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DILEMMAS OF AFRICAN MODERNITY AND THEIR THEORETICAL
CHALLENGES.

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Disappointing modernisation:

The peri-urban life of old women citizens¹

This paper tells the narrative of Mrs. Mwanza who like many other women left her village during the first years of independence and joined her husband in Lusaka. Mrs. Mwanza was fully committed to urban life and embraced the prospects of modernity, but modernity did not bring the expected prosperity. While the focus is on how old people cope in the impoverished peri-urban area with everyday survival and changing family forms and generational obligations. Mrs. Mwanza's memories are also about how she struggled to craft a meaningful citizenship in the local narrative of community. The paper is based on fieldwork containing innumerable talks with Mrs. Mwanza and other residents in George compound since 1968 up to 2010, and on a nationwide study of conditions of elderly people conducted in 2004. It grounds theoretical understandings by focusing on the gendered meaning of everyday spaces and how they are negotiated.

Urban living, Ageing.

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¹ This paper is a merged, updated and condensed version of two papers (Schlyter, 2007 and 2009).

In her middle ages, Jane Mwanza, the central person in this paper, proudly announced that she was a “modern urban woman” who could fend for herself, have a voice, and contribute in her urban neighbourhood. For people in poor peri-urban areas, like George compound in Lusaka, modernisation was characterised by a “decent urban life” in a concrete house, and also by changing family relations. From more than a couple of women I heard complaints: “You cannot trust these modern sons”. And in this case modernity was used as an explanation of the neglectful behaviour of sons not providing for their mother as their mothers had expected.

During my visits to George compound I have often been told that African families take care of and respect their elderly, but many elderly persons complained of not being listened to and cared for, and I met some living in appalling conditions. Like other observers I found that these and similar discourses and observations were made compatible by putting blame on modernisation and urbanisation and by glorifying the golden old age when elderly people were respected (Bourdillon, 1994; Apt, 2002).

So while there are many contradictions in the popular understanding of modernisation in George compound the same can be said about theoretical understanding of modernisation in development theory. Although heavily criticised as a theory for many decades its conceptions of progress and stages of development continues to underpin many development discourses. Ferguson (1999) who made a study on the Copperbelt of Zambia concluded that the meta-narrative of modernisation failed to represent the changes in Zambia at any period, and certainly not during the period of economic decline.

This paper tell the story about Jane Mwanza, who like many other women left her village during the first years of independence and joined her husband in Lusaka. She struggled to craft a meaningful citizenship as a “modern woman” in the local community, while at the same time experiencing poverty and the early deaths of her children. The second part of the paper focuses on how she and other old people cope in the impoverished peri-urban area with everyday survival and changing family forms and generational obligations.

While providing still an example of how dreams of modernity failed, the paper aims at adding to a conversation about gendered citizenship, peri-urban life and aging.

Zambia was early urbanised and in the sixties, when I made my first study in George compound, a quarter of its population lived in urban areas. For long it was generally believed that half of its populations should live in urban areas when entering the new Millennium. However, in the nineties the urban growth rate halted, and between 1998 and 2000 the statistics even points at a decline on one per cent - from thirty-seven to thirty-six (CSO, 1998, 2003). Potts (2006) points at the Zambian case as a telling illustration of the profound impact economic decline have on migration and urban growth.

Zambia, like many other African countries, is deviating from the global trend of an ageing population. Only three per cent of the Zambian population has reached the age of sixty-five, and this percentage is not expected to increase much during the next decade. Life expectancy at birth was more than fifty years in the seventies but dropped to thirty-seven years, less than one baby of five can be expected to reach the age of sixty-five (UNDP, 2006). These figures reflect the impact of HIV/AIDS as well as of poverty. In 1998, two thirds of urban households lived in extreme poverty and with an HIV prevalence of twenty-eight per cent among fifteen to forty-nine years old (Zambia 2002, Table 2.3 and p.110).

In spite of these figures the number of elderly in towns is going to increase (UNDP 2001, calculated from tables 2,5 and 8). Since colonial time it has been assumed that elderly people should retire “to their village”, but this has never been entirely true, and it will be less so for the generation born in cities.

Ageing has only recently been identified as a development issue and is severely under-researched (Risseeuw, 2001; A&D, 2002; INSTRAW, 1999; Makoni and Stroeken, 2002). Although overrepresented among the poor, the elderly are usually not included among the target groups in development cooperation and consequently not prioritised for research funding by international agencies.

The conditions of elderly are highly gendered, as Zambian women’s historic exclusion from wage work and weak property rights continues to affect their life at old age. On average Zambian women are not getting older than men, but due to age difference at marriage, there are many more widowed women than men. Widowed men also tend to remarry more often than women, resulting in a situation where sixteen per cent of Zambian households are headed by widows, while only two per cent are headed by widowers (SPRG, 1993).

Old people in George compound complained about being put aside and made invisible, about the lack of respect from the youth. They nurtured memories (true or mythical) of villages where age was the basis of power. In discussions about returning to the rural areas men put forward the positive argument that in the village they were recognised as a person and listened to. Women were usually against a move – they saw heavy work without the network of friends they had in the compound.

A full and active citizenship continuous to be elusive for women. While at one level, women have taken advantage of the political openings that have followed modernisation in the shape of neo-liberal globalisation and privatisation policies, studies have proved that other women have been negatively affected (Schlyter, 2002; Tripp 2003). Feminist scholars have contested the state-centred understanding of citizenship as a set of abstract rights and propose an understanding of “citizen from below” in which the agency and understanding of the individuals themselves are central (Gouws, 2004). This paper explores what citizenship has meant for women in George.

GENERATIONAL SUPPORT

A comparative study in African cities in several countries addressed the saying that “modernisation” deprived the elderly of their family support. Peil (1995) argued on the basis of the findings that the changes following modernisation were not too dramatic as the support to elderly had always been limited. Still she found that many elderly did receive support, albeit limited and insecure. However, in a recent study in Zambia less than forty per cent of the older persons with adult children said that they received help from them (HelpAge International, 2006).

Another of the few studies that have been done of generational support in urban Africa have made the observation that elderly people often contribute to the household income by working or by sharing their pension among household members. Nevertheless, older people are often considered a burden (Dvereux, 2001; Beall and Kanji, 1999). In Zambia, as in many African countries, the support to elderly largely remains a family business as there is no state universal flat pension, and retirement benefits are tied to formal employment (Kamwengo, 2004).

While young people in George compound always depicted old relatives as dependents in need, I observed that support often was in the other direction - from the elderly to the younger generation. I also observed that daughters often cared for their mothers, while the elderly insisted that “sons should provide”. There were contradictory discourses and observations, both about how well or badly the elderly were cared for, and about who were cared for, and who the care givers were. These were my points of departure in a study which provided many findings used in this paper (Schlyter, 2006).

SOURCES, METHODS AND OUTLINE OF PAPER

Since the sixties, I have followed the development of George compound, analysed various aspects such as housing, upgrading, and the living conditions of various groups of residents such as youth and women who are heading households. Three of several reports are in the reference list (Schlyter, 1988, 1999, 2007).

The paper draws from life histories which have been offered to me in George compound by Jane Mwanza and other elderly women and men, and to Zambian students in Lusaka and other Zambian towns. For more than forty years I have regularly paid visits to a number of households in George compound, among them Jane Mwanza. During five fieldwork periods between the years of 2003 and 2010 I visited between six and twelve elderly residents. I talked with them about their life in the community and about generational

support. Their narratives are all used to inform this paper, but only Jane Mwanza is mentioned by (a fictitious) name.

In 2004, as part of a course in qualitative methodology, I asked sixty-nine students at the Copperbelt University to interview two elderly urban residents, male and female, and to in essays present their urban life histories with focus on housing, care and livelihoods, in the light of generational cooperation or conflict. Most of the students found their informants in the Copperbelt towns, but a number made their interviews in Lusaka.

It is a widely accepted view that the interviewer is part of the creation process of narratives (Makoni and Stoeken, 2002). My own position as an alien appearing in George compound about every or every second year, hanging around for some weeks and posing questions obviously affects the histories I am told. From another study it is reported that the Zambian researchers met numerous older people, in urban townships in particular, who begged them for relief food (HelpAge International 2006). As I was well known by my informants I was not subjected to begging. It could be assumed that they exaggerated their suffering in hope of getting a gift, but by observing their home conditions and talking to several household members, I saw suffering enough; exaggerations were not needed. Still, I was an ignorant outsider and benefitted from that by being allowed to pose stupid and intimate questions without insulting the informants. On the other hand, being an outsider carries a risk of distortion of the narratives due to language and translation, and more seriously, due to limitation in my understanding which is grounded in my own rather different experiences. Long discussions with my translator, a former nurse aid residing in the area, helped in my interpretation of interviews and construction of narratives.

Their common position as students, many of them from better-off homes, might affect their work, but the fact that they were so many helped to neutralise and diffuse in their individual biases when analysing the narratives they presented. A common attitude surfaced as moral comments in their conclusions, in which they were asked to reflect on the narratives they had presented. The narratives provide an insight into how far more than one hundred elderly people lived and experienced generational support. The huge number makes it likely that the main variations in living conditions and forms of generational support have been identified. Thus, the students' essays provide a basis for making a well informed strategic selection of narratives for deeper analyses.

In the paper about a dozen elderly informants are quoted or referred to. If they are presented as inhabitants in George compound, they have been my informants; otherwise they are quoted from the narratives recorded by the students. When I dare suggest quantitative interpretation in terms of "many" or "few", it is on basis of all the narratives.

CRAFTING CITIZENSHIP IN GEORGE COMPOUND

George compound grew rapidly as a squatter area in the sixties when independence promised freedom of movement and work in the capital, Lusaka. It was well located on a ridge within a short walking distance from the heavy industrial area. When Jane Mwanza took her three children and joined her husband who was working in the construction industry, they built a small mud house there. Jane made the mud bricks and her husband laid them.

When I first met her in 1968 she was a mother of five. When her seventh child was born, her husband left her and settled with a second wife in a nearby compound. He never contributed to the seven children, but Jane Mwanza respected him and talked well about him as he did not claim the house. At that time the George compound was legalized and in the process of being upgraded. Roads and water were provided and the residents were given occupancy licences. Jane Mwanza's house came close to one of the larger access roads into the area, this and the bar opposite the road provided good business for front door vending.

George compound was dominated by the UNIP party. The leaders distributed land and solved conflicts. They had struggled for legal recognition of the settlement and participated as the residents' representatives in the process of the upgrading. Jane Mwanza attended the meetings in the party section, and after that her husband had left her she accepted a post a chairlady. As such she engaged in a variety of social activities.

Gradually mud houses were replaced by somewhat larger houses in concrete blocks. Density increased with continued infilling of houses. When Jane Mwanza's only son married he supported the rebuilding of the house into a concrete structure with two separate dwellings. In the back there were two rooms for his family and in the front one room for his mother and sisters. In the mid eighties, the son was retrenched, money was not enough, and the house was never properly finished. The electricity, which Jane Mwanza had pointed at as a proof of her step into a modern world, was disconnected.

In the nineties after the election victory of the Movement for Multi Party Democracy, MMD, George compound became disorganized as the one-party organisation was dissolved and no alternative organization was built. Non-governmental organisations and churches were many, but the impact of their support to settlement improvement was limited. A residential development committee was eventually put in place by the local government to coordinate the efforts.

The economic decline was manifested by non-working water taps and street lighting, washed away roads, and slow progress in the residents' always ongoing work for maintaining their shelters. With international development support water was again provided in public standpipes. However, a fee had to be paid by the users; it was low but unaffordable to many of the poorest. The cholera was therefore not defeated; in 2006 there was an outbreak, and

in 2009 again but more limited. A majority of the residents could be classified as living in extreme poverty and a famine the years before had made things worse. A positive tendency for the national economic situation by the end of the Millennium was not reflected in the peri-urban areas.

Five of Jane Mwanza's six daughters married and moved out, but one by one they returned home with their children, either separated or widowed. For a long period all Jane Mwanza's energy and income have gone to nursing and medicine for her terminal ill daughters. Time got worse, the unemployed son became ill and also he passed away. In 2006 she was sharing the house with six orphaned grandchildren and the daughter-in-law who was also weak from the decease. She was still conducting her business of selling food stuff outside her front door.

In 2010 two of the grandchildren were the main supporters of the household consisting now extended with a wife to a grandson and three great grandchildren. The house was rebuilt so that half the front room had become a proper shop with security bars, and one bedroom was added at the side. Jane continued to work and she offered me one of her delicious fat balls, which she fried and sold at the road side. She did not complain, but her granddaughter-in-law told me that she was not strong. They had been to the clinic but offered no help. Still, Jane Mwanza ensured that her live was better than it had been for many years.

COMMUNITY WORK IN THE PARTY

Jane Mwanza never used the concept of citizenship, but she had a strong commitment to the nation and the neighbourhood. She supported Kaunda and the UNIP party, but as long as she was a married woman her contribution in public politics was restricted to the giving of a vote in the elections. Women were according to the constitution citizens and had the voting capacity, but customary law continued to be applied in family matters, which meant that women lived in a restricted form of citizenship; once married they were not regarded as legally major persons.

The married couples in George did not have much insight in legal matters, but a husband was seen as the head of the household with the right to take all decisions and also discipline the family members including the wife. In the everyday life this power was negotiated and compromised, but few husbands accepted that their wives should take up positions in the public life. Almost all chairladies were women who were heading their household.

After the husband had deserted her, Jane Mwanza became active in the local party organisation and was elected chairlady of the section. The Women's Brigade was lead by wives to the male leaders. Schuster (1976) has described the Brigade as very coercive to

women in the peri-urban areas, forcing them to participate in dancing demonstrations in support of male leaders. As a chairlady Jane Mwanza had participated in the organisation of these dancing demonstrations, and when she many years later was looking back on this time, she claimed that she and the other women enjoyed dancing and singing, and that they were happy to leave the compound for some hours, and to get the *chitenge* material with pictures of the leaders.

During the upgrading project in the late seventies of the compound the local party organisation played a crucial part which strengthened its position. Jane Mwanza mobilised women to go to meetings and was proud of the improvements in urban services. However, in less than ten years roads, street lighting and water taps started to deteriorate due to lack of maintenance. With the structural adjustment policy in the eighties there was a decline in the urban households' economy as food subsidies were removed and school fees introduced. According to the 1990s census in George compound, one girl in five and one boy in eight had never attended school because parents could not afford the formal and informal school fees. The party lost in support; people did not come to meetings as nothing happened in spite of all talking. Jane Mwanza resigned from her post.

Ahead of the 1991 election, when the Movement for Multiparty Democracy won a landslide victory, Jane Mwanza did not openly support UNIP. She was afraid of violence (which never occurred) and she could also understand that people wanted a change. She might have joined if MMD had built up a local party organisation, but it did not, and Jane did not see any way for her to engage in politics. So she remained loyal to UNIP, and as the years went by she became deeply critical to MMD.

There were few women among the political leaders at central levels. Jane Mwanza argued: "We poor people need a strong man to talk for us; no one listens to a woman". Young girls asked for women leaders, but most women informants hesitated to vote for a woman as a leader at city or nation level.

Women in George continued to work for their community, Jane Mwanza like most of them within the frame of their churches. While as a chairlady she had done similar social work within the geographical section of the party, now among the members of her church scattered over the compound.

CHALLENGES TO WOMEN'S COMMUNITY WORK

In the one party state women's participation was formalised and supported, although the women's sections were given the "soft", social issues to deal with, while the men discussed the "real" politics. Nevertheless, women were acknowledged and supported in a public role.

The restrictions rather emanated from family responsibilities or husbands' disapproval to the public appearance of their wives. With the introduction of the multi-party system, there were few political spaces, beyond the voting procedure, offered to women in the poor peri-urban areas.

The local party organisation had acted as the lowest level of the city council, organising much of the local services. The organisation disappeared over night after the election. Various non-governmental organisations intervened, but the progress was piecemeal and scattered. After some years the local government took initiative to Residential Development Committees in order to have a body representing the residents to involve in negotiations and coordination between different activities. Women were well represented in the RDC but there was only one for the whole compound of at least 50 000 inhabitants.

The most important sub-committee was the water committee with responsibility for the water taps. With support from the Japanese development aid organisation a water system was renewed and tap leaders were engaged to open and close the tap and to control that the users paid a monthly fee. They were allowed to keep a percentage of the fees they collected as a small reward for their work. A majority of the tap leaders were women heading their households. Many of them came to play a role of a well informed leader for the residents around the tap. .

In spite of the time consuming house work in women's everyday life with the never ending struggle against mud and vermin many women found time to engage in community issues. Many children and long periods of breast feeding are tiring and could be expected to impose restrictions on women's public life. However, my informants never referred to their children as an obstacle to participation. Small ones could be brought to meetings and older children helped looking after the home and the younger ones.

Jane Mwanza was together with other old women engaged in organising initiation ceremonies for girls. Secluded for a week the girls were informed about sexuality and about how to conduct, especially in relation to the in-laws. Girls were advised not to move in public space after dark. Adult women put the same restrictions on themselves because of fear for sexualised violence. Old women could move around and act in public without fear for that kind of violence and also without the risk of being talked about as unfaithful wives or loose women. So, with age came greater freedom and possibilities to women. However, public appearance also put them at risk of being accused of witchcraft, especially if they were in any sense successful. Therefore many elderly people preferred to withdraw from public life, and make themselves as invisible as possible. Jane Mwanza had never been accused of witchcraft but was fully aware of the risks, telling scaring stories about how the mother of her daughter-in-law was chased away from her neighbourhood.

Many women worked as volunteers, for example organised by the clinic. They got no money and they know that it was unlikely that it would help them to a future job, but they were proud to do something for their community. Their choices might be understood as a risk management strategy; in absence of a public social security system, and with families decimated by illness and poverty, the friendship created among work mates in voluntary work complemented active networking among neighbours. Nonetheless, unpaid community work is in reality what constitutes women's citizenship in George.

With exception for the little voluntary work Jane Mwanza did within her church, she had withdrawn from all community activities already some years ago. Like many elderly women she had been nursing her daughters before they passed away and she took care of her grandchildren. It had been too much. She had done her part, and was in 2010 happy that the grandchildren now cared for her. She maintained her interest in community issues and was deeply concerned about the development in the neighbourhood and the country. She had nothing good to say about the government and the ruling party as in her view they had brought nothing good into the neighbourhood.

HOME, GENERATIONS AND POWER

The concepts of household and family easily create confusion. A comprehensive study aiming at defining the Zambian family concluded that family did not mean the same thing to all Zambians (WLSA, 1997). A married couple is by elderly people in George compound not seen as a family, but as two individual forming a union between two families. Among the youth in George compound, however, I found a strong dominance for a view which was very close to the "Western", or in their own words a "modern" concept of a nuclear family (Schlyter, 1999).

Families and households are adapting to the demands of urban everyday life, they are in constant transitions and power is negotiated on basis of age, capacity to provide, property ownership and personality. The official definition of headship on basis of sex was in practice modified depending on age, ownership of the home and on who was the main provider.

In George compound as everywhere in Zambia the impact of HIV/AIDS and poverty on family formation has been great. It exhausts the capacity of the extended family and generates new household types, composed by the survivors of the extended family who join as a strategy to maintain a home and take care of orphans. For old people, as for women and men of all ages, quality of life and ability to contribute to the community has all to do with your home conditions.

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

Elderly people in George wanted to live close to their children, but preferably not in the same house as a married son or the daughter. Rather the ideal was to live separately but close to their offspring. Munalula (2005) found the same in Livingstone, and several of the students' informants said the same. Already in the fifties, in the Copperbelt towns, Epstein (1981) found that generations seldom lived together. He reported that spatial constraints in urban housing made a desirable separation between the elderly people and their in-laws difficult, and that this caused conflicts. Fifty years later this need for physical separation remains a major reason for conflicts in multi-generational households. The narratives of this study reflect similar difficulties in handling urban spatial arrangements. The elderly complains about proximity between bedrooms.

The Mwanza family divided the house and made separate entrances when the son moved back home with his wife. Another example of this need for distance to the in-laws is an old woman who was brought to town by her married daughter when her health was no longer so good. With the son-in-law's blessing she moved into their three-roomed house, but soon the old woman built herself a simple outbuilding of mud bricks. She moved out in order to avoid conflicts. She appreciated having a place of her own, albeit of poor quality and still been able to be close to her daughter and her grandchildren.

Nevertheless, the elderly informants lived in a range of different types of household, with one, two or three, even four generations. Munalula (2005) observed in Livingstone that widow headed household tended to include more relatives. Multi-generational living seemed to be most common in its all female form. Many old women joined an unmarried daughter's household when they became widowed. Multi-generational households consisting of mother, daughter(s) and grandchildren, and as long as no in-laws were present in the household conflicts seemed to be rare.

On the basis of the feelings expressed by the elderly informants, there is reason to differentiate between households headed by a member of a younger generation, which takes in an elderly person, and households headed by an elderly person, which is joined by a member of a younger generation. There are also gender differences; men regularly presented themselves as heads of households, even if they were the ones who joined it. So did, for example, the late son of Jane Mwanza, even when he was retrenched and economically dependent on his mother. The headship of Jane Mwanza's son was, at the most, accepted as a public front; within the household it was contested.

As long as the stay of the elderly was regarded to be temporary they could cope, but tension increased with their prolonged stay. One elderly couple admitted that their son's marriage almost ended in divorce as a result of the tensions, but in principle, they saw no

problem in the fact that their son had to support them. It was his duty to provide for them, and to do so with full respect. As another informant posed it: "I would like my children to look after me, but not to treat me as a charity case."

An elderly woman moved to her daughter in George compound. The daughter already supported a sickly husband, five children aged between twenty-five and eleven, four small grandchildren, and a younger sister. The old woman was healthy and strong and managed much of the work in the household as her daughter was working long hours. The family of thirteen lived in three small rooms, rented in a tenement house. This old woman did not experience the sharing of space as negative. She was just happy to have the children around. She did not like to sleep alone. She never entered the daughters and son-in-law's bedroom and sharing of toilet was a nuisance but mostly because they shared with five other households in the tenement.

Hansen (1996) in her study in Mtendere in Lusaka pointed at the different views women and men, young and old had about appropriate behaviour as causes to tension within a household. Young people in George compound had little tolerance for member of the elderly generation who joined their nucleus family and intruded on both physical and economical space. The elderly, on their side were appalled by the lack of respect they met from the teenagers. A study in Malawi points at conflicts between grandparents and grandchildren, and presents a case where the grandparents occupy what used to be the boys bedroom (Chipeta, 2007).

The elderly wanted to avoid living close to in-laws, but otherwise they did not complain about space although many houses were overcrowded. It seemed as if the problems of sharing domestic space had more to do with power and respect than with actual physical space. Elderly men demanded service from the younger generation; elderly women caused conflicts by intervening in decisions on how the home should be run.

In extreme cases, there was fear and hate between family members affected by premature death and the sharing of tiny space and scarce resources. In one household in George compound a daughter-in-law accused her father-in-law for having killed her children - his grandchildren. In another it was the grandmother who was blamed for using witchcraft in order to get a larger share of the scarce food. Several other narratives include stories of elderly moving out of households due to similar reasons. Although tensions generally were much less serious, the consciousness about difficulties in multi-generational living under the same roof was widely expressed.

A way to minimise tension within the households the elderly joined was to make the stay temporary. The sheltering of elderly parents was sometimes shared between many daughter and sons. They were "guests" in their adult children's houses, staying a month or two with each of them. Positive result of this commuting life was, according to one woman

informant, that she learned to know all her grandchildren; the negative aspect was that she had no place of their own. She experienced a feeling of homelessness.

Some elderly persons preferred to live alone. Most often they did not see this as a great problem as long as they were reasonably healthy and had relatives who paid them regular visits and supported them in case of need. However, at a distance from their children the elderly were easily “forgotten”. There were many of the elderly respondents who did not get the support they needed and considered they were entitled to according to custom.

Among the poor and almost destitute distance often meant a complete break in contacts. Poor people’s children often “disappeared” if they moved to another town, while wealthy parents with children working abroad had no difficulties in keeping contact. Sometimes the contact with children was broken due to conflicts with in-laws over resources which occasionally surfaced in accusations of witchcraft.

An almost eighty years old woman in George compound had lost all her seven children. Her only relative was an orphaned ten years old great grandson who stayed with friends to his late mother in another compound. He walked for one hour twice a week after school to visit her. He helped her with small things and he got a meal. One woman worked hard to support herself. She cultivated a rented plot outside town and grew beans and pumpkin leaves around her house. One day I met she had carried fifteen kilograms of maize on public transport to the mill, and back to the house. She did not expect any charity; when asked what she would do when she was no longer strong enough to work so hard, she said: “I will lie down and stop eating, and then death will come to me.”

GENERATIONAL SUPPORT

Many children wanted to support their parents, and the narratives bear witness of many cases of loving relationships, but poverty and AIDS put them under strain. In contrast to the desired right to “sit and eat” without having to work, elderly people worked as long as they had the strength and possibilities. Generational reciprocity often seemed unbalanced with elderly people acting as providers as long as they had any strength. Only when ill and weak they became needy and dependent.

The narratives clearly bear witness of the existence of a working elderly population. Almost all elderly persons living in the household of a son or a daughter tried to contribute to the household subsistence with their own income generation activities. For example, elderly women sold small portions of items like salt by the roadside, or they cultivated the plot or even fields outside the residential area. Elderly women often had an advantage before men retired from formal wage work, in that they already were established in the informal sector. They had been working since they were young, at least part time, in petty trading or some

other small business which they could continue or expand as long as they were healthy enough. Jane Mwanza continued to sell cooked food outside her front door also when her son was employed and when her widowed daughter supported the family with money generated from the house she had shared with her late husband. So even if Jane Mwanza's contribution to the household not always had been the largest, it was the most permanent and reliable.

The students' essays reveal that surprisingly many elderly were the main or even the only supporters of large households. Adult children joined their parents households when unemployed and in need, and ageing parents continued to support them. This situation is also found in the Zimbabwe context (Nyanguru *et.al.*, 1994).

The elderly contributed to the households both with material support and, especially women, by doing housework, nursing and providing care. Elderly women were the main providers of care in case of illness. Reports from many countries on the effects of HIV/AIDS have confirmed the crucial role of elderly women in the care of the sick (Baylies, 2002; Makina, 2009; Nyanzi 2009). Wives nursed their husbands, but it was seldom the other way round, although there were some exceptions among the informants. Women suffering from AIDS moved to, or called for, their mothers for help during the last and most difficult periods of their lives. For example, Jane Mwanza's daughters who all moved back home to be nursed before they passed away, while the mother of her daughter-in-law came to help out during what was believed to be her daughter's last months of life.

Fifty years ago urban residents on the Copperbelt told Epstein (1981) how they moved to their grandparents at the age of five or six years. It still happened in some poor families that a child, most often a girl-child, was sent to live with the grandmother in order to help her, but nowadays most of the many grandmother-headed households have been formed because the children have been orphaned. A study in Lesotho reveals that two thirds of all orphans live in households headed by women (Chaka, 2007).

In another study, also from Lesotho, Kimane and Mohale (2007) note that there were two types of grandmothers heading households with orphans. The ones they call the "younger generation grandmothers" are in another terminology maternal aunts. Still there are many of the "older generation" that takes care of orphans and provide homes and try to socialise them to full citizens in spite of poor health and scarce resources. Like Jane Mwanza they often have to take children out of school and put them to work in income-generating petty activities.

LACK OF SUPPORT

Even in the most loving families resources were scarce. Many of the elderly saw the poverty and the needs in their children's and grandchildren's households and did not want to be a burden. Thus, they did not ask for the support they needed. There were also parents who saw their children living in relative wealth, and did not get the share they expected. They had no means of forcing the children to support them.

For many of the elderly charity from churches has been their last resort. In George compound, a seventy-five years old man cared for his wife who had been blind for about five years. Their small one roomed mud house had a leaking roof; a door that could not be shut, and walls that had partly collapsed. Until he died he did the cooking and all other domestic chores. Water was drawn from a shallow well just close to the house. The couple sometimes got a little help from a son, who was a drunkard, or from a very poor daughter with a large family of her own. Another daughter was married in the Copperbelt, but they had not heard from her in years.

As the wife was blind they were on the charity list of their church. Just old age was not enough to qualify for this charity, there were too many in need. The Church provided them with a bag of mealie-meal on average every third month, but sometimes it took longer. At the time of one of the interviews, the mealie-meal had been finished for more than two weeks and they were hungry. The man offered to work for the neighbours as a way of begging without losing his dignity.

GENDERED SUPPORT

Cliggett (2005) reports from rural Zambia that old men maintained control over resources including the labour of their offspring, while old women had to develop strategies to encourage their children to support them. One such strategy was to present oneself as old and weak and remind the children of the sacrifices made for them. In urban Zambia old women rather presented themselves as strong and able to help with child care, nursing or home work. As women in George compound used to say: "You cannot trust those modern children". They foresaw the need to have something to offer in negotiations about support. Home ownership was an important strategy of women to secure support. If at old age a woman like Jane Mwanza could offer free shelter her chances of being supported increased.

In town old men had no control over the labour of his offspring, and any strategies to compensate for this cannot be identified in the narratives. While women often developed close and loving relationships, notably to their daughters, men were often detached from their children and therefore in lack of support. Some old men were lonely and complained

bitterly about sons not respecting their traditional duties (Kamwengo 2007). Other men did not expect anything from their children as they knew that they had not contributed to the children's upbringing or education. A woman in George compound supported her mother, who had raised her, but was reluctant to support her father who never had contributed to her upbringing. When he approached her for help, she told him that she could not afford helping him.

Too many narratives bear testimony of sons or grandsons who did not contribute to the welfare of the elderly. One old woman lived in the same house as a grandson, his wife and children. They were totally dependent on a daughter living elsewhere for food and payment of electricity and water bills. The grandson was working but did not contribute to the provision of meals he took or to other needs of the family. He spent his wages "on beer and who knows what else". Kamwengo (2007) in his study in Livingstone also found that daughters were more helpful than sons.

The support provided by the elderly to the younger generation was also highly gendered. Many working elderly men helped their grandchildren with school fees and other expenditures. Like Jane Mwanza, many grandmothers took care of orphaned and provided homes for them regardless of how difficult the situation was. Elderly women living as "dependents" within a sons or a daughter's household often contributed to expenditures and always, as long as they could for health reasons they helped with work in the household, they nursed the ill and cared for the children. If elderly men took care of grandchildren's everyday practical needs it was invariably a temporary solution to an emergency situation.

CONCLUSION

For women in George the dreams of modernity included a better life with decent housing, food enough, schooling for their children, security at old age, and rights to have a voice and actively participate in community and national matters. The informant Jane Mwanza was fully committed to urban life and she embraced the prospects of modernity, but modernity did not bring the expected prosperity. A full and active citizenship continues to be a conditioned and elusive right for women.

For women to be active in political structures space has to be created and political leaders committed to change of gender relations. In the one party state established in the seventies peri-urban women were actively engaged, although within the zones defined as female matters. With the "modern" democracy there are less opportunities offered to these women to participate in formal political structures. Still, women continue to work for their communities within churches and other formal or informal organisations. The women in George clearly define their citizenship in relation to what they can contribute to their

community. They do not seem to share McEwan's (2004) view that women's political activities at community level may be disempowering if it lacks involvement with the state.

One conclusion of this paper is that a woman's possibility to fully exercise her citizen rights starts in the private sphere. It depends on how she lives, with whom, and the power relations within the household. In relation to the outside world all power is assumed to be vested in the male head of household. At least, that is what most men in George claim with reference to custom or the Bible. With age women gain more autonomy. But not schooled into public political life they stay doing their service to community, and they continue to serve their families both by material contributions and by caring and nursing. Acting in public also has risks. Many elderly prefer to keep a low profile as just the fact that they have reached old age can be a basis for accusations of witchcraft.

Modernity failed the first post colonial urban women most obvious regarding the promise of an improved material living standard during their life time. In Zambia life expectancy has been lowered and old people live under unsecure conditions. Household and family relations changes due to urban conditions of work and housing. Poverty and effects of the AIDS pandemic are also factors that impose new roles and responsibilities for elderly women's and men's living in the cities, thus changing the gender and generational support systems.

Both elderly women and men work to earn an income for as long as they can to support themselves and make substantial contributions to their households. Many children give support to their parents, but elderly parents are also supporting the younger generations. Still living sons and daughters are often poor, and among the elderly there is a widespread understanding of the inability of the middle generation to support both their children and their parents.

The elderly often idealised the time when families were united and lived in a communal kind of setting where the former were looked after, not only by close relatives but by all people in the village. In this perspective they saw individualism and small or nuclear families as a negative trend: "Now people just concentrate on their own children". With a nuclear family the risk of being alone at old age increases.

There is a gender bias in the generational support system: Daughters and granddaughters are seen as more reliable and as contributing more to the livelihoods of the elderly than sons and grandsons. Unmarried (divorced or widowed) daughters are often cooperating very closely with their mothers. Many elderly women rely on daughters also when there are sons alive. Affectionate and loving relationships between individuals within the family are more often the basis for support than are "traditional duties".

The situation of women and men in old age was highly dependent on their gendered position in earlier life. The narratives show that years of exclusion from wage work and from

ownership of property have a negative bearing on women's life at old age. There are some tendencies of change of the gender division of labour, but care taking and nursing remain in the female domain. The elderly women engage in domestic work, child-care and nursing of the ill. Exceptional men can demonstrate that reality is more varied than the stereotypes, but usually when men engage in what is regarded as female tasks it is seen as a temporary solution brought on by necessity. Individualised support, poverty and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS have turned elderly people into providing resource persons.

In line with the Millennium Development Goals, development cooperation worldwide is focussed on poverty alleviation. In spite of this, poverty alleviation is not targeting elderly; their poverty status seems to be taken as a norm. This paper provides a basis for the argument that it is time to change the view of the elderly as non-productive, to highlight the burdens on elderly women, and to include them in poverty reduction schemes and in development policy.

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