meaningful lives as adults able to provide for their basic needs as well as those of their families. Honwana (2014) has described this unique phenomenon on the continent as *waithood*. To ameliorate this situation, some African governments have embarked on job creation opportunities in the public sector, even in the neoliberal period when the ideological position is to leave job creation to private capital. As with the efforts of the Zimbabwean government, such efforts on the part of the state are an attempt to address the needs of the citizenry.

This piece written by Ramona Baijnath explores the impact of one such state effort in South Africa. In response to the high rates of unemployment among the South African population, the South African state developed an Expanded Public Works Programme. Drawing on the work experiences of women employed in a public hospital, this author offers a much more nuanced narrative about the programme than official documents suggest. She shows that while the employees were happy about the incomes they earned, however temporary, they were quite unhappy about the institutionalised forms of discrimination they had to endure. This discrimination was manifested in two ways. First, as short-term contract workers, they were denied the benefits that permanent workers received, such as pensions. In addition, they were not provided similar access to resources at work. Even toilet paper and soap were distributed unevenly such that the workers employed through the Expanded Public Works

Programme had to provide their own supplies because as short-term contract workers, they were not entitled to these supplies.

In the final feature piece, Amanor-Wilks describes the narrow ways in which Ghanaian women participate in the kente industry, a traditional fabric-making industry. She points out how the structural adjustment reforms of the 1980s, which led to the removal of subsidies, the sale of state-owned enterprises, and unfettered trade liberalisation, resulted in the decline of Ghana's cotton industry and, by extension, eroded women's roles as cotton spinners in the kente industry. The decline in the cotton industry, coupled with the lack of effort on the part of the Ghanaian state to develop curricula and social programmes that unsettle gender norms, has led to constraints in occupational opportunities for Ghanaian women, the majority of whom participate in the kente industry as traders. The other aspects of the industry, especially weaving, continue to be the preserve of men. As it was when the industry first developed two centuries ago, so it is today, unfortunately. Nonetheless, in the last two decades, there has been a slow increase in the number of women with weaving knowledge.

Together, the six feature pieces in this issue speak to the various ways in which transnational capitalism, land tenure arrangements, and the various forms of gender-blind state attention have reconfigured women's work on the continent. They point out how African women, the majority of whom work in agriculture, have not made much progress on the work front over the last hundred years. In fact, over the last century, their opportunities for provisioning as agricultural workers have not improved by much. Indeed, the state's interest in courting transnational capital has led to a worsening of its circumstances. Even in the case where the state seeks actively to improve the lot of women working in agriculture, as in the Zimbabwean land reform programme, we find that the progressive changes made in the productive sphere do not automatically translate into the reproductive sphere. Women are therefore more burdened, even as they have been provided with better access to land for agricultural purposes. When the state has embarked on job creation, it has done no better. As the article on South Africa demonstrates, workers in these programmes experienced institutional discrimination. And as evident in the final feature piece, the lack of effort on the part of the Ghanaian government to unsettle traditional gender norms has led to a situation where very little has changed in terms of women's entry into occupations traditionally reserved for men.

In the standpoint piece, Bashiratu Kamal, herself a unionist, bemoans the fissuring of the workplace in contemporary Africa and calls on African governments to do more to improve the circumstances of its workers. This issue's 'in-conversation' piece features Deborah Freeman Danquah, the General Secretary of the Union of Informal Workers Associations (UNIWA) in Ghana. UNIWA is unique in that it recognises the fact that the majority of female workers in Ghana, as indeed in many other African countries, make out a living in the informal economy and as a result, are faced with many constraints. The association, therefore, seeks to provide these workers with the benefits of unionisation, one of the key characteristics of decent work according to the International Labour Organization. The conversation discusses the factors that precipitated the formation of the union as well as the benefits that its members have derived from their membership. A review of a biography of Wangari Maathai, Africa's famed environmentalist and the continent's first black female Nobel Prize winner, rounds up the contributions for this issue.

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Land Grabbing: A Big Toll on Women Farmers – Case Study of Segou Region in Mali

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Abstract

In the wake of multiple crises, including economic instability, food shortage, energy crisis, and climate change, African farmers' land relationships have undergone remarkable changes in recent years. These changes in land relationships were initially brought about by the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) of the 1980s imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on sub-Saharan African countries. These programmes encouraged governments to open their markets, especially in the agricultural sector, to multinational companies, claiming that this would reduce poverty and foster economic growth. Further impetus for opening up markets, particularly land markets, in the developing world was fuelled by the triple financial, oil, and food crises of the early 2000s. Based on this, the government of Mali ceded thousands of hectares of land to national and international companies ostensibly to address these problems. Using data collected in the Ségou region of Mali from 2020 to 2022, this study surveys the long-term impact of government decisions on women farmers in this region. Overall, the Malian government's cessation of land to large companies has harmed small-scale women farmers. Most smallholders found themselves expelled from their farms in rural communities under the justification of community development projects, or agro-industrial ventures, usually by force. Women shoulder the burden of land deals as their land tenure access remains fragile under both statutory and customary tenure rights. Land withdrawal from small-scale women farmers who play an essential role in agriculture as food producers, processors, and marketers inevitably impacts their agency in performing their income-generating activities.

Keywords: crises, land deals, land tenure, Mali, women

Introduction

African farmers' land relationships have undergone remarkable changes in recent years. The commodification of land, even in West Africa, predates the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) of the 1980s. Studies have shown that SAPs initiated what Moyo *et al.* (2012) have described as a second scramble for land in Africa, which prioritised the strengthening and formalisation of land markets. Beginning in the 1980s with the adoption of Structural Adjustment Programmes in many parts of the continent, land began to be conceptualised as a commodity that could be bought and sold. The impetus to commoditise land on the continent was furthered in the wake of multiple crises of the early 2000s: a global financial crisis linked to the real estate boom, an oil crisis caused by price volatility, uncertainty in the oil markets leading to the promotion of biofuels and agro-fuels, and lastly a food crisis resulting in pressure on food-importing countries to invest in land in other countries where land resources are available (Dutilleul, 2013). To address these problems, governments encouraged the procurement of African farmlands for food production, biofuel production, and mining purposes (Gaidzanwa, 1995; Agbosu *et al.,* 2007; Adamczewski *et al.,* 2011; Anseeuw *et al.,* 2012; McMichael, 2012; White *et al.*, 2012; Cotula, 2013; Cotula *et al.*, 2014; Tsikata and Yaro, 2014; Nyantakyi-Frimpong and Bezner Kerr, 2017). As a result, over the last two decades, large tracts of land on the continent have been handed over to mostly foreign investors. Africa has emerged as a primary target for investors interested in large-scale land acquisitions (Nations Unies, 2010). In the Land Matrix project which records transactions that entail a transfer of rights to use, control, or own land through sale, lease, or concession covering 200 ha or larger, Anseeuw *et al.* (2012: 10) note that Africa was the most targeted region of land acquisitions; compared to land deals covering seven million hectares (ha) in Latin America and 17,7 million ha in Asia, land deals in Africa covered 56,2 million ha.

The current pace of land appropriation has sparked a heated debate among researchers and civil society advocates (GRAIN, 2008; Deininger and Byerlee, 2011; Matondi *et al.*, 2011; Borras and Franco, 2012; Cotula, 2013). While some scholars maintain that land grabs are a continuation of colonial practices (Deininger and Byerlee, 2011; Alden Wily, 2012; Cotula 2013), others

argue that land grabs are a novelty resulting from food system restructuring (Hall, 2011; Li, 2011; McMichael, 2012).

A less debated but equally important point is the outcomes of land deals across and within societies. Even less explored is the gender-based analysis of land transactions. Numerous studies analyse land acquisitions from the perspective of a household as a homogeneous unit, with assets pooled jointly and associates equally affected by land acquisition decisions (Deininger and Byerlee, 2011; Hall, 2011; Li, 2011; Alden Wily, 2012; McMichael, 2012; Cotula, 2013). On the African continent, incomes are not necessarily pooled equally. As Ekejiuba (1995) has pointed out, these households operate on a separate purse phenomenon. It is thus crucial to investigate the impact of such land grabs on different members of a household.

A growing body of work by scholars such as Daley (2011), Behrman *et al.* (2011), Tsikata and Yaro (2014), and Nyantakyi-Frimpong and Bezner Kerr (2017) is emerging on the subject. These studies show that large-scale industrial agriculture, often preceded by large-scale land acquisition, has been detrimental to women because it reorganises the uses of pre-existing natural resources and changes family production methods as well as revenue sources. In addition, women are unable to profit from these acquisitions due to pre-existing discrimination and prejudice against them. The most beneficial opportunities are often inaccessible to women. In this article, I contribute to this scholarship by focusing on Mali. This is important given the fairly unique circumstances of Mali as a largely agrarian country with around 80% of its population working in agriculture. In such an environment, the impact of large-scale land acquisitions will be more acutely felt, especially by the rural women who are expected to engage in farming to provide for the needs of their families. I contribute to the literature by focusing on both the social and economic impacts of large-scale land acquisitions in this environment.

The Rise of Land Deals in Mali

Mali has great agricultural potential due to its fertile land and water endowment, making it an attractive place for foreign investment. During the 1970s, strains on the Malian economy led to the government's approval of the IMF/World Bank-administered liberalisation of the economy, which resulted in a focus on foreign direct investment to revamp the economy. Following the food, financial, and fuel crisis of the late 2000s, new land acquisitions have been made for biofuel and food production, with special emphasis on cotton, rice, millet, maize, and fruits.

The rise of land deals also occurs in a context of weak land governance where the State has a monopoly on the allocation and management of agricultural land. Officially, all the country's lands belong to the State. Even if leases can be revoked and the land can be taken back from the investors, the statutory laws make all land in Mali the state's property. Yet in practice, a large portion of Mali's farming lands is subject to customary land tenure arrangements where around 85% of the land is held based on customary tenure systems (Code Domanial et Foncier, 2000). Tensions between the statutory and customary law have grown with the recent rise in large-scale land acquisitions.

Mali's attractiveness as a site for large-scale land acquisitions is evident in the sheer amount of land that has been ceded to companies in the last decade. This trend has been increasing as of 2016, an estimated 871,267 hectares had been allocated temporarily or permanently (Djiré *et al.*, 2012). Several NGOs in Mali estimate that millions of hectares of land have been ceded in recent years.

It is within this context of large-scale land acquisitions in a milieu where gender norms and relations impinge quite negatively on women within Malian households, and statutory law on land offers no reprieve, that this paper seeks to interrogate the impact of these land acquisitions on women. In what follows, the article will provide an overview of the land governance framework in Mali, highlighting the three major phases in land tenure governance and how women's land rights evolved within these systems, and discuss the research methods and the empirical data. The analysis reveals the gendered impacts of land deals on women's socio-economic activities, particularly their income-generating activities, household food security, and intra-household relationships.

The Land Governance Framework in Mali and its Implications for Women

Land has a significant social function in Mali, governed by conventional systems as a source of life for humankind. Although there is a diversity of customary land tenure systems resulting from historical, geographic, and socio-cultural differences, they share several common principles. These include kinship, lineage, and seniority norms (Djiré *et al.*, 2012). Before colonisation, village chiefs managed land communally. During this period, unwritten rules governed access to land. It occurred mainly through inheritance and the village chief's allocation of a proportion of lineage land to a family or individual member of the lineage. Village chiefs could grant temporary or permanent rights to individuals outside the clan through donations and agreements. This right was initially not focused on property privileges within the scope of private property rights. Instead, it was centred on a sequence of entitlements (access, exploitation, harvesting of the land and its resources) understood communally by lineage members (Djiré, 2005). The larger the family, the more land it owned. The extent of land use depended on the needs and capacity of the family to exploit it. Conflicts that emerged were settled by arbitration and mediation through special commissions in which village chiefs appointed members. Today, local land dealings still involve district and village heads and their seniors; however, the land is stewarded by kin-based units within communities, ensuring that each person can access land for their various needs. First occupants of a piece of land benefit from usufructuary entitlements. A patrilineal system transmits these privileges from fathers to their eldest sons, who inherit the right to manage the land on their brothers' behalf. As pertains in other West African jurisdictions, women can use land meant for their relatives, but they cannot inherit it (Agbosu *et al.*, 2007). Currently, 85% of land in the country is administered by customary law through lineage systems. Although traditional law has persisted over time, it has not been formalised.

Upon French colonisation in the 1890s, the colonial administration banned customary land tenure systems by imposing its modern law and the notion of private property, disregarding the pre-colonial tenure systems that had ordered the country for centuries (Coulibaly, 2010). Following independence, Mali's newly independent government assumed that a sovereign state must control

its economic growth and thus kept all the colonial texts (Le Bris *et al.,* 1982). The post-colonial governments gradually disposed of customary rights. The evolution of regulation related to agricultural land in the post-colonial period can be divided into three main stages. The first stage was characterised by the state's absolute monopoly on land management. The second stage maintained the state monopoly and allowed local stakeholders to manage natural resources as well as recognise customary rights. The continuity of previous guidelines from the colonial tenure systems predominantly characterised the third stage (Diallo, 2022). It incorporated colonial texts while maintaining some essential elements from the customary system (Gaidzanwa, 1995). Significantly, a key principle underpinning all three stages was the Malian State's insistence that all types of land utilisation remained provisional and revokable by the government at any time.

When significant droughts occurred in the 1980s, Mali adopted neo-liberal policies under the instruction of international financial institutions. As a result, state-owned enterprises were auctioned off, leading to the rise of a "*petit-bourgeoisie*" (Nolte *et. al.*, 2016). After strikes and the revolution of 1991, the 3rd Malian Republic established decentralisation, creating municipalities and promoting territorial development. Moreover, the advent of democracy in 1992 instituted new approaches to the government's attempt to reform land ownership. Another law, the "*Code Domanial et Foncier*" (CDF), or Land Law, was passed in 2000. The Land Law and the "*Loi d'Orientation Agricole*" (LOA) of 2006 (Agricultural Orientation Law) was introduced to promote entrepreneurship and agricultural development. Innovative components of these laws echoed devolution and decentralisation approaches by confining rights to centralised local government bodies to handle their properties. Even so, the state reiterated its power to control land or all public realms, including airspace, property, and subsoil reserves (Cotula *et. al.*, 2014).

Decentralisation gave mayors a lot of authority, as they could introduce real estate agencies by introducing land titles. Mayors took land from the farmers by granting or selling titles to real estate agencies, thus transforming land into collateral for the new "*petit-bourgeois*" who could get loans from banks and invest in agriculture (Diallo, 2022). In 2002, a decree allowed mayors to evict farmers, which intensified the phenomenon of land grabbing. As a result, some farmers,

particularly those in peripheral towns were expelled from their land despite a law that recognises customary rights to land (Coulibaly, 2010; World Bank, 2014).

Nevertheless, land tenure governance is not homogenous in Mali. In the southern regions of Mali, where agriculture is the dominant economic activity, farming production is governed by a customary land tenure system that differs greatly from that in the northern regions. It is mainly through clearance, inheritance, and gifts that smallholder farmers in southern Mali acquire land. Increasingly, however, leases and share agreements have become common in southern Mali, as land has become commoditised, destroying the tenuous kinship-based land securities that gave women land rights. Females' and males' relationships to land are based on social arrangements, predominantly kinship systems, and gender norms (Djiré, 2005). In the southern parts of Mali, where farming is intensively practised, traditionally, women cannot own land. Generally, women gain access to the plot via a male family member (father, husband, or brother), who determines exactly how the land must be used (Djiré and Keita, 2016). In some cases, women might have joint entitlement to the household plots with their spouse; when their male co-owner dies, this right may be constrained (Djiré, 2005). They can cultivate or use these lands temporarily. Even then, land can be taken back from them at any time, preventing many women in rural areas from participating in land improvements such as developing irrigation infrastructure, fencing, or tree planting (USAID, 2010).

Traditional Malian societies' tenure systems are based on rules that reflect the country's socio-economic, political, and cultural realities. These rules are a mixture of traditional conventions established in various communities and precepts from religious beliefs (Djiré *et al.*, 2012). Within this system, traditionally, married women had no rights to the land because their access to land would undermine the conventional household land acquisition system which was based on inheritance (Diallo, 2022). Islamic culture also hinders women's tenure rights. Nearly 90% of Mali's population is Muslim. In regions where Islam is highly practised, such as in the northern part of Gao, Mopti, and Timbuktu, access to land is governed by Shariah's prescriptions. In Islam, the land is considered a sacred trust whose supreme ownership bears upon Allah. Consequently, land and natural resources are governed by two interdependent principles. Firstly, the unrestricted use of natural resources, which is not the object of any human

being's effort, should be free and cannot be traded. The second principle is sustainability, under which land belongs to the individual who sustains it by cultivating it (Diakite and Diallo, 2004).

Regarding women's access to land in Islamic regulations, they have no restrictions on owning, inheriting, using, or purchasing land. In this vein, women can receive land or property as a dowry or acquire it through inheritance, even though their shares are smaller, generally half that of their male counterparts (Chaudhry and Chaudhry, 1997). They can also manage and maintain control over their marital household and financial assets through marriage and may continue to do so after divorce or widowhood (Diallo, 2022). More importantly, women can have individual land title deeds or communal lands. These rights are evident in Islamic law, which endorses women's rights to land and property (Haddad *et al.*, 1997). Yet, in Mali, Islamic rights are neither equally incorporated into the state legislature nor applied correctly among people. Sharia laws are commonly misinterpreted by religious leaders who are generally male.

Mali's secular state has demonstrated an interest in enacting laws that ensure gender equality. This is evident in the nation's constitution, which grants equal rights and opportunities to all its citizens. In addition, the CDF grants males and females equal entitlement to possessing title deeds. More importantly, the Agricultural Orientation Law which was enacted in 2006 conveys in article 83 that 15% of state-managed land must be allotted to women, young people, and vulnerable groups (LOA, 2006).

Despite the Islamic and legal rules that enshrine women's tenure security, in reality, the reverse is the case in contemporary Mali (Djiré and Keita, 2016). This is mostly because in Mali, legal pluralism exists and the boundary between customary and legal systems is often misunderstood, resulting in profound ambiguities, conflicts, and complexities (Diallo, 2021). Consequently, women's land tenure remains challenging throughout the country. As an illustration, in an agricultural survey conducted in 2012 on the state of agriculture and farmers in Mali, men owned 84% of farm plots. Of the 16% of women landowners, 40% were in the Kayes region, 21% in Koulikoro, 20% in Sikasso, 11% in Mopti, and only 8% in Ségou (EAC, 2014-2015). The survey further stated that men have five times more plots at the national level than women. Although females own 16% of the land, it should be noted that women's plots are also tiny. Male plot

owners have an average of more than two ha, compared to 0.22 ha for women (EAC, 2014-2015).

Regarding the gender roles and norms in Mali, the actual chores performed by females and males within the household vary considerably between and within regions and agroecological zones throughout the country. In farming societies, women generally provide labour on their husbands' plots. They also work as independent operators on market gardens, which they grow and handle themselves or with their children's help. Consequently, market gardening is a significant agricultural activity for women, providing their household needs and cash (Diallo, 2021).

Women usually obtain provisional land usage entitlements for their market gardens through a male relative, which can be revoked at any time. A woman might have the right to grow crops on a plot of land to provide for her personal needs; nonetheless, she does not have primary rights over that property, which is retained by the head of the family or the customary chief. Neither does she have any legal rights over the same land (Diallo, 2022). Women can thus unexpectedly be dispossessed of their land, which they have successfully cultivated for years (Iglesias, 2020).

As a result of these tenure systems, women usually find themselves excluded and marginalised when they apply for bank loans due to their lack of title deeds to their farmland. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2013), overcoming inequalities between men and women farmers in accessing productive resources (land, inputs, labour, livestock, opportunities for education, agricultural extension agents, financial services, and technologies) would increase the productivity of women farmers by 20 to 30%. Women often create cooperatives to appeal for land for communal utilisation to address their land tenure insecurity.

As Cotula (2011) has noted for other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, climate change, desertification, and rapid urbanisation in Mali have led to a further shortage of existing farmland. This has triggered the fragmentation of existing plots, as families have traded some of their lands to fulfil their household needs. This process of farm fragmentation has led to a progressive and fundamental change in the traditional management of land rights, leading

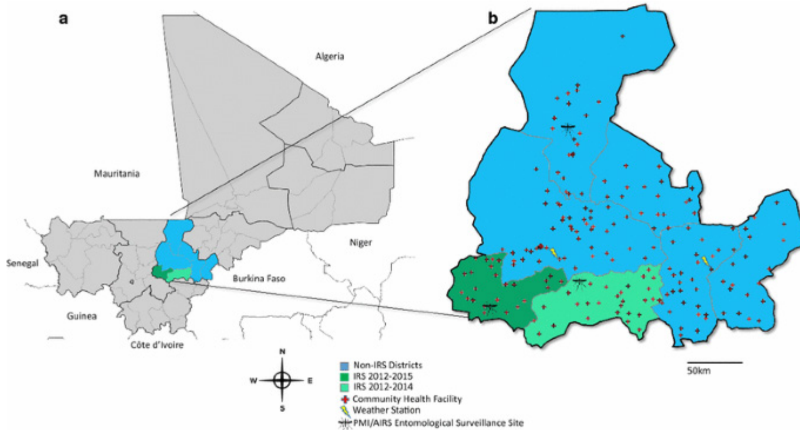
to the individualisation of agricultural property. With land grabbing rising in the country in recent years, women are the primary victims in this fiercely competitive environment, with no title deeds and often with no income or credit to rent plots whose price has become too high.

The intensification of land grabbing substantially affects women's land use rights. While in traditional systems women were guaranteed land use rights for collective or personal purposes, with the individualisation of land rights, they are generally the most vulnerable and the first to be excluded. This is as true in Mali as it is in Ghana (Tsikata, 2016). As such, persistent land shortages lead to the reclassification of women's market gardens as male-controlled household fields, a phenomenon that has been documented in both Ghana (Nyantakyi-Frimpong and Bezner Kerr, 2017) and Mali (Diallo 2021), and makes their rights as wives, mothers, and daughters untenable. This article on the Ségou region of Mali contributes to the evolving land grabbing literature by highlighting its gendered effects.

Study Site and Methodology

Fieldwork in Ségou was undertaken between January 20, 2020, and February 28, 2020, as well as in April 2022. Ségou is located in the south-central part of Mali, approximately 235 km from Bamako, Mali's capital city, as indicated in map 1. It extends for more than six km along the right bank of the Niger River. The area is irrigated by two crucial waterways: the Niger and the Bani Rivers. Ségou has a hot semi-arid climate with rainy and dry seasons. The rainy season starts in May and lasts until September.

Map 1: The Ségou study site



Source: https://bit.ly/3AYuX0P **accessed July 18, 2022**

Ségou is the headquarters of the Office du Niger (ON), an extensive irrigation system that began in 1932. The ON is mainly irrigated by the Markala Dam, built by the French administration in 1947 over the Niger River, which is 4,200 kilometres long, of which 1,700 kilometres of water flows in Mali (Seufert and Hategekimana, 2013). The dam was intended to irrigate 950,000 ha of land in the central delta of the Niger River to produce 500,000 ha of cotton and 450,000 ha of rice (Traore, 2013). Following Mali's independence, the ON became a state-owned agency.

The part of Mali in which Ségou is situated is essential for agriculture due to the presence of the ON. Agricultural activities represent an integral part of the income of the inhabitants of the Ségou region. For example, the ON area's average annual household income pattern reveals that agriculture represents 83% of residents' primary source of cash income, followed by livestock breeding (12%) (*Ministère du Développement Rural*, 2014). Irrigated rice cultivation in the area has been expanded, and other crops such as cotton, sugar, millet, groundnuts, cassava, and beans are also grown. Market gardening is the dominant activity during the off-season. During this period, vegetables such as onions, cabbage,

lettuce, tomatoes, okra, eggplants, groundnuts, mangoes, watermelons, and other fruits are also cultivated.

Ségou is a densely populated region and has always been an important trading centre. With 130,690 inhabitants in 2009, it is the fifth largest town in Mali (INSAT, 2020). People reside in villages comprising 30 to 400 family units. Each household has, on average, seven to 15 workers per agricultural production unit. On average, each household grows rice or vegetables on 0.65 ha in the managed area of the ON, while 2.5 ha in the rain-fed area is used for millet or sorghum cultivation. Its rural population is mainly nomadic, semi-sedentary, or sedentary. Commerce consists primarily of the small-scale exchange and sale of products from the agricultural sector, sold weekly at the large Sudano-Sahelian market, drawing customers from far outside the city.

I used qualitative methods in my data collection. This comprised interviews that were conducted at the national level with institutional actors (government officials in different ministries and NGOs, agricultural extension agents, and local rural services) and at the community level with traditional and religious leaders, civil society organisations as well as local agricultural department officials and extension agents. A total of seven structured interviews were done. Four focus group discussions were also conducted with a total of 56 farmers. These farmers were identified with the help of agricultural extension agents as well as traditional and religious leaders who came from the following seven communities: Diodo, Markala, Sibila, Sanamadougou, M'benwany, Tenou, and Weledikila. The material from the interviews and focus group discussion was transcribed and then manually coded according to the relevant themes.

Land Grabbing in the Office du Niger Region

Land grabbing has become an issue in the ON region largely due to the availability of immense fertile and irrigated land in the area, as highlighted earlier. In the early 2000s, with the encouragement of the World Bank and the IMF, Mali opened up its farmland to the international market by signing long-term leases with domestic and global economic operators to develop export-oriented crops such as sugar, wheat, and potatoes in the ON region.

Sanamadougou and Saou are two villages in the ON area largely affected by land grabbing. These two villages are situated in the rural municipality of Sibila, in the Macina district within the Ségou region. They are located 30 kilometres northeast of the Markala Dam, built by the French administration during the colonial era. Sanamadougou is a village of approximately 120 households of 20 to 30 people, totalling 3,000 to 3,500 people. The town of Saou has about 80 families with 2,000 individuals (Seufert and Hategekimana, 2013). They all belong to the same area known as the Sana, which is recognised as an important agricultural production area.

A survey conducted by the FIAN Institute in 2012 found that these two villages, which had cultivated the land handed down to them by their ancestors for centuries, lost much of it to Moulin Moderne du Mali (M3 SA), an agri-business company established in Ségou. M3 SA has occupied community land since 2010 under a 50-year lease (Traore, 2013). The deal comprises a legal document securing M3 SA's land as part of an agricultural investment project from the government's public-private partnership. The agreement is expected to contribute to Mali's food sovereignty and agrarian development, while promoting sustainable agro-industry development and livestock production in the farming community where the project is located. Through this agreement, the government makes available to M3 SA an area of 20,000 ha in the Kala hydraulic scheme without further specifying the exact location of the land (Seufert and Hategekimana, 2013; Traore, 2013). The 20,000 ha were allocated in two portions, with a specific lease for each deal signed with the ON. The first portion, 7,400 ha under lease with the ON, covers land in Sanamadougou and Saou. The contract stipulates that the State is committed to making land available "free of any legal obstacles that prevent [its] exploitation" and foresees that exploitation of the land will take into account compensatory measures if the allocated area affects certain areas such as villages, sacred places, migratory routes, and agricultural plots (Seufert and Hategekimana, 2013).

Regarding the issue of land grabbing, the people of Sanamadougou and Saou state that they were neither informed of the project's arrival in their area nor of the terms and conditions under which they had to vacate their land at the expense of the investor. They just woke up one day to find M3 SA's tiller clearing their fields and fencing off the land on which they used to farm. When

they made inquiries, they were told that the ON had allocated the land to the M3 SA company. Thus, they began a fierce resistance against the appropriation of their family land, without success. This opposition even led to the imprisonment of some farmers (Traore, 2013), all with no positive outcome. According to the people interviewed by the FIAN Institute, they have not been given any land as compensation or resettlement. They were forced to rent fields between CFA100 000 and CFA150 000 (USD155 to USD233) to produce USD200 to USD300 worth of produce (Seufert and Hategekimana, 2013). In addition, farmers with few heads of livestock were forced to sell them, as they could not feed them due to the lack of grazing land, while pastoralists had to go hundreds of kilometres to graze their herds. Other examples of large-scale land allocations to domestic and foreign investors include 20,000 hectares given to the Chinese company N-Sukala for irrigated sugarcane cultivation. This plantation is on former rain-fed land "owned" by seven Bambara villages 30 km northeast of Ségou and farmed by them under customary rights. No compensation has been paid to the thousands of displaced people for the loss of their farmland. Many families have moved north to borrow farmland in areas with less land scarcity, while others have moved to the city to find work (Toulmin, 2018).

The findings from fieldwork I undertook in the villages of Diodo, Markala, Sibila, Sanamadougou, M'benwany, Tenou, and Weledikila, in the Ségou region corroborate the work of Traore (2013) and Toulmin (2018). Only in one village (Markala) was the extent of land grabbing low according to the respondents. In Sanamadougou, much of the land had been allocated to external actors and in three other villages, the level of land grabbing was high (see Table 2).

Table 2: Extent of Land Deals in the Study Sites

Area	Level of land grabs	Activities	Male	Female
Diodo	+	Market gardening	4	3
Markala	-	Market gardening and marketing	2	2
Sibila	+-	Market gardening and marketing	6	7
Sanama-dougou	++	Market gardening and food process-ing	3	4
M'benwany	+-	Market gardening and processing	2	3
Tenou	+	Market gardening	4	5
Weledikila	+	Market gardening	5	6
Total			26	30

[*Source:* Outcomes from SPSS made from field survey, 2020]
Key: ++: extreme, +: high +-: moderate -: low

The study found that in the villages of Markala, M'benwany, and Sibila, 70% of the respondents knew about the phenomenon of land grabbing. While less than ten per cent of the farmers in these communities stated that they had been affected by land grabbing, 60% of them knew family members or acquaintances whose land had been grabbed by large-scale operators, although they could not specify the exact number of hectares held by agricultural investors. In comparison, 25% of respondents in the Diodo, Tenou, Sanamadougou, and Weledikila villages argued that their plots had been grabbed, leading to their displacement. This was particularly true of the respondents in Sanamadougou.

In promoting agribusiness activities, smallholder farming lands are subject to intense competition, as most agricultural plots are targets of concessions and shady land transactions to the disadvantage of the local inhabitants. Respondents mentioned that villagers are generally not involved in the land allocation processes, since land acquisition is carried out without prior consultation and agreement. In most instances, the respondents in those areas were not compensated for the loss of their land. As one interviewee put it:

> Most farmers have lost their agricultural lands because of M3 SA's large-scale farming in Sanamadougou. They have cultivated those plots for years as they inherited them from their grandparents, who established the village. Now they are told that those lands belong to the state. Most of them were neither informed nor compensated for the loss.
> (Interview at Sanamadougou village in February 2020)

Likewise, some respondents in Markala, who have been less affected by land deals, indicated that they know people in neighbouring villages who have lost their lands to external actors. One such respondent stated:

> Households are losing their land rights to wealthy domestic and foreign investors. These incidents are causing conflicts and anger between the investors and local communities resisting land deals.
>
> (Interview at Markala in February 2022)

This constitutes a blatant violation of the LOA which stipulates in its Article 81, Section 2 that: "no individual or community can be forced to cede their land rights unless it is for public use and in exchange of a fair and prior compensation" (LOA, 2006: 18). The lands on which these rights are vested are part of public land (Code Domanial et Foncier, 2000). As already mentioned, the state may expropriate lands for public use. By law, the farmers are supposed to receive compensation. However, as the respondents above attest to, this is not the case.

Economic Impacts of Land Grabbing on Women

The repercussions of these land grabs were severe, especially for women. As already highlighted in this article, Malian women make an invaluable contribution to food production in their households. Smallholder farming is the primary livelihood activity of the majority of the southern population, a fact that my survey confirmed. A house duction consisting of a male head, his spouses, several mature sons, and their spouses and children. There is a gendered and socially defined responsibility for household provisioning in this family: men are the main breadwinners, whereas females are expected to support male productive activities as their wives and daughters. Along with the belief that young women are provisional members of the family until they marry, the gendered productive

roles in the household legitimise the social, economic, and political power of men and boys in society. In terms of household provisioning, women's vital roles, including cooking meals and offering crucial non-staple food substances, such as cereals, legumes, vegetables, and proteins, for soups and sauces are downplayed. Culturally, men's provision of staples such as maize, millet, rice, and sorghum is considered more important. This gendered cultural valuation of men's and women's productive work has profound implications for women's access to productive resources; men lay claim to the more productive soils and leave the less productive ones to women. Women's poor land access has been further exacerbated by the land grabs in these communities. One respondent speaks to these issues in the following words:

> As women, we have always experienced fragile land tenure systems. The market gardens we used to receive from our husband's connections are not accessible anymore since men are also losing their entitlements to farming plots with the rise of massive land dealing with large-scale investors. This is triggering frustration and conflicts over the remaining land within the families.
>
> (Interview at Tenou village in February 2020)

Similar findings were reported in Nyantakyi-Frimpong and Bezner Kerr's (2017) piece on Ghana. Their study found that women farmers' land access mechanisms and strategies were becoming progressively precarious due to land grabbing. Male farmers who lost their lands appropriated their plots previously handed over to their wives for cultivation. As Jackson (2007: 466) explains, "The rights inherited by males may be firmer and less subject to discretionary interpretation than the rights inherited by females." In effect, in Mali as in northern Ghana, the shifts in land dealings have made the household arena a place where new tensions regarding the control over plots are emerging.

These emerging changes in women's land access had profound implications for their household provisioning responsibilities. The FAO (2013) indicates that economic crisis and land grabbing are intrinsically linked and could potentially lead to hunger affecting one billion people, most of whom live in rural areas and are predominantly women and children. This study confirms these assertions. Women must rely on their food supplies to sustain themselves and their children when household granaries run out. Due to this gendered

obligation, females are forced to engage in autonomous farming through market gardening. Since women's market gardens are seized and turned into domestic or communal plots because of the cumulative land shortage, their earnings are jeopardised, and their children's food security needs are threatened. As one respondent explained:

> We have nothing left. My whole life, I have never bought millet, and now I have to buy it, and my container is not well filled. Hence, land grabs lead to income deficiency and loss for us, affecting our lucrative access to basic food to feed ourselves and our families.
> (Interview at Sanamadougou village in February 2022)

Another interviewee added:

> Before the arrival of multinational investors in our communities, we were self-sufficient in providing the basic food needs of our families from our market gardens. Since the arrival of large investors, we have been unable to cultivate our land and meet our nutritional needs. As a result, families have been exposed to food insecurity due to the decline in production and lack of cultivable land.
>
> (Interview at Sanamadougou village in February 2020)

Land grabbing has also affected women's ability to access foods cost-effectively, especially foods produced by agro-investors. Industrialised production led to a focus on the sale of agricultural products externally, that is in the city or outside the country. In line with this, an interviewee commented:

> The products made by investor companies are generally meant for national, regional, or international markets and not for our local consumption. Even if these goods are made available to us in rural markets, most of us cannot afford them due to our lower income. The amount of food left for domestic and community consumption does not adequately cover families' necessities throughout the year.
>
> (Focus group discussion at Weledikila village in February 2022)

This exacerbates food insecurity problems in the communities affected by land grabbing. With respect to food insecurity, two interviewees brought this stark reality into sharp focus by describing the impact of land grabs on their household consumption. One of them noted, "With the current socio-economic

situation, we are experiencing a constant decrease in the quantity and quality of meals" (interview at Tenou village in February 2022). The other put it even more succinctly as follows:

> We cannot access land and the resources that we use to improve our household needs. This impacted our daily food consumption attitude. I can only provide two meals per day to my children. I hope the situation changes soon.
>
> (Interview at Sanamadougou village in February 2020)

Market gardens were not only a source of non-staple food sources for households but also a source of income. With the loss of access to plots for market gardens from which women could derive their incomes, women are selling or mortgaging their valuable tools, including agricultural production equipment, jewellery, clothes, and anything else that could be sold or traded, to survive. As one respondent explained:

> I sold all my valuables, gold, silver, and livestock to feed my family. Due to the persisting socio-economic challenges, my husband migrated to the mine site as we lost our family land. I am now left with six children to take care of. I have no other options than working as a wage labourer for a meagre salary in large companies.
>
> (Interview at Weledikila village in February 2020)

A second option many women are choosing is to work as farm labourers on investors' farms or migrate to urban areas for low-wage jobs. A respondent opined:

> The socio-political insecurity and land grabbing from belligerent groups are creating hunger in many communities, including ours. As a result, many young people migrate to city centres or neighbouring countries, searching for a better life.
>
> (Focus group discussion at Weledikila village in February 2022)

Participants conveyed that their economic circumstances were worse as a result. In urban areas, day workers make around CFA1 500 a day (less than USD 4), a salary that is unusually low compared to daily expenditures for housing and nutrition.

Social Impacts of Land Grabbing on Women

In addition to the economic impacts, land grabbing also affects women farmers' social relationships. These social impacts revolve around the psychosocial disequilibrium due to increased poverty, insecurity, and the disruption of family units as individual members migrate in search of work, as well as the decrease in family income and changes in the household diet. All of these stressors led to disputes, disagreements, and conflicts between couples, resulting in divorces and domestic violence toward women. An interviewee noted:

> Land losses in our communities led to divorces and gender-based violence toward women. The husbands losing their masculine power over resources triggered frustration and a decrease in confidence as they cannot provide for their household needs. Two of my nieces got divorced because of such incidents. There are several cases of physical violence daily against many women.
>
> (Interview at Sanamadougou village in February 2020)

Another woman added:

> Since we lost the communal land, my husband has become more aggressive and violent. We have seven kids to feed as well as myself and his parents. With income losses, he became eccentric. He does not want to hear anything about household expenses. We are constantly fighting over the remaining resources.
>
> (Interview at Sanamadougou village in February 2020)

Yet another social impact of land acquisitions in Mali has been the security challenges it has created in recent years. The ongoing civil war in the north of the country and the rise of jihadist groups in the centre of the country are partly due to increasing pressure on land and the scarcity of resources and pasture (Bertrand *et al.*, 2017). The communities in the north and central part of the country, including Ségou, feel that they have been partly neglected politically and economically by the central government, compared to the rebels in the north and the sedentary farmers in the south of the country. For example, the Ségou region, home to some two million people and growing at a rate of more than three per cent a year, supports a range of agricultural activities including pastoral nomadism, irrigated rice, and sugar crops, dry millet, maize, sesame, and

cotton, as well as fishing. However, as land has become increasingly scarce and therefore more valuable, relations between the different groups of people who once lived together amicably are now experiencing growing tension and conflict. Women bear the brunt of this insecurity. As an illustration, one-third of the Malian population, of which 70% are women, is now in an urgent humanitarian crisis, mainly poverty and hunger crisis (World Bank, 2022). Accordingly, a respondent in Tenou stated:

> The difficulties resulting from the multidimensional crisis in Mali affect women more than men as it exposes them to further violence and insecurity in conducting their economic activities. For example, in municipalities under terrorist threats, including ours, residents face hurdles growing their farms, selling in village markets, or engaging in farmers' organisations that remain controlled by terrorists.
>
> (Interview at Tenou village in February 2022)

Women and girls may be subject to higher levels of gender-based violence during conflicts, such as arbitrary killings, torture, and sexual violence. As Mukengere Mukwege and Nangini (2009) have noted for South Kivu, which is infamously known as the rape capital of the world, sexual violence against women and girls is increasingly a tactic that the perpetrators of war and conflict use. As one of the interviewees explained:

> Since the rise of this crisis, we are living in fear. Our neighbour village was attacked last month. There were reports of insurgents forcing women to wear burka or hijab before attending local markets or public places. When women can travel, they are victims of robbery and sexual assaults by insurgent groups. These women are forced to remain within their communities and sell in the weekly markets while abiding by the dominant rule. Several women were also abandoned by their husbands due to the conflict or killed by armed groups.
>
> (Focus group discussion at Weledikila village in February 2022)

The psychological trauma and stress associated with living in fear and uncertainty due to insecurity in their communities are compounded by the difficulties of poor land access as a result of land grabs. The responsibility for feeding families lies heavily on women in the majority of African communities. Increasingly, studies found that women in the region could no longer rely on agriculture to

feed their families (Hall, 2011; Li, 2011; McMichael, 2012). In Diodo, Tenou, Sanamadougou, and Weledikila, for example, 63% of respondents reported food insecurity. They argued that the annual food production is insufficient to meet the needs of their households. Meanwhile, women are least likely to get a stable and well-paid job in the industrial sector because they often do not meet the educational requirements of the companies, given their generally low levels of education. According to the findings of the 2018 Mali Demographic and Health Survey (INSTAT and ICF 2019:2), while 28% of Malian women are literate, the literacy rate for men stands at more than one and a half times higher (47%). The figures for tertiary education rates are even more dismal; only two per cent of women aged 15 and above have tertiary education. The equivalent figure for men is three times as high.

In the Ségou region, the prospects for the next generation of children are even bleaker. The majority (90%) of the women respondents stated that their children do not go to school. Many of the schools and literacy centres in the villages in the municipality of Ségou have been closed down due to the ongoing crisis. Parents remain pessimistic about the possibility of their children, especially their daughters, getting formal education given the multidimensional challenges that they currently face.

Conclusion

Land grabbing has become a major issue in Mali, leading to numerous conflicts since the early 2000s. These conflicts are primarily driven by the uneasy coexistence of an informal customary system with formal statutory law. According to the statutory tenure laws, all land belongs to the State. Mali's government, which guarantees statutory rights, is the ultimate owner of all lands. In its policy of promoting agribusiness and investment, the government has ceded thousands of hectares of land to national and international companies. Yet in practice, customary chiefs used to manage lands in most farming communities and provided user rights to women, albeit in a discriminatory fashion.

In the last two decades, however, the role of chiefs in managing lands has been eroded considerably as the State has asserted its rights to the land per formal statutory law. In pursuance of the colonial policy on land, the Malian

State has favoured private investors over citizens in its distribution of land. As demonstrated above, the result is tension at the household level that leads to women's loss of their user rights to land given that women's asset rights are restricted more severely than those of men.

These changes have had socio-economic impacts on women in several ways. Their household provisioning responsibility has been made more difficult as the asset traditionally used to carry out this activity is no longer available to them. This has led to increased food insecurity. While other studies in both Mali (Traore, 2013) and other countries on the continent (Tsikata, 2016; Nyantakyi-Frimpong and Bezner Kerr, 2017) have demonstrated the negative economic impacts of land grabs as done in this analysis, this study goes a step further in exploring the social impacts of the land grabs including new tensions at both the household and community levels. The Malian case demonstrates the multiple impacts of landgrabs on women and shows how the modern State, and not just traditional institutions (Yaro, 2013), are complicit in the immiseration of women in contemporary Africa.

Opening national agrarian lands to foreign investors may yield economic profits but negatively impact women's socio-economic activities. Smallholder farmers' land entitlements, especially women's, should be guaranteed even as the State seeks to enhance its foreign exchange earnings. Women's rights to land lots and other natural resources have traditionally been tenuous, and the State should be seeking to strengthen those rights rather than undermining them even further as evident in the Malian case.

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Fishmeal Production and the Dispossession of Women in The Gambia

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Abstract

This paper examines how large-scale fishmeal processing impacts women's work in The Gambia. Fishmeal factories use bonga (*Ethmalosa fimbriata*), a staple fish in The Gambia, to produce fishmeal for the global aquaculture industry. The Gambian government yearns for FDI in fishmeal factories to industrialise the fisheries sector, increase fisheries contribution to GDP and ultimately achieve sustainable development through South-South Cooperation with Chinese and Mauritanian capital. However, coastal communities, especially women who live and work within the vicinity of three relatively new Chinese-Mauritanian factories, have been protesting the operations of the factories since 2017. Communities complain about livelihood dispossessions such as the displacement and disruption of women's work, food insecurity, as well as environmental and health concerns engendered by the factories. Using ethnographic methods and ecofeminist as well as feminist political ecology approaches, I argue that the operations of the fishmeal factories, which are underpinned by capitalist, patriarchal logic, disrupt women's work as gardeners and fish vendors. Consequently, instead of promoting sustainable development, fishmeal processing undermines it.

Keywords: fishmeal, Chinese capital, South-South Cooperation, dispossession, Gambia

Introduction

The blue revolution, or the growth of aquaculture, is often presented as a driver of sustainable development by the United Nations agencies. Specifically, the

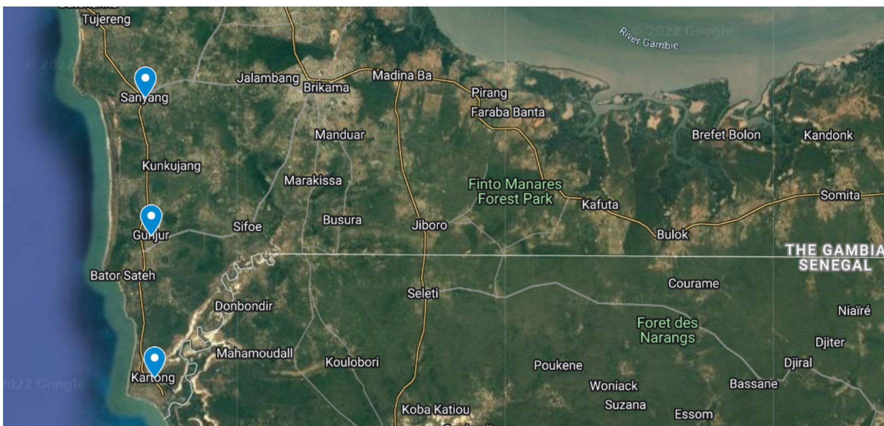
Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2018) conceptualises aquaculture as an alternative to wild-caught fisheries because it has the potential to address the gap between aquatic food demand and supply, and ultimately help countries achieve sustainable development.

The concept of sustainable development has become an important global standard in the development of economic and social policies, especially in the Global South. The discourse on sustainable development is premised on the future use and exploitation of a country's natural resources globally, while simultaneously seeking economic growth through the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For example, UN SDG Goal 14 calls for conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development. The UN SDGs also outline the need for gender equality. Specifically, UN SDG Goal 5 aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by calling on nation states to "end all forms of discrimination against women and girls as it also has a multiplier effect across all other development areas" (United Nations, 2015). Nonetheless, the sustainable development discourse is highly contentious as scholars and development practitioners question its ability to simultaneously pursue economic growth along with the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources (Lélé, 1991).

The expansion of aquaculture and its inputs such as fishmeal has raised sustainability concerns regarding the industry's negative environmental, social, economic, and political impacts (Hall, 2010; Muir, 2013; Froehlich *et al.,* 2018). Yet, in West Africa, fishmeal industries have grown tremendously in the past few years (Urbina, 2021) as West African states prize fishmeal processing as a good source of foreign direct investment (FDI). West Africa's production of fishmeal, in particular that of Mauritania, Senegal, and The Gambia, has grown more than ten-fold in the past decade, from around 13,000 tons in 2010 to over 170,000 tons in 2019 (Greenpeace Africa and Changing Markets Foundation, 2021:6). The interest in fishmeal production is also driven by its increased demand as it is estimated that there will be an additional 500,000 kilograms of fishmeal demand in the next few years (Harkell, 2019). This global demand for fishmeal is mainly driven by China's massive aquaculture sector (Muir, 2013; Greenpeace Africa and Changing Markets Foundation, 2021).

China plays a vital role in the expansion of fishmeal processing in West Africa through its South-South Cooperation (SSC) discourse. In this context, three fishmeal factories were established in The Gambia after the government resumed bilateral relations with China in 2016. Since then, China has been playing a key role in developing the local fishmeal sector. Chinese investors fully or partially control the country's three fishmeal factories located on coastal shorelines: Chinese-owned Golden Lead in Gunjur, which started operations in early 2016, followed by joint Chinese-Mauritanian JXYG in Kartong in early 2017, and Chinese-Mauritanian Nessim in Sanyang in early 2018 (Changing Markets Foundation, 2019) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: *Map of Sanyang, Gunjur and Kartong in The Gambia*



Source: **Google Maps, 2022**

In this article, I draw on ecofeminist and feminist political ecology (FPE) approaches to examine how large-scale fishmeal processing in The Gambia impacts women gardeners and fish processors who work within the vicinity of the factories, as well as fish vendors who compete with the factories to access fish to sell in local markets. Similar to Isla (2009), I question whether sustainable development can deliver gender equality and simultaneously ensure environmental sustainability. I argue that the Gambian government's attempts to industrialise and achieve sustainable development through fishmeal processing

are unsustainable because its strategies simply replicate the domination of both women and nature by capitalism and patriarchy. This is evident in the fact that women who have historically worked and lived within the vicinity of the factories are being dispossessed by the operations of the factories in coastal Gambia.

The paper is organised as follows: firstly, I provide context with a discussion of fisheries and aquaculture as drivers of sustainable development. Secondly, I describe the role of China in industrialisation efforts through SSC in Africa. Thirdly, I outline the context of fishmeal in The Gambia by discussing fisheries in The Gambia as a case study of sustainable development and SSC efforts. Fourthly, I make a case for ecofeminist and FPE as useful approaches to studying the impact of large-scale fish processing on women and outline my methodology. Fifthly, I present my findings by discussing women's lack of employment opportunities and how fish processors, women gardeners, and fish vendors are dispossessed by the operations of the factories. Lastly, I conclude with recommendations to the Gambian government.

Sustainable Development through Fisheries, Aquaculture, and Fishmeal

The United Nations offered the first definition of sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987: 43). In other words, sustainable development is development premised on three interconnected pillars: the environment, society, and the economy. Since the pillars are interdependent, sustainability can only be achieved if all pillars are respected and balanced (Bleicher and Pehlken, 2020: 142).

Proponents of sustainable development often present it as an alternative to the dominant economic growth-focused development model (Allen *et al.,* 2018). Inheriting the legacy of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2015, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) gradually became a primary tool in policy design, especially in the Global South (Raimi *et al.,* 2020). The UN SDGs mandate the sustainable use and management of natural resources such as fisheries as drivers of sustainable development.

Fisheries represent one of the most prized natural resources globally because fish is a vital source of protein and livelihood for coastal communities (Angulo-Valdes *et al.,* 2022). Moreover, the fisheries sector is also a source of revenue for state governments through export and industrialisation efforts in aquaculture and fish processing (Allison, 2011).

Similar to how sustainable development is presented as an alternative to the economic growth-focused development model, aquaculture is often promoted as a sustainable substitute for conventional wild-caught fisheries (Stonich and Vendergeest, 2001: 264). Its advocates are optimistic that, through sustainable development, aquaculture will offer a unique transformative approach to shift the world to a sustainable and resilient path that leaves no one behind (Nasr-Allah *et al.,* 2020). Aquaculture is believed to have the potential to address the gap between aquatic food demand and supply and to help countries achieve the UN SDGS (FAO, 2018) including UN SDG Target 14.7 which aims to increase the economic benefits to least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources through sustainable management of fisheries and aquaculture by 2030 (United Nations, 2015).

Aquaculture relies heavily on fishmeal, a generic term for a nutrient-rich premium feed ingredient used primarily in diets for farmed aquaculture and other animal megafirms. Fishmeal can be produced from almost any type of seafood, but it is generally manufactured using wild-caught small pelagic fish that contain a high percentage of bones and oil, such as bonga (Péron *et al.,* 2010). Fishmeal has been developed and promoted as a high protein feed ingredient in diets for aquaculture since the 1940s, especially in Peru (Clarke, 2009). However, it was not until the 1980s, with the growth of intensive aquaculture, particularly in salmon and trout farming, that the global fishmeal industry started to grow (Tveterås, 2003). In 2008 and 2016, nearly 59% and 69% of global supplies of fishmeal, respectively, were used in aquaculture (Jackson and Shepherd, 2010: 332; Boyd 2013: 17; Greenpeace Africa and Changing Markets Foundation, 2021:17).

China has consistently been the main consumption market for fishmeal primarily because of its large-scale aquaculture industry (Mullon *et al.,* 2009). While Peru continued to be the leading world producer and exporter of fishmeal (Deutsch *et al.,* 2007), West African countries such as Mauritania, Senegal, and The Gambia have become medium-sized production hubs for fishmeal production since the mid-2000s (Corten *et al.*, 2017; Gorez, 2018). This has been made possible with financing from China as part of its SSC discourse.

South-South Cooperation, Beijing Consensus, and China-Africa Relations

The discourse on SSC conveys the notion that sustainable development may be achieved by Southern countries themselves through mutual assistance and economic engagement with one another to reflect mutual interest vis-à vis the dominant Global North (Gray and Gills, 2018). Currently, emerging economies such as China have been instrumental in advancing SSC initiatives and projects (Muhr, 2016). China's development path, often termed the Beijing Consensus, is championed and viewed as a model for Southern countries to achieve development through SSC.

As opposed to the Washington Consensus, which was based on neoliberal ideals that emphasised opening economies to the rest of the world through trade and privatisation, the Beijing Consensus is based on state-led capitalism that provides an alternative development approach that puts more emphasis on national sovereignty and state intervention in industrial development (Asongu and Acha-Anyi, 2020). The Beijing Consensus is also often portrayed through a rosy picture that proposes self-determination against hegemonic Western powers and a sustainable and balanced development that mitigates development trade-offs between cities and rural areas, between coastal communities and inland areas, and between society and nature (Kang, 2016).

However, critics of the Beijing Consensus, framed in the literature as pessimists (Shinn and Eisenman, 2012), argue that China's model is not that much different from the Washington Consensus because it still operates within a capitalist logic that is not different from that of the West (Kennedy, 2010;

Rapanyane, 2021). Yet, Southern countries, and optimistic scholars such as Alden (2005), view the Beijing Consensus as an alternative model for development. For instance, China's lack of colonial history with Africa and its status as a former "underdeveloped country" reflects a sense of hope for many African leaders. Furthermore, the lack of conditionalities in China-Africa relations is prized by African states.

Consequently, since China's "going-out" policy in the mid-2000s, China-Africa relations have exponentially increased over the last decade. China's development assistance aid to African countries represented 45% of China's total aid disbursements, including grants, interest-free loans, and concessional loans, between 2013 and 2018 (CARI, 2022a). China has also become the largest trading partner for most African countries with an all-time high total trade of US$254 billion, with China exporting US$148 billion to Africa and importing US$105 billion from the continent in 2020 (General Administration of Customs, P.R. China, 2021). Chinese FDI inflows in African countries have been steadily increasing since 2003, rising from US$75 million in 2003 to US$4.2 billion in 2020 (CARI, 2022b). While early investments, and by extension scholarship, focused mainly on predominantly natural resource-rich countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, and Sudan (Bogale, 2017; Adovor Tsikudo, 2021; Imanche *et al.,* 2021), recent studies have shown that Chinese FDI inflows to these countries have been declining since 2011, whereas investments in natural resource-poor countries such as The Gambia, Senegal, and Mauritania have been on the rise (Brautigam, 2009).

Mauritania was the pioneer in establishing a fishmeal industry in the region in 2005 by using bonga to produce fishmeal (Corten *et al.,* 2017). However, unlike The Gambia and Senegal, there is no human consumption market for bonga in Mauritania. This is partly due to the abundance of other, less bony species, and partly to the absence of a fish-smoking industry (Corten *et al.,* 2017). The use of bonga for fishmeal in Mauritania thus does not have a direct effect on Mauritanian fish consumption. In the mid-2010s, The Gambia and Senegal followed the path of Mauritania by welcoming FDI from China and Mauritania to establish a fishmeal industry (Gorez, 2018) despite the consumption of bonga in their respective countries. This article, which explores the impact of fishmeal

factories on women's livelihoods in The Gambia, seeks to expand the existing literature on China-Africa relations by bringing a gender lens to bear. By so doing, it adds to the work of scholars like Jeken (2017).

Sustainable Development and Fisheries Industrialisation in The Gambia

The Government of The Gambia has made an explicit commitment to integrating the SDGs into its *National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2021*, a new policy plan proposed after former president Jammeh's dictatorial rule ended in 2016. The Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs of The Gambia said that the country's "adoption of the 2030 Agenda and implementation of the SDGs supports the national vision of the 'new Gambia'" (UNDP, 2020: 7). Therefore, the UN SDGs serve as a blueprint for the management and conservation of natural resources, including fisheries, in The Gambia.

Fish is a major source of protein for Gambians, especially for the rural poor (Van der Knaap and Sanyang, 2021). With a marine coastline of 80 km, The Gambia is enriched with fisheries that flow from the Gambia River and the Atlantic Ocean. The Gambia's marine waters attract many species which feed and spawn in the area, including small pelagic fish such as bonga (Satia and Hansen, 1994). Although per capita fish consumption in The Gambia was 28.5 kg in 2016, it still surpasses the global per capita fish consumption average of 20.5 kg (FAO, 2023; FAO 2020: 2). Affordable fish such as bonga thus represents one of the cheapest sources of protein in The Gambia. Moreover, traditional processing methods and trade in local markets are important to make bonga available to local consumers (UNCTAD, 2014: 13).

The fisheries sector is also vital economically. In 2018, fisheries and aquaculture represented about 7.9% of GDP (GBoS, 2020: 32). The artisanal sector has been the major producer of fish with around 90% consumed domestically, especially in the coastal areas (UNCTAD, 2014:10). UNCTAD (2014:8) estimates that 25,000-30,000 Gambians are directly and indirectly employed in the artisanal sector. The livelihoods of an estimated 200,000 people are dependent on fisheries and related activities (Palomares and Pauly, 2004). This number is

significant given that the population of The Gambia stood at 2,335,504 people in 2018 (GBoS, 2018:16). Moreover, although men are involved in large-scale fish smoking for domestic and export marketing, most local smoking, drying, and trading are done by women (Njie and Mikkola, 2001).

In accordance with the NDP, The Gambia has made tremendous efforts to increase the economic benefits of the fisheries sector. Although fisheries' contribution to GDP did not increase to the stated goal of 15%, it increased from 5.2% in 2015 to 10.1% in 2020 (GBoS, 2020:32). For the first time ever, fisheries surpassed agriculture as the second major contributor to GDP in 2020. As fisheries industrialisation expands through fishmeal processing and the Gambian state reaps benefits from it through increased GDP contribution and licensing fees, coastal communities continually protest and call for the elimination of the factories. Therefore, one must ask who benefits from the economic improvements in the fisheries sector? Using an ecofeminist and FPE perspective, I interrogate how women's work and livelihoods have been impacted by the fishmeal factories' attempt to dominate both nature and women through patriarchy and capitalism.

Ecofeminist and Feminist Political Ecology Approaches

The ecofeminist perspective explicitly links the domination of nature and women to capitalism and patriarchy (Shiva, 1988; Plumwood, 1991; Salleh, 1997). Ecofeminists often use ethnographic methods to study how women's subsistence and use of the commons are subjugated, deemed "unproductive," and thus dominated alongside nature (Isla, 2009; Nyambura 2015; Brownhill and Turner 2019). Ecofeminists also critique oppositional value dualisms or binary opposition such as male/female; productive/unproductive; and rational/emotional as the root of the domination of women and nature (Plumwood, 1991).

Shiva (1988) argues that the preservation of nature in its most organic form and women's sustenance work are deemed unproductive unless they produce profits for global capital. As such, Shiva contends that economic growth measures emerge as a new source of male-female inequality and the subjugation of nature.

Ecofeminists are, however, often deemed essentialist in that, although they are against oppositional dualism such as male/female and productive/unproductive often associated with gender norms, they tend to essentialise women as natural caregivers of the environment. Furthermore, they portray women as a monolithic category with no differentiations in class, race, caste, culture, geography, and sexuality (Agarwal, 1998; Jumawan-Dadang, 2015). Whereas ecofeminism suffers from its essentialist characteristic, socialist ecofeminist and FPE approaches employ historical materialism and power relations respectively to analyse the domination of nature and women (Salleh, 1995; Rocheleau *et al.,* 1996; Mellor, 1998).

Socialist ecofeminists focus their analysis on the sphere of reproduction (biological, social, and economic) to explain the dominance of nature and women by both capital and patriarchy (Salleh, 1997). This scholarship provides a Marxist political economy lens to ecofeminism (Merchant, 1992: 269; Salleh, 1995). Salleh (1995) for example calls for an ecofeminist perspective that centres embodied materialism to account for an ecofeminist understanding of the domination of women and nature. This perspective transcends oppositional value dualism and views the ecological crisis as a material theft of capitalism and patriarchy embodied in women's reproductive responsibilities. According to Salleh (1984: 344), the feminism in ecofeminism invokes notions of womanhood because it is "a transvaluation of 'feminine' experiences and, in particular, the relational sensibility often gained in mothering labours." Mothering thus encompasses the paid and unpaid reproductive relations between women, nature, men, and children.

Drawing inspiration from ecofeminism, FPE also provides a unique approach to studying nature-society relations from a gender lens. FPE's analytical approach brings a feminist perspective to political ecology (PE), the interdisciplinary analytical approach that applies political economy methods to environmental degradation and livelihoods (Robbins 2012; Blaikie and Brookfield, 2015). The scholarship on FPE highlights how social conflict can be predicated on socio-ecological change, and how changing gender roles or power can drive environmental transformation and vice versa (Rocheleau *et al.,* 1996). State-imposed development schemes, as in the case of fishmeal investments in The Gambia or marketed products such as fishmeal, may lead

not only to conflict but also to the collapse of environmental systems tended to and managed by women (Robbins, 2012). Consequently, development efforts that seek to alter local production systems with the goal of intensification may inadvertently reduce the resources women can claim, while increasing their labour burden.

Therefore, an FPE approach illuminates the different forms of social-ecological constructs and documents the power relations associated with different eco-social groups. In addition to gendered ways, FPE examines how social differences such as race, ethnicity, class, age, sexuality, and ability/disability overlap and intersect to create complex outcomes of marginalisation and empowerment (Robbins, 2020). For FPE scholars, gender is a process and is mutually constituted with the environment (Nightingale, 2006). Thus, although gender is seen as a critical variable, it is neither analytically central nor the end point of critique and analysis. As suggested by Elmhirst (2011), people are conceptualised as inhabiting multiple and fragmented identities constituted through social relations that include gender, but also class, religion, sexuality, race/ethnicity, and post-coloniality, as well as in multiple networks for coping with, transforming, or resisting development.

Socialist ecofeminist and FPE perspectives provide a useful lens to study the socio-economic impact of large-scale processing on women's livelihoods. Therefore, in this paper I ask two main questions: 1) What are the employment opportunities for women in the fishmeal industry? and 2) How does fishmeal processing impact the work of women?

Methodology

To answer these questions, I relied primarily on a qualitative approach including interviews, ethnographic observations, and document analysis that was part of the research conducted between February and April 2021 during my MA thesis research at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. Data was sourced from (1) focus group interviews with women in Gunjur and Sanyang; (2) interviews with local community members in the three communities of Gunjur, Sanyang, and Kartong, as well as interviews with local and national

government officials; (3) observations of the factory operations and local market in Sanyang; and (4) newspaper and government policy documents. The focus group interviews were conducted mostly in Mandinka with a few Wolof interjections. As I am a native Wolof speaker, my research assistant helped with the translations of Mandinka.

In addition to women, I interviewed community members, including youth activists, in all three communities, government officials from appropriate agencies and ministries, as well as the local governing bodies, and the village development committees (VDC). Most of the interviews were conducted in Sanyang. Purposive sampling was used to select interview participants. All the interviews were conducted in English except for one which was conducted in Wolof. I asked open-ended interview questions to solicit data on understanding the perceptions of fishmeal factories by all three actors.

In addition to interviews, I gathered field notes by conducting observations on the field in Sanyang and government offices, along with a tour of the factory in Sanyang. I also gathered secondary sources that document fishmeal processing in The Gambia. I used online search engines to find major Gambian newspapers including *Foroyaa* and *GunjurOnline* as well as other international publications such as *The Guardian*. I collected twenty newspaper articles. I also collected data from government policy and reported documents published online.

Data analysis of the interview transcripts and observations took place simultaneously with data collection so that I could further refine data collection methods (Emerson *et al.,* 1995; Maxwell, 2013). Interview transcripts and field notes were read completely before the initial coding of the collected data. After the interviews had been transcribed, I employed an open-coding system to analyse participants' responses line-by-line, phrase-by-phrase, and word-by-word to identify key themes (Creswell, 2014). I applied the same coding methods for newspapers and policy documents by reading articles clearly to identify key themes.

Notably, although I focus on discourses from different genders, classes, and age groups, it is worth noting that most of my participants are of Mandinka and Wolof origin. However, ethnicity did not emerge as an important identity, whereas the issue of class is salient. Therefore, I would also argue that class

discrepancies of African women are salient when using an ecofeminist approach, as African women are not a monolithic group. Poor African women who live in cities and work in industries, as well as rural women who primarily work in subsistence industries, are typically the African women who are most affected by capitalist extractive industries. Thus, FPE and socialist ecofeminist perspectives provide a better analytical approach to examining how social and environmental variables intersect with local, regional, and global political-economic forces to shape patterns of resource access, use, and control (Robbins 2012; Blaikie and Brookfield, 2015).

I conducted the study in full compliance with the ethical guidelines of the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board (IRB #21405).

Fishmeal Processing, Employment Opportunities, and the Disruption of Women's Work

Fisheries and agriculture are the major contributors to women's economic activities in The Gambia and the most prominent source of income for poor rural households. Historically, women make up the majority of those working in the agriculture, forestry, and fishing industries, with 13.2% of women employed in the sector compared to seven per cent of men (GBoS, 2020: 65). Although the Gambian government attempts to industrialise the fisheries industry, and increase employment opportunities in the sector, only men seem to benefit from such industrialisation because, in the case of fishmeal processing, men are the main beneficiaries of fishmeal processing. Thus, it seems that men benefit the most from the industrialisation of the fisheries through fishmeal processing. A closer look at the case study of the fishmeal factories reveals further profound consequences on women's working opportunities and conditions as fishmeal processing obstructs both the nature of women's work in these sectors and the environment that women rely on for subsistence.

Fishmeal production and employment

Notwithstanding the discourse that increased investments in the fisheries sector will enhance employment opportunities for local communities, the factories have

not provided substantial employment for either women or men. Since I did not get access to observe the factories in Gunjur and Kartong, I can only deduce based on my findings from Sanyang. It is also important to note that the factories have specific working days and thus do not operate every day of the week.

According to the manager, the estimated number of people officially employed at the factory in Sanyang is fifty. However, I noticed that they constitute mostly Mauritanian and Chinese expatriates. An exception is the few local Gambian men who are directly employed as "community liaisons" and security guards, but even they are not drawn from the coastal communities. The remaining employment opportunities can be divided into six categories: 1) contracted Senegalese fishermen who supply bonga to the factory (I was not able to get the figures from boat owners); 2) slab boys who carry fish from boats to baskets; 3) basket carriers who transport loaded baskets from shore to trucks; 4) counters who count the number of baskets carried by each basket carrier; 5) pickers who pick fallen fish and put them back into a basket; and 6) truck drivers who transport fish from the shore to the factory. I was only able to find the pay scale for basket carriers and truck drivers. Basket carriers get paid 35 dalasis (US$0.57) per basket and usually carry about 20 baskets per day. Truck drivers get paid the most with an average pay of 6,000 dalasis (US$97.80) to 7,000 dalasis (US$114.10) for a day of work.

Although it was difficult to obtain official employment data from the factories, I did not observe any women working inside the factory. Women mostly work informally as basket carriers and pickers, tasks which require a lot of physical strength and are often not ergonomic as they must carry baskets of fish back and forth or bend down to pick up fallen fish. Although men also work as basket carriers, all the fishermen and workers inside the factories are men. As basket carriers and pickers, women are subjected to poor working conditions. As one interviewee noted:

> You want to give us that kind of job and keep pointing fingers at the youths that they do not want work, they do not want hard work, they don't want any jobs? Anybody who does that kind of work [basket carrying], by age 40 you are dead.
>
> (Interviewee 9, Sanyang, March 2, 2021).

This interviewee points to the ways that women as basket carriers are subjected to work that is not sustainable in the long term. Although African women historically carry baskets of goods on their heads, basket carrying for fishmeal is different in that it is capitalistic as it is not for subsistence but for export, thus large-scale and repetitive. Furthermore, whereas women normally carry goods for sustenance, basket carrying for fishmeal processing is not for the household or local consumption. Rather, it is for fishmeal producers whose primary aim is to gain surplus value through exportation. Despite promises to hire local people, the lack of employment opportunities in the factories demonstrates that the factories are not drivers of sustainable development in coastal Gambia.

Besides the lack of formal employment for women in the factories, the factories are also dispossessing women through displacement and the disruption of their work. In particular, fish processors and women gardeners who previously used the land where the factory in Gunjur now stands and women gardeners in both Sanyang and Gunjur who grow crops near the factories complain that the factories have obstructed their livelihoods.

Displacement of fish processors and disruption of gardeners

Agriculture is the primary source of income for about 72% of extremely poor rural households, especially women, who dominate the industry (World Bank, 2019: iv). Women also make up around 80% of fish processors and 50% of small-sized fish traders in The Gambia (UNCTAD, 2014:12). For this reason, agriculture and fisheries are a major contributor to women's economic activities and a major source of income for poor rural households.

Although women in The Gambia dominate the agriculture and fisheries sector, they do not enjoy equal access to land. Despite constitutional and policy provisions of gender equality, according to which all women should be considered and treated as equals to men with respect to political, social, and economic opportunities, land reform has not benefitted rural women as most rely on use rights (Schroeder, 1997; Carney, 1998; Bensouda, 2013; Monterroso *et al.,* 2021).

The fishmeal industry in The Gambia reduces women's access to land by displacing fish processors and disrupting the work of women gardeners who

enjoyed land use rights. In Gunjur, the factory displaced fish processors who had use rights to the land for fish smoking. The Department of Fisheries asked women to give up the land and assured them that the factory would build a standard fish processing site and market that they could use to dry fish and sell for free. This promise was never fulfilled, according to the fish processors. Consequently, the Department of Fisheries built a small oven space for them on the beach to dry and smoke fish, but the women must pay a daily fee of ten dalasis (US$ 0.18) per oven use as opposed to the free land they hitherto enjoyed (Focus Group 1, Gunjur, March 18, 2021). This further exacerbates the economic burden on women and reduces their incomes.

Similarly, women gardeners in Gunjur have been using land next to the factories to cultivate vegetables for more than two decades. Although they do not own the land they farm on, they have been enjoying use rights. However, the factories encroached on the land and built a water pipe along their farm that usually overwaters crops and limits women's yearly yield. Two women noted the following:

> The factory has done nothing for us, but harm. Their water pipe is here [points at pipe in the garden] (see figure 2) and they do whatever they want here, but we cannot say anything because the government gave them access and we do not own the land. In fact, we experienced two years of bad yields after they [the factory] came because sometimes the water pipe bursts and spreads water over the plants.
>
> (Focus Group 3, Gunjur, April 8, 2021).
>
> Last month [March 2021] while we were watering our plants, the Chinese came here with tape lines measuring, which was very random. So, we got so scared because we knew they would do something bad like the water pipe. We had to call the boys [youth activists] to chase them away. Even though I am married, all my kids depend on this garden. Be it food, school fees, or lunch money…everything comes from this garden. This garden is my everything. So, when I heard that the Chinese were going to extend it, I was sleepless.
>
> (Focus Group 3, Gunjur on April 8, 2021).

These statements by women gardeners demonstrate the mothering role that they embody as mothers, but also their role as sustainers of nature. Salleh (1984: 340)

argues that "women's monthly fertility cycle, the tiring symbiosis of pregnancy, the wrench of childbirth and the pleasure of suckling an infant, these things already ground women's consciousness in the knowledge of being coterminous with Nature." For Salleh, even when women are unconscious of this positioning, it is a "fact of life." Fishmeal processing is thus disrupting both nature's work and women's work in agriculture, and "by destroying the water and land and organic matter base for food production, women's productivity in sustenance is killed" (Shiva, 1988: 74).

In Sanyang, a journalist interviewed women vegetable gardeners who also complained that they experienced two consecutive years of bad yield due to crop diseases caused by flies that carry bacteria from the factory (Darboe, 2021). Since women gardeners witnessed fish processors lose use rights to the factories, they consistently feel threatened that the factories will encroach on the land they use and rob them of their livelihood.

The women in Gunjur are not alone in fighting the encroachment of the factories. The fishmeal factory in Sanyang installed a pipe dumping its waste just thirty metres out to sea, in full view of the beachfront hotels and women's vegetable gardens (Changing Market Foundation, 2019; figure 3). A second group of women gardeners also associated poor yields with the factory's waste dump site that was located near their garden (Nyang and Jobe, 2018).

Women claim that the disposal of the waste has destroyed their vegetable gardens in Sanyang. One gardener who grows bitter tomato, tomato, and eggplant said, in an interview with a journalist, "These past two years have been a total disaster for us. We harvest nothing." She also stated that she is a single mother raising five children from the revenue she gets from gardening. With the decline in her garden productivity comes difficulty in making ends meet (Darboe, 2021).

"Our fate is in Allah's hands," she told the journalist as she weeded her newly created sorrel beds, a less profitable product. The sorrel had to be planted in place of the rotten tomato, bitter tomato, and eggplant. This woman's story is one too many according to Darboe (2021) because other women gardeners in Sanyang grapple with a similar fate. Their harvest between 2018 and 2019 has been a disaster, another woman told Darboe. "The proceeds from this garden are used to feed our families. It has been a helpless two years for us." The women

blame the fishmeal factory for bad yields as the factory stands thirty metres from the garden where at least 50 to 100 women earn a living (Darboe, 2021).

Figure 2: *Factory's water pipe in women's gardens*

Source: **Fieldwork, 2021**

Figure 3 :*Factory waste pipe emptying into the ocean with a young boy sitting and playing.*

Source: **Fieldwork, 2021**

The work and productivity of these women are rendered invisible as fishmeal production became a project of the global capitalist patriarchy. Moreover, the "work and wealth in accordance with the feminine principle are significant precisely because they are rooted in stability and sustainability" (Shiva, 1988: 42) as women rely on their gardens to not only feed their families but also to supply food for the local economy. Therefore, fishmeal processing is not a driver of sustainable development because the operations of the factories displace and disrupt women from being productive. Moreover, these mechanisms demonstrate that sustainable development is not robust enough to restrain capitalistic destruction of sustenance work and natural resources for survival.

Dispossession of fish vendors and the impact on the sustenance of local fisheries

Women engaged in the fishery trade in The Gambia have historically faced several challenges including inadequate access to funds and markets (Mbenga, 1996; Ragusa, 2014). However, with the arrival of fishmeal factories, fish vendors started facing new challenges as they encounter severe competition in buying and reselling fish. Fish vendors point out that the factories affect the price and availability of bonga in local markets because fishermen prioritise supplying the fishmeal factories. One interviewee noted that the fishermen now operate on the principle of "you buy it or leave" because, at the end of the day, they do not rely on local fish vendors anymore since the factories have contracts with them. Another interviewee also confirmed this by noting: "At some point, fishermen realised that instead of having to deal with fish vendors, they just go to the fishmeal factories because it is a guaranteed sale." Additionally, some women who can no longer afford to buy fish from fishermen now have to work either as basket carriers or pickers instead of trading fish.

Since most fishermen now have contracts with the factories, they do not negotiate with vendors anymore. With the advent of fishmeal factories and contracts between fishermen and factories, fishermen must supply a specified number of bonga to the factories. I could not verify the contracts with the fishermen as they claim that they cannot disclose contract details. However, the contracts specify the amount of bonga needed per working day at an agreed-upon

price. Haggling when buying anything is part of the market culture in The Gambia as in most parts of Africa (Uzo *et al.,* 2018). In fact, one always expects to negotiate when buying goods. Therefore, factories are not only diminishing women's access to fish but also undermining the social relationships between women fish vendors and fishermen. One woman noted:

> We are not respected anymore; the fishermen do not even talk to us anymore because we cannot directly buy fish from the boats anymore…We used to have a good relationship with fishermen, but now they do not even look at us because of this fishmeal factory. They really make our lives and work difficult.
>
> (Focus Group 2, Sanyang, March 26, 2021).

Furthermore, fishmeal processing has changed long-standing business relations between women as fish vendors and the fishermen; in the past the women used to buy fish on credit, paying fishermen back once they made a sale (Gbadamosi, 2018). However, since the factories have contracts with the fishermen, the women can neither negotiate with the latter nor buy from them on credit. One woman noted:

> We cannot negotiate for fish anymore and you know here, you always negotiate. I can only get fish in Sanyang if the factory does not want their fish anymore because they sometimes reach a certain number.
> (Focus Group 2, Sanyang, March 26, 2021).

As a result of fishmeal processing, there is also a shortage of fish supply and, as a result, the price of bonga has increased. For instance, before the factories, one could buy three bonga for ten dalasis (US$0.20) but now the price of three bongas has increased to twenty-five dalasis (US$0.49). Women fish vendors claim that they cannot sell bonga at an affordable price anymore because they cannot access it and if they do, the supply price is too high for them to sell it at a reasonable price to make a profit. This also impacts the availability of fish for local community members. One interviewee recalls having to travel twenty minutes to Tanji to buy fish because the factory has created a shortage of fish in Sanyang:

> Sometimes you cannot have what [the fish] you want, there were many times I had to drive to Tanji. I have to drive for twenty minutes to get fish, can you imagine? I think there was a time it went on for two weeks, there was no fish, for two weeks there was no fish here by the beach. I would go check when the factory is operating and guess what? They have all the fish that we used to eat. They are raping the ocean, taking all our fish to make fishmeal to go feed their farmed fish so that when we run out [of fish] they can come and sell us their fish that they stole, because right now 70% of the world export of farmed fish is from China, yes 70%.
>
> (Interviewee 7, Sanyang, March 26th, 2021).

Indeed, per capita consumption of total fish and small pelagic fluctuated between 2013 and 2020. Per capita consumption of total fish reached an all-time high at 30kg in 2015, with a sharp decline in 2017 to 25 kg and back up to 28 kg in 2020 (Deme *et al.,* 2021: 302). This downward trend is more profound for small pelagics as per capita consumption decreased from 15 kg in 2015 to 7 kg in 2020 (Deme *et al.,* 2021:302). The proliferation of fishmeal factories, thus, has disrupted the supply of local fisheries because the fishmeal factories are diverting food destined for local human consumption to feed the global aquaculture industry.

Changing Markets Foundation (2019:5) found that the combined catch of one of the factories, Golden Lead in Gunjur, accounted for approximately 40% of the country's total reported fish catches in 2016, roughly the equivalent of half of the fresh fish landings. Although it was hard to obtain production and export data for fishmeal, a study of The Gambia's fisheries value chain by Avadí *et al.* (2020:8) found that the amount of small pelagic fish processed by fishmeal factories accounted for 31% of all processed fish with a total of 16,642 tons of fishmeal produced between 2014 and 2018. This means that just after two years of establishment, fishmeal factories diverted 31% of fish destined for local consumption into fishmeal to feed global aquaculture. Therefore, the factories are turning a local resource into a high-value product for global aquaculture markets by denying women access to fish, who in turn are then unable to provide sufficient supply for local sustenance.

Unlike community members who opine that the factories are causing a shortage of bonga, government officials that I interviewed argue that the state

sought the fishmeal factories to solve the problem of an unsustainable oversupply of bonga fish. One interviewee noted that:

> ...if it is a fish of low value like bonga it is not worth spending money to freeze them, so most of it was being buried or thrown away at the beach. That is why the factories were brought into The Gambia to produce fishmeal. Instead of throwing it away, the fisherman can sell it to factories. This was the whole idea behind building the fishmeal factories.
>
> (Interviewee, Banjul. April 28, 2021).

This discourse emerging from the Gambian state is what Messner *et al.* (2020) call the prevention paradox. By claiming that fishmeal investments are a sustainable alternative to a natural resource surplus problem (bonga oversupply), the government aims to merge its economic growth ideals and sustainability goals through food waste prevention policies. Furthermore, this narrative that fishmeal investments were established to solve an oversupply of bonga is another attempt to advance the UN SDGs goals in policymaking. Such discourses ultimately exemplify the gender-blind policies that undervalue the work of women because as governments try to achieve economic growth through FDI, they engender a trade-off with food security. Instead of solving an oversupply problem as technocratic discourse suggests, the factories in fact disrupted the local supply of fish for domestic consumption and made bonga scarce for local consumption.

Ultimately, in operating the factories in Gunjur and Sanyang, patriarchal capitalists are disrupting and dominating the nature of women's work and nature simultaneously. Patriarchy and capitalism subordinate women and nature as "'Productive' man, producing commodities, using some of nature's wealth and women's work as raw material and dispensing with the rest as waste, becomes the only legitimate category of work, wealth and production. Nature and women working to produce and reproduce life are declared 'unproductive'" (Shiva, 1988). The profit-maximisation ideals that fishmeal production promises lead producers to use any means necessary to exploit fisheries along with dirty production processes such as waste dumping, noxious smell, and pollution. Hence, women along with nature are subjugated by capitalism and patriarchy.

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that large-scale fishmeal processing by Chinese-Mauritanian factories dominates women and nature by disrupting women's work and by exploiting a low-value staple fish through the mechanisms of capitalism and patriarchy. In particular, the fishmeal factories are diverting fish traditionally supplied to fish vendors to sell for local consumption to factories to process feedstock for global aquaculture industries. The big push for increased investments in aquaculture and fishmeal is therefore not sustainable. Rather, they are causing unsustainable outcomes.

Fishmeal processing negatively impacts the nature of women's work in coastal Gambia by disrupting the work of local fish processors, vendors, and women gardeners. The domination of both women and nature's work for sustenance is an inherent and ongoing process of capitalist expansion. Thus, ongoing capital accumulation through fishmeal processing reveals the expanding hegemony of transnational operations that deepens the domination of nature and women.

Since fishmeal factories are located near coastal regions for easy access to fisheries resources, they have also enclosed women's access to the commons. According to Mesmain (2014), following similar patterns to agriculture, dominant economic theories have been promoting the privatisation of fishing access to maximise profits for more than four decades. Privatisation involves redefining access rights or privileges to open common or state-owned fisheries by increasing the level of private allocation of, and control over, public resources (Mesmain, 2014). Fishmeal industries have also replicated this pattern by privatising local resources as well as local spaces and land which women used to freely enjoy in The Gambia. The enclosures are also accompanied by securitisation as factories hire guards.

Therefore, despite aquaculture being promoted as a sustainable alternative, its supply inputs are causing unsustainable outcomes, thereby demanding an alternative to the capitalist regime. This reveals how the state holds a gendered and dualistic worldview that deems nature and indigenous peoples as inferior, feminine, and passive, who are to be subordinated to the masculine extractive industry and government policies.

My findings also further illuminate the broader mechanisms leading to the further marginalisation of women in The Gambia and, by extension, on the continent. Gender equality and women empowerment initiatives on the continent are facades for sustainable development objectives that are incompatible with the protection of women and the environment and are entwined with global capital. Overall, patriarchal roles, coupled with development policies, forefront foreign capital, which hinders African women from living a dignified life. This study should inform governments who yearn for increased fishmeal investments, scholars and development practitioners who push aquaculture and fishmeal as a sustainable alternative to wild-caught fishing, and multilateral organisations such as the UN and FAO to rethink "better" management processes to mitigate conflict and violence around the industries.

The Gambian government must mitigate the negative ramifications of industrial production on women. Since fisheries stock requires regional cooperation and management, there is a crucial need for a gender-sensitive fisheries management plan to ensure sustainable regional management of bonga for local and regional consumption. This will require fishermen to prioritise the supply of fish for local consumption. Furthermore, the Gambian government must step up and protect coastal areas whose citizens depend on gardens for their livelihoods. For instance, given that women only enjoy the use of land rights and constantly feel insecure that factory owners will encroach on their land, it is necessary for the Gambian government to legally protect women from being displaced by the factories.

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Women Farm Workers in Zimbabwe: The Social Policy Outcomes Two Decades after the Transformative Fast Track Land Reform

Tom Tom and Resina Banda

Abstract

Women farm workers have so far received limited scholarly attention in Zimbabwe's agrarian and labour policy literature. This is in a context where a conscious understanding of land reform as a social policy instrument is paltry. Taking women farm workers as the prime focus and using an empirical case study, the paper addresses these lacunae by exploring the redistributive, protective and reproductive outcomes of the fast track land reform. Twenty-two years after the formalisation of the land reform, nuanced evidence shows that even though female farm workers are agentive and engage in diverse livelihood pathways, they experience multiple challenges. Due to the politics of exclusion and inclusion, normalised gender hierarchies and compartmentalisation, as well as policy vacuity, they are embroiled in precarious livelihoods, poverty, inequality, and marginalisation, and are worse off than they were in the superseded land tenure regime. Accordingly, the question of women farm workers is yet to be resolved. The Government of Zimbabwe and other relevant stakeholders should address this question primarily and urgently by placing it on the policy agenda.

Keywords: women farm workers; gender hierarchies; gender compartmentalisation; fast track land reform; social policy outcomes; Zimbabwe

Introduction

Since the 1990s, sub-Saharan African countries have been actively engaging in land reforms, particularly land tenure reform, altering the institutions regarding

land (Takeuchi, 2021). In this context, Zimbabwe's land reform, particularly the fast track land reform, has been radically different in terms of character, scope, and impact compared to the earlier phases of land reform (Moyo, 2011a; Mkodzongi and Lawrence, 2019; Helliker *et al.*, 2021). A little over two decades after the formalisation of the fast track land reform, the focus has shifted from its histories, geographies, and controversies to exploring pathways for leveraging its outcomes to enhance social policy impact and development (Tekwa and Adesina, 2018; Chipenda, 2019, 2020). Yet, an underlying argument is that the processes and outcomes of the fast track land reform cannot be dissociated from the shifting national and global geopolitical configurations of power (Moyo, 2011b, c; Chamunogwa, 2019).

Farm labour is fundamental to the outcomes of agrarian reform, agriculture, and agro-based development. In this regard, a focus on farm labour, especially if disaggregated by gender, is fundamental to understanding labour issues in agrarian contexts from a gender standpoint, and in developing transformative policy options to improve the lives of the workers. Benya (2017) explores the inclusion of women in underground mining in South Africa, the associated masculine culture of mining, and the implications for gender equality in mining and women's empowerment. Similarly, Agarwal et al. (2021) interrogate inter- and intra-gender inequalities in land ownership in India, noting asymmetrical land ownership by women compared to men, and argue that land ownership is an essential vector for measuring women's empowerment and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality. In another context, Tsikata and Amanor-Wilks (2009) acknowledge the importance of land and labour rights to women in sub-Saharan Africa particularly due to the largely agrarian nature of livelihood activities and low technological base that makes labour a critical factor. Furthermore, outside the remit of agriculture, land organises livelihoods and influences social and political power, and determines resource control. Overall, scholars working on African women workers in diverse contexts (see Whitehead and Tsikata, 2003; Tsikata, 2009; Darkwah and Tsikata, 2021; Tsikata and Eweh, 2021), and particularly those working on women's land ownership and agricultural labour (see Apusigah, 2009; Bhaumik et al., 2016; Fischer, 2021) highlight the importance of women's labour and expose the enduring gender inequalities in resource ownership and labour markets.

Zimbabwe's land reform has gone through phases influenced by the centrality of addressing land tenure imbalances created and sustained by colonialism and neo-colonialism manoeuvrings, the expansionist approach adopted by the post-colonial government led by the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF), and land movements mainly by the peasants. The land question in Zimbabwe is often situated in colonial accumulation by dispossession which started in 1890, challenges to land repossession after independence in 1980 (Moyo, 2011a; Ruswa, 2007), and new land questions post land repossession (Chipenda, 2020). From 1890 when the British colonised Zimbabwe, the colonial administration engaged in widespread accumulation by dispossession and alienation of the Black majority from governance and development (Gundani, 2003). The land dispossessions and alienations were facilitated by supportive social and economic policies – economic regulations and taxes – specifically intended to benefit the British colonialists. The Black population had to be severed from the land which was their main source of livelihood and prosperity. This called for the application of laws that were oppressive and led to alienation. These included the Rudd Concession, Native Reserve Order in Council of 1898, Native Reserve Areas of 1915, Land Apportionment Act of 1930, Maize Control Act of 1931, Cattle Levy Act, Land Acquisition Scheme, Land Husbandry Act of 1951 and Land Tenure Act of 1969 (Mukanya, 1994; Utete, 2003). State-supported unequal and repressive agrarian relations between Blacks and whites were sustained by these legislations (Moyo, 2011a; Moyo and Chambati, 2013). Land dispossession, coupled with extra-economic regulations and taxes, turned Zimbabwe into a labour reserve economy, which repressed the peasantry, and small-scale rural industry and commerce, without creating full-scale proletarianisation (Bush and Cliffe, 1984; Yeros, 2002).

Due to colonial overt and covert land dispossession, at independence in 1980 there was acute racial skewness in landholding – 6,000 white farmers held 15,5 million hectares located mainly in the best agro-ecological regions while 8,500 Black farmers held 1,4 million hectares and 4,500 communal farmers held 16,4 million hectares (Sachikonye, 2003a: 227; Utete, 2003: 14). To address the land question created by colonialism, at independence the government engaged in land acquisition and resettlement. The first phase was from September 1980 to 1998. Despite the transformative ambition, in this phase the government merely

acquired 3,498,444 hectares of land and resettled 71,000 families (Waeterloos and Rutherford 2004: 538). This number was far below the official target of 162,000 families (Moyo, 2013: 32). Based on lessons learnt in the first phase, the second phase of the land acquisition and resettlement programme was launched in September 1998. The government was only able to resettle 4,697 families on 145,000 hectares against a set target of acquiring 8,5 million hectares and resettling 91,000 families (Sarimana, 2005: 68). Spontaneous and radical occupation of large-scale commercial farms, mainly dominated by peasants, emerged due to the government's failure to solve the land question and flagging macroeconomic performance. The government's efforts were constrained by the willing seller-willing buyer provision of the Lancaster House Agreement of 1979 and major resource constraints in a context of high expectations from the Black majority who, for almost a century, were marginalised from their land and other development opportunities. The *Jambanja* or Third *Chimurenga*, as this land movement is known (Sadomba, 2013), became the Fast Track Land Reform Programme upon formalisation in 2000.

Compared to the preceding land reform, the fast track is the most topical due to its scope and impact. It resulted in the resettlement of 180,000 households on 13 million hectares (Chipenda, 2018: 2) – 170,000 in the A1 model (Moyo, 2011c: 496) and 10,000 in the A2 model respectively (Moyo, 2013). Land beneficiaries of the A1 model were allocated smaller portions of land. For example, the prescribed arable land per beneficiary in agroecological regions 1 and 2 is five hectares, and ten hectares for regions 3, 4 and 5. The A1 was planned as an intensive decongestion model aimed at relieving land pressure in over-populated communal areas and benefitting landless peasants. The model was aimed at eliminating squatting and disorderly settlements in both urban and rural areas as well as extending and improving the agricultural capacity of the peasant farming sector (Utete, 2003: 20). This model is also referred to as the villagised scheme because it resembles the village set-up of the areas under customary tenure. The A2 was set aside for commercial farming and was to be administered by the Minister of Lands, Land Reform and Resettlement in terms of the Agricultural Land Settlement Act Chapter 20:01. This model was aimed at increasing the participation of Black farmers in commercial farming (to promote the indigenisation of the commercial farming sector) by giving them

easier access to land and infrastructure (Sarimana, 2005: 74). A2 land sizes are bigger and although not applied to all beneficiaries, access to this scheme had to be based on proof of capital for undertaking commercial farming with minimum government support. Moreover, any assistance provided by the government had to be recovered fully. Allocations depended on agroecological zones and type of farm (small-scale, medium-scale, large-scale, or peri-urban) (Sukume *et al.*, 2004). In the case study used, most A1 land beneficiaries were allocated five hectares while the A2 land beneficiaries got between 60 and 120 hectares.

Concerning processes, impact, and outcomes, the fast track has been interrogated from multiple ideological and epistemological standpoints: neopatrimonialism, livelihoods, political economy, human rights and, more recently, social policy. Controversy surrounds its outcomes. Notwithstanding the various phases of land reform, the "land" question is yet to be fully resolved and 'new' land questions are increasingly becoming apparent. The "farm workers" question is a central example – what were the outcomes of the fast track land reform in relation to farm workers? Centring on farm workers, while there is no consensus, the fast track eroded broader access to work, tenure security, income, and other livelihoods of the approximately 20,000 farm workers of the white commercial farmers (Sachikonye, 2003a). During the *Jambanja*, their human rights were violated (physical and psychological) along with those of the white commercial farmers because they were considered to be supporters of the old land regime (Sachikonye and Zishiri, 1999). Their situation is more precarious in the new land tenure system carved out by the fast track (Chambati, 2017). Most do not own land in their own right; they have to rent land to produce food for the household, are job insecure, are engaged occasionally or are out of employment, are mostly paid in kind, are paid low wages, and are in arrears; overtime is rarely recognised, they rarely get food rations, and are not prioritised in other social protection measures (Chiweshe and Chabata, 2019).

In Zimbabwe, there is a large body of work on farm workers in the aftermath of the land reform, and their contribution to agriculture (Amanor-Wilks, 1995, 1996, 2001; Chambati, 2011, 2017, 2022; Scoones and Murimbarimba, 2020; Scoones *et al.*, 2018; Chiweshe and Chabata, 2019). There are also organisations that focus on farm workers (see Farm Community Trust of Zimbabwe, 2002). In addition, studies on women and land in both resettlement areas (Ras)

and areas under customary tenure (also known as communal areas, CAs) are remarkable (Gaidzanwa, 1994, 2011; Chingarande, 2008; Chingarande *et al.*, 2012; Chiweshe *et al.*, 2014; Mutopo, 2014; Mutopo *et al.*, 2014; Chiweshe, 2015; Bhatasara and Chiweshe, 2017). Yet, the discourse on farm workers has not kept up with the times, sometimes fails to grasp the current and changing realities of the farm workers, and may not pay particular attention to women farm workers.

This paper complements the existing corpus of literature by interrogating central debates – the persistent gender inequalities in land ownership before and after the land reform, how such inequalities shape livelihoods and social relations, and the vacuity of scholarly focus on social policy outcomes among farm workers particularly relating to women farm labour. In this context, the paper broadens the remit of knowledge on farm labour and the well-being of women farm workers in four ways. First, it avoids the bunching together of farm workers by focusing specifically on women farm workers. Secondly, it prioritises the current women farm workers, their diverse lived experiences, and agency in a context of challenges and precarious livelihoods. Thirdly, the paper is grounded in a Transformative Social Policy (TSP) approach. Accordingly, it is crystallised around selected tasks of social policy – redistribution, protection, and reproduction – a thrust that is still largely scanty, principally in relation to agrarian literature. In this regard, it explores the extent to which the land reform policy has transformed the experiences of women farm workers. Finally, the empirical basis of the paper informs farm labour policy and seeks to improve the well-being of women farm workers, particularly based on nuanced evidence drawn from the farms. Thus, the paper has both intellectual and activist research underpinnings. The limits of a micro study, single district focus, and interpretivism acknowledged, the paper provides focal insights on women farm workers and how their conditions can be transformed. The paper is organised into three parts – TSP (the evaluative conceptual underpinnings), discussion (prioritising redistribution, protection, and reproduction), and conclusion.

Methods and Materials

The paper is informed by a primary study carried out in the Zvimba district in 2021 and 2022, and ongoing engagement with the beneficiaries of the fast track and earlier phases of land reform that span from 2014 to 2022. The district is located in northern central Zimbabwe in Mashonaland West Province and is composed of 35 wards (Chipenda and Tom, 2022: 187). It had 718 large-scale commercial farms (LSCFs) and about 150,000 households under customary tenure before the fast track (Murisa, 2009: 21). Banket ward, lying approximately 95 kilometres to the north-west of Zimbabwe's capital (Harare), was the epicentre of the study where the two main study sites – Dalkeith and Whynhill farms – and the accompanying St. Lucia and Wannock Glen farms were drawn. Before the fast track, Banket ward had 41 LSCFs. Of these, 16 were converted to A1 plots and 26 into A2 plots (Chipenda and Tom, 2022: 187). The white commercial farmer of Dalkeith used to employ about 200 permanent farm workers while casual labour was not specified and depended on the season (Murisa, 2009: 247). At Whynhill farm, in the 1990s, 70 full-time employees were engaged. However, during peak seasons more manual labour was required and the number of farm workers increased threefold (Murisa, 2009: 261).

The sample was drawn from a cross-section of individuals, groups and organisations. These are 40 women farm workers; ten male farm workers; 30 plot owners; two village heads; 15 farmers from the areas under customary tenure proximate to the farms (Chirau, Kasanze and Murombedzi); one Agritex officer; one lands officer; two senior government officials from the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Water and Rural Resettlement, and the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare respectively; one district coordinator, and one woman labour expert. Overall, the participants were selected from the groups of people most relevant to the focus of the study. A review of scholarly literature about farm labour in the Zvimba and other districts in Zimbabwe and studies in other countries complemented the primary research.

Exploring the lived situation of women farm workers in the farms borne out of the fast track and the associated current social policy outcomes demanded the application of interpretivism with its qualitative-dominant methods. The essence of interpretivism in feminist research is notable in literature (see for example,

Chingarande, 2010; Benya, 2017; Martignoni, 2021). Data collection methods included less structured key informant interviews (KIIs), in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Exploration of life histories and informal interaction and questioning were associated with the data collection methods. The merits and demerits of these methods and techniques are acknowledged (Neuman, 2011; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Some of the merits include flexibility, enhanced capability to engage with the context and subjectivities, encouraging exploration, ability to capture the lived experiences and situated meanings, and broadening research and responses to social problems beyond statistics. However, these methods and techniques are weak where statistical representation and analysis are required, they consume more time and labour, are subjective, and results cannot be replicated. Merits and demerits acknowledged, the choice of methods depends on the problem, objective(s) and research question(s).

Transformative Social Policy: The Heuristic Underpinnings

In Zimbabwe, the exploration of gender issues relating to land reform and farm work has mainly been approached from the lens of African feminists who work on the agrarian sector – particularly their insights on land questions, land reform and agrarian change. Broadly, African feminism interrogates diverse aspects: gender difference, gender inequality, and gender oppression in African contexts. Despite the diversity, African feminisms, like other variants of feminism, converge on a woman/women-centred focus in questioning social life and human experience, and pursuing change (Maponya, 2021). It is a philosophical, political, activist, and emancipatory tradition grounded in the lived experiences of African women (Ossome, 2020; Bakare-Yusuf and Dosekun, 2021; Okoli, 2021). African feminists who focus on the agrarian sector bring to the fore four core dimensions. They take the situations and experiences of women as the starting point of enquiry; describe the social world, particularly from the standpoint of African women; are activist and change-oriented for the benefit of women; and delve beyond women and aim to emancipate all other disadvantaged groups.

To address issues in the agrarian sector, they answer four questions: What about women? Why is all this as it is? How can the social world be changed and

improved to make society a more just place for women and all people? What about the differences between and among African women? These questions are fundamental in the various scholarly contributions on Zimbabwe's land reform (Gaidzanwa, 1994; Chingarande, 2008; Chingarande *et al.*, 2011, 2012; Mutopo, 2011; Mutopo *et al.*, 2014; Bhatasara and Chiweshe, 2017; Chambati and Mazwi, 2020). Overall, they acknowledge the heterogeneity, complexity, and fluidity of women's situations in agrarian contexts. However, African feminists in general and African agrarian scholars who adopt a gender lens do not explain the social policy dimensions of land reform pertaining to women farm workers, hence the emphasis on this dimension in this paper.

This article weaves TSP into the analysis of the social policy outcomes of land reform relating to women farm workers in a post land reform context. TSP is a product of monumental research under the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), and later contributions by individual scholars (Mkandawire, 2007; Adesina, 2010, 2021; Yi, 2015). TSP seeks to address the weaknesses of earlier social policies that were applied in Africa and other parts of the Global South, including but not limited to the Social Dimensions of Adjustment, Social Risk Management and Transformative Social Protection. These approaches were based on a neoliberal philosophy, are narrow, emphasised targeting of the "deserving poor" and application of safety nets to improve their situation; they restrict social policy to social protection in the anti-poverty agenda. They do not question and address the structural causes of inequality, marginalisation, and poverty. Furthermore, available evidence shows that these approaches have failed to lead to developmental transformation and broader well-being.

TSP emphasises the centrality of a better society for all, social solidarity and equity norms, shared goals and active participation of the hitherto disadvantaged groups, and the importance of an encompassing social policy. It is immersed in norms of parity and social cohesion, and in providing collective membership and coverage. Consequently, social policy is about achieving a collective good and holistic well-being. In this context, reducing poverty levels requires a return to the wider vision of development and social policy. This calls for connecting normative (ideational/basis goals), multiple tasks (functions) and the assortment of policy instruments, and development outcomes (see Adesina,

2011). In this regard, TSP has productive, protective, reproductive, redistributive, and social cohesion/nation-building tasks. These multiple tasks are linked to various instruments and feed into social, economic, and political development. In this context, social policy and economic policy are intertwined, a characteristic that is acknowledged in earlier regimes of social policy (see Adesina, 2009 for the Bismarckian, Beveridgean, Nordic and Nationalist models). The understanding that land and agrarian reform is among the core instruments of social policy that can generate and sustain people's well-being is the basis for analysing the situation of women farm workers in post land reform Zimbabwe.

While acknowledging the appropriateness of the TSP approach particularly in a context where it is largely limited in agrarian literature and policy, it is crucial to understand that this approach does not address all the challenges to the outcomes of land and agrarian reform. TSP is one among several useful approaches to analysing the outcomes of land and agrarian reform. This approach addresses, though not immensely, other critical aspects including political economy, (neo)patrimonialism, human rights, and livelihoods. The approach is not a "silver bullet" to solve all the problems associated with land reform as a transformative instrument. Closely linked to the central focus of this article, TSP is not solely a gender analysis approach, yet it can be applied smoothly to interrogate and develop transformative pathways relating to gender dimensions of redistribution, production, protection, reproduction, and social cohesion. Moreover, the transformative agenda, for example, transforming socioeconomic well-being, is not solely determined by an approach to social policy but largely by macro aspects including the economy, politics, governance and so forth. Accordingly, in relation to the focus of this paper, the TSP approach is applied to aspects that are within its remit and where it has comparative merits. Moreover, its complementary role to other approaches is acknowledged. Through the broader view of social policy, multiple instruments and manifold social policy tasks – redistributive, productive, protective, reproductive, and social compact – TSP not only fills lacunae in African feminist analysis but complements certain aspects of it as well.

The Social Policy Outcomes Among Women Farm Workers

In this section, three themes are pertinent but not exhaustive. These are the redistributive outcomes, protective outcomes, and reproductive outcomes of the fast track. Women farm workers are the primary focus of enquiry in the three themes.

Redistributive Outcomes

Redistribution in and beyond the farms may relate to various aspects. However, in this section, particular focus is on two points. First, and concerning land reform, the focus is on land redistribution. Land is a core resource in Africa (Moyo, 2011a) without which one may, depending on circumstances, be more vulnerable to poverty (Mafeje, 2003). Then, land reform is understood as a TSP pathway with the potential to achieve redistributive outcomes, along with production, protection, reproduction, and social cohesion/compact. Several scholars are advancing transformative social and development policies for Africa (Mkandawire, 2015; Adesina, 2021). In relation to social policy, the level of redistribution resulting from a policy (land reform in this paper) is an essential consideration in evaluating social and development policies.

The number of farm workers before the fast track is contested. For example, the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum and Justice for Agriculture (2007: 29) estimated that there were more than 600,000 farm workers before the fast track. Approximately 70% of the farm workers – which is about 420,000 – lost their jobs by 2003 (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum and Justice for Agriculture, 2007: 29). However, official statistics (see Central Statistics Office, 2002a: 128) indicate that there were between 320,000 and 350,000 farm workers. This range was corroborated by field-based studies by various scholars (Moyo *et al.,* 2000: 182; Kanyenze, 2001: 106; Sachikonye, 2003b: 5). Some of the farm workers had known no other home than the LSCFs on which they lived and worked (Chambati, 2017: 80). What then are the diversities, complexities, and dynamics of redistributive outcomes among women farm workers, and the manner in which they are shaped by structural factors including culture, gender segregation, and segmentation? The redistribution of agricultural land to farm workers informally and formally has been a thorny issue in the Zvimba

district and other parts of Zimbabwe. The original farm workers (both men and women) reported that from 1999 to 2000, before formalisation, broadly, the land invaders viewed farm workers in the LSCFs as puppets of the white commercial farmers. Accordingly, most were marginalised in land occupations. The reports are confirmed by literature (see Goebel, 2005; Mutopo *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, at the time of fieldwork, the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Water and Rural Resettlement (the then Ministry of Lands) was not clear about how many farm workers were allocated land, and how many women farm workers got land in their own right at district and national levels (interviews with a senior official from the Ministry and the District Coordinator (DC). Scholarly literature also reveals these gaps.

How was the situation of farm workers in the Zvimba district and what are the dynamics 21 years on? Despite the vagueness of statistics relating to macro levels, the DC and land officer availed information on the core study sites. Mainly, peasants from the CAs initially occupied Whynhill farm informally in 2001. On formalisation, 54 A1 beneficiaries (45 male-headed, nine female-headed) and one A2 beneficiary were allocated land at the farm. Yet, none of the 70 full-time farm workers (sex not provided) was allocated land at the farm. The farm workers either moved to CAs or other farms including St. Lucia and Wannock Glen. Dalkeith farm was officially subdivided in the year 2000, an exercise led by the Department of Extension and the Ministry of Lands. Before the fast track, it was a 600-hectare farm. The farm was subdivided into 79 A1 plots. Eight were allocated to female-headed households of a central lineage – the Manjinjiwa. Notable at Dalkeith is the allocation of 0,3 hectares each to 56 farm workers (a total of 16,8 hectares out of 600 hectares) who remained on the farm. However, five crucial issues can be noted. First, the farm workers were not a priority in land allocations. Secondly, based on information gathered using informal interactions and life histories, only four women farm workers were reported to have been formally allocated land using social networks and capital to enforce their claims. Being a descendant of a powerful lineage (as in the Manjinjiwa) and having a consanguineal relationship or close social ties with the village head, chiefs, politicians, and businesspersons linked to ZANU PF constituted pivotal sources of social networks and capital for these women. Thirdly, the plots allocated were smaller in size than the official A1 plot size (five hectares of arable land)

prescribed by the Ministry of Lands. Fourthly, 22 years later, nothing has been done to formally redress the injustices and inequalities pertaining to farm workers in general and women farm workers in particular created during the fast track.

The fifth issue is male dominance in land ownership and agriculture. Scholars that focus on Zimbabwe's agrarian sector explore multiple gender issues in land access before and after the fast track (see Bhatasara and Chiweshe, 2017; Chambati and Mazwi, 2020, Tekwa this issue). Topical in their contributions are minor improvements in women's land ownership due to land reform, the continued dominance of women as farm labour, multi-faceted inequalities in access to land and agrarian support by women, and how such inequalities perpetually bedevil their socioeconomic well-being. To improve the situation of women, Chambati and Mazwi (2020) argue for a gender-sensitive national land policy that tackles historical and emerging land ownership inequalities. Furthermore, women's land access across the African continent is problematic (see Tsikata, 2016; Boone, 2019; Prügl *et al.*, 2021; Ajefu *et al.,* 2022). Regardless of the African country under focus, while acknowledging both diversity and change, women are in a disempowered situation with regard to both land access and agriculture. Bearing on Zimbabwe's fast track land reform, despite conscious efforts to address land tenure issues, the land reform had failed woefully at the task in relation to gender equality. For example, only four women out of 56 farm workers at Dalkeith had been allocated land but the land sizes were small and the land had been bequeathed to their sons, not daughters. The sons control the plots, produce and income. Accordingly, despite the much-heralded redistributive outcomes of the fast track, broader land ownership by women is still a myth. This is a dominant story across most land beneficiary households in and beyond the Zvimba district (Murisa, 2009; Mutopo *et al.*, 2014; Chiweshe and Bhatasara, 2022). Yet land ownership in fast track farms defies a mono and overgeneralised explanation. Some (women) farm workers have access to additional portions through social networks, land leasing arrangements or using plots of "absentee" landowners or unutilised portions of both resident and non-resident beneficiaries.

Protective Outcomes

Twenty-two years after the formalisation of the fast track land reform, we investigate the impact of land reform on social protection among female farm workers. Social protection refers to the various formal and informal ways meant to protect people from life cycle risks including sickness and old age, negative effects of economic policies, market shocks, unemployment, and other socioeconomic vagaries (Mkandawire, 2007). The focus on social protection mainly pertains to farm wages and rations but can also be linked to land use for the female farm workers who own land and are renting or utilising "excess" portions of land owned by others (see Mudimu *et al*,. 2021). Insights from the Zvimba district show that the situation of women farm workers, and the farm workers in general, where social protection is concerned is complex, diverse, and changing. The agrarian structure resulting from the fast track is dominated by the peasantry (A1 beneficiaries) and is marked by changing forms of wage labour. The peasants mainly make use of unpaid family labour and they employ informal wage labour dominated by women. The conditions of employment and labour relations vary highly from those of both permanent and casual labourers in the previous land tenure regime.

While the current trimodal agrarian structure is credited for extensive land redistribution (Moyo, 2011a; Chipenda, 2019), in Zvimba the protective function of land is ailing due to various issues. To begin with, farm workers are highly exploited as shown by unregulated working hours, low wages for full and part-time workers, and unfavourable living conditions for resident labour in farm compounds. Voices of the women farm workers based in Dalkeith, Whynhill and surrounding farms, while not glorifying the past, showed that unlike in the superseded land tenure regime where farm workers worked for eight hours from Monday to Friday, five to six hours on Saturday and most rested on Sunday, work days and hours are no longer clear. They are expected to work every day. Saturday and Sunday are no longer recognised as off days. On average, they are now working up to 12 hours a day or more and overtime is often unpaid. Whereas in the old regime, wages and food rations were known and provided as scheduled, in the new regime, "agreements" are not followed. Some farm workers reported recurrent payments in arrears, receiving US$5 to US$10 per month as well as payment in kind that is not commensurate with the agreed wage.

The lived experiences of the women farm workers reveal super-exploitation and neglect and negation of farm workers' rights. Moreover, most farm compounds are now dilapidated and not maintained, and the living conditions are harsh. Shortage of land, and in some cases landlessness, is higher among farm workers than any other group (evidence from the study sites confirmed by research in other districts). An excerpt from an interview with a woman farm worker sums up the issues raised by the 40 women farm workers (and crosscutting issues reported by the ten male workers):

> We are the poorest group in this community. Most female farm workers were excluded from land allocations due to both politics of the land reform and patriarchy. There is no stipulated wage. Even if you informally agree on a wage with the farmers, it is not binding. We go for months without a wage, which is often paid in arrears and mostly in kind. We do not get assistance from donors. Most of our income diversification strategies are unreliable. Some are not even affording necessities. We are therefore vulnerable to poverty and our children will inherit poverty.

The Government of Zimbabwe does not seem committed to formulating farm labour laws. The Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare official interviewed as part of this project emphasised that this has been problematic in the white settler land regime (see GAPWUZ, 1997). The woman labour expert (Ms. Winnie Madziwanzira) also explored farm labour law and labour relations in both the pre and post fast track contexts and argued that although these were problematic before the fast track and the old land tenure regime cannot be presented as a golden era, the current situation reveals the vacuity of state regulation, absence of recognised farm worker organisation and representation, gross loss of rights, heightening precarity, and extreme vulnerability to exploitation. There are no prospects for formal recognition of farm workers in the near future. Moreover, as pointed out by the Agritex officer we interviewed, social provisioning by the government is low, as is agrarian support. Some women farm workers reported experiencing food insecurity – seasonal or recurrent. Food security post fast track land reform is explored from a gender perspective by other scholars. For example, using a gender lens, Tekwa (2022) explores how the fast track land reform led to between 12% and 18% of women accessing land in their own right. While food security and employment have improved for some women, a

significant number are still embroiled in food insecurity and unemployment. Furthermore, liberalisation has radically reduced peasant maize production and constrained the dual role of peasant households, resulting in gender-differentiated knock-on effects for household food security. Women bear the major brunt of food insecurity. Accordingly, the state should play a crucial role in ensuring household and national food sufficiency (Tekwa and Tekwa, 2022). NGOs are "not permitted" to provide social assistance in the fast track farms due to the political nature of these areas. In this context, social protection among female farm workers continues to be militated by the absence of legislation, state failure, and despotism. However, the women farm workers are agentive, and sometimes engage in alternative livelihoods, no matter how precarious. They are engaging in both farm and off-farm activities to broaden income generation for various uses: agricultural activities on rented portions (land leasing is high as confirmed by the land beneficiaries); freely provided land (through social networks) and formally allocated land (the few who were allocated below prescribed portions); gold panning; vending; and use of remittances in the case of those with children and relatives that are remitting. Other scholars (Sachikonye and Zishiri, 1999; Magaramombe, 2010; Shonhe *et al.*, 2021) acknowledge the complexity and diversity of the situation of farm workers.

Reproductive Outcomes

Reproduction is broader than reconciling the burden of family and childcare (Mkandawire and UNRISD, 2006), and includes the various ways in which society sustains and improves its well-being. In addition to biological reproduction (see Maponya, 2021), sources of food and income, capital formation and accumulation, farm labour and improvements in agriculture are also focal. Regardless of diversity on the remit of social reproduction, land access and control as well as labour are central resources for individual, household, and community reproduction, particularly in the Global South (Rao, 2014; Naidu and Ossome, 2016; Chipenda, 2021). In this section of the article, we focus on how the women farm workers are reproducing themselves and their households, and how sustainable the reproductive outcomes are. The main issues relating to landlessness, smaller pieces of land access which is largely affected by long-standing institutionalised gender compartmentalisation, use of non-land-based

livelihoods, and providing labour to both A1 and A2 farmers were explored under social protection outcomes. These also affect the usefulness and sustainability of social reproduction. Also important, with regard to reproductive outcomes, is the division of reproductive labour (see Tekwa this issue), as well as the conception of family that underpins the fast track reforms as they relate to women farm workers. The division of labour is gender-based with most women farm labourers (and women in general) engaging in unpaid activities such as breastfeeding and caring for the children. They also mostly produce food crops for household consumption and reproduction. At face value, the plot may be presented as owned by the whole family yet patriarchy is still dominant, although not uniformly, across families and fast track farms in general. The situation is worse for female-headed and child-headed farmworker families that bear the burden of social reproduction and land access challenges.

In response, some female farm workers are selling labour to the peasants in CAs or engaging in off-farm activities for survival including harvesting wild fruits and collecting firewood for sale. Artisanal gold mining and vending of various wares are the main alternative ways of social reproduction. Out of the 40 women farm workers, 34 reported that they are selling foodstuffs, second-hand clothes (commonly referred to as *mabhero* in Zimbabwe) and household utensils. They sell the wares on the farms, in areas under customary tenure, where the majority came from, and in artisanal gold mining areas (known as *kumakorokoza* in the study sites and most other parts of Zimbabwe). The artisanal gold mining areas are not only for trading wares – 31 women farm workers also trade their labour for money (fetching water, cooking, and washing for the miners, and crushing/grinding the ore). These areas are also arenas for sex work. Reports from a cross-section of the participants showed that vending and artisanal gold mining are also practised by some landholders, particularly the A1 land beneficiaries, and that some sections of the plots are now used for artisanal gold mining. Yet, given the high contribution of women to family and childcare roles and financial requirements, the women farm workers may fail to exploit some alternatives. For example, vending may demand moving within and beyond the farms, and to nearby CAs and towns, given the inter-linkages (see Scoones and Murimbarimba, 2021). Gold panning in rivers (dominated by women) or providing support services to the male panners who practice underground

extraction requires the women to spend a substantial amount of time away from home, but doing so reduces the time for family and household care. Other scholars (Mkodzongi and Spiegel, 2018) explore the dynamics among artisanal gold mining, livelihoods and labour in fast track farms. They argue that the linkage should be understood beyond competition for labour between artisanal gold mining and farming, and the deagrarianisation thesis, but in a nuanced and multi-faceted way that captures both opportunities and challenges. Women anchor the well-being of most households. The problems they experience will also affect their children. Cumulatively, the challenges bedevilling female farm workers militate against capital formation and accumulation, livelihood sustainability and social reproduction.

Conclusion

Using a TSP lens, the paper explored the situation of women farm workers over two decades post the fast track land reform. Fully acknowledging the limits of basing the article on a single district case study and selected issues, the article gives primacy to three outcomes: redistribution, social protection, and social reproduction. The land reform programme was supposed to be transformative. Overall, however, while land reform has proven capacity to transform the socioeconomic well-being of the beneficiaries (see Tekwa and Adesina, 2018; Chipenda, 2018, 2019, 2021, Tekwa this issue), among women farm workers, the outcomes are principally limited. This is mainly due to landlessness, limited access to agricultural land due to patriarchy, access to small portions of land, limited access to agrarian support or exclusion from agrarian support schemes, as well as exploitative labour regimes. These realities are detached from the goal of the fast track – that of transforming the socioeconomic well-being of the Black majority who were marginalised from the land through British colonialism. Consequently, 22 years later, the fast track land reform has not fully resolved the land question and has, in some cases, created new land and well-being questions. In relation to this article, two questions are paramount – those about land access by women farm workers, and legislation on farm workers' conditions of service. Female farm workers and farm workers, in general, were not a priority in both informal and formal allocations. The female farm workers were further

marginalised through gender inequality engrained in the culture. Their current conditions of service do not enhance social protection and reproduction or other aspects of socioeconomic transformation. While acknowledging diversity, their lives are marked by precarity, exploitation, inequality, marginalisation, and poverty.

What policy options can be adopted to improve the situation of women farm workers? Land as a core resource should be equitably distributed. The recently gazetted new farm size regulations and the land audit are opportunities for considering women farm workers in land redistribution. Allocating land to this often-excluded group should be followed up with agrarian support particularly in the initial phases because most of them have so far failed to accumulate capital essential in enhancing land use. Broadening access to key resources and support guarantees socio-economic transformation. Land and agrarian reform should be understood as a social policy pathway consciously meant to affect and effect the well-being of various groups. The Government of Zimbabwe, through the relevant ministries, should seriously and urgently implement a farm worker policy that particularly addresses work conditions and remuneration issues. This was an issue in the white-dominated agrarian structure and cannot remain unresolved in post-independence and post land reform Zimbabwe. The importance of state leadership in addressing structural issues as we argue is a point emphasised by other scholars (see Gaidzanwa, 2015; Chambati and Mazwi, 2020). Feminists and pressure groups should engage the government to eliminate the vacuity of legislation for protecting the well-being of farm workers through state-regulated labour relations and practices. Female farm workers matter in agricultural and national development; therefore, they should be prioritised in social and development policy.

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"That Woman is a 'Farmer": Gender and the Changing Character of Commercial Agriculture in Zimbabwe

Newman Tekwa

Abstract

Female participation in commercial agriculture as part of women's work in Zimbabwe remains inadequately documented and theorised. In a context of land reform and framed within the Transformative Social Policy framework, this paper seeks to highlight commercial agriculture as a new work role for women that challenges the existing gender system characterising commercial agriculture as a male-dominated occupation. Primary data gathered through ethnographic fieldwork, which formed part of the author's doctoral research, reveals that the post-2000 land reform programme in Zimbabwe created a cohort of women commercial farmers, 12% are A2 farm owners according to government statistics. Within the study site, Mkwasine sugarcane farming area, 24.4% of the redistributed commercial sugarcane plots were allocated to women, justifying the exploration of women farmers in commercial agriculture, a research niche yet to be adequately documented in the Zimbabwe land reform literature. Women commercial sugarcane farmers are defying the gender system to claim the "farmer" title, once a preserve for men. This is despite household work remaining a female responsibility making "being a farmer, a housewife and a mother just too much work for women."

Keywords: women, commercial agriculture, Zimbabwe, reproductive labour, productive labour

Introduction

Literature is awash with statistics suggesting that African women make up almost 50% of the agricultural labour force in sub-Saharan Africa and produce 80% of the continent's food (AfDB, 2015: 9). The narrative proceeds to highlight that the majority of African women work mainly in smallholder production, portraying African farming to be at production levels sufficient only for own consumption subsistence agriculture (Fonjong and Gyapong, 2021: 4). This reinforces the common assumption that subsistence farmers are female while commercial farmers are male (Amenyah and Puplampu, 2013: 15). Agriculture is argued to come second after consumer goods as the largest industrial sector by value in Africa, and the McKinsey Global Institute projects that the sector will expand at a rate of 6% per annum until 2030 (AfDB, 2015: 8). In spite of occupying such a position within the African economy, little is known about the participation of African women within the sector as commercial farmers in their own right and the potential impact of this new type of work on women.

Zimbabwe has a long history of the establishment of some form of "indigenised" commercial agriculture dating back to the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 (Cheater, 1981: 369; Gaidzanwa, 2011: 4; Scoones, Mavedzenge and Murimbarimba, 2018: 598). The Act set aside 3,7 million acres to create what were then called Native Purchase Areas (NPAs), lands set aside as a concession to indigenous black Africans for the loss of their rights (Cheater, 1981: 374). Within these designated areas, which subsequently changed name post-independence to Small-Scale Commercial Farms (SSCFs) thus distinguishing them from the former white Large-Scale Commercial Farms (LSCFs), indigenous black Africans with the requisite resources were allowed to buy freehold lands to set up commercial farms owned and managed by black Africans (Cheater, 1981: 374; Scoones *et al.,* 2018: 598). Colonial land allocation laws in the NPAs discriminated against indigenous black African women as they specified only married black African men as holders of farming rights (Cheater, 1986: 71; Gaidzanwa, 2011: 4). With women legally not allowed to own property in their own right, including freehold land before independence and a few years thereafter, commercial production on small and large-scale commercial farming areas remained a preserve of black African and white European men, respectively.

On the eve of the land reform programme in 2000 following the 1990s policy shift geared towards deracialising LSCFs, only 11% of freehold land under commercial agricultural production was owned by indigenous black Africans (Moyo and Skalnes, 1990: 158; Palmer, 1990: 174). Very little is known about how much of the 11% freehold commercial agricultural land was owned by indigenous black African women, as indications suggest that women benefitted less as "efficiency" and "experience" took centre stage (Tekwa, 2020: 18). Highlighting the racial and gendered nature of commercial agriculture in Zimbabwe, the Rukuni Commission of 1994 indicates that only 2.3% of LSCFs in Zimbabwe were female-owned (Rukuni Commission, 1994). This article focuses on the post-2000 land reform programme in which anecdotal government policy indicates that 30% of the land that was to be redistributed was set aside for women resulting in 12% of the redistributed A2 farms[1] – capitalist commercial oriented medium-scale farms – being allocated to women (Utete, 2003; Chiweshe *et. al.*, 2014: 6).

The article adopts a strict definition of commercial agriculture to mean the primary production of crops and livestock mainly for commercial purposes; thus, a commercial farmer is one who sells all they produce (Grant *et. al.*, 2017: 5) and, in this context, on free or leasehold land. The paper adopts this definition to exclude all forms of commercialisation of peasant farming including the sale of surplus or the production of cash crops by the latter on communally-held land. Africanised commercial forms of agriculture remain inadequately theorised generally. This is more acute from a gender perspective. This paper seeks to redress that imbalance in the literature. It focuses on women commercial farmers on State-facilitated leasehold land reform A2 farms in Zimbabwe and seeks to highlight the transformative new work role for indigenous black African women entering the male-dominated farming occupation to claim the "farmer" title, thus challenging the existing gender systems (Haugen and Brandth, 1994: 206). This study represents an important but neglected area of research in Africa, that is, indigenous black African women in commercial agriculture, a research niche that has been eclipsed by the predominant feminisation of agriculture thesis

1 A2 farms are medium commercial production-oriented farms above 20 hectares. The smaller A1 farms are family farms between five and ten hectares of arable land taking on the subsistence model of the communal areas.

and the greater participation of African women in peasant and subsistence forms of agriculture. Based on primary research, the paper seeks to highlight that African women in agriculture represent a more diverse group including women as independent commercial farmers, a new work role for indigenous black African women made possible within the context of land reform. However, I argue that these women are not fully supported in their competing roles as wives and mothers (Bhatasara, 2011: 316; Amenyah and Puplampu, 2013: 26) thus limiting the transformative nature of the social policy of land redistribution.

Methods and Materials

Data for the article comes from sugarcane farmers in Mkwasine Chiredzi district, Zimbabwe, comprising 12 male-headed households and 20 female-headed households making a total sample of 32 randomly selected households. Data was gathered using a mixed methods approach comprising surveys, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations. Quantitative data was statistically analysed with the aid of the SPSS software package. Given the rather small size of the sample, the statistical test used in this analysis is the Fisher test. As argued by quantitative specialists such as Kim (2017: 154) the Fisher test is the most appropriate test for determining statistically significant differences among a small sample. Atlas Ti was used to conduct a thematic analysis of the qualitative data in this study.

Literature Review

A large body of literature exists on gender and land (tenure) reform in Africa, although with a particular focus on African customary lands and more lately on the gender implications of large-scale land acquisitions on the continent (Amanor, 2012; Amenyah and Puplampu, 2013: 16; Tsikata, 2016; Fonjong and Gyapong, 2021). Scholars such as Tsikata (2016) use a feminist agrarian political economy perspective and write from the context of West Africa, where colonialism established smallholder models of production, to highlight the extent to which social relations of production within African traditional smallholder agriculture are rooted in structurally unequal power relations in which men as a group sought to control female labour, thus reproducing gender inequalities and poverty (Amanor-Wilks, 2009: 32; Tsikata and Amanor-Wilks, 2009: 3). These

scholars stress the extent to which the conjugal contract of marriage lies at the heart of household production relations with differentiated gendered livelihoods outcomes (Tsikata and Amanor-Wilks, 2009: 3). Using a livelihoods approach, Tsikata (2016) explores the gender implications of State efforts towards improving land tenure security for smallholder farmers, which are embedded within a gendered division of labour and male control of productive resources. Writing from the same context, but with a focus on large-scale land acquisitions, Fonjong and Gyapong (2021) used an agrarian political economy perspective to highlight the gendered negative implications of large-scale investments in plantation agriculture on household food security in Ghana and Cameroon. The authors highlight the extent to which customary lands are being deeply integrated into capitalist markets thereby exacerbating existing inequalities, while at the same time generating new forms of control to the detriment of women's welfare.

While not comparable with respect to theoretical rigour, many studies on gender and land reform have been conducted following land reform in Zimbabwe. This literature focuses on the laws governing access, ownership and control over land in Zimbabwe and their biases against women (Bhatasara, 2011: 316; Shumba, 2011: 241). Issues regarding equitable access to land between women and men, land titling and registration, as well as joint titling for couples, have tended to receive greater limelight (Matondi, 2012:185; Chiweshe *et al.*, 2014: 6). Highlighting the "indifference of hegemonic masculinities", Bhatasara used Amartya Sen's capability and human rights-based approach to argue that State involvement in land allocation, registration as well as titling negatively affects access to land for women in relation to men, resulting in the creation of new rights through the State for men, not women (Bhatasara, 2011: 316). The author argues that land reform without decisive policymaking does not automatically bring about gender-equitable outcomes, while at the same time highlighting the gender blindness of androcentric state policies which assume that giving land to households automatically benefits women (Bhatasara, 2011: 317). Acknowledging the above shortcomings of the latest land reform programme in Zimbabwe, some gender scholars focus on women's entrepreneurial activities following access to land in Goromonzi and Mwenezi districts (Mazhawidza *et al.*, 2011; Mutopo, 2011). These studies focused more on women on smaller A1 farms and less on the commercially-oriented A2 farms. In the Zimbabwean

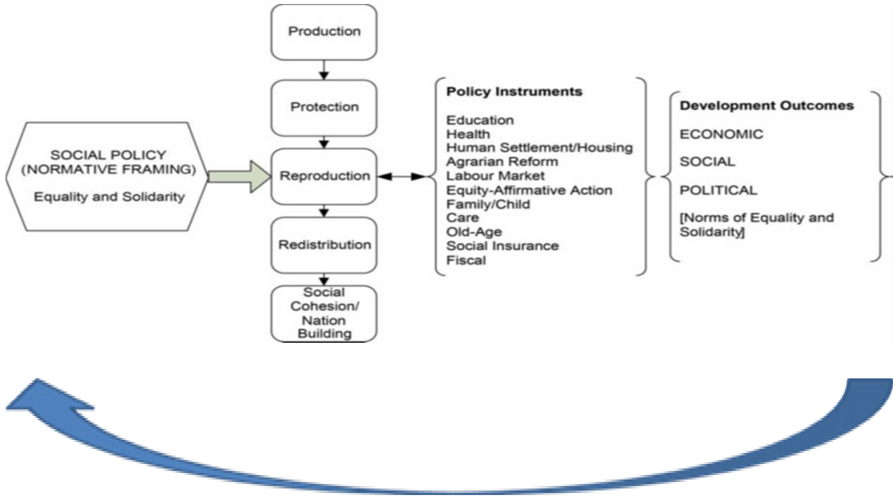
literature on gender and land reform, not much is known about the experiences of women who got A2 farms irrespective of their minute numbers (Tekwa, 2020: 47).

This is in spite of the existence of a growing body of scholarly work focusing on the growth of medium-scale commercial farms across the African continent (Sitko and Jayne, 2014; Sitko and Chamberlin, 2015; Anseeuw *et al.*, 2016; Scoones *et al.*, 2018). These studies highlight the fact that medium-scale commercial farms are quite distinct from the traditional forms of subsistence farming on farm sizes ranging from an average of 5ha to 50ha, thus occupying an intermediate position between the small-scale subsistence farms and the large-scale and more commercial farms (Sitko and Chamberlin, 2015: 870; Anseeuw *et al.*, 2016: 2). While in other parts of the continent, this is an important development endogenously driven by wage earners' investment in customary lands, the Zimbabwean case remains distinct as it was a State-driven social policy intervention with clearly set out policy objectives targeting not customary but white-owned freehold large-scale farms established during the colonial period (Scoones *et al.,* 2018; see also Tom and Banda in this issue). A limitation of this literature is that it is yet to incorporate a gender lens to understand the extent to which indigenous African women are participating in either the wage-driven acquisitions of African customary lands or the State-sponsored acquisitions of freehold large-scale farms. This research seeks to redress that imbalance by documenting the experiences of A2 women commercial sugarcane farmers on leasehold land in the Chiredzi district located in the southeast of Zimbabwe. In doing so, this article seeks to interrogate the extent to which the State's attempt to assist its citizens in the acquisition of land was a truly transformative social policy.

Conceptual Framework: Transformative Social Policy and the Role of The State

Within the context of land reform, therefore, l sought to deploy the Transformative Social Policy (TSP) framework (see Figure 1) to highlight the critical role of the State in facilitating equality of opportunities for women and men in progressive commercial-oriented agriculture.

Figure 1: TSP framework, norms, instruments and functions



Source: Adesina (2011: 463).

The TSP approach has its origins in the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) flagship programme, *Social Policy in Development Context*, which sought to highlight the multi-tasks and developmental role of social policy (Mkandawire, 2004; UNRISD, 2010). Underpinned by norms of equality and solidarity, social policies within the TSP framework, as indicated in Figure 1, are context-dependent and can be tasked with multiple social policy functions/objectives of production, protection, reproduction, redistribution, and social cohesion/nation-building. While production leads to protection and so forth, as presented in the diagram, these social policy functions are not mutually exclusive. For instance, public funding of education through taxes is redistributive but with productive social protection, social cohesion/nation-building social policy outcomes. Similarly, public investment in child and elderly care, while redistributive, has productive as well as progressive social reproduction outcomes on the gender front. Figure 1 presents the diversity of social policy instruments available to policymakers in the attainment of these multiple social policy objectives ranging from education, health, housing, labour market, care

and old age, social insurance, fiscal (including land and agrarian) reform policies for progressive economic, social, and political outcomes. These outcomes feed back to the framing resulting in reformulation and new weighting of the social functions over time. Germane to this study, the TSP highlights the importance of social reproduction to advance equality on the gender front in addition to the elevation of the State as opposed to the market in social provisioning and its facilitation role in creating social transformation.

As illustrated in Figure 1, land and agrarian reform constitute one important social policy instrument within the TSP framework as the redistribution of land remains a major factor in commercial agricultural production and a necessary and prerequisite condition for becoming a "farmer" (Haugen and Brandth, 1994: 211; Brandth, 2002: 183). With traditional men's identity as "farmers" closely linked to male ownership of land, within the TSP framework, access to land for women through State-facilitated land redistribution programmes is critical for the future of African women's work as farmers in a changing agrarian world. I explore the extent to which this has truly been realised in the Zimbabwean case.

Redistribution and the Creation of A Cohort of Women Commercial Farmers in Zimbabwe

One of the outcomes of the post-2000 land reform programme in Zimbabwe relates to the redistribution of land across different sections of Zimbabwean society. Moyo (2009:1) indicates that about 80% of the former LSCFs acquired for redistribution benefited a broad range of beneficiaries, including women, compared to previous land reform programmes. While national statistics indicate that 12% of the redistributed agricultural land within the A2 model (geared towards commercial agriculture) was allocated to women, Table 1 highlights the distributional outcomes of the post-2000 land reform programme within the country's eight rural provinces. The Matabeleland provinces record the highest numbers of female A2 land reform beneficiaries with Matabeleland South topping the list at 21% followed by Matabeleland North at 17% of A2 beneficiaries being women.

Table 1: Percentage of A2 (Medium Size) Commercial Farms Allocated to Women Across Zimbabwe's Eight Rural Provinces

Province	Outcome %			Province	Outcome %		
	Women	Men	Total		Women	Men	Total
Midlands	5.0	95.0	100.0	Matabeleland South	17.0	83.0	100.0
Mashonaland Central	13.0	87.0	100.0	Manicaland	9.0	91.0	100.0
Mashonaland West	11.0	89.0	100.0	Mashonaland East	-	-	- (missing data)
Matabeleland North	21.0	79.0	100.00	Masvingo	8.0	92.0	100.0
National Average					12.0	88.0	100.0

Source: **Government of Zimbabwe, 2003**

While figures are missing for Mashonaland East province, the proportion of women beneficiaries within the Mashonaland provinces ranges around the national average with 11% and 13% of the redistributed commercial-oriented A2 farms, in Mashonaland West and Mashonaland Central province respectively, allocated to women land beneficiaries. Based on the proportion of women A2 beneficiaries, the Midlands and Masvingo provinces reflected the most patriarchal tendencies during the land redistribution programme with the former recording the lowest proportion of women A2 beneficiaries at 5% while Masvingo province, where the district of study, Chiredzi, is located, recorded 8% A2 women land reform beneficiaries (see also Tom and Banda in this issue). Although men benefitted more than women across the eight rural provinces, the proportion of women benefiting within the A2 commercial-oriented agricultural production justifies the exploration of women's experiences as commercial farmers, a new work role for Zimbabwean women farmers.

Pre-2000, sugarcane production in Zimbabwe was spread across three estates, namely Mkwasine, Hippo Valley and Triangle Estates. While only the out-grower section of the Hippo Valley and the Triangle Estates of Chiredzi were acquired for redistribution, Mkwasine Estate, where this research was conducted, was wholly acquired by the government to form the largest block of A2 sugarcane plots subsequently redistributed to 431 indigenous land reform beneficiaries as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of A2 (Medium Size) Commercial Sugarcane Farms at Mkwasine Vhiredzi District, Masvingo Province

Redistribution Section	Allocated Ha	Sugarcane Farms Distributed by Gender at Mkwasine, Chiredzi District				
		No. Male	%	No. Female	%	Total No. of Farms
Former White Settler Growers	1350	146	76.4	45	23.6	191
Former Mkwasine Estate	4880	180	75.0	60	25.0	240
Total	6230	326	75.6	105	24.4	431

Source: **Fieldwork, 2016**

The former Mkwasine Estate comprised a settler out-grower section covering 1,350ha and a main estate covering 4,880ha to make a total of 6,230ha. This total was subdivided into plot sizes averaging 20ha each as shown in Table 2. It is important to note the relatively high percentage of women A2 beneficiaries in Mkwasine; at 24.4%, this stood at twice the national average. This was a remarkable departure from colonial and early post-independence allocation of resettlement land. Close to a quarter of the redistricted sugarcane plots in Mkwasine were allocated to women beneficiaries to form an unprecedentedly large cohort of female commercial sugarcane producers in the south-eastern part of Zimbabwe. This has created a less publicised new work role for black Zimbabwean women distinct from the labour exploitative "women as 'farm hands'" characteristic of the agricultural commercialisation thesis in Africa (Hajjar, 2017: 15).

The role of the State in facilitating such a transformation cannot be over-emphasised. Sugarcane production in the south-eastern corner of Zimbabwe is highly industrialised and commodity-focused. Much of the sugarcane produced in Chiredzi is oriented toward the external market with a small proportion consumed within the domestic market. In the absence of the State, women would have been precluded entry into this high-value global production chain (Haugen and Brandth, 1994: 9; Brandth, 2002: 188; Shisler and Sbicca, 2019: 3).

The expansion of an indigenous out-grower area linked to a commercial large-scale sugar estate, Tongaat Hulett Zimbabwe (THZ)[2], represents one of the redistributive outcomes of the post-2000 land redistribution programme in Zimbabwe (Scoones *et al.*, 2016: 1). According to the company's website, the post-2000 land reform programme in Zimbabwe made a net "transfer of nearly 16,000ha to over 800 resettlement farmers on irrigated 'A2' plots of around 20ha each" (http://www.tongaat.co.za). Access to these lands did not require much beyond an application and was as accessible to widowed women as it was to married women. As one interviewee explained:

> During the land reform programme, I went and applied for land at the Agritex department just as others were doing. I was just trying as women are always looked down upon. After three months, I received a call from Masvingo notifying me that there is an offer letter in my name. I went there and was told that I was offered land at Mkwasine Estate. This is how I got this piece of land. My husband died in 1994, well before the land reform programme. The land is 17,3ha.
>
> (In-depth Interview Female A2 Land Beneficiary 03 September 2016)

Similarly, another opined:

> I am the one who looked for the land even though my husband was still alive. I applied and got an opportunity and got the 20ha land in my name even though my husband is still alive.
>
> (In-depth Interview Female A2 Land Beneficiary 14 September 2016)

Clearly, land allocations in the post-2000 land redistribution programme in Zimbabwe represent a marked departure from colonial and early post-independence land allocation procedures that tended to disadvantage women. While women's access to land in the post-2000 land allocation programme was much easier than in previous times, the true measure of the revolutionary nature of this programme lay in the ability of the women to cultivate these plots and earn income from it, which is the subject of the next section.

2 Tongaat Hulletts is a large South African-owned sugar conglomerate, which controls the largest percentage of shares in the Zimbabwean sugar industry. Its business in Zimbabwe alone is worth several millions of dollars.

Sugarcane Production Trends and Women Farmers' Contribution to Total Production

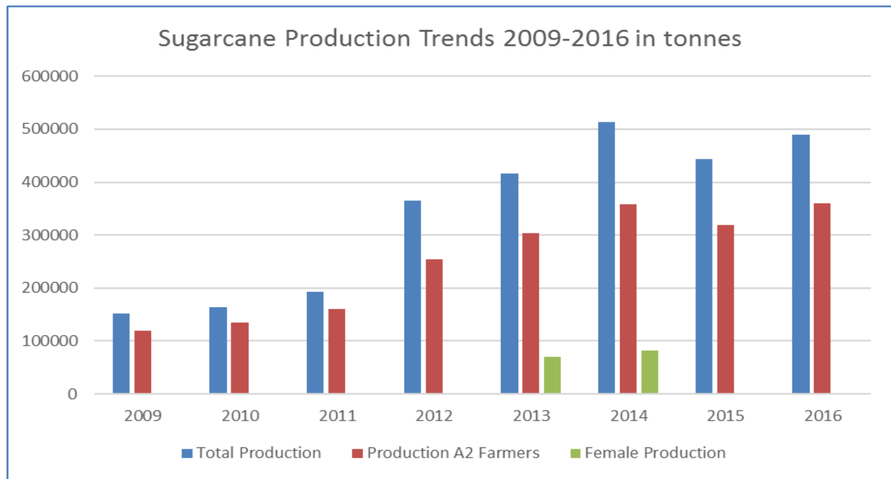
While sugarcane production declined in the aftermath of the land reform programme, as shown in Figure 2, sugarcane production doubled between 2011 and 2014 because of the Successful Rural Sugarcane Farming Community Project (SUSCO) intervention. SUSCO was a partnership between the Zimbabwean government, private funding institutions represented by Bank ABC, Tongaat Hulett, a private firm, the EU, and rural communities. This comprehensive private farmer rehabilitation programme had the goal of supporting private (resettled) farmers to increase their supply of sugarcane to the mills. The programme involved a four-year revolving US$20 million financing scheme. It benefitted some 872 sugarcane farmers from the Hippo Valley, Triangle and Mkwasine Milling Group areas.

In the 2014/15 season, however, there was a slight decline in the levels of production. This is attributed to the drought, which affected the sub-region, and led to the rationing of water for irrigation. Despite the drought, farmers managed to record an overall 10.68% increase in sugarcane production in the 2015/16 season. Women farmers held their own in this production effort. A brief background of these women sugarcane farmers helps to illuminate the transformative potential of social policy approaches in addressing structural gender inequalities. While the political affiliation of these women was not a subject of interest to the researcher, the average age of this cohort of 20 women commercial sugarcane farmers in 2016 was 48,18 years. 70% of them indicated that they originated from communal areas within the Chiredzi district, their province of Masvingo or other communal areas within Zimbabwe. 75% indicated that they were not previously employed. The remaining 25% indicated that they were in formal employment. With regards to education, 30% had primary education as their highest educational attainment with 45% having attained secondary education. The remaining 25% representing the category in formal employment had tertiary education. 25% reported that they were married while the remaining 25% were widowed.

Against this background, in the 2013 and 2014 production seasons, for example, these women sugarcane farmers made a 23.0% and 22.74% contribution

respectively to the total output on the Mkwasine A2 farms. This indicates that female land beneficiaries made an equal contribution to total production as their male counterparts since they constitute 24.4% of the land beneficiaries in Mkwasine.

Figure 2. Sugarcane Production Trends (Mkwasine Area 2009-2016)



Source: **Fieldwork, 2016**

Through the State-facilitated land reform programme, women sugarcane commercial farmers are making an equal productive contribution to the national sugarcane output as their male counterparts. In Chiredzi, sugarcane production constitutes a new work role for Zimbabwean women in the south-eastern part of the country. The "plugging" onto globally integrated high-value commodity chains of the new out-growers has had robust work and employment outcomes not mentioned in much of the analyses of the latest land reform programme in Zimbabwe. With "excellent topography, climate and established water storage and conveyance infrastructures for irrigation," Scoones *et al.* (2016:2) argued that the resettled sugarcane farmers now account for 25% of the sugar production supplied to Triangle and Hippo Valley mills. The business remains optimistic as "sugar production in Zimbabwe in the 2012/2013 financial year increased by 28% to 475,000 tons, as sugarcane deliveries from private and third-party farmers grew substantially." (http://www.tongaat.co.za).

Gender, Farm Sizes and Incomes in Zimbabwe

Research in other parts of the world, such as the US, has found that women-run farms are relatively smaller in size compared to those run by their male counterparts (USDA 2012 cited in Shisler and Sbicca, 2019: 2). This, however, is not the case with farm sizes for male and female farmers in post-2000 in Zimbabwe. While the average farm size for the 32 households surveyed in Mkwasine was 21.32ha (see Table 3), the chi-square p-value testing the relationship between gender and farm size produced a null hypothesis indicating gender as an unimportant factor in the distribution of farm sizes. In female-headed households, 45% of the land reform beneficiaries have sugarcane plot sizes averaging between 16ha and 20ha. The percentage for male-headed households is pegged at 41.6%. Similarly, there are almost twice as many women with farm sizes between 21ha and 25ha as there are men.

Table 3: Gender and Farm Sizes in Mkwasine, Chiredzi

	Farm Size Distribution by Gender					
	Male		**Female**		**Total**	
Farm Sizes (Ha)	No	%	No	%	No	%
11-15 Ha	2	16.7	1	5.0	3	9.4
16-20 Ha	5	41.6	9	45.0	14	43.8
21-25 Ha	2	16.7	6	30.0	8	25.0
Above 25 Ha	3	25.0	4	20.0	7	21.9
Total	12	100	20	100	32	100
Mean Land Size Ha						21.32
Chi-Square P-Value						1.727

Source: **Fieldwork, 2016**

The farm size distribution presented in Table 3 clearly defies the gender disparities in farm sizes prevalent in the existing literature. As with farm sizes, there are no significant gender differences in farm incomes of male and female farmers. Fisher's Exact Test of Significance testing the relationship between the gender of household heads and farm incomes indicated a null hypothesis defying gender disparity in farm incomes. While the average per capita income was pegged at US$4 462.03, per capita household income for female-headed households was found to be higher at US$4 859.56 relative to US$4 038.00 for male-headed households (see Table 4).

Table 4: Gender and Farm Incomes in Mkwasine, Chiredzi

Per Capita Household Income US$	Household per Capita Mean		Household per Capita Max.		Household per Capita Min.	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Household per Capita Mean	4,038.00	4,859.56	11,600.00	11,000.00	1538.00	1714.00
Household per Capita Income by Area						
Study Site Per Capita Mean	4,462.03					
Fisher's Exact Test of Significance	.269					

Source: **Fieldwork, 2016**

If income generation is a major source of male status and identity (Brandth, 2002: 184;), so it is for Zimbabwean women farmers engaged in commercial agricultural production. Their access to land, participation in industrial forms of agricultural production, and enhanced household incomes represent a source of status and identity for women commercial sugarcane farmers in Zimbabwe. The voices of the women interviewed are indicative of the pride in their new-found identity:

> Now, as I move around, people will be saying "*Mai avo murimi.*" ("That woman is a sugarcane farmer.") I feel equal to men just because we all have land. When speaking, we speak the same language on farming and on equal footing. Even on household welfare, if we all depend on the land for welfare, I feel equal or even surpassing some men. Women used to wait outside the bank to be given some money by their husbands. Now we are all entering banking halls asking whether revenues are reflecting on bank statements with all status and confidence.
>
> (In-depth Interview Female A2 Sugarcane Farmer 14 September 2016).
>
> Access to land has transformed my social status. I cannot compare myself with my working colleagues here without any land. There is a difference. I can afford to send my child to an expensive university or boarding school or out of the country because I have access to land. My work colleagues cannot afford even to send one child to boarding school, yet I can afford to have three children in boarding school at a given time, something I could not have afforded based on my salary as a nurse.
>
> (In-depth Interview Female A2 Sugarcane Farmer 15 September 2016).

Farm Work as a Business

Given how much money the women farmers make as sugarcane farmers, it is not surprising that they treat their farm work as a conscious occupational choice and seek to enhance their knowledge in the field. These women seek farmer support services from extension workers in equal numbers as their male counterparts do (see Table 5).

Table 5: Women Commercial Sugarcane Farmers and Access to Specialised Crop Training and Support Services

Farmer Support Services		**Mkwasine A2 Farms**					
	Male		Female		Total		
	No	%	No	%	No	%	
Field Crop Market	Yes	12	100	20	100	32	100.0
	No	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Extension Services	Public	12	100	20	100	32	100.0
	Private	12	100	20	100	32	100.0
Inputs on Credit	Yes	7	58.3	14	70.0	21	65.6
	No	5	41.7	6	30.0	11	34.4
Bank Loans	Yes	8	66.7	9	45.0	17	53.1
	No	4	33.3	11	55.0	15	46.9

Source: **Fieldwork, 2016**

Sugarcane farmers have access to both publicly- and privately-provided extension and technical agricultural services. The key informant interview with the estate field extension officer highlighted the highly significant work the estate is doing to provide training and extension services critical to building the capacity of resettled sugarcane farmers, including women commercial farmers.

> The estate is assisting farmers with extension advice from land preparation to harvesting. We conduct field training, workshops and seminars educating farmers on the production of cane. Recently, since it's harvesting time, we trained the farmers on putting sugarcane on dry-off in preparation for harvesting, the importance of drying-off cane, when to do dry-off and how long depending on soil types; proper cane cutting, the level of cutting; arranging cane in a bundle for easy haulage and the standard size of a cane bundle. A sugarcane farmer must know all these. So, we schedule our training according to these stages. After this, we get into training on fertiliser application and so on.
>
> (Key Informant Interview, Field Extension Officer, 24 September 2016).

In addition, due to their relatively poor economic background and status as formerly unemployed individuals, these women farmers are more likely to seek commercial agricultural support services, including inputs on credit, than their male counterparts, although access to bank loans is lower for women farmers. This is not surprising, given the large body of work that shows gendered access to formal credit facilities (Agarwal, 1994, 2003).

In the Mkwasine sugarcane areas of Chiredzi, women commercial farmers are also affirming their new work roles as farmers in their own right by joining and taking up leadership roles in the Farmers' Unions in the sugarcane industry. One interviewee shared with us as follows:

> I am a member of the Commercial Sugarcane Farmers Association of Zimbabwe (CSFAZ). There are three women in the executive and eight men. The treasurer is a female, and the other two are committee members.
>
> (In-depth Interview Female A2 Sugarcane Farmer 03 September 2016).
>
> Another opined:
>
> I am an executive member of the Mkwasine Sugarcane Farmers Association (MSFA). I am a committee member in the executive committee comprising four males and two females.
>
> (Key Informant Interview Female A2 Sugarcane Farmer 28 September 2016).

Farm Decision-Making and Transformation from Farm Labourers to Employers

Not only are female land beneficiaries co-identified as farmers together with male land beneficiaries, but also as employers in their own right, hiring both casual labour during peak labour demand periods such as harvesting, and a lean permanent labour force during off-peak seasons. As shown in Table 6, permanently hired workers on A2 sugarcane farms were pegged at 3.69 workers. This is in addition to work opportunities created for household members, creating cumulative total employment or work opportunities at 6.27 workers. As indicated in Table 6, female sugarcane farmers are not only employing female but also male workers, thus transforming gendered labour relations on sugarcane farms. An

average of 3.0 work opportunities were created for male workers relative to female workers pegged at 0.72. This contrasts with the narrative that females represent the largest percentages of farm labourers (Chambati, 2017: 84). Although the women workers are fewer, they sometimes held high positions in the field as we found out through the in-depth interviews:

> I have five permanent employees, four of whom are male and a woman supervisor. She is the supervisor, and male workers take orders from her... Wherever she makes a mistake I will see to it.
>
> (In-depth Interview Widowed A2 Female Land Beneficiary 14 September 2016)

Table 6: Sugarcane Farm Employment in Mkwasine Chiredzi

	Average Number of Hired Workers	**Number of Male Workers**	**Number of Female Workers**	**Average Number of Household Members Working on the Farm**	**Total Farm Labour Force**
Mkwasine Estate	3.69	3.0	0.72	2.58	6.27

Source: **Fieldwork, 2016**

Apart from employing resident and itinerant male workers, this position of women commercial sugarcane farmers contrasts significantly with that of peasant women (Cheater, 1981: 367). As presented in Table 7, these women commercial farmers are making important production decisions as autonomous or semi-autonomous controllers of production, directly opposing the traditional farmer's wife position (Cheater, 1981: 355). These include decisions on which crops would be planted where and in what quantities; recruitment of hired labour as necessary (on a permanent or temporary basis); rather than being allotted portions of farmland for cultivation by others (Cheater, 1981: 365). As shown in Table 7 below, almost half (45%) of the female commercial farmers are responsible for critical production decisions on their farms. This compares

favourably with decision-making of their counterpart male commercial sugarcane farmers, where 53.8% of the male owners are responsible for production decisions on their farms.

Table 7: Women Commercial Sugarcane Farmers and Farm Decision-Making

Farm Decision Maker	Male Owner			Female Owner		Wife/Hus-band		Husband & Wife		Son		Manager/ Supervi-sor		Chi-square p-value
	No		%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	
Mk-wasine A2 Farmers	Male	7	58.3	0	0.0	1	8.3	2	16.6	1	8.3	4	33.3	.046
	Female	0	0.0	9	45.0	1	5.0	0	0.0	2	10.0	5	25.0	

Source: **Fieldwork, 2016**

While close to a quarter of female sugarcane farmers have delegated farm decision-making to their managers and supervisors, they remain accountable for all farm operations as owners. With a chi-square p-value of 0.46, no association was found between gender and decision-making, suggesting a transformation of production relation within Mkwasine sugarcane farming areas. With women responsible for key production decisions, this indicates a new work role for African women commercial farmers that contrasts markedly with that portrayed in the literature (Chiweshe, 2015).

Gender, Technology and Female Tractor Ownership in Mkwasine

The literature on women in Western agriculture revealed tools and machinery, particularly the tractor, as gendered objects (Brandth, 1995: 125). Female ownership of the tractor as presented in Table 8 will transform the symbolic nature of the tractor as a sign of masculine identity in modern Zimbabwean agriculture (Brandth, 1995: 125)

Table 8: Women and Tractor Ownership

		Tractor Ownership by Gender of Plot Holder			
	Yes		No		
	Number	%	Number	%	
Mkwasine A2 Farmers	Male	4	33.3	8	66.7
	Female	9	45.0	11	55.0
	Total	**13**	**40.6**	**19**	**59.4**

Source: **Fieldwork, 2016**

Table 8 indicates female commercial sugarcane farmers investing in productive assets, particularly tractors. In the Mkwasine sugarcane farming areas, female tractor ownership stood at 45% for female plot holders relative to 33% for male plot holders. This suggests that female land beneficiaries are investing more in productive assets compared to their male counterparts, partly explained by the relatively higher incomes from their agricultural production activities. These statistics corroborate findings from a household survey by the Sam Moyo Institute of Agrarian Studies indicating that in the A2 category, more women farmers own tractors at 45.8% relative to 41.5% for males (SMAIAS, 2014). If the tractor is a symbol of male identity in commercial agriculture, these statistics show that women commercial farmers are claiming this symbol of identity in commercial agriculture just as their male counterparts.

Women as Farmers, Mothers and Spouses

While women commercial farmers in Zimbabwe have become more like men in many aspects of commercial farming, domestic work remains a key responsibility for women showing no sign of decline (Brandth, 2002: 183). Table 9 illustrates the interplay between the productive and reproductive aspects of work on sugarcane farms in Mkwasine, Chiredzi. As presented in Table 9.35% of women commercial farmers reported spending four hours or more daily on housework. In other words, a third of the women reported a working day greater than 12 hours, combining time spent on productive work on the farm and social reproductive work in the household.

Table 9: The Interplay Between Productive and Reproductive Work for Women Sugarcane Commercial Farmers in Chiredzi

Social Reproduction Variable **No**		**Female Commercial Sugarcane Farmers**	
		% of total	
Time Spent on housework	< 3 Hrs	13	65.0
	4-6 Hrs	3	15.0
	> 6 Hrs	4	20.0
% Women reporting a working day (productive and reproductive work)	>12 hr Day	7	35.0
Feel time poverty	Yes	9	45.0
	No	8	40.0
	Undecided	3	15.0
Employ housemaid	Yes	8	40.0
	No	12	60.0

***Source:* Fieldwork, 2016**

Over 40% of participating women sugarcane farmers felt time-poor and so could not engage in other activities such as leisure and personal care. Although interviewing men would have shed light on the matter of whether women sugarcane farmers felt more time-poor than men, it is clear nonetheless that a sizeable proportion of women (two-fifths) felt time-poor. The high incomes from the sugar enterprises enabled 40% of female commercial sugarcane producers to engage the services of paid domestic workers. However, from a feminist perspective, this is less progressive and transformative. It represents a classic case of "middle peasant" women off-loading their care burden on "other" lower-class women. That notwithstanding, these women sang the praises of paid domestic workers in the following words:

> I had employed a maid to assist me with household chores. I bought a washing machine such that all the laundry is done while one is watching television. When it is cloudy, the machine would dry the clothes and the maid irons and packs them in the wardrobes. I feel my welfare has improved very well.
>
> (In-depth Interview Female A2 Land Beneficiary 16 September 2016)

> In the morning, I first go to the field to arrange all the work, which needs to be done. At least by 7 o'clock, l will be back at home to do my household tasks. I am balancing both productive and household work. Even still, I find time to rest. Besides I have employed a maid to assist me with household work.
>
> (In-depth Interview Female A2 Land Beneficiary 17 September 2016)
>
> I have employed a maid to assist with household work. As such l always have time to rest.
>
> (In-depth Interview Female A2 Land Beneficiary 20 September 2016)

Although the option of engaging domestic paid helps represents one strategy for coping with the overburden of domestic work, it is a luxury for most women in low-income countries, whose household daily welfare depends on them to carry out these activities (Ferrant *et. al.*, 2014: 5). These experiences of women sugarcane commercial farmers in Mkwasine, Chiredzi confirm the overburdening triple roles of being a farmer, a housewife, and a mother at the same time (Haugen and Brandth, 1994: 221). This aspect remains a contradictory phenomenon for women keen to enter the male-dominated commercial agricultural occupation.

Conclusion

Commercial agriculture, once a male-dominated occupation, holds potential as an important source of work for women. In the Zimbabwean context, the State-led land redistribution programme assisted a good number of women to enter into commercial sugarcane production, thus challenging the existing gender system in commercial agriculture. I argue that the observed gender inequalities in female and male participation in commercial farming are not due to any innate differences between the ability of men and women in performing these tasks but have their roots in structurally unequal power relations. Thus, attempts on the part of the State to redress this structural imbalance paid off, lending credence to the idea that land redistribution could be a transformative social policy that would fundamentally redefine gender relations in agrarian communities in Zimbabwe. On the face of it, this seemed to be true. With the State redistribution effort, commercial sugar production had become an important source of work for

African women, with 24.4% of sugarcane plots in Mkwasine directly benefiting women in their own right by enabling them to obtain farms equal in size to that of men. As a result, women commercial sugarcane farmers were contributing proportionally to total sugarcane production in Mkwasine. Access to farm sizes equal to that of men resulted in women obtaining farm incomes equal to and even surpassing that of their male counterparts, defying the common gender assumption of women being lower income earners than men. New women entrants into commercial farming are also engaged in specialised crop production workshops and many of them have become unionised, in some cases even taking on leadership roles, once the preserve of men. In addition, women commercial sugarcane farmers have become employers in their own right, taking autonomous critical production decisions on their farms. With increased tractor ownership, women commercial sugarcane farmers are also breaking gender barriers to identify themselves as "farmers" equal in status to men and obtaining prestige and status quite different from the farmer's wife position.

However, the extent to which the land redistribution exercise was transformative is greatly limited by its inability to address the imbalances in the social reproduction burdens that women carry. The empirical evidence indicates "being a farmer, a housewife and a mother is just too much work for women" (Haugen and Brandth, 1994: 221). The latter remains a contradictory outcome for women venturing into commercial agricultural work.

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Workplace Experiences of Infrastructure Sector Participants in South Africa's Expanded Public Works Programme

Ramona Baijnath

Abstract

The dominant narrative of Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) beneficiaries in South Africa has been largely documented through government communication channels under the titles of *Beneficiary Stories* and *EPWP Changing Lives Testimonials*. These stories indicate that Public Works Programme (PWP) beneficiaries are able to save or invest towards the realisation of short-term goals including education and the purchase of household equipment. The South African government narrative is enormously triumphant in creating a powerful single story of the EPWP beneficiary, which focuses on the positive impact(s) of this temporary income transfer. However, thus far, scant research has been conducted on the work experiences of women participating in these projects. The focal point of this research was to understand the work experiences of women beneficiaries participating in the Zuvuseni Reloaded and National Youth Services EPWP projects. This article hones in on the experiences of nine black South African women participants utilising the life history narrative technique coupled with an African feminist lens. The article finds that although participants value the financial reprieve provided by the EPWP stipend, as documented in government narratives, and are proud of their newly acquired skill set, they face institutionalised prejudice within the workplace.

Keywords: income transfers, South Africa, institutionalised prejudice, life history

Introduction

Public Works Programmes (PWPs), also known as Cash for Work (CfW), Employment Guarantee Programmes (EPGs), Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs), or Employment Intensive Investment Programmes (EIIPs), have been harnessed and implemented in varying degrees around the globe. In the main, PWPs target vulnerable populations and provide employment by creating labour-intensive work related to the creation of infrastructure assets in exchange for a cash or in-kind transfer. McCord (2009) affirms that the allure of PWPs to governments, policymakers, and donors is its appeal as a win-win policy option; through this provision of social protection, the beneficiary can gain a measure of fiscal relief obtained through employment whilst simultaneously creating tangible assets. The wages offered by PWPs are set at or below the minimum wage. According to Ravallion (1990), the wage is set below the market rate to discourage programme uptake from those who already have work and to attract the poor. Mackintosh and Blomquist (2003) contend that PWP wage must be set with the intention to distribute social protection to a maximum number of beneficiaries but caution that although lower wages enhance the probability of self-targeting, it also has the outcome of lowering the benefit to the individual beneficiary.

A large number of publications focusing on PWPs have been commissioned on behalf of governments and international donor organisations. Publications include the World Bank's (2013) *Public Works as a Safety Net: Design, Evidence and Implementation*, which focused on the design, evidence, and implementation of PWPs. The International Labour Organization's *Public Works Programmes: A strategy for poverty alleviation: The Gender Dimension* written by Dejardin (1996), investigated women's access to employment in PWPs and how they benefitted from the assets generated. The South African Cities Network's *The State of Expanded Public Works in South African Cities* (2014), provided an evaluation of the programme based on the person days of employment created, job opportunities, project wage, training days, project budget, actual expenditure, and the demographic characteristics of workers. The focus in these documents is largely on the evaluation or review of PWP performance indicators such as the number of work opportunities created, training days, gender, age, targeted groups, the value of the assets generated, and the number of days beneficiaries worked.

The South African government's *EPWP Changing Lives Testimonials* focuses on the programme's positive impact but fails to meaningfully engage with the holistic experience of beneficiaries. A typical extract from the *EPWP Changing Lives Testimonials* published by the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS), *Vuk'uzenzele* publication (2012: ¶2-5) reads as follows:

> Josephine Sondlana is a widowed mother of four. She matriculated in 1995, in the small village of Elim, near Giyani outside Polokwane. Little did she know that she would be unemployed for most of her life. One of her four children is currently studying at the Tshwane North College in Pretoria. This, she says, couldn't have happened if it wasn't for an EPWP project she joined in 2009. "The Tivoneleni Bakery Project changed a lot of things in my life." Sondlana says while other beneficiaries were buying new television sets and fridges, she was saving up for her daughter's education. "I saved almost all my stipend money for her registration fees."

The narrative above indicates that PWP workers are able to save or invest towards the realisation of predetermined goals i.e., education and household equipment over this short-term work opportunity. There is no mention of Sondlana's workplace experience nor any indication of how she would pay for her daughter's fees post-registration or upon exiting the programme. The government testimonial falls silent here.

Rarely does the body of knowledge meaningfully engage the beneficiaries whom PWPs aim to assist. This view is supported by McCord, who problematised "the lack of voice of PWP beneficiaries, for whose benefit PWPs have been repeatedly selected" (2012: XVIII). Devereux and Solomon (2006: 37) highlighted "an exhaustive literature search revealed a surprising dearth of detailed and credible evidence on the impacts of employment creation across the world."

When the gendered implications of PWPs are researched, these also remain within the rigid parameters of programmatic inquiry. Dejardin (1996: 19) asks: "Are 'special' efforts necessary to get women on board in infrastructure programmes and to make sure that they do not fall through the cracks?" I believe that these enterprises should not be considered "special" but rather normalised interventions to include a largely marginalised and vulnerable population.

Reporting on gendered implications is indeed a step in the right direction, but most knowledge created within this space fails to consider in sufficient detail the impact of PWP labour on the body and the life history of beneficiaries. Even less is known about the impact that participation in these programmes has had on the lives of beneficiaries. The existing body of knowledge makes confident assertions about the complexities of lived realities without being audacious enough to purposely consult them. In the main, the body of knowledge about PWPs is useful in providing calculations and macro-economic generalisations but seldom moves beyond these parameters to wilfully develop an unabbreviated and unabridged body of knowledge.

This article seeks to redress this gap in the literature on PWPs. It explores the experiences of women participants within their work environment to provide a more nuanced accounting of the impact of PWPs on beneficiaries, and specifically documents a range of workplace experiences moving beyond the well-documented narrative focused on the benefits of income transfer to the hitherto undocumented experiences of workplace discrimination, prejudice, and institutional hierarchy. The article draws on the narratives of nine black South African women participants in the EPWP. The upcoming Context provides a history of PWPs in South Africa, which is followed by a discussion of the research site and a methodology section, and then the findings.

Context

Poverty in South Africa is gendered. She takes the guise of a poorly educated, young, black African woman. According to Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) (2021: 2 & 14), the country has a population of 60.4 million, and unemployment is at 7.8 million. Youth unemployment represents a staggering 46.3% and is on the rise. Young women between the ages of 15 and 24 years are significantly more prone to unemployment, with 48.1% of women, as opposed to 40.5% of males, comprising the total unemployed youth rate. Approximately 31% of South Africans are social grant recipients with 45.5% of households receiving a social grant. The 2003 Growth and Development Summit (GDS) activated the EPWP into the South African labour landscape. The EPWP encompassed four sectors: infrastructure, environment and culture, social, and non-State. This

nationwide PWP intended to improve social infrastructure through the provision of short-term socially useful work opportunities.

The EPWP provides a temporary income transfer to unemployed able-bodied women, youth, and the broader unemployed population aged between 19 and 59 years. These workers are placed in four sectors: infrastructure, environment and culture, social, and non-State. The EPWP is coordinated at the level of macro government by the national Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI). At a meso level, the programme is devolved to each of South Africa's nine provinces under the coordination of the provincial department mandated to perform the public works functions. Local government implements the EPWP at a micro level. According to the DPWI (2019: 22), the intent of this nationwide PWP is: "To provide WOs (work opportunities) and income support to poor and unemployed people through the labour-intensive delivery of public and community assets and services, thereby contributing to development." The country's National Development Plan (NDP), a key policy instrument, intends to create 24 million jobs by 2030. This entails the massification of the EPWP to create work opportunities for the unemployed. According to the NDP, the EPWP is expected to include larger numbers of low-skilled, unemployed adults as a form of unemployment relief (2012: 61 & 382). The EPWP is enshrined in the NDP and is largely concerned with decreasing unemployment and increasing job creation.

The EPWP offering is part of the South African government's arsenal to push back chronic unemployment via the creation of decent work through sustainable job creation. According to Henderson (2018), the EPWP is a flagship PWP which has created almost 10 million work opportunities since its inception. The programme is intent on alleviating poverty and complements other government offerings in response to structural unemployment. The EPWP leverages government budgets and offers project-based training for beneficiaries. It has created and maintained social assets and provides a service offering inclusive of health care and early childhood development. The programme disbursed R93 billion on income transfers with 219,947 work opportunities created in the infrastructure sector alone during the 2020/21 cycle (South African Government, 2021). The infrastructure sector, which is the largest sector in the EPWP, provides social infrastructure through construction and maintenance projects throughout

the country in exchange for a minimum wage to beneficiaries. The participants in this study were all black South African women who took part in the infrastructure sector of the EPWP in Gauteng province.

Research Site

This paper is concerned with the infrastructure sector of the EPWP at the level of provincial government. The EPWP in Gauteng province is coordinated by the Gauteng Department of Infrastructure Development (DID) which implements two EPWP offerings, the Zivuseni Reloaded, and the National Youth Service (NYS) projects. The research site is located at a Facility Maintenance Hub on the premises of a hospital. This Facility Maintenance Hub services a regional hospital located in the Western part of Gauteng province on the outskirts of Kagiso in the West Rand region in South Africa.

This government or public hospital which is run by the Gauteng Department of Health (GDH) is the sole regional hospital and the largest health facility in the West Rand region. The Facility Maintenance Hub is a DID institution. The purpose of this facility is to implement day-to-day maintenance services, conduct routine and preventative maintenance services, and conduct emergency maintenance services for the hospital. At the Facility Maintenance Hub, EPWP beneficiaries are identified by bright orange uniforms and permanent employees are identified by navy blue uniforms. EPWP beneficiaries earned a stipend of R120 per day which is on average R3 500 per month. Permanent employees earn at least R10 000 monthly and qualify for pension, leave, and medical benefits. EPWP employment is positioned as a short-term employment intervention by government: participants sign employment contracts for 12 months; however, the bulk of participants in the project have had over six contract renewals spanning six years.

The DID (2014: 2-3) views the NYS as a stepping stone to the enhancement of the youth's activity in economic and personal development. The NYS selection criteria are different from the Zivuseni Reloaded project in two areas: participants must fall between the ages of 18 and 35 years old and have a minimum education of grade ten or equivalent. Five of the six female NYS beneficiaries ranging between the ages of 27 and 34 volunteered to participate in this study.

The Zivuseni Reloaded project was designed to provide an income transfer to poor households in exchange for a work requirement. The criteria for beneficiaries were not limited by age or qualifications. No beneficiaries were subjected to any form of testing, and recruitment in the main was conducted via the municipal government. This paper incorporates four Zivuseni Reloaded participants from a possible 17 women beneficiaries. The ages of participants ranged between 28 and 39.

Methodology

This paper utilised the life history method of recounting the narrative. As Watson and Watson-Franke (1985: 2) put it, "Life history is any retrospective account by the individual of his/her life in whole or in part, in written or oral form, that has been elicited or prompted by another person." Aside from the obvious allure of the potential of the life history narrative method, a strong deciding factor was the potential illumination of the EPWP beneficiaries, which I believe is largely undocumented save for largely disembodied quantitative studies and snippets of beneficiary experiences documented by the government. In this way, this paper works to actively fill silences in history and bring a range of previously unheard, silenced, or unacknowledged voices to this discussion. This work positions women as protagonists in their own lives. They strategise around their challenges and leverage their various resources, including the EPWP, to effect change and gain relief. Their agency, no matter how constrained it may be, is enacted. The individual stories contained in this paper demonstrate the many ways in which change, agency, and life are enacted. These stories challenge what is legitimate knowledge and evidence.

For this article, I utilised both structured and semi-structured interviews as a method of data collection. The data collected allowed me to gain insight into the demographic, ethnographic, and specific family structure of each participant before the administration of a more flexible semi-structured course of inquiry. All nine participants spoke and understood English. The interviews were held in a private location at the hospital workshop; they were conducted in English, which all nine participants spoke and understood. The interviews lasted at least three hours and each participant was interviewed over three sessions, totalling

a minimum of nine hours per participant. The fieldwork for this study occurred between 2nd December 2019 and 5th March 2020. All participants signed letters of informed consent before data collection at each engagement.

I made use of pseudonyms to protect participants' identities. I asked each participant to invent their own pseudonym, stressing that it should not be an easily identifiable second name or the name of other study participants. The rationale for self-selected pseudonyms was to create a platform for participants to enact their identities and locate themselves easily within the discourse. Of the nine participants only one participant, Lethabo Khumalo, opted to choose both a first name and surname as a pseudonym. I went further to try to protect the identities of those mentioned in this paper. I have applied de-identification, and the ages of participants have been changed to further protect their identities. Where geographic locations have been used, I have noted the general vicinity rather than provide exact locations. When references are made to the family/friends or persons of interest mentioned by participants, names and specific job titles are not recorded. Finally, it must be noted that all participants included in this study are no longer part of the EPWP due to the termination of their contracts in 2021. Both the NYS and Zivuseni Reloaded cohorts form part of this research. Below, all nine study participants are listed in the order in which they volunteered to participate in this study.

Lucky, a 32-year-old BaTswana woman, is an NYS project participant receiving work experience as an electrical assistant. Hailing from North West province, she moved to Gauteng after completing her matric. Describing herself as a "mother of two, but only one is living," her surviving son resides with her. She is in a committed relationship with the father of her second child. The most important aspects of her identity include her Batswana ethnicity; this keeps her rooted in her culture – a culture that she does not risk offending. Lucky was abandoned by the father of her firstborn because their ethnicity differed. Her birth home is in North West province; this is the place she feels safe and content.

Tsakani is a 34-year-old VaTsonga woman from Limpopo province. She obtained work with the NYS project and is training as a plumbing assistant. She has a 13-year-old son who lives with her parents in Limpopo to whom she remits R300 monthly. This single woman resides in the vicinity of Doornkop, in a home owned by her father. Tsakani's key intersecting identity markers include

ORDER	PSEUDONYM	PROGRAMME	VOCATION	AGE	ETHNICITY	PROVINCE OF BIRTH	STATUS POST CONTRACT
1	Lucky	NYS	Electrical Assistant	32	BaTswana	North West	Employed
2	Tsakani	NYS	Plumber Assistant	34	VaTsonga	Limpopo	Employed
3	Precious	NYS	Painter Assistant	29	BaTswana	Gauteng	Left project prior to contract end.
4	Makhadzi	NYS	Plumber Assistant	34	VhaVenda	Limpopo	Employed
5	Mpho	NYS	Administrative Assistant	27	VhaVenda	Limpopo	Employed
6	Lethabo Khumalo	Zivuseni Reloaded	Administrative Assistant	38	BaPedi	Limpopo	Unemployed
7	Snow White	Zivuseni Reloaded	Administrative Assistant	28	BaTswana	Gauteng	Unemployed
8	Sylvia	Zivuseni Reloaded	Electrical Assistant	39	BaPedi	Limpopo	Unemployed
9	Wadibona	Zivuseni Reloaded	Electrical Assistant	28	BaTswana	North West	Unemployed

her education, having obtained a matric with a bachelor's pass (also known as an Exemption), and certificates in hospitality and fashion design. She has made many personal sacrifices to attain these qualifications. Her vocation as a plumbing assistant is a badge of honour and is significant of her level of skill. She regards working for the government as a privilege. Her efforts to attain a permanent job are linked to her role as a mother.

Precious is a 29-year-old mother of two who was gaining work experience as an assistant painter in the NYS project. Born in Gauteng province, she lives in her natal home in the vicinity of Dobsonville with her two children, parents, and two younger siblings. Both her parents are employed. Precious's identity markers are motherhood, gender, and ethnicity. Her racial identification as black African, and education – having a matric diploma and studying towards a diploma in credit management – are also defining markers of her identity. She is unconcerned with her marital status and geographic location.

Makhadzi is a 34-year-old VhaVenda woman hailing from Limpopo. She is an NYS participant gaining experience as a plumbing assistant. Makhadzi is married with two young children and resides in Dobsonville with her husband who is in the public service. They have their own home and benefits such as medical insurance and their children were born at private hospitals. Her educational history includes completing her matric with a diploma pass and certificates in pre-nursing and paramedics. She has a driving license. Makhadzi's definitive identity markers include gender, motherhood, vocation, education, and marital status.

Mpho is a 27-year-old VhaVenda woman born in Limpopo but relocated to Gauteng in search of work. Mpho is the youngest participant in this study. She is part of the NYS project and is interning as an administrative assistant. She has no children and is in a long-term relationship. Mpho's educational history includes matric with a Higher Certificate. She has a National Qualification Framework (NQF)[1], level five in business management, and was registered for an NQF six programme of study. Her key identity markers are religion – she identifies as a Christian belonging to End Time Message Church; education – she was enrolled for N6; vocation – she is as an administrative assistant; gender – she identifies as female, and her ethnicity as VhaVenda. She views her VhaVenda ethnicity as more important than her racial identity as a black African. Mpho is unconcerned with politics.

Lethabo Khumalo is a 38-year-old BaPedi mother of four from Limpopo. Lethabo Khumalo was the longest-serving EPWP participant in this study with six years in the programme. Lethabo Khumalo's dominant identity marker is

1 South African body to register learner achievement to enable the national recognition of acquired skills and knowledge.

womanhood. This she believes is indicative of both her power and her weakness. Her life strategy has been to utilise a sugar daddy or *makhwapheni* as a means of economic relief. Womanhood is also indicative of her vulnerabilities most associated with her economic problems. She views her BaPedi ethnicity as more significant than her black African identity.

Snow White is a 28-year-old Zivuseni Reloaded urban participant from Gauteng. She is BaTswana and resides in Kagiso. Snow White was raised by her single mother and did not know the identity of her father. Snow White was orphaned at the age of 17. She is gaining work experience as an administrative assistant. Snow White's overwhelming identity marker is motherhood. Her identity as a heterosexual female is important to her in the pursuit of a lasting romantic relationship signified by marriage. She is distinguished by her status as employed. Snow White's gender is important to her struggles and her position as a caregiver to her younger siblings and her position as a single parent. Her identity as a youth is an important marker – it shows that she is youthful and that she still has time to reach her goals.

Sylvia is a 39-year-old Zivuseni Reloaded participant, from Limpopo. Sylvia initially joined the DID under a graduate internship programme for 24 months and was subsequently afforded the opportunity, albeit with a lesser stipend, to join the Zivuseni Reloaded project. Sylvia resides in a two-bedroom rental home in the vicinity of Krugersdorp with her husband. Sylvia is the mother of three children, and this is her defining identity marker. She has made many educational and career sacrifices to attain what she believes is the coveted title of mother. Sylvia believes that her age shows her maturity and commands respect. This, coupled with her wife or married position, gives her respectability.

Wadibona is a 28-year-old Zivuseni Reloaded project participant as an electrical assistant. She was born in North West province and is the mother of two. Wadibona's dominant identity marker is that of motherhood. Whilst she is determined to be a more successful parent than her own, she frequently falls into learned behaviour patterns, which she then desperately tries to overcome. She is a woman – this is particularly important for Wadibona. She believes that if she was born a man, she would not experience the struggles indicated in her life herstory, including rape and GBV. Wadibona's age and youthfulness are important to her – she is youthful but keenly aware that the clock is ticking. She is

proud of being employed and of her unique skill set inclusive of higher education and on-the-job experience. Her ethnicity as BaTswana is more powerful than her identity as a black African or even her home language.

Participants' Experiences of Working on the Project

The infrastructure sector of EPWP is distinctive from the other sectors which mainly focus on cleaning and care activities, the sanctioned domain of women. Participants working in the infrastructure sector are exposed to various technical skills which were traditionally male-dominated and are often physically demanding.

Mentors and supervisors within this sector were predominantly male. Some participants including Lucky, Precious, Tsakani, and Makhadzi expressed great pride in their new skills and believe they have made inroads into a traditionally male sphere of work. Others like Snow White, Mpho, Lethabo Khumalo, Makhadzi, Wadibona, and Sylvia are confronted with patriarchal mechanics daily and struggle to gain equal access to the skills and opportunities which are institutionalised as male privilege. All these factors have a noted impact on the experiences of women in the EPWP workplace.

Lucky, in describing the benefits of the programme said:

> We are learning too many things; I did not know one day I will work at the workshop. I know electricity – you are curious about what you are learning. Even at home when my stove is not working, I just took the screwdriver, I just fix it and connect it, and put it on again. I can fix my kettle when it is not working, I put the light and I can fix the plug. You see. I am enjoying it because I am learning. Even if I don't get the work as an electrician but I can do something for myself. I go home and open a business, bring a kettle and I will fix it for R50. I know something I can survive from that experience. I am feeling proud because whenever someone is asking me what you are doing, I say electrician and they say, "*Haai*, a woman electrician!" I say, "*Ja* (yes) that's me." I am a woman who is doing electric, I am proud of myself. I am getting brave now. I am a woman. What are you waiting for? You are waiting for a man to do? You must not do this; you must not do this – you can do it! So I am proud, you see.

Precious embraced her new level of skill as well. "Now I can put a handle in the doors because of carpentry. I have skill, painting, perfect skill. They can give me a brush (paint brush) now, I can do my job. I love this job." Precious was determined to achieve gender equity and break stereotypes within the infrastructure sector:

> I think it is a privilege to be a woman in infrastructure. Like people are always asking, "You know how to paint?" It's like it was for men. I can do it. It makes me proud. I have power like I am a hard worker. I can do what a man can do. That makes me proud.

Tsakani also embraced being a woman in infrastructure:

> For me, it's a good experience because we're living in a country whereby we believe we are equal. So, if I wanna (want to) fix the door, I might as well. I know some women wouldn't want to try but for me I'm okay. I felt I was useful. They are just shocked that a woman can do electric. I will not ask for help. I will make sure that I can do it, so they are surprised. When we are on the stepladder, they say "*Haai*, no, the woman must not go up, you the man must." It's 50/50 now; if he can, I can, so just like that they get surprised. You know plumbing is very challenging, like as a woman, because before, I did not know how to handle the spanner but now I do. Sometimes we have to dig with a pick, it's heavy. Sometimes, you know, like drains blocks – we have to unblock it. I feel good working here. I love it because I want to be first when the supervisor told us that there is a toilet that needed to be installed. We have to do it ourselves without anybody. We install it until it flush(es). I feel like I am in the high class.

Makhadzi had a good relationship with her mentor and was pleased with the skills she learned in the workplace:

> Like for even me, I can prove them (men) that those things I can do that. The men are fine, they are supportive, and they are not like difficult. They teach us very well; they show us the job. They say that one you must be careful when you do this. Sometimes they don't want to show us, they say you want to work at the workshop, you must prove yourself.

Snow White, Lethabo Khumalo, and Mpho spoke of the gendered limitations that women in EPWP who worked in the infrastructure sector faced. According to Snow White:

> It's hard if you are a woman working with men, they look down on you. Everything, even if you are sitting and the man is standing, they will ask you to move. In everything like when they do something here, if you are a woman, they will start with a man. It's like those people who work in electricity, the women, they only change lights, they do not do plugs, they do not fix fans, just because they are women. It's kind of an imbalance here (workshop) because there's some work that you cannot do as a woman. Well, the senior official will not allow you to climb on the roof to maybe fix a leak. You know you can do that, but you are not allowed to do that. If there's a leakage, it's only allocated for them (men). Oh, maybe the window glasses, only them. The way I see it, I think it's the senior official protecting him from too many enquiries, "You are a woman, you are up there, you didn't notice you were pregnant, you fall, then I (official) am blamed."

Sylvia touched on the lack of patience she experienced with male professional staff:

> Men just say you are slow, when you open the plug, the power is not the same, if you open the plug, they just say, "You see you're taking a long time, let me do it." Because of this problem now men go with men and women go with women.

However, not all of the women worked in the male-dominated sections of the infrastructure and therefore had the opportunity to learn new skills, albeit with some intimidation from the men. Others were given jobs in female-dominated sectors, such as secretaryship, and thus did not learn anything new on the job even though they were earning income they very much appreciated. According to Snow White:

> I want to tell you, the main reason I am here is that I want the R120. But I can say that I am not gaining anything. We answer the phones, you know. Write work orders, write minutes only. There is no challenge here!

While Precious indicated that the stipend was a relief, she was dissatisfied with the continued lack of accredited training:

> But so far, like I cannot complain because the money in itself makes a difference. But life – I mean the time is going. So, you just sit; okay I have R2 500 it makes a difference but in paper (formal accredited qualifications) nothing, what do we have? Nothing. I cannot say I am happy; I still want more that they promised but they are still not delivering on what they

> promised (formal accredited training). They think that "Okay maybe because we are giving them money, they will just keep quiet," but it's not always about money, it's what you have, what I can produce.

Mpho expressed a similar disenchantment with the quality of the on-the-job training she received in her job as an administrator:

> For me, this is not a stressful or challenging job. If you are an artisan, you just have to know your job and work according to the works orders. At first, I was happy that I got a job. I was excited and eager to learn, I thought I was going to have theory classes on the job and then practical but that didn't happen. As time went by, I kind of lost interest because for me, it's not challenging. Like for me this (EPWP) is just for poverty. It's fine working here, but we are not getting anything here. I am doing admin but there is no computer. If there is training, it is only for one day and they will say we only want people who did electric or people doing plumbing.

Lethabo Khumalo expressed a similar sentiment, "It's nice and we also have challenges, like now I'm working as an admin, we don't have computers, we don't have photocopy machine you see." While some participants felt positive, five of the nine participants were dissatisfied with the lack of formal accredited training and the quality of on-the-job training. Their most critical requirement of the NYS project was the fulfilment of the experiential training component for them to receive their formal NQF certificate. They were frustrated that their contracts had rolled on for six years without them being able to gain accredited work experience that would fulfil the practical requirement to gain their formal qualifications. Participants' experiences within the workplace are clearly articulated herein. Through these experiences, we can discern that although there is great pride in the skills and work that participants undertake, there are still patriarchal boundaries and preconceptions which are firmly institutionalised within the infrastructure sector at the workshop. Most often this masqueraded as care and consideration, sometimes irritation, all of which served to limit learning opportunities, stifle growth and reinforce gendered stereotypes. Allowing women access to the infrastructure sector was not enough; a more concerted intervention to empower women in infrastructure is required.

Beneficiaries' Experiences of Internal Hierarchy

All nine participants in this study felt maligned about the difference in the treatment of EPWP beneficiaries and permanent DID employees. Participants were fully aware that they were short-term contract workers who were not entitled to the same benefits as permanent employees or remuneration. However, they recognised that their basic needs were systematically violated due to their temporary employment status.

Wadibona weighed in on the inequitable distribution of work resources:

> I have found somebody who help(s) me every day to clean the bathroom but before they were not cleaned. They were dirty but now they (DID) are sacrificing to bring the cleaning material so that we can clean. There is no soap to wash our hands. We wash our hands with water only. We don't get enough toilet paper – we EPWP we only get one a month – one only for all of us! The permanents get. Like in our workshop, we are about ten EPWP, so they give us one. But each permanent they give them two each. To them the permanents it is fair but it's not fair at all because I remember I was the one that was complaining about it before when they were not giving anything to us. But at least now they are giving us at least one. I complained to the senior official. So, I was like we are also people though we don't have benefits. We are here. We work in the same area. We work at the same job. Why am I earning less than you but you are getting more? Why can't you give us tissues (toilet paper) when we go to the toilet? We are also people. Our senior official discussed it somewhere and said, "nah that girl somewhere somehow, she is right!" Toilet paper – it's a benefit for permanent staff. We (EPWP) don't benefit. It is their benefit that's what they say. Yes, everything is benefits, benefits, benefits! So, until we get permanent, we (EPWP) must also talk about benefits!

Snow White was similarly concerned about the supply of soap and toilet paper:

> We, (EPWP participants) share the job (cleaning) every time. We (EPWP) do the orders (procurement requests) for toilet paper and soap for permanent staff from the senior official but when we do that, permanent staff gets to be served first. For permanent staff it is like, here's your toilet paper, here's your bar of Sunlight (soap). Each permanent person gets. Then afterwards, if there are some left, there'll be two toilet papers per workshop, that's how it's been done monthly actually. If you are in the

> workshop (EPWP) if you have your periods (menstruate) you need to make your own plan.

Sylvia said she was forced to supply her own toilet paper and soap as these were only allocated to permanent employees. She asserted that the senior official was aware of this discrimination but did nothing to remedy the situation.

> I don't have toilet paper. Permanent staff get toilet paper but now I think they're trying to give one roll for three EPWP for the whole month. I bring my own (toilet paper), we don't have toilet paper, we don't have something to clean the toilet. I don't have soap when I come to work, if you don't have soap, everything you touch you get germs. The senior official knows everything, and it still doesn't change!

EPWP beneficiaries earn below the minimum wage. They were forced to spend some of their stipend to bring toilet paper to work so that they could safely relieve themselves without infringing on the benefits of permanent employees. According to Makhadzi:

> You have to provide yourself because you are the one who need(s) toilet paper so you have to buy yours. If they (permanent employees) don't want to give you (EPWP) because you are not permanent, there is nothing you can do. They (permanent employees) don't want to. They say it (toilet paper) is part of their benefits (laughs). They say, "It's our (permanent employees) benefits." So, we (EPWP) can't argue with them.

Through this reflection, we discern that EPWP beneficiaries were not accorded the rights to human dignity and the right to a healthy environment – this demonstrates inequity within the work environment. Permanent employees withheld this necessary resource therein exhibiting unhealthy and prejudicial power over the bodies of a subaltern group of beneficiaries. The Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) was flagrantly disregarded. These unimpeachable rights were superseded by the privilege of permanent employees. Permanent employees were the guardians of petty but significant resources which caused unnecessary discomfort to EPWP beneficiaries and impinged on their rights to human dignity and a healthy environment. In the hierarchy of needs and or benefits at the workshop, the permanent employees were at the apex whilst the EPWP beneficiaries were at the base.

Yet, Wadibona asserted that EPWP beneficiaries were doing the work of permanent staff. This, Wadibona believes, freed up the permanent staff to undertake paid work outside the Department during working hours:

> They (permanent staff) don't know even if we (EPWP) had the qualification or started the trade test. We (EPWP) don't get that equal money like the same as artisans. But there are even people (permanent staff) who don't have qualifications or training but still, they are here but they are permanent. We are testing the generator because we the EPWP are the ones that test the generator. The permanents don't do that. We are doing permanent jobs here! They (permanent staff) are doing other jobs (private work for additional remuneration) or they come late, or I mean they're not committed; they are permanent! Yes, they are working privately. EPWP has no supervision (hopeless sigh). We work ourselves. We know, right? We know, we are even better than them (permanent staff)! *Ja* (yes) some of them that are permanent they cannot even test the generators.

Makhadzi believed that permanent employees and EPWP beneficiaries undertook the same labour. She was unmotivated to perform her work functions due to the difference in contract status, employment benefits, and remuneration:

> NYS, sometimes you know them it's that thing – it's difficult. I don't want to work today, I'm tired, we are not permanent, we don't have, we not earning more money like permanent, tell permanent you know those kinds of stuff *ja* (yes). The EPWP contract – they must change to make us permanent – we are tired of contracts. We (EPWP) do the same thing (same work as permanent staff) but the money is different (permanent staff earn more).

According to Tsakani, the permanent employees created and upheld a hierarchy within the workplace that privileged permanent employees and prejudiced the EPWP beneficiaries:

> The permanent staff are okay although sometimes they sideline us. You know sometimes we would talk about issues in the kitchen all of us, Zivuseni, NYS, and permanent staff. But some of the staff they would say, "Permanent staff must come to this small office, we need to discuss these things" like this. So, we'd be like "What are they talking about?" "What have we done?" Things like that and they would always remind you they are permanent staff. Permanent staff is needed at Head Office, you Zivuseni and NYS we were told you shouldn't come, stuff like that. There

> is some stuff only for the permanents. They say, "You wanna have it but it's for the permanents, it's for us you guys are not permanent." If you go to the microwave and there is a permanent there – they say, "I warm my food first; this is my microwave."

Precious experienced workplace bullying and was often ridiculed by permanent employees:

> The permanent … are bully ones. Who (They) say, "I am permanent, what can you do to me? I don't want you to use my microwave, go to the other workshop" and in the other workshop there is no microwave, you see.

This finding provides evidence that EPWP beneficiaries were subject to differential treatment by permanent employees of the DID which is largely based on their temporary employment status. The inequality of power relations between these workers is clearly manifested. Within the workshop, there was inequitable access to communal resources, as the permanent staff often claimed access as part of the benefits of being permanently appointed by DID. The EPWP participants were consistently made aware of their precarious contracts and the transient nature of this work opportunity. All study participants have relayed how they were discriminated against by permanent staff members for their most basic of needs – access to hygiene, toilet paper, and soap – which were considered the benefits of permanent employees. The EPWP beneficiaries were expected to clean the workshop bathrooms and no permanent staff member was allocated to provide cleaning services. The Minister of Labour, under section 43 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA), 1993 (Act No. 85 of 1993), legislates that the employer shall provide sanitary facilities at the workplace: "Toilet paper must be available free of charge to employees. A towel for every employee for his or her sole use or disposable paper towels or hot air blowers or clean portions of continuous cloth towels. The employer must provide toilet soap or a similar cleansing agent free of charge to employees" (Department of Labour, 1993: 1). The OHSA is applied in a discriminatory manner at the workshop, and this deepens workplace inequality, separating permanent employees and EPWP beneficiaries and, in addition, negatively impacting on the bodies of EPWP women at work.

Beneficiaries' Experience of External Hierarchy

EPWP participants often experience inhumane treatment at the hands of medical professionals employed by the GDH whilst conducting maintenance work at the hospital. Their right to dignity was subject to ridicule through the public undermining of their skills and vocation. The staff at the GDH wielded an unhealthy level of prejudicial power over the subaltern EPWP beneficiaries. Some participants believe this was due to the stigma of being part of the EPWP or the absence of professional qualifications. Medical professionals at the hospital were not welcoming of EPWP beneficiaries and demanded to work with permanent artisans from DID. The senior official at the workshop was made aware of this hostile occupational prejudice but the matter seemed to be both pervasive and acceptable within the hospital and the employees of the Department of Health (DoH).

According to Tsakani, both the nurses and patients were scornful of EPWP beneficiaries and treated them with unbridled hostility and prejudice:

> They (patients) undermine us. Like I will show you these people from Ward 13 (Psychiatric Ward); when we enter there, they will laugh at us (meaning mentally ill patients mocking EPWP beneficiaries). Just imagine! The nurses, even them, they laugh. Sometimes when we enter, they say, "What do you want?" "Do you think you can unblock this?" The nurses will say they studied in Australia – "so don't tell me anything!" They (health staff) undermine us. But like the permanent staff, they respect them but Zivuseni and NYS, they don't respect us at all because of the uniform. They undermine us because of the orange!

Sylvia echoed this sentiment and indicated that, despite bringing the matter to the attention of the senior official, this behaviour was habitual:

> I think with the sisters (nursing staff) it's not easy, when you go to Health, they just say you do not have qualifications. "Who's teaching you?" "You must bring a qualification before you work here!" I complained about them to our senior official and the hospital maintenance office.

Snow White said that the GDH staff were dismissive of EPWP beneficiaries and preferred to work with permanent employees from the DID:

> The sisters in charge of the wards, don't kind of like, if you don't put your name tag on, they don't need you (EPWP) in their ward. But you are there to fix something important. They will be like, "No, you (EPWP) are not from workshop (artisans)," or they lay a complaint that, "Some people from the workshop have stolen something." Which nobody did that. You know.

Wadibona highlighted that EPWP beneficiaries experienced the most discrimination from the GDH employees at the hospital. The GDH employees expected EPWP beneficiaries to repair their personal appliances:

> It's obvious that the people inside the hospital from Health treat us (EPWP beneficiaries) the worst. The nurses – but not all of them. Some, they know that we know what we are doing. Because they even come with their appliances from home.

Discrimination and prejudice were rife at the hospital. The right to dignity was permanently suspended for EPWP beneficiaries. The health professionals employed by the DoH had institutionalised open hostility and aggression toward beneficiaries of the EPWP. This unsanctioned and unethical treatment of beneficiaries requires an intervention from both the DID and the GDH to put an end to this flourishing unprofessional, unethical, and inhumane behaviour within the workplace.

Conclusion

This article has shared the experiences of participants in the EPWP project at a Regional Hospital in Gauteng, South Africa. This paper documents the workplace experiences of project participants inclusive of pride in being women with infrastructure experience and skills and participants' appreciation of the financial reprieve provided through the EPWP stipend. However, it is here that this paper departs from the government discourse through the documentation of participants' experience of workplace discrimination and prejudice, internally through employees of the DID and externally through the employees of the GDH, which they believe is linked to their precarious EPWP employment status and institutionalised gender inequity within the workplace.

Basically, EPWP participants are the outsiders within. They were employed inside of government and the DID yet remained outside formal employment. They receive remuneration in the form of a stipend but remained outside the

official payroll. They were inside the workshop and performed the same work activities as permanent employees but remained outside the benefits and rights accorded to permanent employees. They worked inside the hospital but fell outside the hierarchy of respect. They had an inside track to learn unique skills but remained outside formally recognised qualifications. Their orange uniforms placed them inside employment but outside a profession. They both belonged and were unwanted concurrently.

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Continuity and Change: Women's Work in the Kente Economy of Bonwire, Ghana

Dede Amanor-Wilks

Abstract

Asante weaving traditions have survived relatively unchanged for more than 300 years. Yet the productive role that women once played as cotton growers and spinners has been eroded while a traditional ban on women entering the loom has proved difficult to overturn conclusively. Kente has been studied as an art form but rarely as an economic activity in which women's productive role is clearly defined. This paper aims to fill that gap. The paper seeks to understand why more women do not weave and to test some claims made by male weavers about the low participation of women. The paper draws on a 10% survey of households in Bonwire, the original weaving village in Asante, where to this day kente is produced for the Asantehene, the King of Asante. The survey pinpointed precisely who does what in the kente industry. The research found that more women are weaving than ever before yet continue to face pressure to stop, despite suspension of the traditional gender taboo on weaving. These findings are important in a context where women are increasingly asserting their right to their own employment preferences.

Keywords: weaving, tradition, women, taboo, change

Introduction

This paper looks at the gender dimensions of work in the kente industry of Bonwire, a royal weaving town in Asante. Bonwire is located 18 kilometres from Kumasi, Ghana's second city and the capital of Asante, which is a highly structured matrilineal society with a deeply studied pre-colonial polity (Bowdich,

1819; Rattray, 1927; Boahen, 1975; Wilks, 1975; McCaskie, 2022). There, boldly patterned kente cloth is woven in strips on narrow looms and sewn together to form a cloth. Each pattern used in a strip of kente is deeply symbolic and may be used to communicate pointed messages. In the past, kente cloth was produced under royal patronage and could only be worn by royals. Today, it is widely used in Ghana for all manner of joyful and ceremonial occasions from weddings to university graduations and has been adopted in the African diaspora as an expression of black pride. Kente weaving is a highly-skilled, powerfully communicative, and aesthetically rewarding undertaking, which many consider worthy of consideration as a UNESCO masterpiece.

Asante weaving traditions are more associated with continuity than change; for example, the design of the loom has barely changed in 300 years (see photographs in Bowdich, 1819; Rattray 1927). Yet recent changes in the supply of the key input – the yarns – have impacted significantly on who does what in the industry. Whereas Bonwire is usually noted for the work done by men, this paper focuses more on what the women do.

Boserup (1970: 92) said that men despised occupations dominated by women. However, Boserup also made the point that women, like many men, preferred small profits from trading to larger profits from more arduous forms of agricultural work. Alongside the question of who weaves kente, this paper looks at who trades it once it is produced.

This paper draws on a survey of households in Bonwire, conducted in late 2014.[1] The objective of the survey, conducted at every tenth house in Bonwire, was to test observations I had made about the social organisation of kente during an earlier research trip in January 2005 and to test some of the claims made by male weavers about who weaves kente and why. During my first field trip in 2005, I had met no female weaver but was told of one active female weaver, who had travelled to Kumasi. I was also told of two other women from a royal weaving household who knew how to weave. While it might be expected that a traditional taboo would be most closely observed in a royal household steeped in tradition, this seemed to suggest that women in such households had more leverage to engage productively in the sector of choice.

1 I am grateful to Louis Boakye-Yiadom for his critical comments on my survey questionnaire.

One of the claims made then was that to accept women as weavers would interfere with cooking arrangements in the home (Amanor-Wilks, 2006: 309). Returning to Bonwire nine years later, the systematic household survey approach enabled me to probe these issues. Although eight years have passed since the household survey was conducted, my work on this signature, pre-industrial and contemporary indigenous industry is grounded in economic history and its findings speak to a sector more associated with continuity than change, though some evidence of change does emerge in the picture. This paper explores the tension between continuity and change in the relationship between gender and reproductive work, as well as the productive work associated with women in the kente industry.

Balancing Productive and Reproductive Roles

The tension between the competing labour demands of cooking and childcare in relation to economic production is a significant theme in the literature on gender. As shown by Britwum, citing Manuh (2003) and Tsikata (1989), this tension exists in both matrilineal and patrilineal societies:

> Contrary to accounts that celebrate female autonomy under matriliny, these communities are male dominated, confirming the observations that matrilineal societies are not synonymous with matriarchies and do not grant female power over male (Britwum, 2009: 72).

In the case of Asante market women, Gracia Clark (1994) analyses the kinds of negotiations that successful market women must master before reallocating their time from domestic duties, primarily cooking and childcare, to productive work. Market women do not receive much financial help from husbands and must therefore use their ingenuity to establish viable trade enterprises. But as part of a matrilineage that protects women from various risks, a woman must also take care not to neglect her kinship responsibilities. As Clark (1994: 331) points out:

> The matrilineage provides a real safety net for most urban Asante women, against the risks of divorce, illness, or bankruptcy. This safety net can also help a trading enterprise survive, but helping to maintain it for other kin requires commitments of time and income that inhibit capital formation.

Children provide a woman's greatest ties to the matrilineage, influencing lineage

relations and the balance of power, while trading also increases a woman's leverage in lineage affairs. But childcare is easier to delegate—preferably to older siblings rather than to maids, who can harm children with their carelessness—than cooking (Clark, 1994: 361). For, of all the responsibilities that compete with her ambition as a trader, the delegation of cooking responsibilities is the most delicate for a woman to negotiate since cooking is primarily for her husband and influences the gender power balance within the marriage. Yet without children, a woman will have fewer opportunities to delegate domestic work and increase her economic sphere of influence. As Clark (1994: 332) puts it: "Unpaid domestic labour from children and kin paradoxically gives more women their best opening to withdraw from unpaid domestic labour for kin and husbands themselves."

Standard definitions of child labour do not include this gender problematique, namely that when domestic duties are disproportionately allotted to girl-children, women face the dilemma that they can only free up their own time for productive enterprise and thereby meet their obligations to feed children and put them through school when they delegate some of their domestic duties to their children. Since African society generally expects girl-children to do more unpaid domestic work than boy-children, this inevitably creates a cycle in which women perpetually must free themselves from domestic servitude to achieve their productive and economic goals.

Chalfin (2004: 52-5) in her work on the social organisation of shea butter extraction and shea nut trade in Ghana's Upper East region found an intergenerational division of labour and expertise in which "[t]he youngest women—daughters, daughters-in-law, and junior wives—are the source of labour, middle-aged women, the source of capital, and older women, the source of expert knowledge."

The emergence of this female commodity as a highly prized global value chain commodity has opened up avenues for women to accumulate capital, as Chalfin (2004: 25) notes thus:

> Rather than domains of female obligation, with respect to shea butter production, rural households emerge as sites where women control and concentrate labour, allowing them to endow resources with value and to accumulate wealth.

Shea butter producers often learn their trade as young girls from their mothers and other female kin. As she assumes the more tedious and physically demanding tasks of head-loading, mixing, and beating shea nuts and butter, a young woman acquires, before marriage, the skills she will need to sustain her own business and access the labour of other girls. Through this process of initiation, teenage girls learn to balance their time between assisting their mothers to process and trade the nuts while pursuing their own butter business. Chalfin draws on Clark and Manuh's 1991 study of the impact of neoliberal reforms in reducing the working capital of female entrepreneurs in the south of Ghana. Increasingly, to avoid being squeezed out of the market, rural women must diversify their economic pursuits.

Balancing productive and reproductive roles that enable them to be both successful businesswomen and family providers is also a theme of Ragnhild Overå's comparative 1998 study of gendered roles in three distinct coastline fishery communities in Ghana, Moree in the Central Region, Kpone in the Greater Accra Region and Dzelukope in the Volta Region. Of the three areas, the first is matrilineal while the other two are patrilineal. As observed in the literature, fishing is men's work while women partake in fish smoking, distribution, and trade (Odotei, 2000; Odotei, 2003; Britwum 2009). However, women have been able to push into the male domain to establish enterprises beyond the female market domain. Overå (1998: 340-1) found that only in matrilineal Moree could women act beyond their socially constructed female role as fish traders to own their own canoes and emerge as fisheries entrepreneurs. But even here, a woman's power did not extend beyond her roles as defined by the matrilineage, her own canoe company, or the market hierarchy, and beyond those three areas, female canoe owners had to find male mediators to connect them to resources.

This point is developed further by Odotei (2000: 6) and Britwum (2009), who argue that because women are unable to go to sea, they constantly face the threat of having their fishing enterprises wrested from them by the male captains they hire to manage their fishing equipment and expeditions. As the latter's study of three matrilineal coastal fishing communities in Ghana's Central Region notes further, "It is fishing that gives men control over fresh fish, which in turn gives them power over women" (Britwum, 2009: 81).

In all three societies studied by Overå, marriage gives women access to fish through the right to buy it from their husbands, but kinship ties provide access to labour, particularly female labour. Overå (1998: 339) found that women in matrilineal Moree had more opportunities to establish their own fisheries enterprises because the matrilineal system encouraged male relatives, not only female relatives, to take an interest in enhancing their mothers' and sisters' redistributive potential. In the two patrilineal communities, by contrast, men had little interest in "investing their time, labour, knowledge and loyalty in fishing enterprises run by women" thus women ploughed their surpluses back into the female domain of the fish trade or built their own houses. Men, on the other hand, focused their energy "within the male domain of fishing and accumulation and redistribution to lineage members in the male line" (1998: 340-1).

Whereas Fante women in Moree could build on local matrilineal networks in their home towns to break new ground — Overå attributes the high incidence of motorised canoes to women's extension of credit and their innovative integration of production and distribution processes, as well as their visibility in large-scale and long-distance trade — the Ewe and Ga-Adangbe women in Dzelukope and Kpone, respectively, had to create networks outside their patrilineages and home towns to become redistributors or managers of beach seine (dragnet) companies in the case of the former or motorised canoe companies in the case of the latter, drawing on gender models on a higher geographical level, in regional female market hierarchies or through "masculine" models constructed at Tema Fishing Harbour (Overå 1998: 341-2).

Taken together, these studies of Ghanaian women entrepreneurs suggest powerful reasons for the kinds of prohibitions facing women weavers, described by Rattray in 1927. They also go some way to explain why close to a century after Rattray's work was published, women weavers are still relatively hard to find. These reasons will be examined further below. The next two sections explore the impact on women of the decline in cotton production and the current roles played by women in the kente economy.

The Decline of Women's Productive Role

Up until the late twentieth century, women had important productive roles transforming raw cotton for the weaving industry. According to Rattray (1927: 221): "The earlier fabric woven on the looms in Ashanti was undoubtedly made of cotton threads, obtained from cotton grown and spun in the country." He gives a vivid description of the role of Asante women in growing and spinning cotton for the kente industry:

> While weaving in Ashanti is an art entirely confined to the male sex, cotton may be picked and spun into thread by the women—especially old women—who have reached the menopause. The women's share in the work begins with the planting of the seed, and ends with the spinning of the cotton into thread, the intermediate states of picking the cotton (*tete asa*) and removing the seeds (*yiyi asa*) also being carried out by them. Great deftness and skill are displayed in spinning. It is quite fascinating to watch some old dame at the work (Rattray,1927: 221).

As spinners historically of cotton growing wild in the Asante forests and supplemented by savannah sources of cotton, women could claim to have an occupation every bit as important as weaving. Without the spinning of cotton into yarns, weavers might have continued to depend on raffia as their primary input and kente would not have climbed the heights of artistry and design for which it is known today.

As cotton growers and spinners, Asante women could claim an element of prestige that is often lacking in subsistence agricultural production. Cotton is a cash crop, and this makes it almost as prestigious as cocoa in West Africa and tobacco in Southern African countries such as Malawi, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.

The decline of the cotton industry in Ghana and the reliance on imported rayon yarns has removed from production an important plank of women's work. This has eroded the long-term sustainability of the kente industry in an era of unfettered market liberalisation. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding attempts to revive the cotton industry in the north of Ghana most particularly, it is unlikely that cotton could again become the favoured input for the kente industry. For, while silk threads are admired above all else for their smooth, soft and shiny

appearance, today's synthetic rayons mimic silk more closely than cotton can.[1]

With the major role that women once played in kente production missing today, other productive roles for women include winding bobbins for weavers and stitching woven kente strips together. However, women now engage in the kente industry to the largest extent through the trade of woven kente cloth, as will be shown below.

Women's Work in the Bonwire Economy

Women in Bonwire are engaged in a relatively broad range of economic occupations while supporting the kente-focused economy of the town. However, female weavers are far less visible than male weavers and this makes their contribution to the kente economy much more difficult to capture. Occupational data on 61 female respondents and 33 male respondents show a stark contrast in the principal occupation of household respondents. All 33 males were household respondents, whereas the 61 females comprised both household and individual female respondents, reflecting the desire to capture more data on women.

As Table 1 shows, whereas three-quarters of male household respondents were principally engaged as weavers, among a larger number of female respondents, only one apprentice weaver was visible. Nevertheless, the largest category of female respondents, 23.0%, said their main occupation was in the kente industry. The category comprised 13 kente traders, of whom two were also food vendors, and one apprentice weaver who was also a student. Across the broader sample population of 807 people recorded in the household inventory, men are engaged in a wider variety of occupational activities than is evident in Table 1. At the same time, the proportion of women engaged principally in the kente sector increases to 30%.

Among the sample shown in Table 1, twelve farmers accounted for the second largest category of females, representing 19.7% of respondents. The only other significant category of economically occupied respondents was the category of food vendors. These comprised eight in total representing 13.1% of the 61 respondents, though two are also counted as kente traders. The remaining list

1 I am grateful to Gracia Clark for pointing this out to me.

of economically active female respondents is varied, including two fishmongers, two hairdressers, a teacher, a banker, a nurse, a seamstress, a drinks vendor and a sandals vendor. Some of the women employed in the above categories also work as bobbin winders for the kente industry.

About a fifth of respondents could be classified as economically dependent. However, it would be wrong to assume that none of these was contributing to the Bonwire economy. For example, 14-year-old Belinda is a student, but she is also an apprentice weaver. And I encountered 85-year-old Adutwumaa, a strip stitcher, walking to her cocoa farm though she had previously stated that she was retired.

Table 1: Principal Occupation of Respondents by Gender

Men's occupations			**Women's occupations**		
Occupation	Frequency	%	Occupation	Frequency	%
Weaver	24	72.73	Apprentice weaver	1	1.64
Trader/storekeeper	3	9.09	Kente trader	11	18.03
Weaver/trader	1	3.03	Food & kente vendor	2	3.28
Driver	1	3.03	Seamstress	1	1.64
			Farmer	12	19.67
			Food vendor	6	9.84
			Drinks vendor	1	1.64
			Sandals vendor	1	1.64
			Fishmonger	2	3.28
			Hairdresser	2	3.28
			Student	3	4.92
			Nurse	1	1.64
			Teacher	1	1.64
			Banker	1	1.64
			Okomfo's assistant	1	1.64
			Housewife	1	1.64
			Retired	8	13.12
Not economically active	4	12.12	Not economically active	6	9.84
Total	**33**	**100**	**Total**	**61**	**100**

In Table 2, we see the precise engagement with the kente industry of each of the 61 female respondents. More than 77% of women had had some involvement with the kente industry. In contrast to Table 1 showing the principal occupation only, here we find two weavers, two apprentice weavers and one former weaver. Kente traders account for 34.4% of women, the largest category. They comprise

eight kente traders, another eight trekker-traders and five trader-bobbin winders, making a total of 21 active women kente traders. Bobbin winders comprise another large category of kente workers. Altogether 21.3% (13) of the 61 respondents were bobbin winders. However, five of them were primarily kente traders and are already counted in the 34.4%. One of the 13 bobbin winders also worked as a kente strip stitcher. She was one of just two kente strip stitchers counted in households, and the only active one. Among the 61 female respondents, there was no kente accessories producer. The results for women weavers improve when data are analysed on the total sample population of 807 people counted in households.

Table 2: Involvement in the Kente Industry of 61 Female Respondents

Kente involvement	Number of women	% of female respondents
No involvement	14	22.95
Weaver	2	3.28
Apprentice weaver	2	3.28
Bobbin winder	7	11.48
Kente strip stitcher	1	1.64
Kente trader	8	13.11
Trekker & kente trader	8	13.11
Kente trader & bobbin winder	5	8.2
Bobbin winder & strip stitcher	1	1.64
Former weaver	1	1.64
Former kente trader	5	8.2
Former bobbin winder	4	6.56
Former strip stitcher	1	1.64
Former strip stitcher/bobbin winder/kente trader	2	3.28
Total	61	100

Women weavers

The true extent of weaving knowledge among women only becomes apparent when data on the occupational activities of all 807 people in the sample population are unpacked. In 24.6% of sample households (14 sample sites), there were females who had some knowledge of weaving. The breakdown of these women and girls is shown in Table 3. As the table shows, there was a total of 29 females with weaving knowledge, representing 7.4% of females in the sample population. Of the 29, six were active weavers, seven were apprentices and 16 were inactive weavers. Inactive weavers included two who had learnt how to weave but did not appear to have used their skills for economic gain. One of these was Ama, aged 18, who household respondent Yaw (#5) said had learnt to weave but was "not a weaver." Though Ama is not counted among the five weavers in her household, she is listed here as an inactive weaver.

Table 3: Number of Women Weavers (Total Sample)

Weavers	Apprentice	Inactive weavers	Total weaving knowledge
6	7	16	29

Extrapolating from these figures would give a total of 290 women in Bonwire who have acquired weaving skills. Of these, 70 are apprentices and 60 are active weavers, though some active weavers are still in school and weaving under the guidance of male family members, and do not therefore earn an income from weaving. However, the bulk of women with weaving knowledge, 160 women and girls, are inactive weavers.

Women kente traders

Kente trading is the chief of the kente-related activities in Bonwire that is seen as "women's work", as highlighted further below. Bonwire household residents appear comfortable with a gender division of labour that encourages males to weave kente and females to market it. Yet the division that is so pronounced in

terms of the production of kente is far less pronounced in the marketing of the cloth. Indeed, many male weavers market their own kente cloths and some weavers abandon their looms for lucrative kente entrepreneurship, commissioning other weavers to produce cloths for sale in their stores. Bonwire is a popular destination for kente buyers and tourists. But Bonwire's kente sellers do not wait for the market to come to them. Thus, trekking kente is a routine activity in many Bonwire households.

Christiana, aged 46, is one such trekker. Once a month she travels to Accra, staying at Achimota with one of her customers. She takes 30-40 pieces of kente with her and stays a week, selling all the cloth before she returns to Bonwire. Although some customers give ready cash, Christiana says there is a great deal of trust required in kente trading as some customers insist on taking the kente on credit. When she travels to Accra the next month Christiana collects the outstanding payments. Kente is a relatively expensive good, and while some customers pay after a period of one month, others pay by instalments over two or three months. During her week on trek, Christiana visits many offices in Accra searching for customers. Like other kente trekkers, Christiana plans her visits to coincide with the end of the month, when government workers would have received their salaries.

For some women, such as Hegar, trekking supplements the income from other occupations. In her case, she is a food vendor. She spends one week in each month trekking to sell kente and the remainder of the month selling banku and kenkey. Though Hegar is more visible in Bonwire as a food seller, the occupation from which she earns more income is kente trading. "Trekking is every month while banku is every day, but there is more profit in trekking than in selling banku," she explains. Hegar's husband is a weaver who also treks. At the time of interviewing Hegar, her husband had travelled to Sunyani in the then Brong Ahafo Region to sell kente. It is common for trekkers to market kente cloths woven by any weaver in the household as well as by friends and relatives who have cloth ready for sale.

Bobbin winders and strip stitchers

A household respondent who combines kente trekking with bobbin winding is Ama Akomaa, aged 42. Since Ama's mother, Afia, 60, has retired as a bobbin

winder, Ama winds bobbins for her father, Kwame, aged 80, an active weaver and cocoa farmer who is the head of household. In terms of the actual production of kente, bobbin winding is the activity giving females the greatest visibility, albeit part-time. Bobbin winding does not require a great outlay of time and can easily be combined with schooling and other occupational activities. It requires less skill and concentration than warp-laying and is popular with women of all ages. On the other hand, kente strip stitchers appeared far less visible. The only active female strip stitcher counted among household respondents was Lydia, aged 52, who is also a bobbin winder. Lydia says that she learnt these skills in school during the 1970s. According to her: "During Acheampong's[2] time there was a JHS (Junior High School) in Bonwire that used to train students in weaving, stitching, warping, bobbin winding, etc." Lydia's stepmother, Adutwumaa, aged 85, also used to stitch kente strips, wind bobbins, and trade in kente. Although she retired from this work four years ago, she still farms cocoa and cassava. Lydia and Adutwumaa were the only strip stitchers encountered in our survey.

With their once crucial role in cotton production and spinning upended by the decline in cotton production in Ghana and a shift to imported rayons, women's role in the kente industry has been diminished, as the results discussed here show. Though they are still active as bobbin winders and trader-trekkers, two factors make these roles less secure than in the past. The first is that yarns are now sold pre-wound onto cones instead of in loose hanks and this has, to some extent, eroded the work of bobbin winders. The second is that market conditions arising from the liberalisation of the Ghanaian cedi, which performed particularly badly in 2014 (the year I conducted my household survey), and the reliance on imported yarns, for which ever more cedis are required in exchange, makes kente an ever more luxurious good relative to average salaries, and this means that women traders must work increasingly hard to find markets for the kente cloth woven by their husbands, brothers, fathers, and friends. With only 6,6% of women respondents actively engaged as weavers or as weaving apprentices, the next section explores the reasons why more women do not work in the industry as weavers.

2 General Ignatius Kutu Acheampong was head of state between 1972 and 1978.

Why More Women do not Weave

> If I marry a woman and I teach her [to weave], who is going to cook for us? Then she'll know the value of the money. Then she'll go to work, and she won't stop to cook for a man to eat. At the same time, it's painful at the waist. If you sit [at the loom] for a long time, it pains the women a lot.

The statement above by master weaver Afranie Okese, quoted in my earlier research (Amanor-Wilks, 2006: 309), contains three key ideas. The first is that teaching women to weave deprives men of their cooks. The second is that women should not know the value of money because they would no longer be prepared to cook for men. The third is that weaving is painful for women. The first two ideas address domestic reasons why women should not weave, the second with economic ramifications, and the third idea focuses on an occupational health reason. Unfortunately, during my first field trip in 2005, when I interviewed Afranie, I was unable to find any woman weaver in Bonwire to comment on these findings. Nor did I spend sufficient time in the field then to generate other data on women, since I was conducting primarily archive-based research. Addressing that gap, this paper analyses the reasons more women in Bonwire do not weave, discovered through my 2014 survey and interviews.

Answers to the question "What prevents women from weaving?" were put to male and female household respondents and to female questionnaire respondents. Responses were obtained from 44 household respondents and 51 female respondents, some overlapping. A comparison of the responses is shown in Table 4. Where responses are missing it is either because some women weavers were present in those households, or because there were no women at all living in the household. As the table shows, I found five main categories of reasons why women and girls did not weave. For both sets of respondents, a traditional loom taboo was by far the most important reason given. Other reasons cited are grouped as (i) lack of interest; (ii) lack of time due largely to domestic duties; (iii) the laboriousness of weaving; and (iv) education, as interpreted below.

This question elicited more unprompted comments than any other in the questionnaire and in only one case did a household respondent, a woman, say she did not know what prevented women or girls in her household from weaving. Some respondents cited more than one reason; hence the total number

of responses adds up to more than the number of respondents. Among them, two household respondents and one female respondent said the reason was both the traditional taboo and "tedious, hard work", and two household respondents cited both education and the traditional taboo. Before looking more closely at the traditional loom taboo, the following sections discuss briefly the other reasons cited as preventing women from weaving.

Table 4: Reasons Women do not Weave

	HH Respondents (44 of 57)			Women (51 of 61)		
Reason	**Frequency**	**%**	**Valid %**	**Frequency**	**%**	**Valid %**
Tradition or traditional taboo	21	36.84	43.75	24	39.34	46.15
Lack of interest	6	10.53	12.50	11	18.03	21.15
Education	9	15.79	18.75	6	9.84	11.54
Lack of time and domestic duties	5	8.77	10.42	4	6.56	7.69
Tedious, hard work	5	8.77	10.42	4	6.56	7.69
Weren't taught	1	1.75	2.08	2	3.28	3.85
Don't know	1	1.75	2.08	1	1.64	1.92
Total number of responses	48	84.21	100	52	85.25	100

Lack of interest and competing demands on time

Lack of interest was the second most important reason cited by female respondents. By contrast, household respondents (female and male) perceived it to be the third most important reason why more women did not weave. As can be seen in Table 4, 21.1% of responses by women[3] and 12,5% of responses by men and women cited lack of interest as the reason women did not weave.

Among these Alhaji stated: "It's not every woman who's interested in weaving. Those who are interested engage."

3 In all, 13,6% of household respondents (mainly men) and 22% of women cited this

By contrast, 7.69% of responses by females and 10.42% of responses by males and females cited lack of time and/or competing domestic duties as the reason women did not weave.[4] According to Afia, aged 44: "We don't have time. It's too time consuming before the day was done and we don't have that time because of domestic duties. If I combine with that I'll die early." Elsewhere, Abena, aged 39, said that although women in her household lacked interest in weaving, she knew two or three women in other households who did weave. Asked that question directly, several female respondents said they knew women in other households who knew how to weave.

Preference for formal education

A preference for formal education was the second most important factor preventing women and girls from weaving in the eyes of household respondents, though female-only responses ranked it third. Whereas 18.8% of male and female responses combined cited education, 11.5% of all-female responses did. Explanations surrounding the importance of education appeared to suggest that education was viewed as a priority by males in the household rather than by women. For example, in explaining why none of the girls in her household knew how to weave, Ama, aged 42, said: "Their concentration is always on school. Their father wants them to go to school." This perspective was supported by Samuel, aged 31, who said: "Because of education we won't allow them to weave." Samuel went on to explain why he thought young women should not be allowed to weave: "My junior sister was interested to learn but I won't give her a chance while she's in school. In a lady, if she learns she might concentrate on this work and won't find time to study. That's the nature of ladies. Because of traditional custom too, in our town they don't weave."

Samuel's point about traditional custom is explored further below. Quite striking are his views about the "nature of ladies" as being unable to balance interests in favour of something as formative as education and recalling the opinion of Afranie Okese, quoted above, that a woman who is taught to weave will learn the value of money and refuse to cook for her husband. Notwithstanding

4 In all, 7,8% of female respondents and 11,4% of male and female household respondents cited lack of time and/or competing domestic duties as the reason women did not weave.

Samuel's concerns, the junior sister alluded to, Akos aged 18, was listed in the household inventory, compiled with the assistance of various household members, as a schoolgirl weaver who practised weaving during school holidays.

Tedious, hard work

Both women and men preferred trading to work that was excessively hard, Boserup said, as noted above. Although Boserup was referring specifically to farm work, a similar observation may be applied in relation to weaving given the exceptional skill required to become a master weaver, described extensively in the literature. For weaving kente does not simply require coordination between hands, feet, and eyes to manipulate the different parts of the loom. It also requires awareness of the potential of warp and weft patterns, awareness of the checker-board effect created when strips of woven kente are lined up against one other and stitched together into a cloth, and mathematical precision in the ordering on the loom of threads of varying lengths and colours.

Some responses highlighted the difficulty of acquiring such intricate skills, though male respondents tended to link this reason to the gender division of labour. Thus, while from Ama the question elicited the response: "It's tedious to learn and hard work," and from Mavis: "It's hard work", Matthew stated more categorically: "Kente is not for women, kente is for men; the work is tedious for women to do." A little less categorically, Kofi said: "Weaving is tedious, that's why in this household women don't involve themselves with weaving." This view was shared by Kofi Amankwah, 32, who said: "It's so complex, some ladies don't take it up", though interestingly, in his house there was one female, Felicia aged 33, who did know how to weave. As Table 4 shows, "tedious work" or "tedious hard work" was cited in 7.7% of all-female responses and 10.4% of all-male responses as the reason women and girls did not weave.

Health and lack of capital

Surprisingly no respondent cited health or capital constraints as the reasons women did not weave. It seemed surprising that health was not mentioned given the explanation offered during my preliminary 2005 research that women in

Bonwire do not weave because "it is painful at the waist", as alluded to at the top of this section. Indeed, we did find that in almost every household, respondents said that weaving caused a variety of ailments, of which "waist pains" (lower back pain) were the most cited. Nevertheless, beyond the mystical threat of barrenness for women who sat at the loom, health was never cited as a barrier to women's participation in weaving. This does not mean that women do not experience lower back pain when weaving. Though beyond the scope of this paper, worth noting too is the association between food and sex in Asante culture, to which Gracia Clark (1994) alludes in her work. Linked to this, as pointed out to me by Professor Clark during a discussion in Accra, is that "waist pains" might also reflect that the "waist" is a euphemism for a woman's womb and genitals. This is signalled by her waist beads, which, like cooking, reference her sexuality and marriage.[5]

When it comes to the question of capital, although this was not cited as a barrier, my additional interviews with young women weavers surveyed suggest that young women who learn to weave may lack the capital to buy yarns and that this may cloud their identity as weavers.

Gender, Tradition and a Loom Taboo

For both women and men, the most important reason cited for the non-participation of women in weaving is tradition, buttressed by a traditional loom taboo. Close to a full century after Rattray mentioned this taboo, it continues to act as the number one explanator of women's low visibility as weavers. For hundreds of years, the taboo has been upheld by a body of ideas on the power of menstrual blood linked to warnings about the ultimate penalty for women who defy the taboo, namely barrenness. Rattray (1927: 74-5) explained the taboo in terms of the belief that contact with a menstruating woman had the power to dissolve "all supernatural or magico-protective powers possessed by either persons or spirits or objects (i.e., *suman*)," and, of consequence, "all barriers which stand between defenceless man and those evil unseen powers which beset him on every side." Thus, a woman in her menses must not cook food for her husband or any other adult male and faced a raft of other restrictions or taboos. Drawing on

5 Clark, Gracia. Personal communication, Legon, 20 October 2016.

Rattray's work, Eugenia Herbert (1993: 226-7) points out that many cultures use menstruation as a metaphor for the "ambivalent qualities of women," for example sterility and fertility, purification and pollution, life and death. Many cultures link women's menstrual cycles to the waxing and waning of the moon and menstrual taboos express anxiety about the forces of nature, even in relation to human activities such as iron-smelting, Herbert noted.

In relation to weaving, according to Asante tradition, the loom, being a sacred enabler of important work, must never be used to start or complete work on a Friday, the day that Otaa Kraban — the inventor of the classic Oyokoman kente cloth — first set up a loom (Rattray 1927: 234). Named *Odomankoma nsa dua Kofi*, ("Kofi, the Creator's loom"), looms serve as a reminder of their near-sacred nature and evoke one aspect of the loom taboo.[6] Because of the power of menstrual blood alluded to by Rattray, a menstruating woman must never touch a loom, much less climb into one. Hence, weaving is the work of men and a woman who weaves must bear the consequence that she will never give birth. This is indeed a terrible consequence since childbirth gives women an important role in ensuring the continuance of the lineage, not least in matrilineal societies.[7] This powerful combination of mysticism, mythology, and patriarchy has effectively preserved a model of production that kept the most lucrative economic activity in the hands of men, supported in its less prestigious secondary activities by women.

In the survey, 43,8% of responses from male and female respondents of all ages and 46,2% of all-female responses directly cited tradition or the traditional taboo as the reason women did not weave. In addition, the responses from two women (including one household respondent) who said "We weren't taught"

may reasonably be added to the category of tradition. A number of respondents cited "tradition" or "the old tradition" without going into detail. Among them, Prophet Labi, aged 37, stated: "We stick to the old tradition." Other male respondents drew attention to the long hours of work to justify traditional taboos or reinforce gender prejudices. Thus, according to Ntiamoah: "In the evening both man and wife are weaving. Neither will be willing to stand up and go and cook for

6 Nsa dua means "loom" and Kofi is the day name for a male born on Friday.

7 As Herbert (1993: 227) puts it: "To die without leaving progeny is the greatest misfortune imaginable… Ancestors…have just as much stake in human procreativity as the living because they die definitively only when a lineage comes to an end."

the other." The male responses linked different types of gender prejudices, such as perceptions about women's menstruation and pregnancy, with concern about who would cook. Thus, according to Akwasi: "At times if you don't know your menses is coming, it can stain the white cloth and you won't know." He added: "If both men and women are weaving, who will cook for the man? Or someone needs an order fast and the woman is pregnant, how can she weave fast?"[8] Although the latter reason may seem to be a practical consideration, nevertheless in formal sector industries, women's employment rights are protected by law precisely because of the perception, real or imagined, that pregnant women cannot work at full capacity. In Bonwire's highly cooperative society, moreover, there seems little reason why a heavily pregnant woman would not be able to enlist help to complete a cloth.

On the question of domestic responsibilities raised by Ntiamoah, Osei made a similar point with less emphasis on the long hours and more on the gender division of labour: "It's not women's work. We stick to the old tradition. If I'm weaving and my wife is also weaving and I summon her to go and do the cooking, she may refuse." Thus, the gender division of responsibilities appeared inseparable from the old tradition. Another male respondent, Amos, aged 43, responded by stating where women's work was considered more appropriate: "Ladies used to put their trade in the market." Some female respondents emphasised the fact that they were never taught how to weave. According to Lydia: "Our brothers were doing the weaving. Our father taught only the men how to do weaving, not the ladies. Our mother sent the girls to farm while our father was teaching the boys weaving." Similarly, Prophet Labi said: "It's not a woman's work," and kente trekker Hegar said: "Kente is a work for men. I know a few women only who have knowledge of weaving." While interviewing a master weaver at sample house 55 in Bonwire Mission, a female family visitor, Regina, contributed to this question by saying: "In this village, we don't allow women to weave."

From the above, it may be seen that arguments about long hours, men's work and women's work had entered into people's consciousness as part of the inviolable rules of culture and tradition. Over time, the desire to protect gender privileges had been infused with the myth of barrenness resulting in a scare tactic

8 Akwasi was contributing to the point made by Ntiamoah.

and a most potent reason why women should not weave. Demonstrating that the traditional taboo was still the most important reason why women did not weave, 85-year-old Abena said: "In the olden days when our ancestors brought this weaving into our town they said if a woman gets into the loom, she'll not give birth." Similarly, Mary, aged 73, said: "In the olden days our ancestors said if you sit on the loom, you won't give birth, so we were scared to sit on the loom. That's what we were taught." However, while the myth of childlessness was echoed by many respondents of different generations, not all respondents were impressed by this scare tactic. Thus, according to 24-year-old Mavis: "People are saying if a woman weaves, she'll not give birth. In Ghana here when they want you not to do something they'll put things behind to scare you." The role of women themselves in enforcing the gender ban was highlighted by Yaw, aged 48. He explained: "There were two ladies weaving in this house. They stopped weaving because the grandmothers told them that the ancestors don't allow women to weave. So, they stopped and went to Accra to practise another trade." According to Yaw, the two women were taught bobbin winding and weaving by their brother and had been weaving for six months before they yielded to the pressure to stop.

Discussion of Findings and Conclusion

This paper has examined the nature of women's work in Bonwire and the extent of female involvement in the kente industry, drawing on the results of a household survey conducted in late 2014. In relation to this paper, two objectives of the survey were to ascertain the extent of women's involvement in the kente industry, including the number of women weavers in Bonwire, and to understand the reasons more women do not weave. In pursuing these research objectives, the paper sought to test the claims made by a weaver in my earlier research that learning to weave would deter women from cooking for their husbands and that women, moreover, don't weave because weaving is "painful at the waist" (Afranie Okese, cited in Amanor-Wilks, 2006).

Quantitative investigation additionally produced evidence on the number of women weavers in Bonwire while qualitative interviews shed light on the low visibility of women working in the kente sector. However, several layers of investigation were required to create a credible dataset and only the household

inventory of each member's occupational profile provided satisfactory quantitative evidence on the number of women weavers. Thus, the extent of weaving knowledge among women became fully apparent when data on the occupational activities of all 807 people in the sample population were analysed, as shown in Table 3.

Whereas the survey found 29 women with weaving knowledge, this paper has focused on the constraints preventing more women from weaving. Qualitative profiles of the 29 women will be published in a separate paper.

The paper sought evidence on the reasons more women do not weave and found the overwhelming reason to be a traditional loom taboo traced to long-held beliefs about the power of menstrual blood. Though this belief system is now subjected to greater challenge by women, in reality, many women themselves uphold the tradition. Other reasons cited for the low numbers of women weavers were a lack of interest, a greater focus on formal education, a lack of time due to domestic duties, and the difficulty and tediousness of weaving.

Surprisingly, there was no evidence to support the notion that waist pains are the reason more women do not weave. Nevertheless, there was evidence to support Afranie Okese's contention that a particular aspect of the gender division of labour, namely women's responsibility for cooking, prevented women from becoming weavers. To the extent that waist pains could be an oblique reference to a woman's womb and genitals, as alluded to above, this could be a reference back to the traditional loom taboo.

Equally surprisingly, lack of capital was never cited as a reason more women did not weave, though it did come up clearly in my conversations with women weavers. This suggests that even if the problem of access to/starting capital is improved for women, greater constraints impede their trajectory as weavers.

Kente weaving is a major source of job satisfaction and prestige in Bonwire. However, Bonwire's male-dominated society, though matrilineal, does not willingly support the development of women weavers. Within this system, women are socialised to espouse the philosophy of a male-dominated society and the most ardent advocates of the exclusion of women from weaving include women themselves.

Boserup's observations still provide insightful perspectives on the desire of men to protect lucrative occupations controlled by them. Whether fear of the power of menstrual blood still holds as much influence as in Rattray's day seems unlikely and the traditional taboo may now appear more part of a competitive strategy than a genuine reason to deny women access to the loom. However, this point can only be concluded after examining the findings of my in-depth interviews with women weavers, which was beyond the scope of the present paper to interrogate.

Nevertheless, between the literature on Asante reviewed here and the slow-changing reality on the ground revealed in my preliminary interviews and more comprehensive household survey, this paper has found evidence of both continuity and change in the work of Bonwire's women. The paper found that women's once critical role as producers and spinners of cotton for the kente industry, described so vividly in the literature, had long been eroded, a somewhat unfortunate example of change. This change comes because of a shift in the sourcing of the main input, the yarns, though the design of the loom itself has barely changed, a major example of continuity in the sector.

Kente remains the most important economic sector in Bonwire for women, not just men, with 30% of women principally occupied in the kente industry and very many more combining activities such as kente trading, bobbin winding and kente strip stitching with other forms of economic activity. This is another important sign of continuity.

But while close to 80% of women are involved in the kente industry, very few are involved as weavers. My survey counted just six active female weavers, and only two of these were established as full-time weavers earning their livelihood from weaving and of these two, one operated outside Bonwire. Of the total 29 women and girls with weaving skills, seven were apprentices and 16 were inactive weavers.

Extrapolating from these figures in a 10% survey would give a total of 290 women and girls in Bonwire who have acquired weaving skills. A very high number of them, 160, are inactive weavers, and this explains the low visibility of women weavers in Bonwire. Of the remaining 130 women and girls, 70 are

apprentices and 60 are active weavers, though some active weavers are still in school and weaving under the guidance of male family members, and do not, therefore, earn an income from weaving. These results are a significant improvement on the situation I met when I first went to the field in 2005, when I could not identify any woman weaver to interview, and they do provide evidence of change over time. In those days women weavers were visible only during the annual kente festival in Bonwire. The improved results may be due in part to an expanded survey. But they are certainly also due to the success of women in breaking down traditional barriers to their participation in weaving. Confirming the validity of these extrapolated results, several female respondents said they knew women outside their household who knew how to weave.

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All That Glitters is not Gold: Formal Work Deficits on The African Continent

Bashiratu Kamal

Introduction

Ghana, my country of birth, has a population of about 30 million out of which 51% are women. The majority of these women in the workforce (85%) can be found in the informal economy. This situation is not unique to Ghana. According to an International Labour Organization (ILO) survey conducted in 2015, women are more likely to be engaged in informal employment than men. It is estimated that in Africa 74% of women's non-agricultural employment is informal in contrast with 61% for men. In many parts of the continent, work in the informal economy is not regulated by labour laws and is thus precarious. Many people working in the informal economy are not there by choice; they would rather work in the formal sector due to the assumption that it guarantees better income and protection for women workers. Drawing on the case of Ghana, I argue that contrary to this assumption, the formal economy itself is bedevilled with precarity and informality. This is due to the continuous deregulation and strengthened protection for corporations vis-à-vis workers, especially women.

The macroeconomic policies that African governments have adopted on the advice of international financial institutions have made the labour market of the subregion "employer-driven" where conditions of employment are dictated by these institutions. In Ghana, for example, the last International Monetary Fund loan conditionalities of 2015 led to a freeze on public sector employment, the promotion of public-private partnerships, and the privatisation of public services. The 2023 budget presented by the finance minister in November 2022 has similar conditions.

These policies lead to job and income insecurities in the labour market. This has been a major concern of trade unions and other civil society organisations who have argued that these conditionalities have led to a massive growth in

fissuring in the labour market, a situation where the core business of a company is devolved from the secondary activities that keep the business running through franchising, third party contracting, and outsourcing (Weil, 2014). Fissuring "means that in more and more workplaces, the employment relationship has been broken into pieces, often shifted … to individuals who are treated as independent contractors." (Weil and Tanya, 2016: 27). Weil (2014: 16) argues that fissuring is "…not simply the result of employers seeking to reduce wages and cut benefits but a representation of the intersection of three business strategies … focused on revenues, costs, and on providing the 'glue' to make the overall strategy operate effectively."

The growth in fissuring has been accompanied by a growth in the establishment of public and private employment agencies across the continent. In Ghana, employment in the formal sector is mostly through public and private employment centres that match job seekers to "user employers" through recruitment, human resource management, outsourcing, and contracting. Big corporations in the mining, agricultural, and telecommunications sectors have resorted to casualisation, contracting, and temporary workers even for jobs that have existed for several years.

Although the Ghana Labour Act of 2003 (Act 651) protects workers employed through these agencies, there is a general lack of adherence to the Act. Workers' rights are thus disrespected routinely – women especially so due to their reproductive roles. Today, the formal economy is characterised by poor wages, long working hours, and a constant sense of insecurity for the many workers employed through agencies. The state is handicapped in its efforts at regulation given the fact that it relies heavily on the efforts of private corporations to complement its poor efforts at job creation. As a result, employees have become accustomed to the idea that "bad jobs are better than no jobs" (Krugman, 1997) and thus endure poor working conditions with no intention of reporting violations and maltreatment. This is particularly the case concerning women workers needing reproductive support.

Even though there is some amount of guaranteed protection under the Labour Act, these are not readily accessible and comprehensive enough, especially for women workers. The provisions under Part 6 of the Act are not protective enough. For instance, the section is silent on how antenatal and post-natal care

for pregnant women and lactating mothers is to be addressed. Many women have complained about being threatened by their human resource managers for taking days off to carry out this important exercise. Similarly, the law is silent on the status of a mother who has had a stillbirth. Several women have reported being recalled to work two weeks after having had a stillbirth (see Case 1). While maternity protection under Ghana's Labour Act and ratified ILO Convention 03 and 103 is divided into three parts, namely cash benefits, leave, and occupational safety and health of the mother and baby, emphasis has mostly been on the cash and access to leave, with the third component largely ignored. Ironically, the informal sector may offer some flexibility in terms of protection after a stillbirth even though cash and paid leave may not necessarily be guaranteed. Several cases in workplaces expose the vulnerabilities of women who seek to fulfil their biological and reproductive roles of childbearing, as indicated in cases 1 and 2.

CASE 1:

In February 2017, a worker contacted the staff member of a union to complain about the conduct of the Human Resource (HR) Manager in recalling a colleague, Abiba, to work. Abiba had delivered two weeks earlier and had suffered a stillbirth due to complications during labour. For the HR Manager, since Abiba had no baby to breastfeed, she did not deserve any of the protections provided for under any of the legal frameworks on maternity protection. The HR Manager forgot that Abiba went through all the processes of childbirth, including a caesarean section, only to lose the baby. In this instance, Abiba deserved the provisions under the law and more because of the traumatic experience of losing the baby.

Even the leave component of maternity protection is currently under threat for employees hired through fissuring practices. For many, attempting to get pregnant even after yearning for a baby may be a crime because they may not be re-engaged once it is noticed that they have given birth. It is worth noting that Ghana Cocoa Board has approved a three-week paid leave for contract workers. This, however, is not the case for the majority of workers in Ghana engaged through an agency. In my over ten years of work as a labour activist and educator, the worst complaint I got on the field was when a male worker told me he had never seen a pregnant woman on site since joining his organisation 15

years prior. When asked, most of the women mentioned fear of losing their slots and contract once they got pregnant. The only option according to them was not to re-engage or renew their contract but to venture into buying and selling in the informal economy once they got pregnant. Further evidence of the fact that women are likely to lose their jobs on getting pregnant is presented in Case 2.

Yet another example of the discriminatory practices women endure upon pregnancy is the infamous case of the two female personnel of the Ghana National Fire Service who were dismissed for getting pregnant after passing through a stipulated six-month training and another six months of probation. It took a court case to have them reinstated (Asiedu, 2019).

In 2016, a Millicom Ghana memo asking pregnant employees not to expect maternity leave and to re-apply for their jobs after delivery was leaked into the public domain (see Case 2). These forms of marginalisation and discrimination violate the ILO's call for promoting equality for all (ILO agenda, 1999). The request for the women to re-apply for a position they hold goes against Ghana's Labour Act since the period of maternity confinement is considered work and requires full remuneration, employment protection, and other benefits received by workers during the period.

CASE 2:

Memo

To: Reliance Staff (TiGo)

From: Management of Reliance Personnel Services

Date: April 5, 2016

Subject: **Maternity Leave Policy**

Kindly be informed that effective January 2016, an employee who wishes to go on maternity leave will have to apply for a break (leave without pay) and reapply for their position after the maternity break.

Also note that, contract duration is for six (6) months and renewable upon availability of the job and performance.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully

Delia Ayisi-Okyere
General Manager

Source: Agyapong, 2016

The assumption that decent work exists for everyone in the formal economy without any deficits is a fallacy. According to the ILO (1998), decent work means work that is carried out in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity. It is the convergence of four interdependent strategic objectives encompassing rights at work (adherence to international labour standards), employment (job creation), social protection (the existence of social insurance before, during, and after work life), as well as social dialogue (the ability of workers to engage their employers on their conditions of work).

Increasingly, across the continent, there are fewer and fewer people working in steady, long-term positions for one employer. Having a secure job with full benefits, paid pensions, and a decent salary is just a dream for many instead of a reality. Ghana's National Pensions Act, 2008 (Act 766) requires that employers pay social security contributions on behalf of their employees.

Social security in Ghana is contributory: employers pay 13.5% on behalf of each worker while workers pay 5%. Thus, the total contribution on behalf of a worker is 18.5%, which is a minimum contribution. Today, there are many reports about employers who do not abide by this regulation and threaten to dismiss workers who try to protest. When employees in the formal economy are the only ones contributing to their pension schemes, these workers are in effect similar to workers in Ghana's informal economy who, with the introduction of a third tier in the pension scheme, also have access to pensions, even if it is not structured like the formal sector pensions.

Yet another way in which the fallacy of secure employment in the formal economy is made evident is in the poor earnings of workers. With the rising cost in the standard of living for the citizenry, remuneration and other benefits are simply not commensurate with spending. As we all in Ghana anticipate what 2023 means for better wages, the agreed daily minimum wage of GHS14.88 for 2023 is less than the cost of a loaf of bread in 2022. This makes the formal economy no different from the informal economy when it comes to poor earnings. Today, it is no news that workers in Ghana's formal economy are engaged in what Niger-Thomas (2000) calls straddling, that is to say, they take on jobs in the informal economy such as trading alongside their jobs in the formal economy to be able to make ends meet.

While many may think harassment from city authorities is rampant and threatens the security of women in the informal economy, female employees in the formal economy are not spared the menace of gender-based violence and harassment from employers, managers, supervisors, peers, or third parties. Meanwhile, there is no adequate protection available for women or other vulnerable workers in these two economies.

Substantive equality and state obligations to improve the status of women and other minority groups within any nation cannot be compromised. To this end, it is important to recognise that "every worker is a worker" and has the right to join or form a union as guaranteed, in the case of Ghana, in the 1992 constitution (Chapter 5), Labour Act 651 (2003:15), as well as the ILO fundamental principles which Ghana, along with many other African countries, have ratified. In a world where injustice thrives so that employers can continue to increase the bottom line of profit, workers need to be reminded that they are

entitled to more than remuneration and deserve decent conditions of service like rest, holidays with pay as well as occupational safety and health. Provision also needs to be made in the workplace to ensure that women can carry out their reproductive roles without overburdening themselves or having to choose between their work and family due to the absence of child-care facilities or support in workplaces. There should be adherence to conventions such as the Maternity Protection and Workers with Family Responsibilities which guarantee women's rights to reproductive roles while not compromising their right to work under conditions of dignity.

As evident above, it is difficult to say that in the Ghanaian context, formal economy jobs can be classified as decent work that has an interconnectedness with social protection, social dialogue, rights at work, and not just the creation of jobs. This situation, I daresay, is not much different from what pertains in many other parts of the sub-region.

For several decades, the ILO and other international bodies have adopted conventions, principles, treaties, and protocols which seek to eliminate all forms of discrimination against all categories of vulnerable and marginalised workers as a blueprint for governments in making national legislation. Ratifying some of these conventions can be cumbersome, depending on a country's processes for making international treaties law. Nonetheless, unions must partner with like-minded civil society organisations to mobilise all forms of power resources available at their disposal to ensure that their various governments, Ghana included, ratify ILO C181 adopting Articles 4, 5, 9, and 11 of the Convention, which responds to the protection of agency-recruited workers. These guarantees cover fundamental rights at work, such as freedom of association (C87) and the right to collectively bargain (C98). There could also be enhanced protection to make jobs decent for everyone irrespective of the sector in which they are found. It is also important for trade unions to ensure the enforcement of all ratified ILO standards and legislations protecting women and guiding employment relations in both the formal and informal economies in the various countries across the sub-region.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is evident that a formal economy with all the protective legislation as well as effective enforcement mechanisms does not exist across the continent. The inability to truly guarantee adequate social protection, promote social dialogue, and adhere to international labour standards has made workers' interest in working in the formal economy to secure their present and future a fallacy. What they do find in the world of formal work is just fissured jobs that leave vulnerable workers with job and income insecurities. The formal economy has become even more precarious, especially for women agency workers whose reproductive roles can potentially become a reason for the termination of an appointment. If African governments continue to renege on their primary responsibility of protecting and promoting the basic rights of workers, the formal economy will remain employer-driven and wealth-grabbing to the detriment of workers. African governments can and should do better.

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A Union like None Other on the Continent

Akosua K. Darkwah Speaks with Deborah Freeman Danquah, General Secretary of the Union Of Informal Workers' Associations (Uniwa) of TUC Ghana

Globally, the African continent has the largest percentage of workers in informal employment. Based on data collected in 2016 by Bonnet *et al.* (2019: 10), 89% of workers in the sub-region work in informal employment. The figure is higher for women than it is for men, standing at 92% and 86% respectively. Workers in informal employment are less likely to enjoy decent work standards than those in formal employment. These decent work standards include, among others, the rights to social protection benefits such as paid health care and pensions, annual paid leave, parental leave, sick leave and written contracts, and the right to unionise. In Ghana, efforts have been underway to address the decent work deficits in informal employment. One such effort is the establishment in 2015 of the Union of Informal Workers' Association (UNIWA). This association has the enviable record of being an associate member of the Ghana Trades Union Congress (TUC). In this conversation piece, Akosua K. Darkwah speaks to Deborah Freeman Danquah, the General Secretary of UNIWA, about the origins, achievements, and challenges the association faces as well as her vision for the future.

The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Akosua K. Darkwah: I would like to start with a bit about yourself as a person.

Deborah Freeman Danquah: Okay, thank you very much. My name is Deborah Freeman Danquah. I am Fante. I come from the Central Region of Ghana. I am married with three kids. I am a labour activist, an entrepreneur, and a musician. I sing; I am a gospel musician.

Akosua K. Darkwah: Do you have recordings?

Deborah Freeman Danquah: I do. In the early 2000s, I produced four albums. After 2008, I delved deeply into music administration. It was music that brought me into the limelight. I became a member of the Musicians' Union of Ghana (MUSIGA) in the year 2000. And in 2001, I became the Central Regional Secretary of the MUSIGA. I served for two terms and then moved to the head office. There, I became the personal assistant to the President, Diana Hopeson, then Diana Akiwumi. I became General Secretary of the union in the year 2011 and I was re-elected in 2015. To date, I am the General Secretary but I'm aspiring to be President of MUSIGA.

Akosua K. Darkwah: So, are these jobs paid?

Deborah Freeman Danquah: No, you are just a political figurehead. You are not on payroll but it allows you to network. I mean, you go places, and you also have the opportunity to help others. I believe that my professional status today is due to the work that I have been involved in as part of MUSIGA. It was through MUSIGA that I got involved with a trade union. MUSIGA was the first organisation I worked with in the corporate world. MUSIGA introduced me to the corporate world at the age of 19.

Akosua K. Darkwah: So, how old were you when you started your music career?

Deborah Freeman Danquah: I started singing at the age of 14. But I wasn't with MUSIGA. I became a member of MUSIGA at the age of 19 and released my first music album in 2002.

Akosua K. Darkwah: Okay, so you completed Junior High School. Did you attend Senior High School?

Deborah Freeman Danquah: Yes please, I attended the Workers' College for my Senior High School Education. At the Workers College, you work and study. I had switched to music administration before I proceeded to the university to do my bachelor's degree. I am now doing my Master's degree in International Business with Law.

Akosua K. Darkwah: So, you went to school and did the music alongside it?

Deborah Freeman Danquah: I went to school and sewed. While I was at the Workers' College, I had my shop in Cape Coast. I sewed wedding gowns and other things.

Akosua K. Darkwah: Did you do an apprenticeship for dressmaking or you learnt how to do it at home?

Deborah Freeman Danquah: I went through an apprenticeship. I did the apprenticeship from 1997 to 2001.

Akosua K. Darkwah: So, you were sewing and you were singing on the side?

Deborah Freeman Danquah: Yes, please. I established my fashion centre in Cape Coast in the year 2001 where I sewed. I had three apprentices at the time whom I trained in sewing while I engaged also in music album recordings and live performances. They held the fort anytime I had to go for a performance or be in the studio.

Akosua K. Darkwah: Do you remember how it was that you joined MUSIGA?

Deborah Freeman Danquah: Yes, I remember. That was in the year 2000. There was a renowned musician called Mr. C. B. Wilson. He was very popular in Cape Coast. He lost his wife. So, during the funeral, we had some officials from the Musicians' Union of Ghana come to the funeral, where I performed. That was when they identified me to be someone who could be a member of the union. So, that was where it started. But before that, I was singing at church. I joined a singing group at church, the Wesley Methodist Church in Cape Coast called Echoes of Wesley; it was the youth fellowship's singing group. When I moved to MUSIGA, I joined a band called Christian Joyful Band and I was the lead vocalist from 2001 up till 2007 when I left Ghana briefly.

Akosua K. Darkwah: Okay, so then you were rising through the ranks at MUSIGA?

Deborah Freeman Danquah: Yes, please.

Akosua K. Darkwah: Then how did the shift from MUSIGA to UNIWA take place?

Deborah Freeman Danquah: So that took place in the year 2012. Before that, MUSIGA was an associate member of the TUC. It had been since 2008. So, anytime TUC had a statutory meeting, MUSIGA was invited. When I became the personal assistant to Diana Akiwumi the then President, she used to nominate me or delegate me for TUC meetings. It was through those meetings that the TUC officials identified me as someone who could lead the informal workers union

and then in 2012, there was the first conference of informal workers associations across the country by the TUC. After those meetings, the TUC decided to form an umbrella body to bring together all its associates in the informal economy to form one union called the UNIWA we know today. So, I was the Interim General Secretary from 2012. Then in 2015, the Union held its founding conference, and I was elected as the substantive General Secretary. And I was re-elected in 2019. So, my association with UNIWA came about through the Musicians' Union.

Akosua K. Darkwah: And the TUC identifying you as somebody who could lead.

Deborah Freeman Danquah: Yes, because, you know, in the process of forming UNIWA, they needed someone who could do the documentation on behalf of the informal workers. They needed somebody who could do the administrative work on behalf of the union such as write minutes of meetings, write letters to invite people to events, and so on. The Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Ghana was the major sponsor of the formation of UNIWA and its Resident Director was about to leave for Turkey. She wanted to ensure that there was someone at the helm of affairs at UNIWA whom she could trust to hold the union and make it work. According to her, she received emails from me at 2 am. At the time, I was single, so I could work at odd hours, and I could work around the clock. I was a very passionate worker, so I was the right person to lead the organisation. And my colleagues voted massively for me to become first the Interim General Secretary and eventually the Substantive Secretary. So, it was by dint of hard work that I came to head the Union because I believe that if I had not justified my inclusion when I came to the TUC, I would not have this job now.

Akosua K. Darkwah: Okay, so now tell me about UNIWA.

Deborah Freeman Danquah: So UNIWA started as the Council of Informal Workers' Associations (CIWA) in 2012. In 2014, we changed from a Council to a Union. To become a full member of the TUC or even an associate member of TUC required that we change the name. At the time, UNIWA started with nine member associations that were already existing associate members of the TUC. The TUC thought that, with nine member associates, the informal economy was likely to outnumber the bona fide members who work in the formal economy at statutory meetings. It was decided then that a platform should be created to

bring together all the informal economy associations and then elect two leaders who could represent them during the statutory meetings. That was how UNIWA came about. Then when it was formed, we thought we could go beyond just making it a platform to be represented at the TUC to registering it as a trade union, which would mean then that we could have a trade union certificate. So, as we speak, UNIWA is a trade union recognised by Ghana's Labour Law. So, we grew gradually from having nine member associations to our current number of 21 member associations representing various sectors. Our membership is quite diverse. We have artisans, musicians, actors and then we have traders. Traders dominate our membership because we know they organise occupational groupings based on geographical location, so we have the Dansoman Market Traders' Association, the Tema Station Market Traders' Association, Makola Market Traders' Association, etc. So, traders dominate our membership. Women also dominate our membership because the informal economy has more women.

Despite our decade of existence, we still are associate members of the TUC because there are requirements we need to meet at the TUC level to be able to be admitted as a fully-fledged union. One of the requirements is dues payments and another is ensuring that our constitution is consistent with that of the TUC. In most cases, we are unable to adhere to the rules as easily as our counterparts in the formal economy do. For example, you can find an association that was founded by a single person. For example, market queens often champion the formation of specific market associations and then run it as a monarchy until they die. Meanwhile, the trade union system is run democratically. Secondly, these trade associations run mostly as welfare associations and do not have constitutions, which is yet another requirement for TUC membership. So, those are some of the things that have impeded our quest to become a full member of the TUC, which is why we are still an associate member. We are working on helping the various associations in UNIWA to at least formalise and make their systems of operation more democratic so that UNIWA can eventually become a full member of the TUC with voting rights. Then it will be recorded in history all over Africa that Ghana's model should be emulated by all because informal economy workers have voting rights in a mainstream trade union.

Akosua K. Darkwah: So, of your 21 unions, can you name off-head some of those that are properly registered with democratic leaders and constitutions?

Deborah Freeman Danquah: Oh yes, the Musicians' Union of Ghana is properly registered, the Actors Guild is properly registered, Ghana Artisans and Traders' Union is properly registered as well as the Ghana Union of Physically Challenged Workers. Some of the market associations like the Odawna Market Traders' Association are also registered properly. The Makola market has two unions. They split into two because they wanted to be consistent with the TUC's tradition. The original Makola Traders Union belongs to those who operate the monarchic system. A decade ago, a new Makola Traders Union was formed, which is being managed democratically and is guided by a constitution. So, we revoked the membership of the first one and then admitted the new Makola union as it has a constitution it has been registered. Then we have a Domestic Services Workers' Union which is also registered properly. Most of the 21 member associations have registered properly.

Akosua K. Darkwah: Is the Ghana Hairdressers' Association part of UNIWA?

Deborah Freeman Danquah: No, they belong to the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) but that notwithstanding, we have some of their members within the regions who are members of UNIWA. However, the association itself is not yet a member. That is another area we are looking at so that we can bring them on board as members.

Akosua K. Darkwah: Now, why would they join the ICU and not UNIWA?

Deborah Freeman Danquah: The ICU has been in existence for many years. Before the formation of UNIWA, they had already organised some of the informal workers' groupings under them such as the hairdressers. However, there's freedom of association so being members of the ICU does not bar them from becoming members of UNIWA. So, it is an area we are looking at organising.

Akosua K. Darkwah: Okay. So now we can talk about the advantages of being part of UNIWA and an associate member of the TUC.

Deborah Freeman Danquah: All right, so there are many of them. First of all, it gives us a voice because riding on the leverage or the clout of the TUC is something that has taken us places, you know. During the tripartite meetings where government, employers, and workers meet to determine the daily minimum wage, we are represented. So that is one key benefit. It gives us that voice. And then also, through the TUC, we can get donor support for our activities. The Friedrich

Ebert Foundation supports UNIWA through the TUC because the TUC has had a long-standing working relationship with them. Other organisations in the Netherlands also support UNIWA through the TUC's long-standing working relationship with them. This is something we could not have been able to achieve all by ourselves as an informal economy union. The TUC has also given us two offices at its headquarters in Accra for free. Even formal economy unions that are bona fide members of the TUC have to pay for their offices. Next week, I will be in Mexico for a conference, the Conference of Women in Informal Employment Organising and Globalising (WIEGO), to represent the TUC. I have been nominated by TUC to represent both the informal economy and formal workers. Then there are the many training programmes I have attended as well. I must confess that there are many things I can do today in the corporate world thanks to the training that the TUC has offered to us.

Overall, the TUC's ability to bring informal economy workers into the mainstream through UNIWA is unprecedented. In many African countries, they call this the Ghana UNIWA model which they seek to emulate especially because of the high levels of informality across the continent. The majority of Ghana's workers are informal economy employees, so organising the informal workers and bringing them into the mainstream is the way to go. So, the TUC has done well and informal economy workers feel at home when we come to the trade union. So, these are some of the benefits among many others.

The TUC has also helped us to establish a pension scheme for informal economy workers. We call it the TUC UNIWA Informal Workers Pension Scheme. Hitherto, since most informal economy workers are own-account workers, they did not contribute to a pension, and they were not saving towards retirement. With the introduction of the National Pensions Act of 2008 (Act 766), the TUC made it possible to develop a pension scheme for our members to contribute towards every month. There are two components of the scheme: one is saving toward retirement and the other one is just savings. If you save for up to six months, you qualify to take loans out of your savings or 50% of your savings as the loan which you pay back without interest. This is a very, very, significant development.

Akosua K. Darkwah: So, I want to spend a bit of time on this pension scheme. Which pension house are you working with?

Deborah Freeman Danquah: The People's Pension Trust (PPT).

Akosua K. Darkwah: Ok and how many workers do you have who are part of this scheme?

Deborah Freeman Danquah: We have over 1,000 subscribers. Last week we held our board meeting and we gave ourselves a target to register at least 200,000. The informal economy is quite huge but again, to get people to subscribe to a scheme that will require that they pay some monies out of the little they earn is a challenge so there is a need for constant education on the benefits. The board has decided to make the pension scheme membership compulsory for all members.

Akosua K. Darkwah: So, is the money taken out via mobile money?

Deborah Freeman Danquah: Yes, please. They have the code they use. In the past, the workers used to go to them, and reach out to the workers to collect the monies but we were told it was not safe. So now, we are using the digital system, which is very good.

Akosua K. Darkwah: Okay, so the loan you were talking about, is that also provided by the PPT?

Deborah Freeman Danquah: Yes, please but last week when we met, we discussed the need to grow the funds to a certain level. So, what we together with PPT have agreed is to solicit support from some of these financial institutions who are willing to grant loans to our members and use their contributions as collateral. For now, even though the amounts are quite small, it favours drivers and hawkers. It is a 24-hour loan. You take out a loan at 6 am, and the next morning at 6 am you pay it back and you can access more loans. The amounts are fairly small – 100 Ghana cedis, 200 Ghana cedis; but for the drivers who need money for fuel to start the day's work, it helps a great deal. Similarly, the hawkers who go to Kantamanto to get second-hand clothes to sell daily think of it as a Godsend. However, the sums are too little to serve the needs of others such as caterers and seamstresses, so we are thinking of a package for the other workers in the coming months.

Akosua K. Darkwah: Great, so are there other benefits you wanted to mention before we move on to the difficulties or challenges?

Deborah Freeman Danquah: Okay, so during the annual May Day celebrations, we are also given the space to represent ourselves just as our colleagues in the formal economy. When the leaders of the formal economy unions get to shake hands with the president, that opportunity is granted to us as well. There is true inclusivity in the trade union circles in Ghana.

The only challenge is that we do not have voting rights but we fully understand that the reason for that is that our constitution is not yet consistent with that of the TUC. We are working towards addressing that challenge. Just today, we held a constitutional review meeting to address all the issues and to ensure that our constitution is consistent with that of the TUC. By the time the next congress is held in 2024, UNIWA will be admitted as a full member of the TUC.

Akosua K. Darkwah: And what will happen with the dues?

Deborah Freeman Danquah: We have used the constitution to address the dues in a very interesting manner. We are saying that during our conference where we elect our leaders, if your association has been able to pay up consistently, then you'll be given more slots for delegates. So, we have tied our benefits to the ability to pay just as the TUC does. That resolves the dues payments issue.

Akosua K. Darkwah: And internally when you had this discussion was there no dissent?

Deborah Freeman Danquah: Interestingly, it was a consensus. We all agreed that this is the best way. Of course, during the discussions, people agreed to disagree. People raised some concerns, but they were in the minority. The majority believed that this is a system that will help the organisation to grow, so that is the route we will take.

Akosua K. Darkwah: Okay, so now to a potentially contentious issue. UNIWA is technically an umbrella organisation for both own-account workers and employees in the informal economy. How true is it to say, though, that UNIWA works primarily in the interest of own-account workers and not employees?

Deborah Freeman Danquah: UNIWA acknowledges all the categories of workers within the informal economy be it the own-account worker with employees or sole proprietors or solely employees. We embrace all categories of informal workers. So that's why our membership is association based.

Akosua K. Darkwah: But their needs are different, aren't they?

Deborah Freeman Danquah: Their needs are different. So periodically, we do a needs assessment. When we even design the membership benefits, we look at the needs of the various sectors of the informal economy. What the musicians need will not always be the same as what the actors need, so we do a needs assessment to ensure that we can give each group tailor-made benefits.

Akosua K. Darkwah: When it comes to wages, for example, you are a part of that tripartite agreement. But in informal associations, will the workers and the employers go and meet with the government to determine wages for example?

Deborah Freeman Danquah: Very, very interesting question. So, in the informal economy, many of us are own-account workers. So, the minimum wage does not apply to many of us. But even for the few employees within the informal economy, when we represent at the tripartite level, we know that at least we have some members who are going to benefit. Now, for the many informal economy workers for whom the daily minimum wage may not apply, we do minimum standards. So, our members at Dansoman Market who are head porters (kayayei) for example, we tell them, "If you carry loads from one point to another, do not take less than this amount," so that they all have one uniform pricing. So, if you pick a kayayo in that area, they quote one price and you cannot cheat them.

The informal economy is complex but we design minimum standards according to their occupational needs. We form part of the tripartite engagement but because of the nature of our work, we work hand in hand with the Metropolitan Assembly authorities as well to ensure that officials do not harass market women daily for tolls. On the 6th of October, we had a big forum with the Accra Metropolitan Assembly authorities where many informal workers were present and we all agreed that we are all under one umbrella which is the Ghana Informal Economy Forum. The group consists of UNIWA, Ghana Union of Traders' Associations (GUTA), and all the big and small informal economy associations within the country. Periodically, we meet the Metropolitan Assembly authorities for negotiations concerning daily tolls. Informal workers are made to pay tolls daily and the amounts are not negotiated with the Metropolitan Assemblies because we don't have a voice. With the formation of the Ghana Informal Economy Forum, we have now changed that. The authorities have

agreed that we will negotiate the amount to be paid as a toll. Similarly, we will be involved in the decision-making to relocate markets. So, in addition to the tripartite agreement with employers and the state, we have bipartite agreements with the Metropolitan authorities. Informal economy work requires constant engagement with authorities. Social dialogue is key but in Ghana, social dialogue is difficult unless we organise through trade unions.

Akosua K. Darkwah: So now to the future. How would you like to see the association grow in the coming years?

Deborah Freeman Danquah: In five years, I am expecting that UNIWA of TUC should be a fully-fledged union that is a full member of the Trade Union Congress with voting rights. In the next ten years, I'm expecting some leaders or some of the leaders who have passed through UNIWA to be officeholders of the TUC. And that will be history for us that, in Africa, an informal economy worker has gone through the mill and has become a member or an executive of a formal trade union. And I am expecting that many of the associations whose structures are not consistent with those of UNIWA and TUC will fall in line so that they can also be taken on board as full members of UNIWA and of TUC as well. I'm expecting that UNIWA should have clout such that the government will not make any decision that has implications for informal economy work without engaging with the leaders of the Union. I am expecting that UNIWA will become indeed the most representative organisation of informal economy workers in Ghana and I'm expecting that women especially within UNIWA should be projected. Women who have gone through the mill through the UNIWA structures should be seen at the national level playing key roles in government. At that point, history will truly be made.

Akosua K. Darkwah: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Deborah Freeman Danquah: So, when I became the General Secretary of UNIWA, some members from especially the market commented, "Oh but Deborah, you are not a typical informal worker. You have a bachelor's degree so what's your business with the informal economy?" and I replied, "I may be a degree holder but I am an informal worker. I am an entrepreneur." And besides, even if you are a formal economy worker, and you have a side hustle in the informal economy, nothing stops you from being a member of an informal

economy organisation. I'm saying this to encourage our graduates out there, who think that the informal economy is for only the downtrodden and uneducated, to come on board with their capacity to help informal workers also come to the limelight.

Akosua K. Darkwah: Thank you very, very much. I have learnt a lot.

Deborah Freeman Danquah: Thank you too.

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Wangari Maathai, by Tabitha Kanogo. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2020

Patricia Kameri-Mbote

Reviewing this book is an honour for me. The subject – Wangari Maathai – is a woman I knew personally and admired greatly. She and I shared a cup of tea and buns at an international symposium that she had officially opened as an Assistant Minister for environment law on the morning of the day her award of the Nobel Peace Prize was announced in 2004. The author – Tabitha Kanogo – is a woman I have known personally for many years and greatly admire. Her tenacity in the academy has greatly inspired me. I read Kanogo's history scholarship with the eagerness of a hungry child because it filled the gaps in my study of legal subjects such as women, property, and the environment.

Kanogo's story of Wangari Maathai fits in my genre of (her) story and departs from (his) story. It fills many of the gaps I have had about the towering Maathai's life. It is easily written and very accessible, yet its depth and incisiveness capture the paradoxical life of an iconic woman who is at once simple and very complex. The story of the hummingbird doing the best it can is the story of Wangari Maathai. I first met Wangari in the early 1990s as a young academic at the University of Nairobi. I was awed by the work of the National Council of Women in Kenya (NCWK) but never got to understand why tree seedlings littered the NCWK office. But then, there were many other things that I did not understand. For instance, why was the NCWK office at the Central Police Station? What was the connection between the Association of African Women on Research and Development (AAWORD) and NCWK and the tree seedlings?

As a curious young scholar, I joined AAWORD and got to work with many great women including Tabitha Kanogo and Wangari Maathai. With the benefit of hindsight, I now see the connections between trees, women's research, and women's lives. Having grown up in central Kenya's deforested and bare landscapes in the 1970s, the thickets of trees and shrubs that now cover those

same landscapes today, the giving of way by muddy waters to clear waters in the rivers, and the ambient air that I enjoy when I visit those landscapes now make me revere Wangari's farsightedness. She was way ahead of her time. Populations have grown but trees have also increased. It is a credit to initiatives of Wangari's brainchild, the Greenbelt Movement (GBM), that rural landscapes in densely populated central Kenya are green. The genius of engaging women in the initiatives has also highlighted the role of women as managers of landscapes and countered narratives that assign land rights to men and deny women such rights. Despite not having title deeds to land – the highest recognition of land ownership rights – women have used the access rights that make them the primary workers on land to cover the landscapes with trees and shrubs. As in Wangari's hummingbird story, women are doing all that they can. Maathai noted of the GBM that its greatest achievement was not the planting of trees, important as that is, but the elevation of illiterate women to a space where they could use their skills to make a difference.

Kanogo's mastery of Kenya's history and her deep understanding of the gender and class contexts permeates the narration. This makes the book a rich source of material for students in diverse disciplines including history, women's studies, politics, religion, sociology, economics, anthropology, and law. As a teacher of the law of equality, I am fascinated by the intersections within which Wangari found herself – gender, patriarchy, race, class, and domesticity – and which she had to navigate. The description of Wangari as a child of two worlds is deep because the binaries are not just colonial/postcolonial but also cultural/religious, exposed/unexposed, aware/unaware, and educated/uneducated, among many others. Having been born in and grown up as part of a polygamous family, her monogamous marriage must also have been a case of learning by doing.

The description of Wangari as a child of the soil with an intimate relationship with land is very apt. The quests to secure Karura Forest and Uhuru Park as open public spaces for current and future generations exemplify that relationship. Planting trees also demonstrates that aspect of Wangari's life. Many of us were amazed that Wangari was always dressed in a manner that would not stand in the way of planting a tree when the opportunity presented. In her flowing African robes, it was easy to squat, scoop the soil and plant a tree. She did not worry about getting her hands dirty from the soil.

The account of Wangari's education is fascinating, particularly the denial of opportunities for African children in the reserves and on squatter farms. The duality of education, agriculture, and health systems for Africans and the settlers explains the inequalities that were cultivated during the colonial period and bequeathed to the new state at independence. The accounts of the competition between different mission groups and between the colonial government and indigenous educational entrepreneurs are mind-boggling. It is disturbing that these took centre stage and, in the circumstances, it did not matter that African children lost out on educational opportunities.

Another point on education that is interesting is the dialectic between 'social mobility' and 'social death'. It is ironic that education that facilitates movement in the social echelons also kills one's connectedness to one's roots. The loneliness of the socially mobile on the one hand and socially dead on the other is paradoxical. Colonialism's erosion of culture is an issue that many people in postcolonial states continue to grapple with as calls for decolonisation grow louder.[1] Wangari's assumption of Roman Catholic names, and English as the language of choice during her studies, and her movement to Roman Catholic institutions for further studies reveals the overbearing tenor of these seemingly benign steps. The schisms in society caused by religious formations are also not obvious. One would think that the conversion of heathens to Christianity is a universal quest for all denominations of the Christian faith. The competition and segregation between protestant and catholic faithful and schools tell a different story.

The awakening for Wangari during her studies in the United States illustrates that one's consciousness can be raised by events in a far-flung land dealing with seemingly different issues. In shedding the names given to her by the nuns, Wangari was asserting her identity. The assertion of identity is not an explicit theme in the book but it is implicit in discussions of her entry into and exit out of marriage; her work at the University of Nairobi; her work as a women's rights champion, environmental conservationist, and advocate for the rights of the poor; and as a politician. The one identity that interspersed with all others was gender. The description on pages 51-52 aptly captures the fact that she took on womanhood responsibilities with zest. It states:

1 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. 2012. Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa: Myths of Decolonization Dakar: CODESRIA. 37.

> …she adopted a hands on approach, especially on the home front, and took to waiting on family guests personally: after all, domesticity was the cultural symbol of wifehood and womanhood. But the gendered construction of the social reproduction of her household was exacting. Hers was a furious dance as she juggled household responsibilities, a career, and public commitments. Even for this accomplished academic, the 'business of [African] womanhood was a heavy burden.'

The reference to Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*[2] enables the reader to appreciate the burdens of womanhood and wifehood in an African context. For women like Wangari who take on roles that are outside what is expected of the African woman, the burden is extremely onerous.

Wangari's fight for the environment is legendary and continues to reverberate. Her concern about deforestation went beyond trees to the soil that trees held together and protected from erosion; the carbon that trees store, which helps in regulating the climate and cleansing the air from pollution; the water catchment functions of forests; and the species of flora and fauna that are hosted in forests. Interestingly, former President Daniel Arap Moi and she were at loggerheads most of the time yet President Moi was a great champion of the environment. He is famed for his soil conservation campaign and other initiatives. It is either because he perceived stewardship of the environment as a male space and Wangari therefore, as out of order in venturing into it, or because his policies were riddled with contradictions. The latter seems to be a plausible explanation. As Kanogo demonstrates, Wangari exposed the contradictory policy moves of the Moi government over the environment at a time when dissent on any matter was not tolerated. It is therefore not surprising that Wangari's environmental conservation initiatives merged with and fuelled general dissatisfaction with Moi's repressive government.

Wangari's initiatives led to awareness raising about wrong incarceration, corruption, abuse of human rights, and poor governance. Everything Wangari did was connected to everything else leading to people's movement from the practical to the strategic needs in both urban and rural contexts. This may explain the brutal use of force against Wangari and those who supported her. Her

2 Dangarembga, Tsitsi. 1988. Nervous Conditions. Harare, Zimbabwe: Zimbabwe Pub. House.

courage and resilience fuelled the fire that led to the opening of the democratic space in Kenya and contributed to the birthing and eventual promulgation of the transformative 2010 Constitution. Wangari used all means at her disposal to fight for what she believed in – from rallying local and internal support, to court battles, to protests and traditional ways of expressing opposition. For a woman who was highly educated, the protests with mothers of political prisoners that used *guturama* (showing your private parts) and shaking breasts at policemen who attacked them illustrate how women like Wangari belonged to different worlds. That could be an advantage when fighting a war that had many different fronts and required marshalling of all arsenals.

Wangari did her work with conviction and great passion. The expectation of the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Wangari in 2004, while merited, was not what kept her going. She was as comfortable with local people as she was with players at the national and international levels. She was famous locally and internationally before the award of the Prize. Kanogo's account of the initiatives that Wangari got involved in after the award of the Prize point to her vision and the use of her skills to improve the world she lived in. Wangari's vision continues to inspire generations. This history of her life is a great addition to the existing troves of knowledge and provides excellent fodder for future generations and scholars.

Contributors

Akosua K. Darkwah is an Associate Professor of Sociology and Dean of the School of Information and Communication Studies at the University of Ghana. Her research interests are in gender and work as well as gender and the media. For her studies on gender and work, she focuses primarily on the ways in which global economic policies and practices reconfigure Ghanaian women's work. She is currently studying the baking industry in Ghana. Since 2022, she has been serving as the Convenor for the Network for Women's Rights, Ghana's largest network of women's rights organisations and individuals.

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Deborah Freeman Danquah is a business entrepreneur, labour activist, and music composer. She has been an executive member of the Union of Informal Workers' Associations (UNIWA)'s affiliate union, the Musicians Union of Ghana (MUSIGA) for the past 20 years. She is currently the General Secretary of MUSIGA and is aspiring to be its President. She is also the founding General Secretary of the UNIWA of the TUC, Ghana and currently serves in the same position. She has been active in promoting the labour rights of women and informal workers for the past decade.

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