

‘For the Elections, We Want Women!’: Closing the Gender Gap in Zambian Politics

ABSTRACT

This article examines the causes of women’s rising political participation in Zambia. It argues that women’s historical paucity in politics was largely the result of widely-shared gender stereotypes. These are now weakening due to growing flexibility in gender divisions of labour, which has been catalysed by worsening economic security. By performing work previously presumed to be beyond their abilities and valorised because of its association with masculinity, such women are increasingly perceived as equally capable of leadership. This gradual erosion of gender beliefs has fostered women’s political participation and leadership in Zambia.

INTRODUCTION

Zambian women (from across the socio-economic spectrum) are increasingly stepping into historically male-dominated, socially valued political domains. Slowly and incrementally, they are also being recognised and supported, as independent political actors. This paper seeks to explain this change. Drawing on ethnographic research from Kitwe (the largest city in Zambia’s Copperbelt Province), this paper attributes the rising supply and demand for women’s political participation and leadership to the gradual erosion of gender beliefs. Historically, in the early decades of Zambia’s independence, men’s monopoly of leadership roles perpetuated gender stereotypes of men as naturally better leaders, which in turn reinforced their dominance. This trend has recently been disrupted. Worsening economic security has catalysed growing flexibility in gender divisions of labour, which is often perceived as disconfirming evidence of presumptions about cultural expectations.

This paper contributes to broader debates about gender gaps in political participation and leadership by emphasising the relative importance of gender beliefs, as opposed to political institutions or individuals’ socio-economic resources. Further, it advances theory by advocating a particular conceptualisation of social norms – centring not on the properties of a given society but rather individuals’ presumptions about cultural expectations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing literature on this topic suggests there are no monocausal explanations. Debates in this field concern the relative significance of political, socio-economic and ideological factors – as will be outlined below.

Some emphasise particular political systems and processes, such as proportional representation and democratisation. Matland (1998) finds that high-income countries with proportional representation tend to elect more women. However, this association does not hold for low and middle-income countries – such as Zambia (ibid; Fallon et al., 2012). Moreover, cross-national, longitudinal studies suggest that changes in electoral laws (e.g. from majoritarian to proportional representation) are not sufficient to amplify female political participation over time (Paxton et al., 2010; Roberts et al., forthcoming). So while there may be a positive association at any one time, changing electoral systems does not amplify women’s descriptive representation. Hence we must look for other explanations.

Another political variable is democratisation. This is associated with increased female representation over time (Fallon et al., 2012). Greater freedoms of speech and assembly arguably spurred women’s political participation in Ghana and Zambia by lessening their fear to speak out (Fallon, 2008; Geisler, 2004: 154-156). Tripp (2001: 142-144) suggests that ‘the shift from one-party to multiparty politics... created favourable conditions for greater participation by sectors of society long marginalized under authoritarianism... [T]he opening of new political space’ created ‘new

organisational opportunities', which women were able to seize upon given their 'long experience of working collectively' and increased donor support. For Tripp, it was thus a conjunction of factors, not democratisation alone. The question then is not a binary one but rather about the *extent* to which democratisation has caused women's increased political participation and leadership.

There are certainly reasons to doubt its importance. For instance, even if the transition to multipartyism has lessened state repression, this would only explain increased levels of public critique, not the closing gender gap. As Tripp recognises, we need to invoke further factors. Accordingly, this paper seeks to ascertain the relative significance of other processes, besides democratisation, in initially catalysing and thereafter perpetuating women's increased political participation and leadership in Zambia.

Besides political systems, a second area of inquiry concerns differences between individual men and women's socio-economic resources, as gained through formal education and employment. These conceivably foster political participation and leadership by enabling engagement in formal and informal networks, providing politicising experiences (such as exposure to unions), as well as human, financial and social capital (Desposato and Norrande, 2008; Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2008; Ross, 2008; Schlozman et al., 1999). This perspective emphasises supply-side constraints: women's paucity in politics results from their lesser share of resources. The hypothesis is that individual women who are employed (especially in full-time and high-level jobs) are more likely to engage politically. In Latin America, for example, women who work outside the home are more likely to discuss politics or demonstrate (Desposato and Norrande, 2008). However, in Zambia, the gender gap in political participation persists even when controlling for socio-economic characteristics¹ (Coffe and Bolzendahl, 2010). This underscores the need to explore further factors at play.

These socio-economic theories also predict that if a woman is employed then she is more likely to be electorally competitive, due to her increased resources. To quote Stockemer (forthcoming: 11), '[t]hrough work experience, women can gain the necessary capital to run for office'. However, cross-national research does not always record an association between women's share of employment and the gender gap in representation (Hughes, 2009; Kenworthy and Malami, 1999). Or at least, this association only appears significant in high-income countries. This variation is arguably due to the different kinds of work typically undertaken by women in low and high income countries (Matland, 1998; Stockemer, forthcoming).

Another possible reason why some studies do not find an association between women's employment and political participation/ leadership is that they typically look at a single point in time. This synchronic methodology blinkers the analysis to change over time and thereby overlooks the possibility that rising female labour force participation might have lagged effects on political participation, such as by eroding gender stereotypes – as will be argued in this paper.

This brings us to the third area of inquiry, besides political and socio-economic variables, namely 'ideology'/ 'culture'/ 'gender norms'. Much of this literature opaquely refers to 'gender norms', leaving their exact mode unspecified. I suggest we fine tune the analysis by distinguishing between three analytically distinct forms of gender beliefs: gendered self-perceptions, gender stereotypes and presumptions about cultural expectations.

First, a woman might eschew public leadership because of how she sees herself – her gendered self-perceptions. Perhaps she thinks that (by virtue of her sex category) she does not have the relevant abilities. Drawing on the United States' Citizen Political Ambition Survey, Fox and Lawless (2011: 69) find that '[w]omen and men who are equally and objectively qualified to run for office perceive neither themselves nor the political arena the same way. Similar professional credentials, economic autonomy, and political experience, alone, cannot close the gender gap in self-efficacy'. This casts doubt on hypotheses emphasising gender differences in resources. Further research from the United States suggests that women's self-reported assertiveness increases with (though slightly lags behind) increasingly egalitarian social indicators, namely women's educational attainment and their median first age at marriage (Twenge, 2001). This suggests that greater education may not necessarily change a woman's own gendered self-perceptions but may nonetheless inspire younger generations of women by showcasing possibilities. Twenge's research highlights a key issue often overlooked: behavioural

¹ Here socio-economic characteristics include age, religion, education, employment status, place of residence, and poverty.

change precedes attitudinal change. For this reason it is problematic that much research incorporating socio-economic variables does not examine lagged effects on gender beliefs and political representation.

A person may also stereotype men as naturally better leaders. They may endorse ‘gender status beliefs’, i.e. assume that men are more suited to and deserving of positions of influence and esteem in a broad range of social and economic domains.² Such assumptions (which may be subconscious) may lead voters to favour male candidates, above equally qualified women. Besides being descriptive, such stereotypes may also be prescriptive: that men alone should lead.

On the other hand, the limited supply of women candidates for public office may not be due to *their* gendered self-perceptions or internalised stereotypes but rather the anticipated penalties incurred by transgressing (or even openly questioning) cultural expectations. By witnessing how others are treated, individuals learn that they will be monitored and evaluated on the extent to which they conform to cultural expectations for their presumed sex category. While other theorists (such as Ridgeway, 2011) generally conceptualise this phenomenon as a property of a given *society* (such as by using the term ‘culture’, ‘cultural expectations’ or ‘social norms’), this paper focuses on *individuals’ presumptions about* cultural expectations. This theoretical modification is important since cultural expectations only become causally efficacious through an individual’s presumptions about them, as learnt through experience. Understanding how social change occurs is thus partly a matter of ascertaining how individuals come to revise their presumptions about how they will be perceived and judged by others.

Studies on representation and ideology have tried to ascertain how people come to endorse egalitarian beliefs. Exposure to women leaders seems key – according to both quantitative and qualitative research. One cross-national longitudinal study finds that five years after an increase in the female share of parliamentary seats, men were less likely to agree that men make better political leaders than women (Seguino, 2007). Additionally, in Sub-Saharan Africa, a higher proportion of female representatives is associated with a subsequent reduction in the gender gap in citizens’ political engagement (Barnes and Burchard, 2013). In West Bengal (India), quotas for female council leaders in randomly allocated villages appear to have increased girls’ aspirations and educational outcomes, while decreasing their time spent on care work, as well as the gender gap in parent’s aspirations for their children (Beaman et al., 2012). Because the observed shifts in gender beliefs and practices lag behind increased female political participation, it seems plausible that they are its consequence not cause. Qualitative research in Uganda and Rwanda similarly suggests that gender quotas have eroded gender stereotypes by catalysing exposure to women leaders (Burnet, 2011; Tamale, 1999). But how might egalitarian beliefs emerge without this top-down intervention?

Going beyond politics, studies suggest that formative exposure to flexibility in gender divisions of labour undermines commitment to gender stereotypes. In Mexico, Switzerland and the United States, sons of working mothers are more likely to have working wives (Bütikofer, 2013; Campos-Vazquez and Velez-Grajales, 2014; Fernandez et al., 2004; Willets-Bloom and Nock, 1994). Additionally, men and women from female-headed households tend to express greater support for women’s economic and political participation (Kiecolt and Acock, 1988). Amongst new college students in Northeastern USA, Asgari et al. (2010) find that female students with more high quality contact with female (but not male) professors over time became more likely to associate themselves with leadership traits. This indicates the importance of prolonged exposure to female role models.

Yet if women’s leadership, household headship and employment are all precursors to more egalitarian beliefs then how do they ever develop? Absent self-confidence in their equal competence or publicly expressed approval, what might prompt women to stand as leaders? Further, if there are no forerunners to provide disconfirming evidence of gender stereotypes, how could such beliefs be undermined? One possibility – argued for in this paper in relation to Zambia – is that the rise in African women’s labour force participation (induced by worsening economic security) has weakened gender stereotypes. This contrasts with earlier findings that women’s increased employment (which tends to be precarious) has just compounded their stresses and strains (Hansen, 1996; Moser and Holland, 1997), while antagonising men disempowered by economic restructuring (Silberschmidt,

² This specific term, ‘gender status beliefs’, is derived from Ridgeway, 2011; its broader applicability is evident from Sub-Saharan African studies such as Hassim, 2006; Tamale, 1999.

1999). It also challenges the above-mentioned literature that finds no association between women's share of employment and descriptive representation in developing countries.

This paper seeks to understand how individuals from across the socio-economic spectrum come to support women's political participation and leadership (as called for by Paxton et al., 2007: 275). Going beyond the standard attention to women's legislative representation, it explores women's participation and leadership at both grassroots levels and the highest echelons of power. Within this wider remit, it focuses on what Tripp (2001: 142) terms 'African women's increased visibility as independent political actors'. This is not to deny the importance or the power of women's silent strategies or engagement in informal political processes (discussed in Jackson, 2012). Indeed, these have been key to campaigns for both national independence and multipartyism in Africa (Geiger, 1997; Tripp, 2001). However, women's efforts have often been unrecognised. The aim of this paper is to investigate why women (from across the socio-economic spectrum) are increasingly stepping into historically male-dominated, socially valued political domains, and being both recognised and supported, as independent political actors.

The remainder of this article is divided into six sections. These present: the research methodology; data showing rising female political participation in Zambia; the background Copperbelt context of worsening economic security and growing flexibility in gender divisions of labour; an explanation of how these contemporary trends have increased the supply and demand for women leaders; as well as a discussion of the lagged effects of flexibility in gender divisions of labour. The conclusion reflects on how these findings contribute to the literature on this topic.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper primarily draws upon 58 detailed life histories, narrated over several days. Additional group discussions and individual interviews brought my sample size to over 200. This qualitative fieldwork was undertaken between April 2010 and March 2011, primarily in Kitwe (the largest city in the Zambian Copperbelt) but also in Lusaka (the capital), where I interviewed parliamentarians.

Participants would introduce me to others I was interested in meeting. Snowballing facilitated access to a range of men and women from across the socio-economic and generational spectrum: voters, political party candidates, campaigners, organisers, elected trade unionists, councillors, politicians, as well as those with little interest in politics. Tapping into multiple networks via gatekeepers also fostered trust and familiarity. This was enhanced through spending several days with participants, prior to interview.

Such trust was essential in order to facilitate life history interviews, in which participants could reflect at length on their experiences and identify salient influences. I also made comparisons between their narratives, so as to ascertain which experiences were uniquely common to participants who endorsed women's leadership.

In group discussions, contributors were already familiar and at ease with each other (as kin, neighbours, co-workers or political colleagues). Accordingly, my role was generally limited to initiating discussion. Interlocutors would then share experiences. Some urged others to caveat or contextualise their claims, to accommodate diverse perspectives. Further, because discussants were knowledgeable about each other's lives, they could ask each other questions about issues of which I was unaware and had not considered. Their collective narratives on the causes of women's growing visibility as independent political actors provide an important complement to the many quantitative (typically synchronic) studies in this field.

Participants were rarely primed to focus on gender specifically, but instead asked broad questions about politics and leadership in Zambia. Their responses often revealed the extent to which they stereotyped men as leaders. I might raise this observation with them in subsequent interviews and inquire about their normative beliefs – then explicitly seeking their views on women leaders. To triangulate participants' accounts, I also observed their gendered interactions in social and political gatherings. Additionally, I attended gender sensitisation programmes: with parliamentarians, community representatives and also school children.³

³ The effectiveness of these programmes is only briefly discussed in this paper; interested readers should consult Author (2015a).

We generally communicated in Bemba, the local language. I became fluent by living with various families: predominantly with a local government councillor in a low-income township but also with wealthy parliamentarians. Interviews were transcribed then coded using themes that emerged from the research process. This enabled identification of trends within my sample, such as the formative experiences associated with support for women’s leadership. Names have been changed to preserve anonymity. Some are prefixed with ‘*Bana*’ (‘mother of’ – reflecting the importance attached to motherhood) if participants introduced themselves in this way.

RISING FEMALE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN ZAMBIA

During the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, women only accounted for 3-8 per cent of elected parliamentarians (see Figure 1). Women’s political participation was generally confined to singing praises and dance for male politicians at rallies. The leaders of the Women’s League, associated with UNIP (the ruling party), emphasised that their political participation was intended to serve both husband and nation, in compliance with Christian models of the good wife, not to challenge patriarchy at national or local levels (Crehan, 1997).

The few women leaders were rarely perceived as disconfirming evidence of gender stereotypes. Women in politics received little support from electoral parties and were widely dismissed as ‘prostitutes’, assumed to advance through sexual favours rather than merit (Author, 2015b; Geisler, 2004; Schuster, 1979). Besides social condemnation of women leaders (a demand-side constraint), participants’ portrayals of earlier decades also emphasised women’s lesser self-efficacy (a supply-side constraint). Women’s narratives generally emphasised the former, men focused more on the latter.

This trend appears to have been disrupted. For instance, the proportion of female parliamentarians doubled during the 1990s.

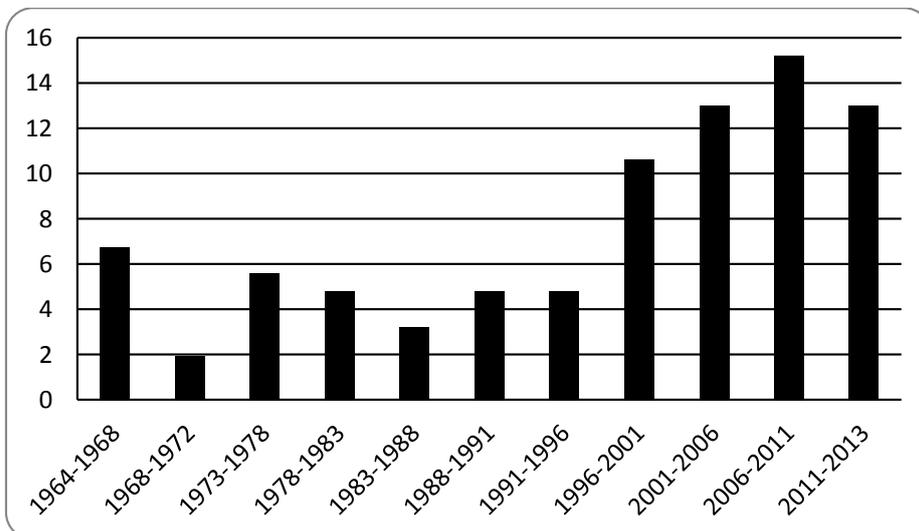


Figure 1: Proportion of female Members of Parliament, 1964-2013

Source: Singogo and Kakompe, 2009: 26; World Economic Forum, 2012.

Support for female political participation and leadership appears to have increased in recent decades. In contrast to historically strong opposition, Zambian survey responses to the statement ‘[o]n the whole, men make better political leaders than women do’ were evenly split between agreement and disagreement in 2007. Only 13.6 per cent of women said they strongly agreed, compared to 21.8 per cent of men (World Values Survey, 2013). In 2012, only 9 per cent of urban women and 18 per cent of urban men strongly agreed⁴ that ‘men make better political leaders than women, and should be elected rather than women’. Additionally, urban women’s proclivity to report ‘frequently’ discussing

⁴ Out of a cumulative frequency of 13 per cent of women and 25 per cent of women agreeing.

politics grew from 8 to 15 per cent between 1999 and 2012 – for urban men this rose from 19 to 24 per cent (Afrobarometer, 2013).⁵

My own interviews and observations similarly suggest a declining tendency to stereotype men as leaders in urban Kitwe, as exemplified below:

Jacob (45, on a political party selection panel): What people want is a person who has been there with them on the ground, who understands their needs their aspirations, who can articulate issues. If it is a man or a woman people will accept...

Author: Has that changed?

Jacob: It's so big I can't even explain... It has changed tremendously... and we have received a lot of willingness from women who want to stand as councillors.

BanaHilda (52, widowed market trader): When choosing a person to be a leader, we should look at how they are. We don't look thinking 'It's a woman'. No, we just look at how they are strong. If it's their gift then they may lead well and men will praise... Long ago women didn't focus their energies on leading, but they've seen that there's no one to speak for them. They should have a person to speak for them [translated].

This incremental shift in popular representations was reflected in media coverage preceding the 2011 national elections. The front page of *The Post* featured powerful women speaking out against the ruling party: Florence Mumba (Chairperson of the Electoral Commission, portrayed as defying the MMD's attempts to bias voter registration); Senior Chieftainess Nkomeshya (who criticised MMD's record); Anna Chifungula (Auditor General, who exposed accounting irregularities in the politically sensitive mining sector); and Sylvia Masebo (an outspoken backbench MMD MP who defected to the opposition, subsequently becoming Minister of Tourism). Their defiance often stimulated public commentary in Kitwe, where there was widespread opposition to the MMD. Male and female participants often expressed desires for more 'strong women'.

At the local level, Kitwe's central market branch of the Patriotic Front (PF, which won the 2011 elections) was founded by four frustrated female market traders, who raised awareness and rallied support, loudly beating drums. Men had been fearful of reprisals from ZANAMA (the market association affiliated with the ruling party). However, social change should not be overstated. These PF women reported to a male party organiser and campaigned for a male MP (now Copperbelt Minister). Furthermore, as stated above, many surveyed Zambians expressed a preference for male leaders, who continue to dominate national politics.

This paper will argue that women's encroachment into historically male-dominated political domains and growing popular support for them as independent political actors are primarily due to contemporary exposure to a critical mass of women demonstrating their equal competence in masculine domains. Although some women did make incursions into employment and politics historically, their paucity meant they were generally perceived as deviating from (rather than disconfirming evidence of) gender stereotypes about the typical woman.

WORSENING ECONOMIC SECURITY AND GROWING FLEXIBILITY IN GENDER DIVISIONS OF LABOUR

Over the past two decades Copperbelt residents have endured worsening economic security: rising living costs, loss of employment, increasingly precarious livelihoods and HIV/AIDS-related deaths of male breadwinners (Fraser and Larmer, 2010). In 2010, in the wake of the global financial crisis, Copperbelt unemployment registered at 28 per cent (CSO, 2011: 102-103). Participants' pessimistic

⁵ While these figures usefully convey women's increased political engagement, they may nevertheless systematically understate it. If women perceive politics as masculine they may not regard or report their own discussions – such as about the poor state of health care, and governance thereof – as political.

portrayals of the present contrasted sharply with their nostalgic recollections of a ‘cradle to grave’ welfare state and full (male) employment.

Financial hardship increased the economic costs of conforming to cultural expectations of the male breadwinner and female housewife. Families came to regard female labour force participation as financially advantageous, even though it jeopardised men’s social respect. Thus while urban Copperbelt men’s employment decreased, women’s increased: from 13 per cent in 1980 to 21 per cent in 2000 (CSO, 1994: 55-57; CSO, 2003: 66). By 2010, 30 per cent of Copperbelt women were employed (CSO, 2012: 216).

Occupational sex segregation has also declined. The proportion of female legislators, senior officials and managers rose from 6 per cent in 2006 to 23 per cent in 2012. Estimated female-to-male earned income also increased from 0.56 to 0.64 during this period (World Economic Forum, 2006: 143; 2012: 360). The proportion of Copperbelt women in skilled manual occupations more than doubled between 2001 and 2007, from 3.5 per cent to 7.9 per cent (CSO et al, 2003: 38; CSO et al, 2009: 44). Women also account for a growing proportion of workers in stereotypically masculine industries, such as mining and electricity (CSO, 2003: 88; 2012: 225). Women were previously ridiculed and resented for encroaching upon this male terrain. Now they are increasingly applauded for undertaking arduous roles and supporting their families amid economic difficulties – as detailed by Bwalya (a 24 year old metallurgist, formerly a student union leader):

As a woman, when anyone sees you wearing safety boots, they really respect you, because it means you’re working... If a woman wears a hard hat it gives everyone the idea she’s doing men’s work, something extremely challenging... You get a lot of confidence, moving around.

The next two sections explain how worsening economic security, rising female labour force participation and occupational desegregation have increased the supply of and demand for women political acleaders.

REASONS FOR THE GROWING SUPPLY OF FEMALE LEADERS AND POLITICAL ACTIVISTS

Former housewives stressed that undertaking the socially valued role of household financial provision has greatly enhanced their self-esteem. Their strong sense of pride was shared by female participants undertaking occupations previously presumed to be beyond their abilities. Many have also come to question their gender stereotypes through observation of other ‘strong’ women, ‘fighting to provide for their families’, undertaking masculine (socially valued) roles. This point was emphasised across the socio-economic spectrum. Poorer women typically emphasised the significance of exposure through paid work in the public sphere, such as markets and cross-border trading.⁶ Meanwhile some wealthier women benefitted from regional networking, as illustrated below.

Belinda’s family previously regarded her wealthy husband as the primary breadwinner. Over the 1990s he experienced business difficulties. From having Mercedes cars, they became ‘broke, broke, broke... It was a problem to buy my children’s clothes and shoes... I used to get a bus to town but my husband refused, it was too much of a step down for him’. He grew depressed, dying soon thereafter. Belinda (now MP) became the breadwinner, as well as leader of an association of business and professional women:

That organisation gave me a lot of exposure... We travelled to Zimbabwe, Botswana, South Africa, Madagascar and Holland after the Beijing Conference. It gave us an insight into what other women in other countries were doing and achieving through hard-work and new projects... It broadened my mind... we met women who had made it on their own without marriage, women who didn’t fear anything, who struggled and emerged successful.

⁶ The ways in which paid work has impacted women’s self-perceptions and social relationships are further discussed in Author (2014).

This weakening of gender beliefs is slow and incremental. Some employed women still doubt their capacity to undertake leadership roles or refrain due to presumptions of limited social support. For instance, the market women who launched PF in Kitwe's central market were initially hesitant to put themselves forward as chairperson and treasurer because they saw these prestigious roles as more appropriate for men, whom they stereotyped as naturally better leaders. However, through experience, they now consider themselves to be more capable than current leadership, whom they plan to challenge in the next branch elections. The importance of 'political apprenticeship' (a term derived from Cornwall and Goetz, 2005; meaning gaining self-efficacy through practice) was also stressed by female trade unionists, councillors and parliamentarians.

Besides undermining gender status beliefs, paid work in the public sphere has also enhanced women's access to the social and economic resources required to fulfil the socially-constructed characteristics of leadership in Zambia. These include the ability to provide financial support to individual voters (e.g. hospital or funeral costs) and also to effectively liaise with a wide range of people. Another important feature of paid work in the public sphere is association, which enables women to learn about politics and organise collectively. Although gaining access to requisite resources does appear to have been important, it does not fully explain the growth in demand for women leaders. Irrespective of their individual characteristics and capital, outspoken women were commonly chastised for deviating from cultural expectations in earlier decades. Challenging the above-mentioned socio-economic hypotheses, my evidence suggests that an individual woman's increased access to resources is not as important as the contemporary shift in presumptions about cultural expectations.

An alternative hypothesis points to the transition to multipartyism (in 1991). Geisler (2004) claims that democratisation inspired young professional women – who had previously withdrawn and felt excluded from politics – to engage politically and pursue leadership positions (see also Fallon, 2008; Fallon et al., 2012; Tripp, 2001). My evidence provides some support for this claim. For example, Rebecca, who became a councillor in the early 1990s and later Cabinet Minister, narrated that 'when multipartyism came there was great excitement amongst students, unions and in civil society. People could talk freely'. But even if public critique was previously curbed by authoritarianism, this would not fully explain women's particular paucity in politics. We also need to know why women might be more fearful than men. Answers to this question would likely invoke (and further need to account for) gender beliefs.

Another possibility is that women's increased political participation has been directly caused by worsening economic security (as argued by Mikell, 1995: 409 Safa, 1990; Waylen, 1994: 337). Perhaps women have been increasingly politicised by the perceived, financial struggle to fulfil their ascribed roles as 'mothers' (see also Britton, 2005; Geiger, 1997: 79; Hassim, 2006: 28, 76). Elected female trade union leaders, councillors and parliamentarians often expressed frustration with current development, low wages and perceived injustices (see also Geisler, 2004: 185). Similarly, when explaining their decisions to join the Patriotic Front (PF), as branch leaders of this opposition party, market women typically bemoaned their children's unemployment. Such framing suggests that it is partly because of powerful maternal stereotypes that women are now engaging politically, or are at least drawing on these accepted identities in order to legitimate encroachments into masculine domains. BanaMayunda (a 39 year old mushroom trader) expressed sentiments shared across the socio-economic spectrum:

We stood in politics in order to change the Government, which is not governing well... My children are just farming... The industries are ruined, there's nothing... This time we've wised up. These days it's 50:50 [men and women] [translated].

However, worsening economic security cannot provide a full explanation since it was also keenly felt in the late 1980s (Ferguson, 1999) yet that did not trigger female political participation. Furthermore, in the contemporary period, political discussions and leadership bids are rare among those women who do not undertake paid work in the public sphere (e.g. housewives, domestic workers and home-based traders). Yet these women also experience financial hardship. Thus the mere experience of 'crisis' does not in itself seem politicising.

Across the socio-economic and generational spectrum, women leaders were alike in one key

respect, which they further emphasised and which has become more common in recent years: *prolonged* exposure to flexibility in gender divisions of labour. This appears to have – slowly and incrementally – undermined gendered self-perceptions, stereotypes and challenged presumptions about cultural expectations, thereby enhancing women’s resolve to engage politically.

REASONS FOR THE GROWING DEMAND FOR WOMEN LEADERS AND POLITICAL ACTIVISTS

Women’s growing interest in politics and aspirations for leadership cannot provide a full explanation of their incursions into this masculine domain in the contemporary period. We also need to account for increasing demand.

The gender stereotypes that previously constrained demand for women leaders appear to have been eroded by prolonged exposure to flexibility in gender divisions of labour. Women’s performance of masculine (socially valued) work that was previously presumed to be beyond their abilities is increasingly perceived as proof of their equal competence and status. Growing flexibility in gender divisions of labour also appears to have shifted popular representations of motherhood. Working mothers are now commonly described as ‘strong’, resilient and self-sacrificing, ‘fighting’ to provide for their children (as also observed by Steady, 2011; Tripp et al., 2009). They are increasingly thought to possess the masculine traits locally associated with leadership. Meanwhile, men are sometimes perceived as having failed to fulfil their normative roles of providers. They are often portrayed as irresponsible, spending on alcohol and girlfriends. Such disappointment with men has fostered a shift in sentiments to ‘let’s try a woman’ – who might better fulfil the quasi-parental role of leadership.

Demand for women leaders also appears to have been fostered by association through paid work in the public sphere. By sharing experiences and realising common obstacles, women often come to perceive their personal problems as symptomatic of structural inequalities. Further, in collectively reflecting on growing flexibility in gender divisions of labour, women often come to publicly endorse egalitarian beliefs.⁷ Such external validation enhances others’ confidence in the possibility of social change, eroding presumptions that others might condemn women’s leadership. Some of these sentiments are highlighted below:

BanaNkandu (a 34 year old married market trader, formerly a housewife): Women leaders see the sufferings we pass through.

BanaBecca (a 36 year old married market trader, former housewife): It’s the very same, she passes through our sufferings...

BanaNkandu: Men have been ruling over us very much. Men use us. So for the elections we want women... In the past we thought that women leaders couldn’t explain the truth... We used to respect men so much. Long ago women were supposed to be alone, we didn’t associate with other people [translated].

BanaRuth (a 35 year old widowed market trader, former housewife): We should have women leaders because it’s a woman who cares/provides for people... We want to have many women leaders. We don’t want to depend on men... We don’t want to hear the intelligence of men alone; we want to listen to the intelligence of women... They [men] wrong us. A woman herself knows what we want because she goes through it... Previously, I was new in the market, I didn’t know anything [explains that she previously voted for men] [translated].

Belinda (an MP, businessperson and widow): Since [my] constituency was created no woman has ever stood in that constituency... People said, [corrects herself] men, not women, said, ‘Would a woman manage to run the constituency?’. Women themselves said, ‘We’ve voted for men too often’. Women know women are mothers, ‘She will not desert us; a woman will never desert her children’... They know I’ve suffered with them [referring to the demise of her

⁷ On the importance of association and collective reflection in enabling realisation of structural discrimination see also Hassim, 2006: 52 on South Africa.

husband's businesses], how I endured the suffering and came through it... I never gave up on my children – that's very important... A mother never neglects her family, no matter what, she looks after everyone and that's what I'm trying to do... Society has looked at the women and seen women's achievement in every area of society and that has given the impetus to support women... Men always think they're the best... But since I've been an MP I've had very good relationships with the men from various disciplines. They know women can run shops but they think certain positions are for men only but with my coming into office I think it's opened up their minds.

These narratives were common amongst interviewed women in paid work in the public sphere, from across the socio-economic spectrum (market traders, mechanics and managers alike). Some argued that since women are undertaking the masculine role of breadwinner, they are evidently just as competent as men and should also be performing political roles. Many women showed great happiness in seeing women parliamentarians and trade unionists, even those (such as BanaBecca and BanaNkandu quoted above) who narrated that they previously perceived women leaders as 'prostitutes', assuming they had not succeeded by merit.

Over time, an increasing proportion of men also appear supportive of women in politics. Scott (a 42 year old onion trader and PF branch leader) narrated that he grew up in rural areas, marked by gender divisions in roles and spaces. Observation of sex-differentiated practices had led him to endorse gender stereotypes. But in recent years he has rejected such presumptions, having seen women demonstrate equal fortitude in masculine (socially valued) domains – as indicated below:

Scott: [Discussing the view that women are not suited to leadership] No no, that's a lie. These days such thoughts will make the country retreat, where...? Backwards... We have confidence that women leaders can work harder than us men leaders because of the strength that women have these days... They've awakened and know that there's no work that men alone can do, we may even fail... Nowadays women think for themselves: it's them who are talking about removing repression in the market... We came to see the strength of women, being strong and active... Onwards from 2001, I gradually came to see a reduction in fear and shyness. The way of living is so very difficult [translated].

A similar account was provided by Matthew (a 47 year old vegetable seller and Scott's contemporary):

A long time ago we were saying, 'They [women] can't do those things: properly providing for homes, properly providing for families and carefully looking after the country'. We didn't know... A long time ago women weren't putting themselves forward to join associations and solving problems. They focused on homes as housewives, and small issues... Men capitalised on that, in those days. But now, upon seeing that it's not only men who can solve these problems, women stood up and came to fight... to solve that particular problem as equals. And these days you could find that some women they are stronger than men... We started to realise that women have intelligence. Therefore we have strength when they have leadership positions [Bemba sections of original translated].

Consistent with my argument that women are increasingly respected by virtue of performing jobs associated with (valourised) masculinity, it is telling that Matthew professes to champion gender equality yet simultaneously appears to devalue women's domestic work and does not consider it as a 'big' issue.

When separately interviewed on multiple occasions, the women leaders working with Matthew and Scott (above) maintained that they felt respected as equal partners. However, gender stereotypes were not rejected by all in my sample. Other men expressed doubts about women's competence. Additionally, women in different associations, trade unions and political parties complained about some male colleagues – as exemplified below:

Nsenga (a local government councillor and owner of several shops): My deputy mayor did a lot of things to put me down, to intimidate me, to incite councillors to turn against me... he tried to get people to talk... Men don't want to be under women. When a woman is talking the man may comment that a woman shouldn't be talking... Just ignore them and show them you're able to do it. What men can do women can do... Now I've proven to them that I can deliver so they've stopped talking... He's very apologetic.

Some women leaders quieten in the face of persistent resistance. They opt to preserve cordial relations with male colleagues. As Judy (a Cabinet Minister) commented, 'many [new female parliamentarians] are intimidated or do not want to be perceived as pushy'. Others shun union and party politics altogether, to avoid insults.

Such resistance does not appear to have been lessened by gender sensitisation. Workshops, radio broadcasts and school lessons on the social construction of gender may call for '50:50' in politics but rarely appear sufficient to undermine gender stereotypes:

Mubanga (MP and lawyer): These NGOs have been dismissed by parliament. What they say falls on deaf ears. They're just empty gangs that just speak.

Agnes (deputy director for the Zambia Congress of Trade Unions): Here the problem is from peers in Lusaka. They said they wanted a man yet they are trained in gender; they haven't even tried you to see if you fail. They are aware; everyone has been talking about gender... So you just continue working and prove them wrong... By having a female there, many they are changing, they have started slowly recognising women.

As Agnes intones, the effectiveness of gender sensitisation seems contingent upon participants' experiences of sex-differentiated practices, by which they interpret abstract messages of gender equality. Participants – from across the socio-economic and generational spectrum – seemed most supportive of equal competence and status when they were able to make sense of it through first-hand evidence of women demonstrating equal competence in socially valued (masculine) roles (Author, 2015a). However, such change has been slow and incremental, not catalysing an immediate rejection of gender stereotypes.

FORMATIVE EXPERIENCES AND LAGGED EFFECTS

Women's encroachments into masculine domains are sometimes dismissed as unusual, not disproving presumptions about women and men in general. This may be because gender stereotypes influence how people process new information: contradictory cases are disregarded to maintain cognitive constancy.⁸ The vast majority of participants who strongly endorsed gender stereotypes narrated that they were accustomed to sex-differentiated practices: male dominance of household decision-making, financial provision and public leadership.

Meanwhile, women with long-standing political aspirations⁹ typically detailed different formative experiences, which they further identified as significant. These included maternal financial provision and exposure to role models in the public sphere. This evidence – presented below – suggests that flexibility in gender divisions of labour may exert lagged effects, fostering political ambitions among younger generations of women.

⁸ In *Framed by Gender*, Ridgeway (2011) likewise attributes the persistence of gender status inequalities in the United States to gender beliefs, which bias information-processing.

⁹ This group included women parliamentarians and others undertaking gender atypical roles requiring prior training. They had cultivated the requisite skills and gained political apprenticeship from their formative years, such as by joining school debate clubs. This group contrasted with those who had only recently sought to lead trade union branches and market associations, following contemporary exposure to flexibility in gender divisions of labour.

Women-headed/ financially-supported Households

Participants who grew up in homes dependent on men's incomes tended to report that they had grown up endorsing gender status beliefs. Children of housewives¹⁰ typically had little access to information that contradicted widely-endorsed stereotypes of women as 'passive dependents', since men also monopolised public leadership. Accustomed to women having a lower status, such participants often expressed and enacted gender status beliefs. Even when adult sons of housewives reluctantly agreed to their wives' labour force participation, given worsening economic security, most still expected to be respected as 'household heads'. They sought the same deference as their fathers had enjoyed. This enforcement of gender status inequalities appears to have been common in the early years of women's labour force participation. Absent prolonged exposure to flexibility in gender divisions of labour, isolated individual incursions were not sufficiently multiple to be perceived as disconfirming evidence of assumptions about women's *typical* competence and status.

Meanwhile, the vast majority of women who had pursued gender atypical ambitions *from their youth* were daughters of employed women.¹¹ Their mothers' financial provision, strength and self-reliance had endowed them with the self-efficacy to undertake roles historically dominated by men. Similar sentiments were expressed by women in masculine occupations, across the socio-economic spectrum:

Brenda (a 24 year old miner): Being brought up by a single parent [who worked as a secretary for Zambia Railways] made me think women can do whatever men can do. If she can raise four children on her own then I can do men's work. They can stand on their own, without men... or with men... I've always grown up wanting to do men's work... I wanted to challenge the men.

Rebecca (Cabinet Minister): My mother was a very strong woman... She became a successful businesswoman: a commercial farmer, transporter, had a fleet of business, invested in real estate... She mixed with politicians: they went to her for sponsorship... She joined politics: became a councillor for UNIP and then with MMD at Provincial Level. She inspired me. She did what the men were doing... things women weren't expected to do. The public used to call her Mr Mulenga [i.e. an honorary man].

Importantly, in the early decades of independence it primarily seems to have been the children (rather than the husbands) of employed women who perceived their economic contributions as disconfirming evidence of gender stereotypes. While women's paid work enhanced their economic autonomy, it rarely enabled more egalitarian marriages. Their husbands either continued to endorse gender status beliefs or were concerned about losing social respect, through deviating from cultural expectations of male breadwinners. My evidence suggests that these presumptions persisted historically due to limited popular exposure to flexibility in gender divisions of labour.

Role Models Beyond the Home

The paucity of women in political domains was sometimes cited (by men and women alike) as evidence of their lesser aptitude. Growing up, seeing only men in leadership, many people doubted women's capabilities in these realms and regarded their leadership as risky. Having internalised gender stereotypes in their youth, contradictory information was often disregarded. For example, I once attended a Copperbelt provincial market association meeting at the Civic Centre in Mufulira town. The auditorium was decorated with 26 portraits of current Mufulira city councillors. Two market association leaders pointed out to me that there were only three pictures of women. Alan (37) commented, 'Women are few therefore their intelligence is small. The ratio is very bad. It's an example of how the intelligence of men is different from that of women' (translated). Even when men

¹⁰ This relationship is not necessarily biological: in a context of HIV/AIDS, many Copperbelt residents grow up with their extended family.

¹¹ A minority in my sample, given low levels of female labour force participation in previous decades.

like Alan were exposed to women in politics, they did not seem to interpret this as disconfirming evidence of their stereotypes. I mentioned the widely-lauded, predominantly female Mufulira market association but Alan was quick to deny that this threatened his gender stereotypes. He pointed to their occasional recourse to male leadership at a national level. He also dismissed female cabinet ministers as evidence of women's equal competence, since they are under (presidential) patriarchal guardianship. Alan's attitudes are reflected in his behaviour: he resists women leaders' independent management of market affairs and doubts their effectiveness (much to the women's infuriation).

Growing up in a nearby township, Alan had become accustomed to gender status inequalities both at home and in society more widely. His mother was a home-based trader, always deferring to his father. Other participants similarly exposed to men's monopoly of household and public decision-making often expressed scepticism about women's capabilities and resisted their incursions into masculine fields. Information that contradicted their gender stereotypes was ignored, quickly forgotten or dismissed as exceptional.

The narratives of participants who had grown up espousing gender stereotypes about women's lesser competence commonly indicated that they were accustomed to gender divisions of labour. Meanwhile, women with long-standing political aspirations (a minority in my sample) generally reported converse experiences and further emphasised their significance. As Mutale (a 23 year old Telecommunications student and elected union leader) commented, 'What really motivates me is seeing women in high positions doing what I do'. Besides women in prestigious positions, others also emphasised the significance of exposure to women in low status masculine roles, such as cutting grass. Such observations often exerted a long-term impact, affecting young women's choices in school – such as their proclivity to join debate clubs, which provide political apprenticeship.

To summarise this section, participants tended to interpret information in ways consistent with the assumptions they had developed through observation of sex-differentiated practices. Some (such as Alan) seemed cognitively resistant to disconfirming evidence of their pre-conceptions. However, those with prolonged exposure to flexibility in gender divisions of labour during their formative years typically questioned gender stereotypes and further emphasised the significance of this experience. The more multiple this information the more it tends to be interpreted as evidence of men and women's *typical* characteristics, rather than just an unusual occurrence. Maternal employment appears particularly important in this regard (as also found by Bütikofer, 2013; Campos-Vazquez and Velez-Grajales, forthcoming). Perhaps this is because it is first-hand evidence witnessed over a long period of time.

However, only a minority of middle-aged participants had eschewed gender stereotypes from their youth. Most had come to revise their internalised gender stereotypes and presumptions about cultural expectations as a result of contemporary exposure to a *critical mass* of contradictory information. The resulting growth in demand for women's leadership has enabled more women to realise their political ambitions. But change is slow and incremental. This may explain why it was not observed by earlier studies in Zambia. It may also be for this reason that synchronic cross-national studies tend not to record an association between women's share of employment and their share of leadership positions.

CONCLUSION

Support for women leaders appears to be growing with prolonged exposure to and collective reflection about a critical mass of flexibility in gender division of labour, which is perceived as disconfirming evidence of gender stereotypes. Association appears particularly significant here. By sharing their experiences, discussants learn about women's growing share of socially valued roles. Their demonstrations of equal competence are increasingly regarded as typical rather than exceptional. This has led to collective disavowals of gender stereotypes. Public affirmation of women's equal competence and endorsement of their political participation have shifted (some) other people's presumptions about cultural expectations. This has allayed concerns about anticipated social condemnation, which previously discouraged women's incursions into the masculine terrain of politics. Furthermore, through paid work in the public sphere, many women come to regard personal trials as symptomatic of structural disadvantage. This, in conjunction with increased access to information about women leaders, appears to have fostered support for women leaders.

In the early decades of independence, however, flexibility in gender divisions of labour was rarely regarded as advantageous or acceptable. Due to macro-economic circumstances, male breadwinners could largely provide for their families and secure social respect by complying with cultural expectations. While some women did encroach upon male-dominated domains of politics and employment, they lacked the critical mass to be perceived as disconfirming evidence of gender stereotypes. Given widespread social condemnation of deviation from cultural expectations, others were seldom inspired to follow suit. This trend has since been disrupted by worsening economic security. A resulting shift in perceived interests has led households to prioritise the economic gains accrued through female labour force participation over the social respect gained by conforming to cultural expectations of male breadwinners. Without this critical juncture, gender divisions of labour might have persisted, reinforcing gender gaps in political participation.

In many ways, this account of social change in the Copperbelt is consistent with the wider literature. For example, the patriarchal trend observed in earlier decades when high copper prices sustained male employment has also been observed in many oil-producing countries (Ross, 2008). The catalytic effects of prolonged (economic) crisis also seem true of some African civil wars and independence struggles, where exigencies of the time led to a shift in perceived interests: flexibility in gender divisions of labour became perceived as advantageous. In Liberia and Uganda, women acted as combatants, financial providers, household heads and important mediators for reconciliation. Women's performance of these masculine roles demonstrated their equal competence and undermined gender beliefs (Bauer and Britton, 2006; Fuest, 2008; Tripp, 2001). These findings may partly explain why additional years of large-scale war are associated with more women in parliament (Hughes, 2008).¹²

My particular emphasis on female labour force participation is not novel. But my explanation of its significance does depart from the existing literature in this field. Others (such as Desposato and Norrande, 2008; Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2008; Schlozman et al., 1999; Stockemer, forthcoming) posit that by amplifying the number of women with the requisite human, social and economic capital or providing politicising experiences, it increases the supply of women candidates. Although these supply-side factors have played some role in the Copperbelt, they do not account for the growth in demand for women leaders, the increased political activism of women market traders, or the contemporary erosion of gender stereotypes. In Kitwe, rising female labour force participation appears to have exerted lagged effects on gender beliefs. This might explain why earlier studies in Zambia did not observe such transformation. If valid more broadly, it would also explain why synchronic cross-national studies tend not to record an association between women's share of employment and leadership positions.

To some extent, my evidence is consistent with research on gender quotas in India and Uganda, which suggests that increased exposure to female leaders can undermine gender status beliefs (Beaman et al., 2012; Burnet, 2011; Tamale, 1999 – discussed in the literature review). This paper contributes to collective knowledge on egalitarian social change by showing that gender status beliefs can be predicated upon assumptions of difference, between men and women. It has further argued that these assumptions of difference can weaken with first-hand disconfirming evidence, in the form of prolonged exposure to women performing work previously presumed to be beyond their capabilities (such as household financial provision, mechanics and dump truck driving). While further research is needed to test this theory more widely, my findings at least indicate the importance of broadening the research scope, beyond exposure to women in prestigious positions, to include flexibility in gender divisions of labour more widely and observe the lagged effects thereof.

This paper has also introduced the concept 'presumptions about cultural expectations'. Contrary to works that understand 'gender norms' as features of a given society (a collective phenomenon, changing universally), I argue for greater attention to why some individuals cease to anticipate social disapproval for atypical performances of gender.

¹² Additional factors include women's organising and taking advantage of political openings.

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