A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Community Development

By

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32520421

2016
Declaration

I declare that this thesis is an account of my own research. It contains as its main content work which has not been previously submitted for a degree at any university.

Donald Mandizvidza
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Abstract

This research project is premised on the argument that women are oppressed and discriminated against socio-culturally, economically and politically. Women do assume social and economic roles in the family and community but their contributions are not recognised compared with men. This dissertation explores the cultural politics behind the exploitation of women in rural Zimbabwe. The research mainly dwells on the negative impacts imposed by patriarchal attitudes on women’s socio-economic and political progress. A review of literature including journals, books, and newspaper articles, government documents, local and international non-governmental organizations reflected that Zimbabwean women face social, cultural, economic, political and educational barriers and despite the measures being done to alleviate the women’s subordinate position, parity has yet to be achieved. Rural women need to be empowered by getting higher education. More economic opportunities, political participation and decision-making in order to reduce their dependency on men can be achieved by increasing their enrolment in higher education, as well as through the provision of microcredit or microfinance. In political participation the use of the quota system is recommended as it has been viewed as the best solution in terms of increasing the participation of women in political governance.
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Finally, as the author of this thesis, I am solely responsible for any kinds of misinterpretation, opinion or information presented.

Donald Mandizvidza (Master of Arts in Community Development)

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List of Acronyms

ACHPR  African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights
AIDS   Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (sometimes written as HIV/AIDS)
CEDAW  Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CCMT   Centre for Conflict Management and Transformation
CRC    Convention on the Rights of the Children
ESCAP  Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (United Nations)
HIV    Human Immunodeficiency Virus (sometimes referred to as HIV/AIDS)
IOM    International Organization for Migration
MDG(s) Millennium Development Goals
NAC    National Aids Council (Zimbabwe)
RAU    Research and Advocacy Unit (Zimbabwe)
SDG(s) Sustainable Development Goals
UN     United Nations
UNAIDS United Nations program on AIDS
UNDAW  United Nations Department of Advancement of Women
UNDP   United Nations Development Programme
UNESCAP United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific
UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF United Nations Children’s Fund
UN Women United Nations program on women empowerment
WHO    World Health Organization
WB     World Bank
ZIMSTAT Zimbabwe National Statistical Agency
ZYC    Zimbabwe Youth Council
Map of Zimbabwe

Source: Maps of the World
Website: [www.mapsoftheworld.com](http://www.mapsoftheworld.com)
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and background of the study

1.0 Introduction and background

It is widely acknowledged that in the developing world, across all cultures, women are more likely to be poor than men and this view is supported by Goody (1983) and the World Health Organization (WHO 2015). According to the United Nations, the term gender is a dynamic one in the sense that it refers to the intricate relationships that exist between men and women especially in context of their society or community and the roles to which they are assigned. This research is motivated by my personal experiences growing up in a patriarchal, small rural family in Zimbabwe and therefore some of the issues to be discussed will be drawn from lived experiences. As I grew up in a rural area, I witnessed first-hand the struggles that my mother and generally other village women went through in the absence of the father who was always away due to work commitments outside of the village. It is also during this time that I witnessed the superior position I held (along with other boys) in the village compared to girls our age as often they dropped out of school and were married off to rich older men of the village. This chapter also gives the research questions, objectives, the structure, scope and methodology of the study.

This study focusses on Zimbabwean rural women and explores the interplay of gender relations between men and women and the impacts they bring to the women’s socio-economic progress. It is an exploration of the gendered facets of life that seem to limit the Zimbabwean women’s socio-economic progress in rural areas and as such focusses on political, cultural, economic, social, and educational forces. Women are the most exploited in any given community in relation to labour, tasks or chores and this is attributed to the concept of patriarchy (Goody 1983:263). The domination of women by men in the developing world at large and Zimbabwean rural women in particular is unfortunately undeniable as they
are confined to the domestic sphere, ‘far away’ from the world of public affairs and economic power (WHO 2015).

In Zimbabwe rural areas are synonymous with poverty and mostly characterised by the absence of critical services such as health, education, employment, sanitation and transport. Zimbabwean rural women therefore bear the burden brought about by the lack of these services due to their attributed lower position on the hierarchal ladder of the society. Rural women constitute about one fourth of the world’s population who are the producers, entrepreneurs, and service providers. Most rural women in Zimbabwe are vital cogs in their communities’ survival and well-being and more broadly, the country’s economy. Over 80 % of Zimbabwean women live in communal or rural areas forming the bulk of the subsistence farmers as well as being the labour providers (UN_Women 2013). Despite these statistics, the face of poverty in Zimbabwe as well as globally remains female in both urban and rural areas with the latter group suffering more than the former (Oxfam 2014).

1.2 Research question

The research questions for this project are:

- What is the major cause(s) of the underdevelopment of rural women in Zimbabwe?
- What are the crucial issues encountered by women in Zimbabwe’s rural areas in their efforts to develop or make a living?
- How can rural women in Zimbabwe be empowered to develop and improve their current low socio-economic and political status?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

- To examine the major causes of women’s low socio-economic and political status in Zimbabwe’s rural areas.
- To describe the impact of culture and patriarchy on rural women in Zimbabwe.
- To explore the empowerment of women in rural areas that could lift them from their low socio-economic and political status.
To suggest recommendations for the empowerment of Zimbabwean rural women.

1.4 Structure of the Study

The thesis is divided into 6 Chapters. Chapter 1 provides the background of the study as well as objectives, scope, methodology, and brief overview of each Chapter.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature regarding the livelihoods of rural people globally in general and Zimbabwe in particular. It also provides the theoretical foundation of the study using classical texts such as Sherry Ortner (1972) *Is Female to Male as Nature to Culture* and (1996) *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture*. Michelle Rosaldo’s (1974) *Women, Culture and Society* are used extensively as well as Eleanor Leacock and June Nash (1977) *Ideologies of Sex: Archetypes and Stereotypes*. Other sources are also used to explain the general position of women in society and those that shed light on Zimbabwean rural women whose situation is worsened by cultural traditions.

Chapter 3 assesses the socio-cultural factors that limit the development of women in rural Zimbabwe such as land ownership, the commercialisation of marriages, arranged and child marriages, property inheritance issues, child bearing and polygamy. The issue of patriarchy is discussed in this section in relation to how it fuels the oppression of rural women and thereby hampers their economic development.

Chapter 4 focuses mainly on socio-political factors that limit the development of women and perpetuate their oppression in rural areas. These include lack of access to education, training and technology, lack of adequate representation in decision-making and government, lack of access to credit or finance and good working conditions. This chapter also discusses the participation of women in the informal sector.

Chapter 5 dwells on the empowerment of Zimbabwean women in rural areas and gives recommendations on what needs to be done to address the inequalities that exist between men and women socio-culturally, politically and economically. The notion of empowerment is examined in relation to economics, politics as well as
socio-cultural matters. Empowerment as a solution to the problems faced by rural women will be presented.

**Chapter 6** is the conclusion to this research study giving a brief summary of the thesis as a whole.

### 1.5 Scope of the Study

Zimbabwe is a small African country with a population of less than 14 million (Zimstat 2015). The country is divided into 10 provinces with the majority of the population being of the Shona and Ndebele tribes whose cultures are largely similar. It is important to note that there are other tribes like the Shangaani, Tonga who are also regarded as patriarchal but this study dwells more on the Shona and Ndebele who are clearly the majority population. The Ndebele and Shona speaking people are both patriarchal and patrilineal societies and therefore are relevant to this research which seeks to examine the influences of culturally informed gendered power relations (Decosas and Padian 2002).

### 1.6 Methodology

An in-depth qualitative analysis relies on literature that includes scholarly journals, newspaper articles, books, dissertations or theses, government and nongovernmental organisations’ reports, websites, archives and academic blogs (contextual data). Critical reflection based on personal experience will also be used as a qualitative method. Qualitative research seeks to understand aspects of social life and was used in this research to understand the experiences and attitudes of the rural patriarchal communities. This method helps in answering to the ‘what’, ‘how’ or ‘why’ of a phenomenon rather than ‘how many’ or ‘how much’, which are answered by quantitative methods (Gill et al. 2008). However, qualitative data in this research will be supported by quantitative techniques in the form of statistics.

### 1.7 Conclusion

This chapter gave a brief background of the study regarding rural women. Zimbabwean rural women are faced with problems ranging from lack of basic
infrastructure and services which is compounded by patriarchal traditions which prevail in the communities. It outlined the objectives, research questions, structure, scope and methodology of the study. In the next chapter, I review literature on the status of rural women and also explore various theoretical angles in order to explain the lower status of women.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature review and theoretical framework

2.0 Introduction

Rural women face different challenges as opposed to their urban counterparts and it is well-known that they are far more marginalised (Goody 1983, WHO 2015). This research supports the view that gender relations, roles and unequal power characterise the lives of all women and girls in societies (Kabeer and Sweetman 2015). The first part of this chapter discusses available global evidence in literature which generally suggests that rural women have limited power over economic and financial resources, and this is constrained by both structural factors and ideologies which accept male authority as the norm. The second part addresses the theories underpinning the relationships between cultural politics and gender dynamics in order to explain the reasons behind the discrimination of women in Zimbabwe.

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.1 Gender and Rural Livelihoods

At least 70% of the world's impoverished people live in rural areas in developing countries. Globally, the livelihoods of rural people are largely agriculture dependent and women, on average, make up more than 40% of the agricultural labour force (World_Bank 2014). The female labour ratio in agriculture ranges from about 20% in Latin America, with more than 50% in East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. The rural population in Zimbabwe for instance stood at 67% in a 2014 survey (World_Bank 2014). Rural livelihoods are intrinsically linked to subsistence agriculture with women being the face of farm work, but it is also important to say that non-agricultural activities such as cross-border trading in groceries and clothing exist in many African rural settings (Figure 1).
Figure 1: Martha Mafa, a subsistence farmer in rural Chivi, Zimbabwe. Photo credit: Reuters' Philemon Bulawayo

Rural people in Zimbabwe and other developing countries have of late diversified into other income generating activities, both formal and informal. For example, men migrate to cities for paid employment or take up paid jobs in rural areas such as building, while women are involved in the buying and selling of agricultural produce, engage in domestic work or other paid activities like sewing and brewing beer (Figure 2) (Van Blerk et al. 2008). In some areas where outmigration of men to the cities or neighbouring countries is very high, the outcome is usually the feminization of farm work; women are solely responsible for all farming activities and responsibilities such as caring for the family using farm income (Kandiyoti 1990). Most of the work done by women in most developing nations including Zimbabwe is classified under the informal sector industry (Van Blerk et al. 2008).
The informal sector covers a wide range of activities which are usually low-paid or unpaid coping strategies (such as selling clothes and art crafts) and subsistence agriculture. The size of the informal sector is estimated to be above 50% in low-income and developing countries (Njaya 2015). The statistics on the informal economy are usually unreliable (due to inconsistent data provided by governments and non-governmental organizations) but at the very least show a picture of how the sector is relevant today in developing nations. Informal employment makes up 48% in North Africa, 51% in Latin America, 65% in Asia, and 72% in Sub-Saharan Africa (Nancy 2014). Women largely make up the greatest part of the informal sector, mostly in home-based industries (Figure 3) such as street vending and illegal activities such as prostitution. According to the Zimbabwe National Statistical Agency (Zimstat) in its 2014 Labour Force Survey, the informal sector in the country stands at more than 80% and thrives mainly due to lack of employment opportunities in the formal sector (Zimstat 2015).
Men’s outmigration from rural areas is a world-wide phenomenon common to Brazil, most parts of Asia as well as Zimbabwe (Figure 4). In Zimbabwe’s rural areas, there are villages where women-headed households are common due to men’s departure. The effect of men’s outmigration is the increase or expansion of women’s responsibilities. They are left in charge of the households as well as expected to continue with their traditional feminine child care roles whilst doubling with the men’s responsibilities of farm work, and earning income for the family’s survival and general upkeep. The resultant double burden on rural women leaves far-reaching consequences that affect girls and children. The 2014 survey by Zimstat also reported that one in three women interviewed married before the legal age of 18. Due to poverty, young girls drop out of school and are forced into early marriages and this puts them at high risk of sexually transmitted diseases as some of them end up engaging in prostitution to make ends meet (International_Organisation_for_Migration 2009).
The recurring argument in the literature reviewed for this study is that rural people are the most disadvantaged group in various aspects of life when compared to those living in urban areas. Rural inadequacies are caused by the under-resourcing and relative deprivation of welfare, education, health and other facilities such as transport (Figure 5) and to some extent, there is bias towards development programs concentrated in urban areas. Essential services such as those above are either not available, or difficult to access and sometimes the costs involved (like school, medical fees) in obtaining them are way beyond the majority's reach (La Nauze 1994).

The above argument is valid in rural areas of many developing countries and equally true for some rural areas in developed countries as well. For instance in Australian rural and remote areas, it was found that service delivery is poor, and access is difficult as businesses and even health workers shun employment in those areas (Humphreys and Wakeman...
2008). In Zimbabwe, rural people walk very long distances, some up to 20 kilometres to get to the nearest shopping centre or health facility and no ambulance personnel are readily available in cases of health emergencies. Schools and clinics are distant, under resourced and dilapidated (Figure 6) and this impacts negatively on the future generation as more children drop out of school and lack access to adequate healthcare. For instance, young boys who do so often end up doing drugs and alcohol. Some of them illegally migrate to neighbouring countries using dangerous routes to look for employment and as mentioned earlier girls and women are pushed into prostitution and early marriages (Centre for Conflict Management and Transformation 2014).

This complex portrayal indicates that rural women are considered powerless, especially in the public domain, and their significant contributions to rural economic and community life left unacknowledged by society. Rural women play a vital role in supporting their families and communities to achieve food security yet their contribution is often overlooked (UNDP 2012). Women’s contribution to agriculture is an integral part of local economies. At the same time rural women and young girls are faced with persistent structural inhibitions, especially cultural beliefs and practices influenced by patriarchal values and beliefs that limit them from fully enjoying their human rights, hampering their efforts to improve their lives as well as those of others around them. For example, men represent 85 % of
agricultural landholders in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Ghana, Madagascar, Zimbabwe and Nigeria men own more than twice the number of livestock compared to women. Similar gaps exist in access to fertilizer, mechanical equipment, new technologies, extension services such as information workshops, farmer training and access to credit (UN_Women 2015).

Rural life in most developing nations is characterised by an authoritarian philosophy which celebrates the women's domestic roles and inferior status in rural culture (Humphreys and Wakerman 2008). It is a well-documented issue that globally, rural women fare badly socially and economically compared with their urban counterparts, a situation worsened by poor or lack of social infrastructure. In a 2010 study conducted in the African countries of Malawi and Guinea, it was found that rural women spent more time doing household duties like fetching water and firewood (Figure 7), child care, and cooking when compared with urban women and both rural and urban men (Heinemann, Prato, and Shepherd 2011).

Figure 7: Collecting firewood is a woman’s responsibility in rural Zimbabwe. Photo credit: Google Images
The United Nations officially acknowledged that globally, gender inequality was one of the major hurdles to development when it published its new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), formerly referred to as the Millennium Development Goals (MDG 3). Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) explained in detail in Figure 8 stresses the need for promoting gender equality and empowerment of women. The quest for explicit support for rural women is a basic-rights issue which makes sense economically and could go a long way in the overall development of rural women (Kandiyoti 1990, Kabeer 2005). It is widely acknowledged that women have limited and different access to resources, assets or opportunities compared with men. Various researchers (Pswarayi 2011, Rose 2012, Stormorken, Vincent, and Santisteban 2007, Townshend 2008, UNAIDS 2005) point out that the distribution of resources such as land for farming and livestock is unequal and largely dependent on and undertaken by the male members in the family or community. It is believed that the distribution of wealth, for example after parents have died is frequently unequal and biased towards the patriline of the family. Male members of the family or community possess more bargaining power than their female counterparts (Haddad, Hoddinott, and Alderman 1997). That brokering power almost always favours the men and this also applies in Zimbabwe.

Figure 8: Sustainable Development Goal 5. Photo credit: www.un.org
Rural women in both developed and developing countries are marginalised and their work is under-recognised, including vital domestic work and voluntary tasks such as unpaid help on neighbouring farms (Alston 1990). Thus although they play a large part in domestic and reproductive goals, many women face enormous challenges in terms of economic and social development. Farming is usually presented as a masculine enterprise and as such inheritance, other land dealings and decision-making falls under the ambit of male partners (Alston 1990) despite the farming labour force being predominantly women and children. In this sense, rural women are inhibited by a cultural ideology which spells out the patriarchal-based gendering of roles and labour.

Research conducted in India by Bhanumathi (2002) indicated that the dislocation of women, through resettlement due to mining activities in their original villages results in the destruction of traditional forms of livelihood. Women who moved into mining areas were not able to cultivate due to land shortages and unsuitability for farming purposes (taking into account the location of most mining areas are usually arid with humid conditions) and henceforth are forced into menial, dangerous and marginalised forms of labour such as maids and prostitution (Bhanumathi 2002). Zimbabwe is endowed with mineral resources such as gold and diamonds and numerous small towns or growth points arose from these mining activities. Most mines are located in very remote areas but have still managed to attract a few businesses and service providers as well as building schools and health facilities for the neighbouring communities. This could also explain why mining and farming areas in Zimbabwe are classified as HIV/AIDS hotspots according to Zimbabwe’s National Aids Council (NAC) report of 2015.  

Farm income and production have been very low in recent years due to several factors such as economic turmoil and climate change effects. According to the World Bank (2014) low rainfall and rising temperatures have resulted in incessant droughts which leave the large rural population in hunger. Consequently in Zimbabwe the word “rural” is almost synonymous with “poverty”. Zimbabwean livelihoods have become severely compromised in both urban and rural areas since the late 1990s. Sky-rocketing inflation, rapid shrinkage in formal sector

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1 The prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe is one of the major issues affecting women in Zimbabwe but is not dealt with in this research. The Zimbabwe National Aids Council Report of 2015 provides more detail on the high rate of HIV/AIDS in mining towns of Zimbabwe.
opportunities including in mining and manufacturing, the demise of the agricultural export sector with the government appropriation of commercial farms owned by the descendants of European colonizers, and the government attack on the informal sector (through destruction of market stalls and arrest of vendors) have all been documented and analysed (Goebel 1999).

2.2 Conclusion

According to the literature reviewed, women are generally a disadvantaged group in various aspects of life but much worse specifically for rural women. There are several factors which contribute to the underdevelopment of women and ranging from cultural, social, economic, and political concepts which will be developed in Chapters 3 and 4. The next section will discuss theoretical angles from classical texts by feminist scholars such as Michelle Rosaldo (1974) and Sherry Ortner (1997) who each try to frame ways by which to assess the social status of women.
2.3 Theoretical Framework

2.3.1 Introduction

This chapter will evaluate the usefulness of several theories regarding the position of women in society. The social inequalities between men and women are increasingly being questioned worldwide. For some scholars and the general women’s population, male domination is one of the major forms of oppression in the world. The theories explored here try to explain the different possibilities or reasons as to why women find themselves in the position they are in. There is a vast literature on women in society but this thesis is concerned with connections between cultural politics and approaches to gender dynamics from both a cultural and political economy perspective. I begin with a discussion of cultural politics as a useful conceptual tool for understanding gender relations, followed by the nature/culture debate, gender as a socio-cultural construct, gendered roles, and the effects of colonialism and capitalism on women’s status.

2.3.2 Cultural politics and gender in society

The concept of cultural politics is useful for understanding the status of women in different societies as a contestation between different forces in any given community whether at family, community or national level. Cultural politics is a site where meanings are made and negotiated, and the definition of who should dominate and be dominated (Jackson 1991). There is a thin line that separates culture and society. As Jackson (1991:200) notes, “cultures are a domain in which economic, political contradictions are ritualistically expressed and symbolically resolved”. Social life is political and there are always contestations of power (Nash 2001). Cultural politics therefore is helpful in explaining the position of women in Zimbabwe taking into consideration Nash’s (2001:77) assertion that “social life is mediated by culture; culture must also be seen as the site of politics”.

By taking the above points into account it can be argued that the domination of women by men is closely tied to power relations in every community, which
cultural and social values prevail over others and what is or is not important (Jordan and Weedon 1995). In Zimbabwean as well as other African societies, there exist social divisions determined by age, gender and kinship. The main argument embedded in “cultural politics” theory is that to a large extent, social divisions reflect social inequality. It can be argued that the low status of women in various societies including Zimbabwe is ideologically rooted in cultural belief and value systems.

The process of making meaning in every society, the dictation of what is permissible, the specific roles and tasks expected of both men and women are determined by cultural politics (Jordan and Weedon 1995). Accordingly, all instances of inequality are deeply embedded in culture, and culture is responsible for legitimatizing social inequality. In Zimbabwe, those who are in positions of authority are able to dictate and control and given that the majority of leaders at family, community and national levels are men, the status of women is bound to be affected in some way. The majority of households are run by men who also dominate at government level (UN_Women 2013).

The “cultural politics” theory borrowed heavily from the feminist revolution of the 1970s led by the likes of Wollstonecraft and Mill (1970). Biological determinism cannot explain women’s suffrage thus the movement sought to dispel these notions as grounds for women’s exploitation, instead arguing that cultural values and beliefs underpinned women’s low status in all facets of life. Socio-cultural roles and beliefs such as domesticity and motherhood are learned and are effects of culture. Social identities are produced and reproduced by social practices. For example, media (as illustrated in Figure 9), advertising, film, sport, literature or art, and popular culture could contribute to shaping gender prejudice that assigns certain qualities to men and/or women (Jordan and Weedon 1995, Wollstonecraft and Mill 1970). The effects of gender stereotyping are far-reaching, and women in different societies are therefore restricted in terms of the distribution of material resources as they are considered inferior.
2.3.3 The Female/Male and Nature/Culture Debate

Sherry Ortner’s, *Is Female to Male as Nature to Culture* (1972) is one of the classical feminist theoretical pieces seeking to explain the deep, underlying cultural behaviours that place women at the lower rung of the human social ladder. She propounds that “everywhere, in every known culture, women are considered in some degree inferior to men” (Ortner 1972:68). There are various ways to find out how communities consider women inferior and this can be through the scrutiny of the allocation of roles or tasks, symbols, and socio-structural arrangements. Ortner (1972) foregrounds the assertion that it is difficult to find a truly classless community where everyone (men and women) are equal both in social and economic dimensions. Nonetheless, women do have certain powers and rights although within a culturally prescribed boundary or limit. In Zimbabwe, women tend to accumulate more power and leadership roles when they get much older. For example, in the country’s traditional religion and customs, they hold important roles in rituals as spirit mediums (Bourdillon 1998). This is a patriarchal tradition which seems to recognise and give respect to women as they grow older (and are no longer menstruating).
From the standpoint of cultural politics the female/male and nature/culture debate is a drastic departure (Jordan and Weedon 1995) in that it actually acknowledges biological determinism in its explanation for the worldwide devaluing of womankind. Both Michelle Rosaldo (1974) and Ortner (1972) view power or domination over women by men to be genetically based, meaning that men are believed to possess something “superior” that women do not (Ortner 1972:68). Their main claim is that women are identified with nature and the domestic sphere and men with culture and the public domain, which I detail further below. It is culture’s duty to rule over and control nature; therefore, culture (identified with men), find it easy and natural to subordinate women. Women’s reproductive functions place her closer to nature and thus her roles in the community are shaped by her procreative functions (Figure 10). The lactation process limits women’s social movement thus they find themselves confined to the domestic sphere characterised by bearing children and doing unpaid work. The gendered domestic / public dichotomy is argued to be a creation of, or “made” by social structures.

Figure 10: Baby clinic day at a rural clinic in Zimbabwe. Women in rural Zimbabwe spend most of their time attending to children and this relegates them to home based work. Photo credit: www.devex.com

2.3.4 Gender as a construction of society

The phrase “making gender” in the title of Ortner’s (1997) Making Gender: Toward a Feminist, Minority, Postcolonial, Subaltern, ETC, Theory of Practice;
underlines her major argument. How society negotiates or makes meaning of particular gendered issues is always subject to the culture within which they operate; human action is always inhibited by the given social and cultural order (structure). Human activities are responsible for the production, reproduction and transformation of the socio-cultural structure, therefore allowing for the possibility to restore female agency (Ortner 1997).

The representation of female agency can be best explained by the transition from childhood to adulthood for both girls and boys. Supporting this assertion, Ortner (1997) borrows from the classic 1812 collection of stories by the Grimm brothers, Jacob and Wilhelm. In most of the stories, boys are culturally conditioned and acquire agency successfully through conscious training by the head of the household (the father) while the female characters are represented as largely unsuccessful in acquiring agency (Ortner 1997). For instance, this is true of the Atjenese families in Java, Indonesia, where the practice of ‘social conditioning’ takes boys away from home so as to become men (Siegel 1969). Basing her analysis of the stories in Grimm’s collection, Ortner argues that the forms and distribution of agency are always culturally and politically constructed and therefore have the potential to unmake some of the beliefs and customs that limit the development of women. Patriarchy is the root cause of inequality between men and women as summed up in the quotation (Figure 11) by a representative of Musasa Project, a non-governmental organisation against patriarchal dominance in Zimbabwe.

The fact that social life is a socio-cultural construct could be captured by the adoption of a new phrase “serious games” to explain that for actors, there are rules and goals involved, and there is interaction between multiple connected subjects (Ortner 1997). The “serious games” of life are characterised by power relations which reproduce inequality in different ways. The game of power or authority (patriarchy) is ‘invaded’ by the role of the father who has enormous privileges over the subordinates of the household - the wife and children. However, while women can also play the game to their own advantage by marrying up the social ladder (hypergamy) (Ortner 1997:12) they do not have full independence or intentionality in the games. Even though women play their own part in the games of power, it does not shape the cultural order of gender
interpretations and traditions which generally express a masculine line of reasoning.

Figure 11: Netty Musanhu of Musasa Project, a non-governmental organisation campaigning for the equality between men and women in Zimbabwe. Photo credit: Lee Webster, www.es.klear.com

2.3.5 Gendered and universal categorization of roles

Michelle Rosaldo (1974) speaks of the universal disproportion in cultural evaluations of women and men. As mentioned earlier, she shares Ortner’s view that while women may be regarded as worthy, powerful, and influential in the domestic sphere, when contrasted to men in many societies they lack culturally appreciated power. Differences between men and women and the allocation of different tasks and responsibilities produce different expectations regarding manners between men and women. This is partially attributed to physiological differences believed to have led or leading to the differential characteristics in male and female activities (Rosaldo 1974) which may not always be visible because of a range of subjective positions.

Rosaldo’s (1974) culturally based model provides many examples from Europe, Asia as well as Africa noting that despite the cultural diversity, there is a single
thread running through all of them: men are the locus of cultural value. While the “right” for men to subordinate women is culturally endorsed nonetheless it is acknowledged that women do possess “informal” power and influence through acts such as gossiping, shouting, refusing to cook, and denying husbands conjugal rights. She notes the universality of male authority but does not necessarily deny that women are also valued to a certain extent. Pointing out that although men are powerful in every culture it would be folly to ignore the fact that women may play the “game” as well (Ortner 1972, 1997, Rosaldo 1974). From a cultural politics or political economy standpoint, domination in the society results from long-standing and usually unquestioned traditional practices and beliefs (Nash 2001, Leacock and Nash 1977). Thus biology is rejected by some cultural theorists in explaining the domination of women in society.

Though biological determinism has been used in differentiating human beings, it has fallen short in explaining that in all cultures men are given more social value and moral worth than women. This argument echoes other studies that vehemently deny biology as the cause of women’s devaluation (Jordan and Weedon 1995, Ortner 1997, Wollstonecraft and Mill 1970), instead pointing to cultural “games” or dynamics. These studies give the example of the transition process of boys and girls from childhood to adulthood. Female personality is acquired naturally and easily while boys have to ‘learn’ being men and at some point boys must break away from the mother to be able to establish maleness (Figure 12). The act of becoming a man is regarded as an achievement and is a prerequisite for attaining manhood yet for women, womanhood is an ascribed status (Ortner 1997, Rosaldo 1974). The social conditioning of boys and girls in their transition to adulthood is a patriarchal practice which leads to the gendering of roles ascribed to both men and women.
The binary opposition between the domestic and public spheres also goes a long way in explaining the status of women in the society. The domestic sphere denotes the activities centred around the household and children while the public sphere is mainly focused on activities that link, classify, and control household groups (Rosaldo 1974). The reason for this distinction has been tied to the procreative functions of the woman. When women give birth, they are bound to the household as they take care of the young children and thus their economic and political activities (identified as the public sphere) are severely constrained. The household inclination of the woman is often contrasted with the extra-household, political, and military spheres which are primarily connected with men (Rosaldo 1974). Although this might explain the devaluation of women, there are other viewpoints that argue the sexualisation of roles were actually caused by the advent of colonialism and emergence of the private property.
2.3.6 Colonization, Capitalism and Gender

Eleanor Leacock and June Nash (1977) studied data from ethnographic literature about diverse societies around the world. Their work seeks to clarify the ‘ethnocentric errors’ that women have been devalued everywhere compared to their male counterparts. To them, it is wrong to link and describe the devaluation of women with inferior nature in contrast to men who are regarded as superior culture (Leacock and Nash 1977). There is documentation to prove the independent and public roles of women were taken away by the governmental structures of the European colonial settlers. The arrival of European colonials resulted in a loss of land rights, economic contributions and independence for the original dwellers (locals) but most affected were women. Leacock and Nash’s arguments seem to borrow heavily from the works of Friedrich Engels (1887) who argues that the emergence of classes in societies was the result of capitalistic tendencies.

Leacock and Nash (1977) give examples from various groups or communities where women had high degree of autonomy, for example the Arapaho and those living in the Central Plateau of Mexico. Their theory falls into a body of literature that suggests that women are devalued and placed lower than men on the social radar by colonialism, capitalist influenced economy as well as class formation (Engels 2010, Marx and Engels 1970). While they agree that women have always been socially subordinate to men – their point of divergence with the likes of Ortner (1972) and Rosaldo (1974) is the cause of that subordination. They argue that there is selective prejudice and methodical misrepresentations of native people’s viewpoints in the New World as they were stereotyped and cast into archetypes of European iconography (Leacock and Nash 1977:618). This can be linked to cultural politics in the sense that the growth of private property or capitalism resulted in contestations of power which resulted in wealth ending up in the hands of men.
2.4 Conclusion

Scholarly accounts attempting to explain the status of women in society refer to the social as well as biological attributes of women to be responsible for the distribution of power favouring men. Women’s procreative functions, their ability to give life ties them to the domestic sphere and limits them from entering the more culturally valued public sphere which is dominated by men. In the literature, the influence of cultural politics has only been alluded to as the major cause of women’s oppression. Gender dimensions are viewed as socio-cultural constructs, where culture shapes, makes and can “unmake” both female and male roles. The next chapter will discuss the socio-cultural factors that limit the development of Zimbabwean rural women particularly in areas of education and employment.
CHAPTER THREE

Cultural power relations and women development in rural Zimbabwe

3.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on patriarchy as the root cause of the limitations imposed on rural women. Patriarchal beliefs and customs such as land ownership, marriage, inheritance, and the gendering of roles, to a large extent, lead to the discrimination of women at all levels of society be it in the government, community or business activities. Property and family laws promulgated by the state (divorce laws or social security systems) deeply reflect the cultural politics of patriarchal tendencies. There are two main ethnic groups in Zimbabwe: the Shona (70 %) and the Ndebele (20 %) (Jackson, Njovana, and Muhwava 2014). Each group is organized along patriarchal, patrilocal and polygynous lines in which “power” is in the hands of the men. This chapter firstly gives a brief discussion of the concept of patriarchy and its relation to Zimbabwean customary law followed by the exploration of patriarchal attributes that contribute to the discrimination of women, including child bearing, polygamous marriages, wife inheritance, arranged or early marriages, bride payment, and inheritance of property in Zimbabwe.

The patriarchal attributes mentioned above fall into the broad category of “culture”. Culture can be most simply understood as everyday lived experiences within any given community which guide how and what people think. There are different definitions of the term “culture” but this study will follow Owomoyela’s (2002:vii) which includes the expression of important aspects as religion, worldview, literature, media, art, housing, architecture, cuisine, traditional dress, gender, marriage, family, lifestyles, social customs, music and dance. Culture can be transmitted through various mechanisms across generations by way of oral tradition, kinship rites and family property distribution, print culture and educational institutions (Owomoyela 2002).

3.1 Patriarchy and customary law
The term patriarchy is generally understood to underlie issues related to gender oppression. Patriarchy can be most simply defined as male domination and female subordination as a universal system (Inhorn 1996, Rosaldo 1974) rooted in economic, religious, legal and political structures (Figure 13). It is also manifest in male power, dominance, and hierarchies that oppress women at the family level, with the father or men exerting total control of family issues over both females and younger males of the household. The Zimbabwean rural family structure for instance, is patrilineal based on relationship to the father; male and female members of the household are socio-culturally conditioned to accept patriarchal ideals from the early stages of their lives.

![Figure 13: Women protesting against the oppressive gender norms influenced by patriarchal culture and religion. Photo credit: www.womeninandbeyond.org](image)

Zimbabwean society seems to fall into what Kandiyoti (1988:4) terms “classical patriarchy” whereby under customary law young girls are given away in marriage and are subservient to all men and senior women of the family. They do not have any claim to their father’s wealth or property and enter the new household as deprived beings who can only establish their place in the patriliney through child-bearing, especially by producing male offspring (Kandiyoti 1988:6). Classic patriarchy continues with the operations of the patrilineal extended family, commonly associated with the reproduction of the peasantry in agrarian societies and this is found to be the case in Zimbabwe’s rural areas. Nonetheless, women under classic patriarchy can engage in patriarchal bargaining. These are
interpersonal strategies to maximize security and optimize life options within the constraining patriarchal ideals, such as manipulation of the affections of sons and husbands (Kandiyoti 1988, Inhorn 1996). For example in Javanese society, women have informal power through language use and the ability to gather information. There, women use fluent, eloquent tongue to manipulate family relations (Keeler 1990). In China women are regarded as having village problem-solving techniques because of their competence and use of informal gatherings to communicate their grievances (Wolf 1974). In Zimbabwe women have bargaining power if they bear male children and also tend to get more respect as they grow older and are given advisory roles in the family and community (Bourdillon 1998, Gelfand 1992, Gombe 1986).

Zimbabwean women, both urban and rural, are controlled in most facets of their lives by customary law under which they are viewed as minors and required to serve their fathers before marriage and subservient to their men in marriage (Reid 1995). Rural women are more affected than their urban counterparts who have access to better opportunities such as education, health facilities and overall better infrastructure, taking into account that most cities in the country are globalising. Henceforth, most rural women in Zimbabwe will at most times in their lives be under the custody of male authority to which they are expected to be subservient. According to Reid (1995), although women can engage in patriarchal bargaining as mentioned before, in many societies they are still regarded as perpetual minors and are left out of negotiations and decision making processes. The social environment in Zimbabwe’s rural areas is accountable for the degradation and devaluation of women’s social worth. One of the factors contributing to devaluation of women derives from the importance attached to child bearing by the broadly patriarchal Zimbabwean social structure.
3.2 Child bearing in Zimbabwean patriarchal society

The bearing of children in Zimbabwean society in general is important but more so in rural urban areas where market forces and expenses like health, and education favors small families. In rural Zimbabwe, the desire for children is the reason for marriage (Figure 14). Taking into consideration that the rural economy is agro-based children are useful in terms of labour supply. Rural areas have limited economic opportunities as government resources are mainly invested in the urban centres. In a situation similar to that described by Marcia Inhorn (1996) in Egypt, this has resulted in rural families relying on farming as there are few local job opportunities. The absence of children in a patriarchal family is largely experienced, suffered, and dreaded every day by women. Childlessness often results in emotional and psychological duress, abuse and ridicule by kin and the community, threats of divorce and violence from the husband (Inhorn 1996). However, infertility is a stigma mainly associated with women who are usually blamed for barrenness in relationships despite the fact that either sex may be responsible for failing to conceive.

Figure 14: Child bearing gives joy to the family and 'completes' womanhood as per socio-cultural expectations. Photo credit: www.nytimes.com

Barrenness has been and still is a woman’s problem, even though in some cases the husband might be the one who is infertile. In African society in general, it is
believed that a man is never infertile and in more superstitious societies like Zimbabwean rural communities, infertility is blamed on witchcraft practices (Chingombe, Mandova, and Nenji 2012). In cases where the man is found infertile, the issue is secretly discussed and in some extreme examples, another man is requested to come into the matrimonial bed to impregnate the wife although they publicly deny it to protect the man’s dignity or ego (Chingombe, Mandova, and Nenji 2012). This is one of the popular methods termed *kupindira* in the Zimbabwean Shona language, meaning ‘letting in a male relative to bear children on behalf of the suspected infertile man’ (Bourdillon 1998, Gelfand 1992). This patriarchal practice shows the preferential treatment given to men compared to the undignified treatment experienced by a woman with the same problem.

From the above discussion, it can be discerned that children are vital components in all marriages in Zimbabwean patrilineal society and the inability of a woman to conceive leaves her a more devalued human being placed on the lowest rung of the human social ladder (Inhorn 1996). Under customary law, a woman who fails to give birth to male heirs is regarded as useless by the husband’s patrilineage, which needs children for the purposes of social reproduction. Having no children or uncooperative reproductive organs also make women feel less feminine, at least according to cultural dictates (Inhorn 1996). Infertility is a serious blemish on a woman’s social identity (Goffman 2009) in many patriarchal societies including those in Zimbabwe’s rural areas. Closely linked to issues of child bearing is the marriage institution itself and how it affects the status of women, especially in relation to polygamous marriages.

### 3.3 The marriage institution and polygamy

Traditional Zimbabwean culture reveres marriage and this is true more in rural than urban areas where people are no longer strict followers of tradition due to many factors such as the pursuit of education and economic influences mentioned previously (Kambarami 2006). Marriage is a sacred institution and married women are venerated whereas those single or divorced women are regarded as failures in life. Kambarami (2006) further notes that marriage is a fulfillment of
life worth sacrificing thus most men and women withstand all types of exploitation (financial, social) in marriages to avoid stigmatization associated with divorce. There is socio-economic discrimination in Zimbabwean marriages between men and women and this can be attributed to the unequal distribution of power endorsed by customary law – cultural politics. The fact that women have to get married at all costs possibly leads to the issue of polygamy. Men marry more wives and women unwillingly enter or accept polygamous arrangements to maintain their position in the family and status in the community.

Polygamy, the taking of more than wife, is entrenched in rural Zimbabwe with men acquiring status, power, and labour supply through having more wives and resultantly, more children for farm labour (Figure 15). The practice is more popular in rural than in urban areas where farm labour is necessary as survival depends on agricultural income. However polygamous unions also exist in urban areas though they are not necessarily meant for the supply of labour (Townshend 2008). It is argued that polygamy contributes to women’s oppression by elevating men to positions of superiority. In rural areas, polygamy survives largely because of the requirements created by the sexual division of labour that marks the sphere of agriculture (Weinrich 1983). Women’s lack of and access to resources such as land for agriculture pressures them to enter into polygamous unions thereby exacerbating their impoverishment.
In addition to having many wives, husbands may have extra-marital affairs. In these cases women are usually blamed for failing to satisfy their husbands in areas such as cooking, general caring and even sexually (Kambarami 2006). The same cannot be said of women who are labeled loose if they ever engage in any extra-marital activities. Such inequalities in marriages among the rural folk go a long way in contributing to the underdevelopment of women. Women are given no voice in marriages and are largely submissive and therefore open to abuse. This has contributed to the high rate of HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa of which Zimbabwe is part. Rural women in the country cannot insist on safe sex as men control female sexuality as well. If women insist on using protection during sex, they are accused and suspected of cheating (Khumalo-Sakutukwa and Garbus 2002). In general, it can be seen that patriarchal cultural politics dictate and influence marriages in rural Zimbabwe; women’s views are not sought in issues of marriage and besides not being able to negotiate for safe sex, they are also forced into other polygamous unions through the wife inheritance system.
3.3.1 The cultural politics of wife inheritance

The death of a husband is usually followed by culturally endorsed directives to the widow to marry one of the late husband’s brothers. This is a cultural norm in most rural areas of Zimbabwe and sometimes the widow’s failure to comply results in her being sent away to fend for herself without any property and income. In contrast, if widowed a man is given a ‘replacement wife’ (kugadza mapfihwa) a practice where a girl child is given away in marriage to a widower from the widow’s family, usually the late wife’s young sister whose voice or consent is not sought. She is expected to comply as per cultural demands as well as automatically becoming subordinate to his wife/wives, further worsening her predicament (Gombe 1986, Kambarami 2006). This traditional practice is termed kugara nhaka in Zimbabwean Shona language or ukungena in Ndebele language (Chijioke and Wright 2012). Various sources (Chijioke and Wright 2012, Zimbabwe_Youth_Council 2014, Genderlinks 2004, Kambarami 2006) have noted that customs such as wife inheritance have exacerbated the low social and economic position of women.

In most instances kinsfolk take possession of the deceased’s estate, including children if the widow refuses to be remarried in the family. Women feel economically forced by the late husband’s relatives to comply with inheritance so that support for her and her children will remain; this is true for women in rural areas who are mostly in customary unions unrecognised by constitutional law. It is these women who are particularly vulnerable as they rely on the husband’s relatives in registering and administering the estate (Gombe 1986, Genderlinks 2004). According to a 2011 Zimbabwean Health Survey there are thousands of wife inheritance cases every year, especially in rural areas (Zimstat and ICF_International 2012). The main arguments given for the practice are that it avoids sexual promiscuity and provides security in terms of financial needs for the widow and children. In addition to the cultural politics of wife inheritance, when coupled with other cultural practices such as arranged marriages (where young girls are usually the victims) Zimbabwean patriarchal power structures perpetuate the subjugation of women, further stripping them of social and economic independence.
3.3.2 Arranged marriages

Arranged marriage is a popular phenomenon in both urban and rural areas as well as in some religious groups such as the Apostolic Sects (Kambarami 2006). According to Kambarami (2006) young girls are married off to older male members of the community or the church or in the case of the Apostolic Churches, where the unions are said to be based on ‘prophetic revelations’. There is an age-old tradition, especially during drought spells in rural areas, when parents marry off their daughters to a rich family in exchange for grain or money for their own upkeep. In almost all instances, the girl’s consent is not sought and those who rebel risk being disowned by their families. Arranged marriages also take another form in the practice called *kuzvarira* (Shona) or *ukwendisela* (Ndebele) (meaning betrothing / pledging a girl child at birth or before to a family) whose purposes are similarly to relieve economic burdens but differs slightly in that the daughter may be pledged even before birth. The girl is already born ‘married’ and strict supervision is implemented to protect her from outside suitors who may ‘steal’ her away.

Closely related to this is the practice of avenging angry spirits (*ngozi/ingozi*). When a family is faced with accusations of murder (usually committed by men) they are required to pay compensation to the dead person’s family in order to calm the angry, dead person’s spirit. Failure to avenge the angry spirit results in unexplained deaths of family members of the accused (Genderlinks 2004). The compensation is usually in the form of a young girl being given to the wronged family as a wife, to be taken by one of the deceased’s brothers. As in all the other cases, the girl’s consent is not important but instead is enforced to comply with cultural traditions. Each practice mentioned degrades the women’s value and self-worth and in the process, inhibits them from pursuing personal development in all aspects of their lives.
3.3.3 Early/child marriages

![UNICEF poster against child marriages](image)

Figure 16: UNICEF poster against child marriages. Girls in Zimbabwe are forced to marry at a young age against their will. Photo credit: www.huffingtonpost.com

The United Nations in 2009 (see Figure 16 which lists some of the benefits of ending child marriages including lessening poverty and HIV/AIDS rates) described early marriages as any union with a child that is under eighteen (18) years of age. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) prohibit child marriage (Edilberto Loaiza and Sylvia 2012). Zimbabwe is placed 41st on the list of countries where child marriages are rife. In a survey carried out in Zimbabwean rural areas by the Zimbabwe Youth Council (ZYC) in 2014, early marriages featured prominently as the most common cultural practice prevalent in the country’s remote communities (Zimbabwe_Youth_Council 2014). Due to lack of structural support such as payment of school fees and poverty, most young girls enter into marriages of convenience where they end up suffering from emotional, physical and psychological abuse (Zimbabwe_Youth_Council 2014).
Child marriage is a violation of children’s basic human rights. It discriminates the girl child and deprives her of good access to health, education, economic development and equality. According to UN funded research into early marriages in different countries in Africa (2011), they have harmful effects such as separation from family and friends, lack of freedom to participate in the community and decreased education opportunities (Figure 17). The image mirrors a typical situation on rural farms in Zimbabwe where young girls are forced to drop from school and married off to older men. These early marriages can lead to sexual exploitation, forced labour or enslavement and increased chances of domestic violence to the young girls (Edilberto Loaiza and Sylvia 2012). These marriages reinforce the gendered nature of poverty in rural Zimbabwe and aptly capture the androcentric cultural power relations prevailing in the countryside.

Figure 17: A group of child brides at Annandale farm, Shamva in Zimbabwe. Photo credit: Dewa Mavhinga, www.hrw.org

A health survey also conducted in Zimbabwe in 2011 reveals that 31% of girls in the rural areas are married before the legal age of 18 while 15% of these girls are married before the age of 15 (Zimstat and ICF International 2012). Most of these marriages are classified in Zimbabwe’s constitutional law as statutory rape. However, rural areas in the country are controlled by customary law which is heavily influenced by patriarchal-based cultural power relations henceforth
families in rural areas opt for negotiated settlements in the form of a bride price as in customary law there is no such thing as rape. Early marriages are a patriarchal practice that relegates the choices of the girl child as unimportant in pursuit of patrimonial ideals.

3.3.4 The bride price (roora/lobola) and women’s oppression.

In rural Zimbabwe, the payment of the bride price (roora in Shona and lobola in Ndebele) is a vital feature of marriages. It is the men’s obligation to pay the bride price to the prospective wife’s family. The payment means that the woman and children she bears in this union now belong to the husband and they all inherit the father’s family name (Kambarami 2006). Lobola/roora payments are made before the couple stays together or during the course of their marriage as per agreement with the bride’s family usually in the form of cattle and other goods in rural areas, but mostly cash in urban areas. While the man has to pay something to the woman’s family to symbolise the joining of their families, differences arise concerning the interpretation and significance to be given to the payment.

The traditional reasons for paying lobola/roora include appreciation, creating a bond or unity between the two families, respect and security for the woman and a sign of commitment from the men (Bourdillon 1998, Gombe 1986, Weinrich 1983). This dissertation argues that the payment of bride price goes beyond this and actually is responsible for the socio-cultural discrimination of women. The payment of the bride price seems to be an exclusive licence for the men to exercise executive powers in the marriage in all areas, including sexual and economic. In additional to the roora/lobola itself, there are other gifts given to the bride’s family during the proceedings like blankets, shoes, hats and clothing as Figure 18 below illustrates. In the 20th and 21st centuries, the practice of paying the bride price has been criticised as a patriarchal tradition which objectifies women and reduces them to property, limiting female independence and creating an environment in which women are exposed to abuse.
Figure 18: A typical bride price ceremony in Zimbabwe. Photo credit: The Herald newspaper, www.herald.co.zw

Bride payment has lost the traditional meaning as it now seems to be a profit making venture (Albertyn 2000, Sithole 2002). This abuse of the practice is to some extent responsible for the degradation and underdevelopment of Zimbabwean rural women. The payment of the bride price is recognized under customary law, and registration of such marriages requires proof of payment of lobola/roora and acknowledgment of parents receiving it. Couples living together without fulfilling the payments are not recognized as married and are classified as co-habiting. There are many cultural consequences that result from failure to pay the bride price. For instance, when the wife dies her relatives refuse to bury her as per the custom and this is a dilemma for the husband as it taboo to bury a person in the absence of their relatives (Kambarami 2006). As payment of the bride price effectively means women are now permanently ‘owned’ by their husbands, they are now under custody where they are not allowed to own anything even land.
3.3.5 The customary law of inheritance and land ownership

In the rural Zimbabwean tradition, the eldest son is the natural heir of the deceased father’s estate. The son is supposed to exercise control for the benefit of other family members. In the absence of sons, the brother of the deceased may succeed. Although Zimbabwe constitutional law gives some provisions for the wife to inherit her husband’s property this has been met with fierce resistance from the deeply patriarchal society (Agarwal 2003). Of the three types of marriage civil, registered customary, and unregistered customary, the latter dominates in rural areas constituting about 80 % (Van Klaveren et al. 2010).

Zimbabwean patriarchal cultural politics means the male members of the family have sole power and authority where customary marriage is dominant. In this type of marriage, husbands can even take custody of all children and women have no legal recourse against such actions, therefore finding it difficult to inherit their husband’s wealth. Daughters face an insurmountable task to get a share especially if there are sons in the family. This form of discriminatory male power violates the women’s right to equality as provided for in Article 1 of CEDAW (UNICEF 2011).

The above-mentioned cultural beliefs surrounding customary marriages fuel the gender disparities in land entitlements. Women in Zimbabwe have less access to land than men as they are restricted to secondary land rights; they hold land rights through male members of the family despite the fact that they do most of the work (Haddad, Hoddinott, and Alderman 1997, Maruzani 2014, Mutanana and Bukaliya 2015, Norris and Inglehart 2008, Owomoyela 2002). Divorce, death, and even the migration of or long absence of the husband may result in a wife losing land, meaning women lose entitlements to land rights. The women face prejudice in terms of land ownership which is essential for their survival as they depend on subsistence farming. Village land is governed by customary law (men only are allowed to inherit land) and therefore heads of households (usually men) are responsible for ownership and parcelling it out. The effects of women having to rely on men for economic survival are far reaching, among them being poverty in the event of death or divorce.
Women are entitled to use land but rarely have the privilege to own it. They also work on the land more than the men but income is not shared equally with the largest share taken by men (Figure 19). Oxfam (2014) notes that women perform much of the farm work producing 50% of the food globally but take only 10% of the total income and less than 1% of the land. However, while women can own land under civil law which recognises women’s rights to access property it is important to note that they still encounter significant resistance from the largely patriarchal society (Townshend 2008). In most developing nations, including Zimbabwe, the women’s rights to own land are denied by patriarchal systems or beliefs inherent in most rural societies mostly because they are administered by customary law. The practice contributes to the deprivation of most rural women who are dependent entirely on the men for basic economic survival and makes them more vulnerable to violence and poverty. This is worse for the widowed, divorced, single and those women in marriages that are not formally recognised (Van Klaveren et al. 2010). As is usually the norm when a land owner passes away, their resources are contested among other members of the family mostly the men and this tends to worsen the rural women’s plight.

Figure 19: An Oxfam poster showing the disparities in ownership of land, and income between men and women. Photo credit: www.madubesbrainspot.wordpress.com
3.4 Conclusion

Cultural power relations (cultural politics) result in discriminatory male power that affects women in their quest to attain social and economic independence. The rural communities in Zimbabwe are largely patriarchal and male authority is the norm. Power relations underpinning cultural ideals of patriarchy permeate almost all sectors of life. This section examined the importance of child-bearing and the consequences posed by infertility to a rural woman where ‘complete’ womanhood is defined partly by the number of children she bears, especially male children. The effects of polygamy were also highlighted regarding how the practice places women into poverty and exploitation. Different types of marriage, including wife inheritance, arranged marriages, early marriages, and the commercialization of the bride price are practices often responsible for the underdevelopment of Zimbabwean rural women; they strip the woman of her autonomy and self-worth, leaving her in the shadows of the men. Customary laws regarding property inheritance as well as ownership of land is detrimental to the economic empowerment of rural women. The next chapter will focus on socio-political factors that limit the development of women in Zimbabwe’s rural areas. The chapter will explore how patriarchy manifests in other facets of life such as education, politics, and employment.
CHAPTER 4

Zimbabwean rural women in education, employment and governance

4.0 Introduction

Following on from the previous chapter’s discussion of patriarchal cultural practices disadvantaging Zimbabwean women in social and economic development, this chapter concerns socio-political factors limiting the development of women in Zimbabwe’s rural areas. It pursues the ways these practices manifest in other facets of rural life such as education, employment, access to micro-credit finance, property ownership and governance to the detriment of women. The socialization process in the family instils patriarchal practices into the youth which also infiltrate into other social institutions such as marriage, religion, education, politics and the economy. The effects of women’s marginalization in these areas will also be explored in relation to issues of migration, and informal trade or economy. This chapter will firstly discuss the impacts of patriarchal cultural politics on women’s access to and gender-typing in education, followed by employment opportunities and property ownership, entrepreneurship, political participation, the informal sector and migration.

4.1 Women and access to education

The discrimination against women in their efforts to attain education is not entirely a rural phenomenon; it goes well beyond rural areas. More than half of the world’s illiterate adults are women (UNESCO 2011). In Zimbabwe, rural families do not give fair or equal access to education to both boys and girls; the patriarchal beliefs and values favour the education of boys over girls. According to the Research and Advocacy Unit (of Zimbabwe) (RAU) report of 2011, this discrimination is born from the argument that the female child will eventually marry and join another family whilst the male child will sire sons thereby ensuring the continuation of the family line. It is evident from this fact that patriarchal cultural practices serves as a prison for women which prevents them
from accessing education (Research_and_Advocacy-Unit 2011). Additional reasons also link to a culture prohibiting women from attaining equal education opportunities include gender inequality, poverty, family pressure, gender-based violence and early marriage. These are keeping girls from completing school in Zimbabwe, with lasting effects on women's and families' health. Many rural women in poor countries lack even the most basic literacy and numeracy skills, without which it is difficult to learn more job-specific skills. Furthermore, while access to formal training is limited for all rural youth, girls and women are particularly excluded from such opportunities.

The evidence from Zimbabwe in general shows that the enrolment of girls in schools declines with the level of education (UNAIDS 2005). According to the UNAIDS (2005) report patriarchal attitudes are mainly responsible for this predicament as educating girls is considered a waste of money. A common saying and practice I have personally experienced while growing up in rural Zimbabwe says educating a girl who will later marry to another family is useless as she will benefit her new family only; instead girls are educated on life and marriage skills. Some religious organisations like the Apostolic Sect are involved in marrying off underage girls who are still in primary school (UNESCO 2011). The education of girls is therefore not important especially in the rural areas and there is a certain label attached to those women that are highly educated – unmarriageable. Thus educated women frequently succumb to patriarchal cultural beliefs and values so that they are not regarded as outcasts or being shunned by prospective partners (Chirimuuta 2006).

Marriage is a sacred union in Zimbabwean rural society leading to women sometimes foregoing education in order to have a partner. Early marriages also contribute to the low numbers of rural women accessing education. Zimbabwean marriage laws were discriminatory against girls until January 2016 when the legal age for girls was raised from 16 to 18 (Zimstat 2014). This was after child brides (shown in figure 20 below) won a court case to make child marriage illegal and also successfully led a campaign for recognition of 18 years as the minimum legal age of marriage for girls. According to the Zimstat survey a total of 4.9 % of girls were first married or in a union before age 15 while only 0.3 % of boys married before the same age. The unfairness in accessing education between boys and
girls also transcends into the school curricula where there is bias in the type of school subjects boys and girls are ‘supposed’ to take.

Figure 20: Loveness Mudzuri was married before the age of 16 and claims she faced a life of poverty without access to education after being forced into child marriage. Photo credit: Facebook/Loveness Mudzuri

4.2 Gender-typing in Zimbabwean education

At independence from colonial rule in 1980, Zimbabwe inherited the British education curriculum which was heavily biased towards educating girls for the domestic sphere while the boys were conditioned to become breadwinners and dominate in the public sphere (Wolpe 1994). Gender-typing of subjects and occupations remains pervasive in Zimbabwe, with a clear distinction between subjects to be done by boys and girls. For example, girls are more concentrated in the arts and other subjects like fashion and fabrics, shorthand, typing, and home economics which are considered as feminine activities while the boys are more into subjects socially typed as muscular or male inclined in the science industry such as metal- work, woodwork, building, and technical drawing (Gordon 1998). The internalisation of patriarchal beliefs and practices therefore not only happens at the family level but also occurs during socialisation in school (Joseph 1996). Thus it is valid to argue that the educational structure in Zimbabwe is modelled in
a way that perpetuates gender inequalities and creates more problems for the women to gain high-paying employment.

4.3 Employment opportunities, and ownership of property in rural areas

It is important to note that while enrolment for women in higher education has increased in both urban and rural areas in Zimbabwe (Biri and Mutambwa 2013) regardless of position or education socio-cultural factors still keep women under the checks and balances of men (Figure 21). Employment opportunities for women, especially those in rural areas are already limited due to the government’s biased support of urban centre development. The neglect of rural centre development means rural women either have to migrate to the cities for employment or remain as subsistence farmers (Chirisa 2009). Patriarchal beliefs and practices also exist in the corporate world and few women are ‘allowed’ to occupy leadership positions (Kambarami 2006). Most women occupy less challenging and less influential jobs like secretarial or clerical positions which according to patriarchal cultural politics are well suited to them due to their procreative functions and ‘weaker’ personality as compared to men. Few development programmes and less visible economic industry in the rural areas makes the situation dire for the women who then need to be subsistence farmers for survival.

The majority of rural women are therefore not employed in the formal sector but instead engage in mainly farm and other non-farm activities such as cross border trading, buying and selling wild fruits and brewing beer for sale (Njenga and Ng’ambi 2015). According to UN Zimbabwe (2013) the income of women is three times less than that of men, with women having a higher unemployment rate of 70% compared with 56% for men. Although the discrimination of women in education as mentioned earlier is decreasing, women’s low social and economic plight is further exacerbated by customary laws regarding the ownership of land and inheritance of property. In Zimbabwean customary laws men are viewed as land owners. According to the RAU this is a patriarchal belief which is more prevalent in the rural areas and forces women to be dependents of men through marriages and reproduction (Research_and_Advocacy-Unit 2011). Land is owned
and inherited by males. For example the land redistribution programme conducted in 2001 saw over 80 % of land being given to men while women received less than 18 % (Njaya 2013).

Figure 21: Ellen Chiweshe of the Zimbabwe Air Force being promoted to the third highest rank in 2016. Despite women also occupying top positions like these, they remain inhibited and subordinated by men. Photo credit: answersafrica.com

Thus women’s lack of autonomy on key resources such as land and other community natural resources (for example, fisheries) virtually makes them unable to develop both socially and economically and this affects even their families, communities and local economies. When a couple separates or divorces, wives typically only take kitchen utensils. This is directly linked to the concept of paying the bride price. According to Kamarami (2006) in the Zimbabwean customary marriage, when bride price is paid, the woman loses the right to own property and this exacerbates property rights violations against rural women. These patriarchal attitudes towards women also inhibit them from venturing into other economic industries or self-employment and entrepreneurship.
4.4 Women and entrepreneurship in rural areas

The most evident barrier for rural women entrepreneurs is the society’s customs and beliefs heavily inclined toward male authority. There are cultural, social and economic barriers each working to limit women’s entrepreneurship in rural areas (Habibi, Dadras, and Shariati 2014). From problems such as lack of finance, dependence on men’s decisions, and family constraints such as caring for children and the extended family; Chitsike’s (2000) study on the barriers facing women entrepreneurs in Zimbabwean rural areas found that they face more restrictions than men in accessing resources and the legal system does not support them. Cultural barriers to women’s entrepreneurship take root in the patriarchal beliefs of the Zimbabwean society at large contributing to how the men and women view entrepreneurship as a concept.

Chitsike’s (2000) detailed study on Zimbabwean rural women and their limitations in entrepreneurship mentions that it is a traditional taboo for women to engage in activities that are purely monetary or involve a lot of money. This is aptly summed up in the Shona expression *anoda mari sehure* which means she wants/likes money like a prostitute (Chitsike 2000:72). It is therefore a patriarchal and to a certain extent religious Christian induced belief that associates women making money with immorality. Business from a patriarchal viewpoint should be “acquisitive, assertive, and ruthless” to be successful and therefore it is the male domain which has those ‘qualities’ rather than that of women (Chitsike 2000:72). This means that women are forced to be dependent on their husbands for a living or to access financial help.

Rural women cannot access formal credit and this has been the major constraint in women’s entrepreneurship. It leaves them with only access to informal sources of finance such as moneylenders, pawnbrokers, rotating savings, credit associations, friends, relatives, suppliers and shopkeepers which despite being relatively easy to access are influenced by patriarchal cultural politics (Bacchetta, Ernst, and Bustamante 2009). While these sources are providing the bulk of financial resources for female entrepreneurs and offer a number of potential advantages, they can be costly and discriminatory. Formal financial institutions are even less receptive and welcoming to potential female entrepreneurs. Their collateral
requirements, bureaucratic loan application, disbursement procedures, the time and resources necessary to visit the banks and discriminatory banking culture virtually exclude poor women as clients (Bacchetta, Ernst, and Bustamante 2009).

As mentioned earlier, the customary law in Zimbabwe supports women’s lack of individual economic rights because they have male relatives or spouses who take care of them. Hence according to Chitsike (2000), a married woman’s possessions in reality belong to the husband and this stems from the fact that the husband paid the bride price. This is true for rural women especially who remain as secondary earners rather than breadwinners. From my own personal experiences growing up in the rural areas, women in the Zimbabwean patriarchal family structure are not supposed to become breadwinners and if this does occur, I have seen the men in the family being ridiculed given demeaning names and at times characterised as ‘women’. It is against this background that women in rural areas are trapped in small investments (Chitsike 2000) which leads to neither total economic independence nor independence from men. The fact that women still find themselves as secondary earners whose contributions are not highly valued compared to those of men can also be explained through their association with “nature” (Ortner 1972).

Women’s reproductive functions actually shape her roles in the family or community (Ortner 1972). The lactation process directly impacts on the woman as it limits her social mobility and thus confines her to the domestic sphere (Ortner 1972). Chitsike (2000) upholds this notion stating that women’s responsibilities as a family carer are limiting factors in their business endeavours (Figure 22). For example, a woman who is a primary carer cannot consider profit as a surplus to invest in the business but would instead use it for immediate family basic needs like school fees, health care and food items. Thus it can be argued that despite their contributions to household income, women’s ambitions to own and operate successful business ventures is inhibited by patriarchal ideology which does not acknowledge the value of women’s work. And this lack of value is also the case in political representation.
4.5 Rural women in political governance

The issue of women’s political representation is mentioned in international instruments such as the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights of 2002 (ACHPR), and Article 9 of the Women’s Protocol to the African Charter highlights the rights of women regarding voting, and standing for elections. This is further supported by the new Constitution of Zimbabwe finalised in 2013 which stresses the importance of women’s political participation at all levels. Although participation of women in politics is increasing in numbers but it is still very low on average as statistics from United Nations show (Figure 23). Despite the percentage of women in parliament increasing by double figures, this only translates to just 22 % of women in parliament. This research argues that despite these instruments advocating for gender equality in political representation as well as the increasing numbers of women in politics in Zimbabwe, women are to yet attain meaningful participation especially in the rural areas. There is discrimination against women in political representation in Zimbabwe in general, and in rural areas specifically. The lack of meaningful participation by women in
making decisions about issues that concern places them at great risk of dominance by the men who constitute the majority in parliaments. 

Figure 23: A United Nations poster showing that women are still under represented in politics and governance in the world despite the recent increase of them participating. Photo credit: UN.org

Generally, women in developing countries are discriminated against in terms of political power representation. Nadezdha (2005) speaks of the political field being culturally regarded as a male domain and this is equally true in Zimbabwe. In a 2013 study conducted in rural Zimbabwe, it was found that men constitute the largest percentage of political party positions, negatively affecting the women as they seek to enter the political field (Dziva, Makaye, and Dube 2013). As the dominant force in politics men make and define the rules of the “game” (Nadezhda 2005, Ortner 1997). The patriarchal society in rural Zimbabwe which regards men as decision makers and women as subordinate to men contributes to this discrimination. For example, politics is usually portrayed as a dirty game (sometimes very violent) and as such women are not encouraged to participate due to the cultural attitudes which view women as weaker than men. Thus women in rural politics are mainly concentrated in the areas of singing, dancing, cooking and as guest entertainers (Figure 24) at political rallies and functions (Tsanga 2002).
Women’s meaningful participation and representation in Zimbabwe is still very low despite the fact that numbers of women in politics has actually increased (Dziva, Makaye, and Dube 2013). As mentioned elsewhere in this thesis, rural women are burdened with socio-cultural and economic issues among them reproductive roles. Family responsibilities coupled with bearing children prohibit women from effective participation in governance structures of the community and country. It is further argued that the poverty and unemployment rife in the rural areas inhibits women’s political ambitions (Dziva, Makaye, and Dube 2013). In this regard women instead spend time working for the survival of the family rather than attending political rallies and voting. The many challenges faced by women in politics are grounded in the patriarchal culture of the Zimbabwean society, which places women at the bottom of the human ladder. This has resulted in women pursuing other ventures classified under the informal economy category.
4.6 The informal sector in rural areas

The informal economy in rural Zimbabwe is mainly represented to a larger extent through farming activities and to a lesser extent, non-farm activities. Njiwa (2013:22) describes Zimbabwe’s informal economy as the use of unofficial channels, smuggling of goods and illegal commodities. The informal sector is an economy that has of late been run by mainly poor and unemployed Zimbabweans as they seek to make ends meet, makes a significant contribution in the reduction of poverty in both urban and rural households. The informal sector acts as a safety net for unemployed people in the developing world and it is noteworthy that most are women seeking to eke out a living (Bacchetta, Ernst, and Bustamante 2009).

In the Zimbabwean context the informal economy as a women’s domain is largely influenced by the gendered nature of patriarchal culture. Most patriarchal beliefs infer that the informal economy is more attuned to the needs of the woman (Ramani et al. 2013). Most of the activities occur from their homes (as shown in Figure 25) or on the streets, while most men do white collar jobs from offices. Women are also discriminated in high income jobs and tend to be overrepresented in low income informal activities. Thus most rural women in Zimbabwe have no choice but to engage in the informal sector as it is the only way they can earn a living (Njiwa 2013). The other factors previously highlighted in this research which help explain the influx of rural women into the informal sector include lack of employment opportunities, lack of training or education, and early marriages. These problems which are rooted in patriarchal culture may hinder women from other employment opportunities outside the informal sector and some women are left with no option except to migrate to the cities or overseas supposedly for greener pastures.
4.7 Migration and its effects on rural women

In most developing nations women are increasingly being forced to migrate due to poverty and high incidences of male unemployment. These factors influence women’s decisions to migrate in order to take responsibility for providing family income. Statistics show an increase of women’s migration since the 1960s and by 2005, 47.4 % of the 17 million immigrants in Africa were women, a rise from 42.3 % in 1960 (Bloch, Kumarappan, and McKay 2014). Migration can contribute to gender equality and women’s empowerment by providing them not only with income and status, but also autonomy, freedom, and self-satisfaction from employment. However, women are faced with more problems than men in the migration process.

Women generally face more drastic decision-making, social and financial restrictions (such as young children, as shown in Figure 26) than do men, which can pose obstacles to freedom of movement (Bloch, Kumarappan, and McKay 2014). The hurdles women migrant workers can face include their greater likelihood of working in occupations such as domestic households, where they are not formally considered as workers or where their status is undocumented (Bloch, Kumarappan, and McKay 2014). Conversely, the common pattern characterizing
men’s migration in rural Zimbabwe is that they leave their wives and this entails expansion of their wives’ responsibilities and tasks not traditionally undertaken by women. Most of the time remittances from the men are not enough and women who get left behind in the native villages have to assume the role of sole breadwinner in addition to familial and domestic responsibilities (Bacchetta, Ernst, and Bustamante 2009, Bloch, Kumarappan, and McKay 2014, Chirisa 2009).

![Figure 26: A woman with her baby trying to cross illegally through the barbed wire on the border between Zimbabwe and South Africa. Most rural woman like her are faced with a lot of challenges when migrating including lack of finance, documents among others. Photo credit: migrantsstory.wordpress.com](image)

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter focussed on the limitations imposed on women in Zimbabwe’s rural areas in accessing education, equal employment opportunities, and political representation. The education sector in Zimbabwe is highly segregated and this is equally true of the employment industry. While political representation is improving, women in rural areas are still far behind in terms of entering into governance positions as compared to their urban counterparts who have made great strides in the area. The influence of patriarchal cultural politics affects most
aspects of women’s lives including lack of access to microfinance and lack of recognition in ownership of property and land. These socio-cultural limitations have pushed women into the informal sector where the jobs are mainly menial and low paid (housework) or even ‘degrading’ like prostitution. Women also migrate to the cities and neighbouring countries in search of better living conditions but end up in the informal sector. They are also affected by the outmigration of men who leave them alone to fend for the extended family. The next chapter evaluates the ways in which women’s empowerment can be a solution to their socio-cultural and economic devaluation.
CHAPTER 5

Empowerment for development of rural women

5.0 Introduction

The previous chapters were an attempt to highlight the underlying causes of women’s underdevelopment in Zimbabwe’s rural areas. Patriarchal cultural politics was regarded as the most influential force in the subordination of rural women. Unequal gendered power relations are imbedded in most facets of life such as education, employment, finance and political governance. This chapter focusses on the empowerment of women as a solution to their socio-cultural and economic devaluation. Firstly, the meaning of empowerment in gender and development studies will be given followed by a discussion on the areas which are critical for the empowerment of women such as education, economic, and political participation.

5.1 The empowerment concept and meaning in gender discourses

Most definitions of empowerment denote freedom and autonomy particularly emphasizing the expansion of people’s choices (Figure 27). Empowerment has been defined as the augmentation of resources and capabilities of individuals to “engage, influence, and hold accountable the institutions which affect them” (Bennett 2002:13). The empowerment process should be a bottom-up approach whereby the group or individuals are involved in decision-making processes. Kabeer (1999) mentions that there is a relationship between empowerment and power, the power or ability to make choices. Each definition (Bennett 2002, Kabeer 1999) emphasizes the concept as a process that should prioritize the inclusion of the disempowered in the decision making process in order to give them a voice. Community engagement can be defined as establishing contact or discussion with individuals and groups within communities with the aim of maximising their participation and decision-making in the major issues that concern them (Tsey 2009). Engagement is the basic and critical step towards effective community development and empowerment. Engagement of the
community means that services provided will definitely address the issues most critical to the people as the public would have contributed to the decision making processes (Moore et al. 2016).

Attaining “agency” is important to the empowerment of women. Agency is the essence of empowerment whereby one has the ability to define one’s own goals and do something about them (Kabeer 1999, Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender 2002). According to Malhotra et al. (2002:5) empowerment is the “the ability to formulate strategic choices and to control resources decisions that affect important life outcomes”. Batliwala (1993) is of the view that empowerment is the extent to which people possess influence over external matters that affect them. Generally, control of resources physical, intellectual or financial (Kabeer 1999) is one of the most important dimensions in empowerment as well as control of ideologies (values, beliefs, attitudes) (Batliwala 1993).

![Holistic approach to Empowerment](image)

**Figure 27:** The women empowerment approach defined in a simplified diagram. Photo Credit: Slideshare.net

Empowering women in all facets of development such as economics, politics and education is important in the process of attaining gender parity. The empowerment of women is a human rights issue (United_Nations_ESCAP 2013). It is important for countries to empower their women who can be vital elements in sustainable socio-economic development (United_Nations_ESCAP 2013).
Women’s empowerment in education, economy or political participation is important for economic growth and prosperity – for individual women, their families, their communities and their countries. Oxfam is one of the biggest international non-governmental organisations working for the empowerment of women encompassing their ability to make decisions, attain personal freedom, access to and control over resources and support from social networks (Oxfam 2014). The organisation further affirms that women should have access to and control of income through access to credit and in attaining higher literacy levels to bring about better socio-economic living conditions.

5.2 Approaches to empowerment

Education

Education is regarded as key to women’s empowerment due to its ability to raise awareness and open possibilities to more economic opportunities (such as employment in the formal sector economy) as well as its instrumental link to economic growth and children’s health (Figure 28). The MDGs (now Sustainable Development Goals SDGs) emphasized the importance of education and set universal primary education as a target goal for developing countries. However, girls from rural areas have been excluded from both primary and secondary education (United Nations 2009). In this regard there is need for strict policies targeting these groups. Statistics from various sources (Jacob and Lehner 2011, Rose 2012, Verspoor 2008) indicate that while there is a general increase in girls’ enrolment in education, they still fall short in terms of parity compared with boys enrolment. Education in all countries is widely recognized as instrumental as an agent for nation building and social cohesion (Jacob and Lehner 2011) and if it is adequately resourced, access to secondary/higher education in particular can result in girls and women gaining the skills and knowledge to participate in their communities economically, socially and politically (World Bank 2004).
In addition, there is the need to introduce more informal education and training programs for girls who dropped out of school due to various cultural factors such as early marriages or preference of boys over girls (Desai 2010). In Zimbabwe, due to the strength of hierarchical power structures favouring males there are negative attitudes and practices regarding the education of girls thus boys are given preference in attending schools whereas the girls are married off (Barbra and Chikumbu 2015, Biri and Mutambwa 2013). As a basic human right, access to education is vital in the socio-economic advancement of Zimbabwean rural girls and women. Although Zimbabwe has one of the highest literacy rates in Africa at about 92 % (UNESCO 2013) as mentioned before, this impressive achievement in literacy rates does not readily transfer to parity, especially in secondary and tertiary education levels in the rural areas.

Economic Participation and Empowerment

The economic independence of rural women is essential as it lessens or reduces mistreatment, the feminization of poverty, discrimination and disrespect of their basic human rights. Gender equality at the economic level therefore contributes
directly to the reduction of poverty and overall development: economic empowerment is the capacity of “poor women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes on terms which recognize the value of their contributions” (Eyben, Kabeer, and Cornwall 2008). Economic empowerment should be characterised by an increase in women’s access to economic resources in the rural areas especially land and other income earning opportunities such as jobs, financial services and skills development (Figure 29). This is supported by Golla et al. (2011) who argued that empowerment of women entails attainment of decision-making powers to succeed and advance. Women need adequate skills and resources to compete in the economic sphere and this should be coupled with fair and equal access to economic institutions (Golla et al. 2011).

Figure 29: A woman in rural Zimbabwe investing in chickens for sale in an empowerment programme by Oxfam Zimbabwe. Photo Credit: Oxfam Zimbabwe website.

As discussed earlier there are many barriers inhibiting women to advance economically which mainly emanate from patriarchal power relations. As such there is need to create an enabling environment to eliminate those barriers. Women’s underdevelopment in rural Zimbabwe is further compounded by other rural-specific problems such as the lack of basic infrastructure, for example, water and sanitation and health facilities (Barbra and Chikumbu 2015, Chirimuuta 2006,
Habibi, Dadras, and Shariati 2014). There are different ways to empower women and UN Women (2015) came up with various examples from different case studies conducted around the world which are applicable to the Zimbabwean situation. Their case studies regarding giving more women work showed positive results in the growth of economies. The increase of the female labour force and reduction in the participation gap in the employment industry ultimately results in faster economic growth. The evidence from different countries studied (Zimbabwe was part of the study) showed that increasing the share of household income controlled by women greatly benefitted children and reduced hunger significantly in the family.

One of the ways of economically empowering women is through the provision of financial services (microfinance/microcredit) to rural women to start projects that could earn them income. Microfinance is an attempt to improve access to small deposits and loans for poor households (Schreiner and Colombet 2001) and therefore is one of the tools for addressing poverty among rural women in developing countries. Microfinance is an alternative aimed to achieve the economic independence of poor rural women economically, socially and politically (Kabeer 2005).

**Political participation and governance**

The participation of women in decision making positions in rural Zimbabwe is difficult due to the prevailing cultural attitudes (largely influenced by patrilineal ideology) towards leadership. As highlighted throughout this thesis, men are culturally viewed as the leaders in the patrilineal family structure in the country. These attitudes clearly manifest in other spheres such as education, economy and in particular political governance. As a result women are often discouraged in becoming candidates for political office, despite having the necessary qualifications (UN_Women 2015). The low socio-economic status of women in rural areas adversely influences their involvement. In general, women earn less compared with men, and this when coupled with the sexual division of labour in society also imposes more burdens on women.

Given this background, women encounter multiple burdens if they choose or are permitted to participate in politics. For example, they have a responsibility to
their work and family, and becoming involved in politics implies they are taking a third full-time job (UN_DAW 2005). They are also constrained by the lack of financial support and time for campaigning due to their domestic duties. The United Nations 2005 report on political participation further states that the political environment in most developing countries especially Zimbabwe is not ‘gender-friendly’ (sitting times in parliaments, meeting schedules of political parties and lack of childcare facilities) and therefore hinders women from being involved. There have been various ways put forward to advance the political participation of women in developing countries.

![Zimbabwean women Parliamentarians sitting on the floor in protest against the inaction of government on the kidnapping of women in the country. Photo Credit: AllAfrica.com](image)

Figure 30: Zimbabwean women Parliamentarians sitting on the floor in protest against the inaction of government on the kidnapping of women in the country. Photo Credit: AllAfrica.com

One of the ways of increasing women’s political participation highly recommended by the UN Department for the Advancement of Women (UN DAW) is through quotas (UN_DAW 2005) which are regarded as effective in increasing the representation of women in decision making. The UN DAW noted that all developing countries that have reached the target of 30 % women in national legislatures used the quota system. In 2013, women made up a third of Zimbabwe’s parliament from just 17 % in 2008 to 35 % in 2013 (Figure 30). Zimbabwe’s constitution gives provision for an electoral quota system to increase women’s representation in Parliament to at least 30 % which is considered the minimum for collective action. Zimbabwean women parliamentarians, as with those from other developing countries have been criticised for being ineffective
(Kabeer 2005). Zimbabwean women’s participation in decision making despite their seemingly high numbers is yet to be effective (Gudhlanga 2013).

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the research data, this section will outline some recommendations on what could be done to improve the status of women in Zimbabwe’s rural areas.

The education of girls and women

Educating rural girls is one of the most influential tools for empowering women. It provides them with the relevant knowledge, confidence and skills to compete in the economic industry. There are many ways that may encourage girls to attend school and these include a school fee subsidy, some financial incentives which have each been proven as effective in increasing girls’ enrolment and completion rates. With regard to Zimbabwe’s rural communities, there is clearly a need to build more schools within walking distance to encourage girls’ participation. There is also need for restructuring of the education curricula so that women are enrolled in appropriate courses or school subjects that makes them competitive in high paying jobs and also as leaders in their localities and nationally.

Women as leaders and agents of change

Despite the general agreement in the literature studied in this research that women are oppressed and ‘powerless’, there is nonetheless an underlying assertion that women do hold some significant power in their families and communities. Rural women could be agents of change in the family and the local community and the nation at large. Taking into consideration that they are the major producers of food and significant income earners through agriculture, there is need to lend an ear to rural women. Giving women some decision making powers at local and national levels will go a long way in the improvement of their socio-economic outcomes. UN Women also champions the leadership and participation of rural women in shaping laws, strategies, policies and programmes on all issues that affect their lives, including improved food and nutrition security, and better rural livelihoods. Literature studied suggests that women are weighed down by differential power held by men and thus it is essential to work with men and boys
to achieve gender equality, to ensure that they understand that women’s empowerment and leadership are also of benefit. This can be done by including men in programs that involve women in a bid to create awareness. In Zimbabwe working with traditional leaders and using their power to influence change for women and girls could be a useful tool to gain gender equality and one of the first steps in that regard would be to encourage women’s ownership of property, mainly land.

Women as owners and inheritors of land

Agriculture forms the backbone of the Zimbabwean rural life which means land ownership is one of the most important economic issues in the rural communities for women’s empowerment. The Zimbabwean Constitutional laws do recognize the need for women to inherit and own land and other property but this is not the case on the ground. Fundamental to the argument adopted in this thesis is that Zimbabwe is patriarchal and thus customary laws often prevail over constitutional laws. Customary laws are against women inheriting any property ahead of men and this is the norm in rural areas. It is therefore important to make sure that the gaps between laws and practices is closed to improve women’s equal rights to inherit, access, use and control land. Taking into consideration that the rural livelihoods are agro-based, allowing women to inherit and own land independently will go a long way in enhancing their socio-economic development. When women are allowed to inherit property, many opportunities will open for them as they will be able to access loans and credit using land and other properties as collateral.

Women as entrepreneurs

Case studies explored herein have shown that microfinance and microcredit schemes are easily accessible to women who are already into entrepreneurship. Hence the challenge is to reach the poor women who are not land owners, subsistence farmers, cross-border traders and domestic workers and ensure that these women have access to the opportunities and benefits of economic growth and trade. There are nonetheless challenges regarding rural women and microfinance/microcredit programs which require some contract signing and collateral such as land and property. This research posits that rural women have
low levels of literacy, limited access to and control over resources. Given this background, microfinance institutions and related partners like banks and government departments should take into account the specific needs of the poor women in designing financial assistance programmes to enable their empowerment.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has prioritised the need for women to have access to and control over natural and financial resources to gain independence from men, as well as education, economic and political empowerment. There is need to increase girls and women’s enrolment in secondary and tertiary education as well as the introduction of more informal education and training programs for those who would have dropped out of school. Empowering rural women economically also goes a long way in lessening the feminization of poverty. The provision of financial services or programs for rural women will help close the existing gap between women and men in terms of ownership and control of financial resources. Although political participation is increasing in Zimbabwe, rural women still have limited influence over the decision-making processes that shape their communities. The women (in parliament) quota policy would help in increasing women’s political participation. The need to recognise women as leaders including re-interpretations and changes to cultural and gender norms by way of engaging men was recommended in this section. Others include opening more educational pathways for women, giving them support as entrepreneurs and also recognizing and giving them rights to own property. The next section is the conclusion to the whole study.
CHAPTER 6

Conclusions to the study

This study was an investigation into the causes of the underdevelopment of rural women in Zimbabwe. Rural women across the globe are considered to be a vulnerable group due to the lack of basic infrastructure and services such as schools, clinics, water and electricity. As mentioned in the introduction to the study, 80% of Zimbabwean women live in the rural areas and their main sources of income and food is through subsistence farming. However, these are not the only problems (worse still the major) that are responsible for the undesirable conditions for the rural women in the country. Thus this study argues that patriarchy is the major cause of the low socio-economic and political status of the women in the rural communities.

The second chapter of the thesis reviewed the literature on the conditions in which rural women across the globe live. Rural livelihoods are mainly characterised by subsistence agriculture with women providing the bulk labour supply which nonetheless goes unrecognised. Due to the afore-mentioned lack of basic infrastructure and the resultant lack of opportunities economically, rural men often migrate to the cities and other neighbouring countries leaving behind them poor women with a double burden. Apart from the usual feminine responsibilities like child caring and elder care among others, women also assume the men’s duties such as earning income for the family and taking care of the extended families as is the norm in patrilineal societies like Zimbabwe.

The last half of the second chapter dwelt on the theoretical angles which inform the study and adopted the argument that patriarchy is responsible for the subjugation of rural women in Zimbabwe. The cultural power differential in a rural society like Zimbabwe best explains the low socio-economic and political status of the women. It was argued that patriarchal cultural politics are responsible for the social inequalities prevailing in the rural communities and to support this assertion, several classical theorists were used in this study. Ortner’s (1972) work
on women being equated to nature and men to culture suggests that men are superior by virtue of women possessing procreative functions which tie them to the domestic sphere. Rosaldo (1997, 1974) blames society for generating the inequalities between men and women, giving men the edge. The domestic/public binary emanating from culture-based role-sharing relegates women to the lower margins of the social ladder. Leacock and Nash (1977) bring a slightly different angle by arguing that capitalism brought by colonialism is one of the factors responsible for the oppression of women. In general, this chapter attempted to explain from various viewpoints the possible causes of women underdevelopment in rural Zimbabwe.

The influence of patriarchy on several issues such as marriages, land ownership and inheritance, child marriages, and child bearing was explored in Chapter 3. Customary laws underpinned by cultural politics (patriarchal) were seen to be influential in most aspects of life of the Zimbabwean rural communities. Chapter 4 as an extension of the preceding chapter further explored the influence of patriarchal cultural politics in fields such as education, employment, entrepreneurship, political participation or governance, the informal sector and migration. It was argued that patriarchal traditions, beliefs and practices permeated in all facets of the Zimbabwean life leading to the exploitation of women.

The empowerment of women in various facets of life can be helpful in raising their socio-economic standards thus Chapter 5 focussed on the empowerment of rural women in Zimbabwe in education, political participation and the economy as vital to the process. There is need to give girls and women incentives and more access to education opportunities, avail more financial services to women (microcredit/microfinance) and also increase their political participation through the use of quota systems. The last section of the chapter gave some recommendations which could also help in the uplifting of the socio-economic status of Zimbabwean rural women.
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