

This paper focuses on the status of women in Zambia during pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. It highlights how colonialism perpetuated gender imbalances in Zambia and it examines the resilience of women's leadership in different developmental contexts.

First, I will present my own story as context for you, the reader, to understand firsthand the impacts that colonialism still has today. This will show that colonialism is not just a chapter in history, but that the damage is deeply rooted and persistent and continues to affect Zambian women. The paper also provides an opportunity for readers to learn more about the impacts of colonialism through my experiences as a Black woman growing up in Zambia. It makes sense to use my own history to examine the impacts of colonialism and to illustrate gendered inequity. My biography helps explain the larger political and social context and how it is experienced by individuals. The story offers a personal account of how inequity impacts women historically and today.

Secondly, I describe the historical, cultural and geographic background of Zambia to provide context when moving to discuss the colonial and post-colonial history. I uncover colonial processes in Zambia and their profound impact on matriarchal societies during this time period. The essay enhances deeper understanding of the history of gendered discrimination. It also explores how women's status was impacted by colonialism and will also show their resilience through different initiatives and strategies.

I, Idah Mukuka, grew up in a loving family of eight -- four boys and four girls, though I have since lost two of my siblings. We grew up very poor and access to education was a challenge. Going to school was not so easy -- it was on and off. Even though I finished high school, I did not manage to go to college because we had no money. I later met a man who promised to marry me and support me in school. I married for education and not for love; though things did not turn out to be the way I wanted. It was disappointing because my marriage only lasted for seven years before my husband died.

I still had dreams of pursuing my education despite the challenges that were coming my way. After the death of my husband, I experienced much grief and hardship, including my late husband's family trying to grab property that I had acquired together with my husband. I was taken to the local court by the family of my late husband as I had married under customary law, which is recognized by the Zambian Constitution. The local court's ruling was that if I ever decided to get married again then I should leave the matrimonial house. The message by the local court judge was clear in my ears that women cannot own property acquired through marriage in Zambia.

It is interesting that all this was happening around year 2000 when Zambia had several women-run non-governmental organizations (NGOs) trying to reinforce the rights of women and empowering them to stand on their own. At the time, I worked for the Young Women's Christian Association of Zambia (YWCA) helping women fight against property grabbing. Now it was happening to me. Even though I fought for my property in the name of my two children and because I worked for the YWCA, it was traumatizing because practically everything that belonged to my husband was mine,

even though this was not recognized by others. I felt disempowered and vulnerable with no confidence. It was unfair because it would have been a different situation if it was me who had died. My husband would have married and stayed in the same house without being questioned by our families. In this system, only husbands had rights and women were just dependants who did not have rights to anything; they could be evicted from their homes at anytime.

Following the local court's ruling, I decided not to get married again, but to stay with a boyfriend so that if the relatives of my late husband decided to take me to court then I would be able to say I was not married. This journey was a tough one because when my late mother heard that I was staying with a man in the matrimonial house, she travelled quickly from Kabwe, which is 100 kilometres from Lusaka where I lived, to advise me to chase my boyfriend from the house. I looked at my mother, smiled and told her to relax and that the man was just a friend. My mother became quiet and looked at me and I was not sure what she was thinking though I knew she was worried for me and my children. I really miss my late mother. She was such a beautiful soul and she loved my children and me.

The second chapter of my life was learning that I was HIV positive, another traumatic experience that continues to shape my life today. Stephanie Nolen (2008), who worked at the CBC in Canada at the time, travelled to Zambia and interviewed me as part of her book *28: Stories of AIDS in Africa*. At the time, I worked as a counselor at the Centre for Infectious Disease Research in Zambia (CIDRZ) and my job was to counsel pregnant women at the Chelstone Clinic and if found HIV positive, Nevirapine was administered to prevent their babies from being infected with HIV. Nolen wrote, "At

the clinic, they said Ida Mukuka could work magic, and there was no case too difficult.” (Nolen, 2008). Even though I was a celebrated counselor who supported many women and created support groups for women and men, the HIV positive result was like a gunshot to me. I did not know what to do. Despite being a counselor and helping women understand their positive status, I went through a lot of counselling myself. I accepted my HIV status like others had done and continued working at the clinic.

My skills, activism and leadership attracted world leaders like Hillary Clinton, who I met at Capitol Hill in Washington DC, and movie stars like Matt Damon, Oprah Winfrey and Naomi Watts, who specifically came to Zambia to learn about the difference our programs were making on the ground as HIV/AIDS was devastating Zambian communities. Other prominent people included Mary Fisher, the former UNAIDS envoy, and Stephen Lewis, the former UN's special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa. All delegates were interested in the grassroots work and met with me to learn about the work with women as the disease had put women at the centre, and also people living with HIV/AIDS.

My continuous hard work earned me a fellowship to study at the Coady International Institute at St Francis Xavier in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada where I was awarded the Katherine Fleming Award for international development work. I have also worked for the Stephen Lewis Foundation in Toronto, Canada for over a decade and I am currently their advisor on the grandmother-to-grandmother campaign which raises funds to support community-based organisations in Africa that supports orphaned vulnerable children and their grandmothers. I have delivered presentations on behalf of

the African grandmothers at the International Human Rights Council in Geneva addressing world leaders. I remain a grassroots international leader with a lot to share.

My experiences living in Zambia have been shaped by the previous history of the invasion and colonization of my country. In order to better understand my experiences, it is important to also understand the historical context of Zambia. Zambia has about 73 tribes and historically it is said that matrilineal inheritance predominated (Caron, 2018). Matrilineal family is when the authority lies on the woman side. For example when a husband gets married and goes to live with the wife's relations or exercise of domestic authority by wife's brother (Phiri, 1983). During pre-colonial Zambia, tribes were organized around matrilineal descent; women had the opportunity to take up leadership roles and both genders spearheaded development (Schuster, 1983). It is said that 80% pre-colonial Zambia was matrilineal and matriarchal until the coming of the British colonisers (Sharma 2019).

Polygamy is marrying more than one woman and it existed previously in some parts of Zambia before the British colonisers arrived and was an indication of the disempowerment of women (Carmody B). For example, in Chikuni when missionaries arrived around 1900, they found polygamy being practised among the Batonga people where it was deeply rooted in tradition (Carmody B). Missionaries tried to stop the practise through promoting monogamy and they usually expelled Christians who practised polygamy from the church (Carmody B).

Colonialism was introduced throughout South-central Africa at the end of the nineteenth century. The colonisers came with a lot of ideas about how they could rule and control Africa. It is said that, “the ideology of the colonial administration was paternalistic, stressing the civilizing activities of administrators, missionaries and settlers in meeting the needs of the Africans of the territory (EISA Zambia, 2021).” The article also says, “The practice, on the other hand, was frankly racist and exploitative (EISA Zambia, 2021).”

Colonialism in Zambia officially began in 1924 when British administration arrived to explore the copper business (Siwila, 2017). The colonisers’ priority was to serve their own interests of expansion and acquire wealth and power as they explored the economic opportunities in Zambia (Siwila, 2017; Tembo, 2016). However, the British colonisers brought gender biases that reinforced male patriarchy and female subservience (Siwila, 2017). As Alice Evans (2015) explains, “The prescriptive stereotypes of male breadwinner and female housewife were encouraged by colonial–capitalist ambitions, as well as Zambian aspirations for middle-class status – secured by emulating white people.” At the time most Zambian men enjoyed dominance over women and wanted them to be housewives, which was in line with the cultural expectations within the new patriarchy society (Siwila, 2017). Most of the British colonisers settled on the copper belt, the region of Zambia’s largest copper mines and where business was booming (Siwila, 2017). It is said that most of the women were made domestic labourers who were confined to white people’s houses while white women did not have these restrictions on mobility (Siwila, 2017).

One of the ideas the British brought to Zambia was to ignore and devalue women, thus reinforcing patriarchal society by reducing the power of women (Sharma, 2019). For example, the British introduced the idea of women working as domestic workers and made women remain at home as housewives while men mostly worked in the mines serving the interests of the colonisers (Siwila L). Women were also not able to pursue other opportunities because they had little freedom of mobility or available time. Access to education and employment became a challenge (Evans, 2015). The colonizers also did not think women were good partners in development and they found ways to disempower them. For example, girls' education was not something that the colonisers wanted to invest in. As Allen states, "Schooling for girls was not a priority for the missionaries and when there was retrenchment due to financial or personnel shortcomings, women teachers were used to keep boys boarding schools running rather than providing schooling for girls" (Julia Allen , 2010).

Most women chiefs were deliberately forgotten by the colonial government because they had their own interests to protect (Sharma, 2019). Sometimes the colonisers viewed women as sex objects who they could sleep with or marry as many as they wanted at anytime (Milner-Thornton J). They described women as evil, sex objects that were there to go after white men for money (Milner-Thornton J). Juliette Milner-Thornton, in her article "A Feather Bed Dictionary: Colonialism and Sexuality," highlights how Broomfield, a white British man, married eight or nine native wives in Feira district alone and left at least 36 half caste children. As the article says, "Broomfield's account of Africa and Africans is in line with Eurocentric masculine perspectives, which focus on savagery, lawlessness and sexualisation." It is clear that

colonists had no respect for Black women. As the article rightly states, “It is important to note that sex, gender and race were influential features during colonialism and imperialism.” British colonisers took advantage of the Zambian women by being white and using their powers and money to make women more vulnerable in a patriarchal structure that was already trying to dis-empower women in different ways.

The coming colonialism negatively affected the matrilineal structure, which in pre-colonial society organized about 80% of Indigenous societies (Sharma 2019).

Matrilocal marriages – in which a man resides with his wife in her native land -- existed in Zambia, yet little is known about whether women benefitted following the death of her husband (Caron, 2018). Today in Zambia, matrilineal and matrilocal practices still favour men (Caron, 2018). Most Zambian women marry under customary law and in case of divorce or death, women still fall victim to the local courts (Coldham, 1990). The local courts are said to be a successor from the native courts which the British colonisers set up in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) just like they did in other African countries in order for them to take full control of Africans (Coldham, 1990). The native courts were renamed local courts after Independence in 1964 and became part of the judicial systems though jurisdiction can be complicated on family cases, adultery and inheritance (Coldham, 1990).

The cases are usually determined in accordance with the applicable customary law though the legislation contains no definition of customary law and guidance on how to resolve conflicts of laws (Coldham, 1990). For example, in my case after my husband died, the relatives of my late husband wanted to grab the house from me and we ended up going to the local court as I married under the customary law. At the local court, I

was told by the local court judge that, “if I decide to get married, then I should leave the house.” This was unfair because if it was me who had died, my husband would be allowed to marry and stay in the same house. The local courts have limited jurisdiction and mostly handle civil cases (Coldham, 1990). The Native courts were established by the British colonisers to handle disputes among the labour migrants living in multi-ethnic communities (Coldham, 1990).

It is also important to mention that even though matrilineal social organisation predominated in pre-colonial society and women fared better in this period than during colonialism, there were some traditional teachings that reinforced gender inequalities between men and women and that made women vulnerable. Some teachings aimed at promoting the patriarchy upheld the housewife ideology and made women believe they could not do anything without men. Women are given advice before they get married. As one woman, interviewed in a recent study, explained what marriage to a man should be:

You must make yourself pliable. The man is the head of the house: one must follow what he says...If you leave you will find exactly the same thing. Don't leave, you must stay...A woman has the right to speak but not to use strong words; she must be calm when explaining... If he refuses you must follow. If the man scolds, the woman must return to the ground [both figuratively and literally, by kneeling]...Through this way of speaking you will live harmoniously [translated]. (Muzyamba et al, 2015).

The system of devaluing women continued throughout colonial times and postcolonial periods, making Zambia look like it had always been male dominated, and leading some to believe that patriarchy organized gender relations even traditionally, or during the pre-colonial period. This could be seen as a kind of “reinvention” of what

tradition is supposed to mean to women or what constitutes traditional gender relations. It also seems to confuse many women today who understand that the traditional beliefs that disempower them override their human rights, when in fact they are supposed to help them live in harmony (Muzyamba et al, 2015). Many Zambian women are even skeptical and not open to ideas that will help advance their lives positively. Some women prefer to continue adhering to cultural beliefs and traditions even if they are harmful to them. It is sometimes surprising that many women do not seem to believe in human rights, which are fundamental to every human being. For example, a 30-year old participant in a study about the views of Zambian HIV-vulnerable women about human rights as public health tools described her understanding of the connection between cultural preservation and patriarchy:

My parents always reminded me of how important preserving our culture is. You know our parents grew up during the colonial times so they more than anyone else understand the importance of preserving culture. These NGOs come in our communities and tell us that times have changed we need to adopt new ways, in short, they tell us to adopt mzungu culture. When growing up, a girl is taught on how to take care of family. Your husband is the most important person in your life as a woman. So whatever happens you need to ensure your husband is well served. Now, look at what these NGOs are telling us to do. They are telling us that we have the right to deny our husbands sex if we so wish. What kind of African woman does that? That is taboo. And these are the things that these people are telling us (Muzyamba et al, 2015).

This comment shows how colonialism has impacted some women to think that human rights are outside of, or are imported Western ideas that disrespect cultural values (Muzyamba et al, 2015). This woman thinks that marriage to man should be a woman's primary goal in life and that one's identity and worth is defined by their relationship to a man. Despite the existence of matrilineal society in pre-colonial times, in many women's

minds, a man is everything to them and they would rather stay with an abusive man even when their rights were being violated.

Despite the negative impacts of colonialism on women in Zambia, there is strong evidence that women worked together with men and in some cases, women proved to be good leaders before the British came. During pre-colonial Zambia, women like Mwenya Mukulu, who came from the Eastern Congo to the Northern Province of Zambia in the seventeenth century, left a huge legacy (Sharma, 2019). It is said that as a chieftain, with her three sisters, Mukulu was able to organise the region into a formal governance structure without any conflicts. Mwenya Mukulu is remembered for her strong political skills, though not much is documented about her (Sharma, 2019). The article also highlights famous women who held influential positions from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries; women like Mwape who was a general and defended her people from the Portuguese (Sharma, 2019). There were also other women of great influence like a woman called great Mukwae who was the Secretary of State who made sure the Europeans respected her land boundaries (Sharma, 2019). Before the coming of the colonizers, there were more than 200 female chiefs and today Zambia only has 26 female chiefs (Sharma, 2019).

It is also clear that during colonialism, women showed resilience by being strategic and resisting the colonial leadership. It is said that around the 1950s, there was a law to repatriate unmarried women from urban areas to rural areas (Evans, 2015). However, women really wanted to enjoy their autonomy and usually escaped after repatriation and came back to the city to continue exploring their economic opportunities (Evans, 2015). Around 1953, the courts decided to remove the policy of

repatriation and this helped many women enjoy their lives and explore different opportunities without pressure of being forced to get married, which was the idea perpetuated by colonialists in a patriarchy structure (Evans, 2015).

Women like Julia Chikamoneka are well remembered in Zambian history for their activism. Julia Mulenga Nsofwa was also known as mama Chikamoneka (Zambian Patriots, 2019). Chikamoneka meaning “it will be seen” was her nickname used to hide her identity (Zambian Patriots, 2019). She was known to be a fierce activist who never feared the British colonisers (Zambian Patriots, 2019). She was the organiser against the British oppression and was part of the Women’s Brigade which supported freedom fighters in Zambia (Zambian Patriots, 2019). In 1960, Chikamoneka made Ian McLeod, the secretary of state of the colonies, weep as a result of her action when he visited Zambia (then Northern Rhodesia) (Zambian Patriots, 2019). Chikamoneka described the incident – when she stood in front of McLeod half-naked and she witnessed the white man cry in front of her, Black women -- as the most amusing and memorable incident in her life (Zambian Patriots, 2019). Chikamoneka, showed her nakedness as the highest form of anger and the only weapon she had at the time in order to resist oppression and demonstrate that people had suffered a lot in Zambia (Zambian Patriots, 2019).

Colonialism had a profoundly negative effect on Zambian women that persists today. Despite living in a post-colonial era, as a Black Zambian woman, I still feel the effects of patriarchy that was introduced and instilled through colonial practices. Even as Black women feel these effects, they remain strong and resilient. Women like Julia Chikamoneka can never be forgotten for her activism and standing up against British oppression. It is said that the only weapon and strategy she had in fighting the white

British oppressors in 1960, was to remain half naked, thus making British Governor Ian MacLeod cry, which was a shock to her because she never imagined that a white man could cry in front of a Black person. In my opinion, her legacy strongly shows the leadership of women in development in Zambia.

Even though colonialism impacted women in different ways and seems to have promoted patriarchy, it is important to acknowledge that the Zambian women and people have tried to correct the situation. Much research has been directed to finding ways that the country can move towards gender balance. When you examine cultural beliefs that dis-empower women, some research shows ways to be effective so that men and women can move towards equality. It is also important to recognise that culture can change and that it can transform in ways that do not undermine Zambian identities and cultural practices. In other words, practices and customs that govern customary tenure are not static (Caron, 2018.). The research shows that when different stakeholders come together to work towards gender relations, cultural transformations do not undermine women's identities.

There are common struggles that we face as Black women, including that we are overlooked historically. Even though marriage is meant to be a union of two people, sometimes women do not have the same property and marital rights. My being dragged to the Zambian local court by my late husband's family with the interest of repossessing the house I owned with my husband is one example. The worst experience for me was when the judge passed judgement and told me to leave the house when I decided to get married. To me it was clear that women cannot own property in marriage. On the other hand, my diagnosis of HIV/AIDS, which also brought specific patriarchal effects,

represents another barrier that, among others, I had to overcome. My leadership with HIV/AIDS clearly shows the power of women in bringing peace and creating harmony between couples within the Zambian communities. During HIV/AIDS in Zambia, the women were put at the centre of HIV and were blamed by men if found HIV positive (Nolen, 2008). In a patriarchy society, which was made worse by the British colonisers (Sharma, 2019), every ugly thing falls on women. I demonstrated to Zambia and the world that I had the right strategies and skills for both men and women (Nolen, 2008). Nolen in her book, *28: AIDS Stories in Africa*, writes that, “A man would arrive at the red-brick Chelstone Clinic in Lusaka sputtering about his cheating wife and the scourge she had brought in to their home, and in a couple of hours Ida would have him signing up for training to lead a support group for other men with HIV.” The book goes on to say, “She could sweet talk those who tested HIV-negative into using condoms (or at least promising that they would), [or] join a class on positive living.” (Nolen,2008). It is evident that through my story that I challenged the gender inequity and joined people who have worked towards challenging many colonizing ideas that worsened the position of women in Zambia. It is against this background of gender inequity, that colonialism came and worsened the status of women in Zambia. The treatment of women during colonialism was more like a pandemic because it affected women in different ways and its effects are still felt to date. It remains an ongoing battle that requires thorough strategies for women to properly move on and contribute to development meaningfully.

Even though I faced immense challenges, I was proud to focus on this topic of matriarchies in Zambia as a fellow Zambian. It was an eye opener to many things

especially around Zambian women and the impacts of colonialism. I know that we live in a patriarchy society and that is why women are vulnerable. However, it was interesting to dig a little bit in to history and understand why we are where we are and that there is still much more to be done.

Challenges: I really had challenges in writing this paper because not much is documented about Zambian women's history. Some of the stories we hear about many times, but when you try to search, there is no information. For example, the story about Julia Chikamoneka, a real activist that was involved in the freedom fighting in Zambia and fighting against British oppression, is not well known. She even made a white man cry by undressing in front of him. But I was disappointed to find that her story is not written or that there is a book to properly honour her. Even though the first President gave her a medal and she was given a state funeral when she died, I still feel that it was not enough to honour her contributions. It would have been better to even have a day she died declared as a holiday to remember her courage in making Zambia free from the colonisers.

Also throughout writing this paper, I realised that there are a lot of Zambian women out there that have shown their skills and strategies, but are not part of the history just like the women like Julia Chikamoneka and others. My own history, which is internationally recognized, has not had much impact in Zambia, probably only at the grassroots with the people I worked with at the time. I also remember when Oprah visited Zambia, there was a picture of her and me on the front page of the newspaper which was very influential at the time, yet the only name that was there was "Oprah Winfrey visits Zambia," as though she was alone, but we were holding hands.

It is also important to recognize that many Zambian women have spearheaded different developmental initiatives to work towards gender balance and to try to correct the impact of colonialism on women. There are so many activities and initiatives that show the resilience of women in colonial and post-colonialism society. For example, there is an initiative of the Women's Museum which is quite powerful because it focuses on recognizing the power of women in pre-colonial and post-colonial Zambia and how colonialism changed things (Sharma 2019). The Women's Museum was launched in 2016 and founded by media consultant Samba Yonga and historian and cultural activist Mulenga Kapwepwe (Sharma, 2019). Kapwepwe talks about coming from a political family; her father was once a top politician in Zambia, the Vice President, she talks about how her father is famous, but not her mother even though she did a lot of work (Sharma, 2019). She described the women's history in Zambia as "subdued" (Sharma, 2019). The title of the article magazine about the museum says, "How Zambia inherited patriarchy from colonialism" (Sharma, 2019). The article demonstrates how the British colonialism tried to erase the history of women in Zambia and how now this is being worked on to bring back the power that women held during pre-colonial Zambia (Sharma, 2019). The article also talks about how during the pre-colonial period, Zambia had over 200 women chiefs compared to today when the country has 26 women chiefs (Sharma, 2019). The initiative is a clear indication that women have understood the role that colonialism played in making Zambia look like it has always been a patriarchy society and hence the need to challenge it and work towards gender balance. It is also true that the effects of colonialism in Zambia are still felt to date.

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