

# **“SHOULD WE VOTE FOR WOMEN JUST BECAUSE THEY ARE WOMEN?”**

---

**Intersectional Assessment of Women’s Political Participation in Zambia**

**Lotta Kinnunen  
Master’s Thesis (Pro gradu)  
Sociology  
Master’s Programme in Development and International Cooperation  
Faculty of Social Sciences and Philosophy  
University of Jyväskylä  
Autumn 2020**

## ABSTRACT

### SHOULD WE VOTE FOR WOMEN JUST BECAUSE THEY ARE WOMEN?

Intersectional Assessment of Women's Political Participation in Zambia

Lotta Kinnunen

Master's Thesis

Master's Programme for Development and International Cooperation

Sociology

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Social Sciences

University of Jyväskylä

Instructor: Tiina Kontinen

Autumn 2020

*67 pages + 1 Appendix*

The aim of this study was to define and assess the themes for women's political participation in Zambia in the framework of feminist theory. As the research went on, the central theoretical concepts were narrowed down to anti-essentialism and feminist intersectionality.

The use of strategic essentialism by harnessing the stereotypical notions of women's roles and their innate good qualities for the wider good is quite common. It is used by women's organisations in Zambia, internationally, and also in UN agencies working towards gender equality. However, using essentialist notions of gender in advocacy work can be risky because it might result in re-enforcing the already existing notions and stereotypes, and the potential political transformative power goes to waste and no change occurs.

The primary data consists of ten (10) semi-structured interviews, conducted in the Southern Province of Zambia in December 2006, three months after the Zambian tri-partite elections, and during my internship with Women for Change (WfC), a Zambian women's organisation. The secondary data collected and used were advocacy materials developed and used by WfC for the pre-electoral campaign "Vote for Women!", my field notes and four (4) semi-structured interviews with the key people of the Zambian Women's Movement, and co-coordinators of the electoral campaign. The data was analysed using thematic analysis; within the theoretical framework of anti-essentialism and intersectionality.

The findings of my research indicate that the use of strategic feminism quickly becomes counterproductive, and starts feeding back into the stereotypes, therefore having no transformative power. On the other hand, my study shows the importance of intersectionality for a more diverse and nuanced picture of the intersections of social divisions which in this study were identified as gender/ethnicity and gender/class. Through these intersections, the structures of patriarchy and inequality become visible.

**Key words:** transnational feminism, intersectionality, feminist theory, essentialism, thematic analysis, Zambia

Abstract

**Table of Contents**

List of Figures and Abbreviations

**Preface ..... 4**

**1. Introduction ..... 6**

    1.1 Background and Context of the Study..... 7

    1.2 Significance and Contribution of the Study ..... 10

    1.3 Research Question and Focus..... 11

    1.4 Structure of the Study ..... 11

**2. The Feminist Rationale and Practice of Women’s Political Participation..... 12**

    2.1 Figures of Underrepresentation..... 12

    2.2 Transnational Sisterhood and the Machineries of Patriarchy..... 14

    2.3 The Case of Zambia ..... 19

    2.4 Gendered Political Sphere in Zambia ..... 23

**3. Strategies for Change: Theory and Practice of Feminist Activism for Women’s Political Participation..... 26**

    3.1 The Trouble of Essentialism ..... 28

    3.2 Intersectional Approach..... 32

**4. Methodological Choices ..... 36**

    4.1 Feminist Research Ethic..... 36

    4.2 Methodology ..... 37

    4.3 Data Collection ..... 38

    4.4 Challenges..... 42

    4.5 Thematic Analysis..... 43

    4.6. Thematic Framework of This Study ..... 45

**5. Results..... 48**

    5.1 Strategic Essentialism and the Limits of Transformation ..... 48

    5.2 At the Intersections ..... 53

    5.3 The Limitations of the Study ..... 57

**6. Conclusion ..... 59**

**Epilogue ..... 61**

**Bibliography ..... 62**

**Appendices**

## List of Figures and Abbreviations

<b>Figure 1:</b>	Vote for Women!-campaign poster, Women for Change 2003
<b>Table 1:</b>	Composition of elected members of Parliament in Zambia by sex between 1994-2006
<b>Table 2:</b>	Interview Participants
<b>Table 3:</b>	Thematic Framework
<b>Table 4:</b>	Notions of leadership traits and women's gendered traits as articulated in the interview data

ANC	African National Congress
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
DW	Deutsche Welle
FDD	Forum for Democracy and Development
GIDD	Gender in Development Division
IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MGCD	Ministry of Gender and Child Development
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NGOCC	Non-Governmental Organisation Coordinating Council
NWLG	National Women's Lobby Group
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
PF	Patriotic Front
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIGI	Social Institutions and Gender Index

UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
UNZA	University of Zambia
UPND	United Party for National Development
US	United States
WfC	Women for Change
ZARD	Zambia Association for Research and Development
ZNWL	Zambia National Women's Lobby
ZWM	Zambian Women's Movement

## Preface

In January 2015, Zambia held presidential elections after the unexpected death of the president Michael Chilufya Sata during his term that was to last until 2016. I was living and working in Zambia at the time and followed the proceedings leading to the presidential election date in the country still as an outsider, yet fortunate to have so many Zambians in my life to explain their viewpoints and opinions. After all this, the politics of the country have opened up to me in a new way. For this I am grateful, and I also feel that this thesis has gained greatly from these lessons.

However, women still have less seats in the parliament and hold less power than men in the political decision-making processes. Although there was one female candidate, Edith Nawakwi, running for the presidency, political parties are still hesitant to take on female candidates and give them their full support. More so, women are still considered unfit for the presidential seat, in general. Therefore, in 2015, Ms. Nawakwi was still unlikely to win the elections, and become the first woman of Zambia, as a president, and not just the wife of one.

This thesis has been long in the making for several reasons. It started in Zambia in the election year of 2006, saw some changes in Zambia during the elections of 2015, and reached its final pages in 2020 in Finland. During these years, and while building a career in the field of development, there were times when I was convinced that the topic became outdated and was not even relevant anymore. I was more than ready to abandon the process and start fresh with a new project.

But my doubts about continuing with this thesis topic were set aside when I read the *Editor's Note* in Zambia Weekly (Issue 215, January 2015, p.2) that made me realise that my thesis topic is still relevant indeed:

Okay, I am a woman, so I may be biased, but I would vote for the only woman amongst the 11 candidates, Edith Nawakwi from the Forum for Democracy and Development (FDD). Women leaders are more assertive, persuasive, empathetic and flexible. They also have better interpersonal skills than men and a stronger need to get things done. This all makes for an excellent president, if you ask me. One who will promote an inclusive, open, consensus building and collaborative leadership style. Just what Zambia needs. No more I-know-everything-and-will-fire-anyone-who-begs-to-differ. The problem is that Nawakwi doesn't stand a chance. The other day, when buying vegetables from one of the ladies down the road from us, she told me she would not vote for Nawakwi, sister solidarity or not. When asked why, she simply replied: A woman cannot be president!

Nothing more. Nothing less. She clearly felt that she was stating the obvious. Well, we live in back-of-beyond Lusaka West, which remains surprisingly untouched by development, considering its proximity to Lusaka. Many people still live simple lives without access to running water, electricity, schooling or other income than subsistence farming. The lady was therefore only expressing a view shared by many Zambians. In short, Zambia is not ready for a female president. The political environment is still not ready to embrace gender equality.

And so it turned out that Edith Nawakwi ended the presidential race in the third place with a total of 15,321 votes, where the winner of the elections and therefore the sixth president of the Republic Zambia Patriotic Front's (PF) Edgar Lungu, got 807,925 votes and the second runner up, United Party 's (UPND) Hakainde Hichilema, 780,168 votes. It may be relevant to also note that out of 5,166,084 registered voters, only 32.36 percent turned up at the polling stations (Electoral Commission of Zambia, 2015). On 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2015, the newly inaugurated President Edgar Lungu made a historical move by appointing the first ever woman as the Vice President of Zambia – Ms. Inonge Wina, previously a prominent figure in the Zambian women's movement who has been building a career in formal politics as a member of parliament since 2001. This made me think; maybe not now, but maybe in some years to come.

Many things have happened in Zambia since 2015. But in 2020, when the Finnish coalition government is run by five women as party leaders, and, while I was on a much needed professional break, I realised I needed to finally bring this project to a close and remind myself of the reasons that brought me to the field of international development in the first place.

# 1. Introduction

The Zambian Women's Movement (ZWM) launched a campaign before the 2006 Zambian tripartite elections<sup>1</sup> under the slogan “Vote for Women!”. The main organisational responsibility for the campaign was with the National Women's Lobby Group (NWLG)<sup>2</sup> and the Non-Governmental Organisation Coordinating Council (NGOCC). NWLG worked to support female politicians and women's decision-making at all levels to enhance the representation of women in politics. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) funded NWLG's civic education workshops and women politicians' workshops before the elections. However, the launch of the “Vote for Women!” – campaign was delayed and the launch took place only a month before the elections, in late August 2006. The campaign concentrated on supporting the female candidates, standing alone as women in their constituencies, regardless of their party affiliation. This limited the support to a very few constituencies, and only to a few candidates. It was also too late to properly campaign or arrange for public debates to raise the profile of the women being supported. The campaign was built around something that could be called strategic essentialism: women politicians' greater innate social responsibility. It argued that women care ‘naturally’ more for social issues, such as health, access to clean water, and that women are ‘naturally’ less corrupted and more transparent than male candidates. Despite the campaign focusing on women’s ‘natural’ qualities, was conditional and the candidates were required to sign a ‘social agreement’ in which they agreed to concentrate on the social issues in case they were elected.

It would have been impossible to measure the impact of the campaign as the launch was so late and the areas for campaigning so limited. In the aftermath, the general consensus within the women's movement seemed to be that it was too little too late, but it served as a learning experience on what to avoid in the future campaigns.

“Should we vote for women just because they are women?” was a question that I was confronted with while discussing my research interests at the University of Zambia (UNZA) right before the elections in September 2006. As an Intern at Women for Change

---

<sup>1</sup> In the tripartite elections the candidates contest for local government (councillors), constituency (Members of Parliament) and presidential seats. In 2006, only males contested for the presidential seat.

<sup>2</sup> Also known as Zambia National Women’s Lobby, ZNWL



(WfC), I had been part of the planning team for the campaign, danced at the launch together with other women, and sat in the back of the campaign trucks chanting “Vote for women!” on Lusaka’s Cairo Road in the afternoon rush hour. The question took me aback. To me it was a simple fact that there should be more elected and appointed women in governments everywhere in the world to have an equal, or at the very least, fair representation of the overall population in the formal decision-making positions, as well as equal and fair access to the same.

When I thought about it through, the question was understandable. In a cultural and political context where women in general are not seen as members of the powerful elite, taking part in legislative decision making, and contributing to the nation’s development from the top, what would all of a sudden qualify them – as women, who are historically mostly conceived as mothers, wives and daughters or, at best, as political party cadres – to do so? What would give them the qualification to be elected and what sets them apart from the men as politicians? The feminist reasoning against institutionalised gender inequality and inequity simply was not enough to convince voters. But neither was the fact that we had used women’s role as mothers, wives and daughters as fixed value systems, and assumed that a woman who is elected, will automatically take the feminist agenda further in their acquired positions because of their perceived roles as the caregivers and ‘do-gooders’. And with very little knowledge or previous experience in the political sphere, how would women even accomplish anything. Voting for women because they were women was difficult to justify.

### **1.1 Background and Context of the Study**

My feminist understanding follows that of “critical perspective on social and political life that draws our attention to the ways in which social, political, and economic norms, practices and structures create injustices that are experienced differently or uniquely by certain groups of women” (Ackerly and True, 2010, p.1). I have placed this study within the contextual framework of transnational and local feminisms, and the current feminist theory, recognising the diversity and difference of women’s experiences and plurality of gendered identities - intersections and anti-essentialism.

In scholarly terms, 'feminist practice' as research was hardly really seen as a problem as it carried certain central understandings for analysis, methodology, and epistemology. But many feminist theorists have called for reclaiming 'feminism' also in its political context of practice and commitment to gender equality and activism: "perhaps one of the things we need to return to in developing feminist theory is the connection between theory and practice, not merely in the way in which we construct theory, but in the ways we live it" (Johnson-Odim, 2002, p.122). The existence of 'universal truths' such as 'sisterhood', 'oppression' or the category of 'women' itself about women is rejected in the sense that they would create essentialist unitary categories with no consideration for the differences in the ways 'women' is also related to the similarly socially constructed divisions: race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, religion, and in the globalised world; their location.

Women's underrepresentation in formal politics is considered a problem. United Nations (UN), Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and other global organisations believe that affirmative action through specific quotas for women are the most effective way to reach the required critical mass<sup>3</sup> of thirty percent (30%) representation in political decision-making bodies. The thirty percent benchmark is seen as critical to meaningfully influence policy development and political decision-making, and to reach the tipping point where equal gender representation becomes a norm. Most countries that have reached the thirty percent threshold, including Finland, have indeed done so by introducing affirmative action through gender quotas in political parties, reserved seats, or alike.

Zambia has still not adopted gender quotas as a strategy to include more women in political decision-making bodies regardless of its several international commitments<sup>4</sup>. However, gender equality, equity and women's empowerment, measured among other indicators by access to education and gender equal representation and women's participation in formal political decision-making are seen and agreed to be the key issues hindering national development and democracy in developing countries. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) highlighted the importance of reaching the critical mass from

---

<sup>3</sup> Critical mass of 30% set by the United Nations Social and Economic Council in 1990.

<sup>4</sup>Zambia is a signatory to several international agreements for promoting gender equality, including women's representation and participation in formal political decision-making. For example see: reports from UN World Conferences for women (Mexico City 1975, Copenhagen 1980, Nairobi 1985), Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and its reviews (2000 and 2005).

their onset in 2000 (UNDP Zambia, 2014). This is one of the areas where the MDGs did not prove successful. The following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have also included equal political representation in its gender equality indicators in 2015 (UN, 2020b).

Worldwide, the policy reforms resulting in more inclusive parliamentary representation have been a result of distinct circumstances, and have required power and openness of the state, dynamic political system and competition, but also an active and organised civil society i.e. women's movement. Women's political empowerment, in terms of equal participation and access to formal decision-making power and positions, and as a fundamental issue of human rights or equality, is often not seen as a gain in itself. It could be said that those in power need to be convinced that there is a reason why women should have equal access to institutionalised political power i.e. that 'they are worth it'. In Zambia, the women's movement has not yet been successful in leveraging for their agenda in the political sphere.

This has led to strategies with strong essentialist tones, and as such, pose a problem for the feminist theory and politics that are *essentially* anti-essentialist. When what is clearly a feminist agenda of gaining equal rights to formal political decision-making, is 'enhanced' by highlighting, for example, women's reproductive role, it waters down the fundamentally feminist agenda of gender equality per se. Women's political participation is seen to automatically lead to improvement on children's health and family welfare, and other desirable demographic effects as a whole that fall *naturally* in women's domain, and that are therefore *essentially* feminine. Although this kind of strategically essentialist take has had some positive outcomes, it can also take a toll on the actual feminist agenda, and the use of essentialism become counterproductive. In other words, women's participation and inclusion becomes 'justified' but the strong feminist agenda based on women's rights and empowerment defined by the *freedom of choice*, rather than the assumed, universal and descriptive female needs, loses its sharp edge.

With essentialism, the inevitable diversity of women and their circumstances is disregarded. Intersectionality as was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), that has since then been widely used and discussed in feminist research and social sciences in

general (in this study e.g. Yuval-Davis 2006a, 2006b, Hancock, 2013, ), shows how the diversity of experience from more than one social division, positions the experiences differentially in terms of power and/or oppression. This can then be seen as a corrective measure; approach, analytical tool or a theoretical framework that allows space and voice of plurality of experiences and reveals simultaneous inequalities at work at once.

Intersectionality as a theoretical approach in this study offers a possibility to look beyond the essentialist notions and the social division of gender, and how it relates to other social divisions that define the position of power in any given scenario and historical location.

## **1.2 Significance and Contribution of the Study**

The theoretical framework of this thesis is firmly placed within the current feminist theory recognising the intersectionality of discrimination and/or oppression i.e. differences of experience and access to power through interrelated experiences shaped by the social divisions of race, sex, gender, class, ability, ethnicity, locale and alike, yet forming alliances around issues on the global feminist agenda. My understanding of 'women' and 'gender' is ideologically feminist, and political as such. Therefore, I also assume that gender equality is a political development goal in its own right.

As long as there is no affirmative action, such as quotas, to ensure a fair and representative number of women in elective decision-making bodies, the civil society consisting of activists and NGOs are left to campaign, lobby and advocate for equal and fair representation. NGOs do this in many fronts, reaching communities through trainings, education and sensitisation work on gender, human rights and elections in rural and urban settings. They also lobby for change and recognition of equal rights in the political structures. I use my field work experience with one Zambian NGO campaigning for gender equality in politics as my point of departure. I see the organisation itself as part of the transnational feminist movement but I question the use of essentialism as a strategy for gender equality as it may homogenise women where the existing social divisions create differences in experience of power beyond gender. The diversity of experience gets silenced in the essential strategies. I have attempted to look for meanings through thematic content analysis to diversify and differentiate the social division of gender through the intersections with class and ethnicity.

Intersectionality has been embraced by feminist theorists and practitioners alike and examples of its operationalisation are abundant. My study is a contribution by its use in the However, each analysis using the intersectional approach is located in their particular settings, and my study is too.

### **1.3 Research Question and Focus**

My main interest was the participants' experiences and views on the topics that were current at the time of the interviews. These were the tripartite elections held in Zambia and the civic education workshops that WfC had held shortly prior to the elections. My larger theoretical frame was in feminist theory at large, later narrowed down to the core concepts of anti-essentialism and feminist intersectionality, which are both tightly linked to questions of social divisions, identity and representation.

The research questions in the context of this study then formed into:

- What are the limitations of strategic essentialism in advocating for women's political participation?
- How can intersectional approach be operationalised as a corrective measure?

### **1.4 Structure of the Study**

I have divided this study into six chapters. After the introduction to my study, I will present some of the background and context of the study, including women's political representation and some of the perceived hindrances to it, specifically in Zambia. In the third chapter, I will present the theoretical approach that focuses on anti-essentialism and makes use of intersectionality as it has been operationalised in feminist theory across the world. Chapter four will explain the ethics and methodology of the study In chapter five, I will present the results of the thematic analysis and finally, the chapter six is to conclude the study in relation to the research questions above.

## **2. The Feminist Rationale and Practice of Women's Political Participation**

In order to present the context and background for this study, I will make use of some of the extensive body of feminist research and policies that exist on women's political participation to provide the rationale for women's representation in formal politics worldwide, and in the specific context of Zambia.

To me, women's political representation and participation in formal politics is simply a matter of gender equality and therefore a feminist goal in itself. However, the political motivation and commitment seem to exist only on paper but lack practical political action. Advocacy for women's political participation is not done in a vacuum but have particular political, historical and social contexts and dimensions, and as a single cause for advocacy and activism illustrate a fair number of women's joint causes globally. It is important to understand that the local level exists against the global backdrop of international treaties and conventions, and a bureaucratic machinery of global organisations and local political systems, together with the evolution of post-colonial feminist theory and practice.

### **2.1 Figures of Underrepresentation**

Worldwide, 24.9 percent members of parliaments are women. (IPU Parline, 2020)  
Regionally, the Nordic countries still have a high average at 42.4 percent, in comparison to the overall European average at 29.7 percent. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the average for women's representation is 22 percent (IPU Parline, 2020).

The research focusing on Sub-Saharan Africa shows that the resistance and lack of political will to change the prevailing gender imbalance is both evident and persistent. Some changes and gains have been made in Sub-Saharan Africa, for example in Uganda, where a thirty percent quota for women in the parliament has been in place since 1995. After 2016 elections, women held 34,08 percent of seats (IPU Parline database: Uganda, 2020). In South Africa, the biggest political party, African National Congress (ANC), has adopted a voluntary fifty percent quota for women candidates within the party, and in the local council elections, all "parties must seek to ensure that 50 percent of the candidates on the party list are women" (Local Government Act, as cited by IDEA Gender Quotas

Database, 2020). Currently, South African Assembly consists 46 percent of women (IDEA Gender Quotas Database, 2020). In Rwanda, where constitutional reform of 2003 included a thirty percent quota for women in “all decision-making organs” (as cited in Powley, 2008, p.10) women currently hold 61 percent of seats (IDEA Gender Quotas Database, 2020). Tanzania introduced the quota system of thirty percent reserved seats for women in the National Assembly in 2010, and extended the quota system to the local level, ensuring that at least one-third of the local level representatives are women, whose seats are allocated among the seats the political parties gain. Currently, women hold 37 percent of the seats in Tanzanian National Assembly seats (IDEA Gender Quotas Database, 2020). The above examples can be seen as direct results of legislative quotas and affirmative action.

Whether this substantive representation is then adequate to transform political decision-making to a truly gender sensitive and more inclusive direction, is debatable. Has it been effective in ensuring women’s actual access to the political making processes and power? Are the women holding seats actually using their agency to further influence the feminist agenda, including equitable social policies? Elizabeth Powley, a researcher with a focus on Rwanda, suggests that women have been successful in particular, driving for policy change for children’s health. Her analysis indicates that “female legislators are more effective than their male colleagues to prioritize children’s rights and family and health issues” (2008, p.5), such as girls’ rights to inheritance and children’s rights to protection against violence.

Although recognising some attempts of policy-level influence by women parliamentarians in Uganda, Elijah Dickens Mushemeza has stated that the impact of affirmative action and increased number of women in political decision-making positions has been less transformative in terms of gender sensitive policy-making but it does serve a purpose of empowerment on an individual basis:

This [affirmative action] has enhanced acceptance of women as leaders and has increased their self-confidence and leadership skills. In other words, the main achievement of affirmative action is the increased level of representation and participation of women in politics and decision making, both at the national and local levels. Increased number of women in politics and decision making has enhanced their visibility in public office, legitimised their presence in areas previously considered to be male domain, and demystified some of the public offices such as that of the Vice President. Women in politics and decision making at all levels have provided role models for other women, with the result that more women today are willing to stand for political positions than was the case earlier (2009, p.177).

Focusing on quotas can be dangerous if it is used as the only indicator of the level of gender equality, equity and democratisation of a country. However, as has been noted among others by political scientist Shireen Hassim: “The glaring absence of women in legislature exposes a democratic deficit at the core of political systems, and “normal” processes of electoral competition cannot be seen as fair or just if they persistently produce the underrepresentation of the same subordinate groups in society” (2006, p.932). Then, quotas and affirmative action can help solve the problem of lacking representation but it is not the only and the most effective solution to the underlying problem of patriarchy per se. As Hassim (ibid.) continues, the emphasis of the feminist agenda for radical change should not be solely on engaging the state and its institutions that have their limitations in shaping their economic policies. It can be concluded that instead, the women’s movements should still be building alliances with other relevant social movements to guide the policy making from outside the formal setting.

The research on women in politics in Africa emphasise (e.g. Goetz and Hassim on South Africa and Uganda, 2003; Tripp on Uganda, 2000 and 2001; Geisler on Southern Africa, 2004): 1) the roles of the civil society i.e. women’s movements, and 2) the role of the state, with a consideration for the political systems, including the patriarchal traditions, and customs still effecting the ways in which gender roles restrict women’s political aspirations and agenda. In some cases, the exclusion and marginalisation of women’s issues and concerns in formal politics in Sub-Saharan Africa has led to strong, autonomous women’s movements that have occasionally been able to effectively promote for change that has led to an increase in representation in formal political sphere, paired with policy-level impact. Needless to say, these examples are inspirational but also serve as a reminder that there is no one fix for all.

## **2.2 Transnational Sisterhood and the Machineries of Patriarchy**

Women’s right to access and participate in formal politics and decision-making have been established and clearly articulated in many international treaties and agreements. Often, the UN has been the spearheading organisation for global policy, setting guidelines for regional organisation and national governments since the First UN World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of



Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted on by the UN General Assembly in 1979. The concern for women's political participation, already established in UN's 1953 Convention on the Political Rights of Women (UN), is further highlighted in CEDAW: "women are guaranteed the rights to vote, to hold public office and to exercise public functions" (UN Women, 1979).

Another milestone – and arguably the most prominent one – for securing women's rights in political decision making was the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (UN, 1995):

13. Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace. (p.3)

The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and the consecutive Platform for Action gave a clear set of key issues for the participating nations and their parliaments to deal with. It also gave clear advice for political parties for revision of their structures and developing initiatives for women's participation.

The UN Millennium Declaration was developed in 2000, signed by 183 heads of state, and it set eight (8) measurable goals to be achieved by 2015: Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (UN, 2020a). By aiming at meeting the goals the world leaders vowed that their "fellow men, women and children would be free from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected". The third goal was: "Promote gender equality and empower women". The indicator for monitoring the progress was threefold:

- 3.1 Ratios of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education
- 3.2 Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector
- 3.3 Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament

The goal and its indicators clearly show that women's political representation, at least in numbers, was seen as a crucial prerequisite for gender equality that could only contribute positively in reducing poverty worldwide, which was the ultimate goal of the MDGs. Looking at the figures of parliamentary seats held by women globally in 2015 that was the MDG deadline, the MDGs failed. The figures, apart from a few exceptions, have stagnated globally.

As a follow-up measure for MDGs, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were signed by all UN member states in 2015. A worldwide consultancy resulted in 17 goals and their indicators. SDG 5 is to “achieve gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls” (UN, 2020b), with the specific target 5.5.: “Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and social life”, and its indicators “5.5.1 Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments, and “5.5.2 Proportion of women in managerial positions” (UN, 2020b).

From a feminist perspective, SDG 5 is lukewarm. The trouble is that UN lacks the system to hold countries accountable for their commitments, which are not legally binding. The agreements do not then necessarily lead to concrete actions. At worst, the UN resolutions have led to creation of political offices with no clear mandate or responsibilities, e.g. Ministries of Gender. The goal in itself is important but the targets and their indicators may have had more concrete meaning when mainstreamed into the other goals and targets across all 17 SDGs. It could be said, that this is continuing the tradition of side-lining women’s political agenda and de-politicising the transformational potential of the core concepts such as gender, as women’s organisations have highlighted continuously.

The UN certainly has its shortcomings when driving for political change, but it has served also as a uniting platform to form a joint feminist agenda and resolving some of the deeper issues of the earlier waves of feminism and focus on white, northern women as discussed by among others, Bunch (2001) and Naples and Desai (2002). The Beijing Platform for Action from 1995 is seen as a turning point and its greatest outcome was coining women’s rights as human rights and therefore opening the platform for a more inclusive dialogue and space. Placing women’s rights in the wider framework of human rights has been an effective way of bringing also local issues into the global forefront. Human rights, as universally declared, could be seen to by-pass the cultural constraints that often colour the localised dialogues on, for example, gender-based violence, women’s rights to reproductive health services, or indeed, women’s political participation. The Beijing conference saw a great investment of women’s organisations and activists globally to participate in the process but at the same time, the investment was spearheaded by the privileged middle-class and clearly marked by the issues of race and class in their local contexts as Political Scientist Amrita Basu (2004) has noted:

[...] some of the most important forms of women's activism emerge around issues at the local level, around community-based concerns. They emerge around questions of women's access to firewood situations in which deforestation causes women to walk that many additional miles each day to gather firewood for fuel. They emerge in situations of political repression, when women protest the disappearance of their children. They emerge around the dumping of toxic waste in certain neighborhoods. Of course, these all tend to be movements organized by poor women rather than by the urban middle classes. And they emerge as much in the North as they do in the South, although we don't think of them that way.

Therefore, it can be argued that the shift from the local to the global arena has led to de-radicalisation of feminist plurality in the local contexts (for example, see Mendoza, 2002; Naples and Desai, 2002). In the same vein, the transnational feminist theory still fails to build grounds for global feminist solidarity in the true sense of the word (Mendoza, 2002). At the same time, the global economic structuring still creates a dependency within the transnational women's movements, where funds are largely coming from the North for supporting the activism in the South, again creating a dependency that can have its effect on the autonomy of the women's movements in the South. Also, the reliance on UN providing the platform for transnational feminist practice, dialogue and its direction, links the process very closely to the global development politics and the bureaucratic machinery behind it. The machinery that according to many critiques, has a watering down effect on the sharp edge of feminist cause.

For example, political scientist Marian Sawer (2000) looks at discourses revolving around the relevance of women's political representation in Australia drawing from the global context of some of the international conventions, in particular the Beijing Platform for Action. As Sawer states: "Women have, in the 1990's in particular, successfully politicised their absence from parliaments and challenged the legitimacy of male-dominated decision-making" (2000, p.361). However, Sawer continues that the language used, is too vague to credibly justify the demands, thus real action towards the commitments has been difficult to mobilise within the existing national political systems. Along the same lines, political scientists Ann-Marie Goetz and Shireen Hassim (2003, p.11-12) point out that discourse within the international development establishment (UN included) has become "anti-political discourse of inclusion". The international development establishment focuses on "bureaucratic representation" that supports the creation of additional "dedicated machineries for women" within formal political institutions, ignoring and deliberately

steering away from other options, such as advocating for political parties as a vessels for increasing women's formal political representation.

Having built a career in the UN and women's empowerment, Joanne Sandler (2012) writes about the UN system and the critique that the system has been facing: "gender units are established without adequate human resources or budgets. Gender theme groups that bring so-called gender experts from various organisations together are composed of junior staff with little access to or influence on decisions. Gender advisors are marginalised from mainstream decision-making, and their advice is not taken into account" (2012, p.8). Sandler might be describing her experiences in the UN system, but the critique could be the same towards many national governments, bi-lateral and multilateral development structures. That leaves the gender mainstreaming – the process that is described as "a gender perspective in all policies and programmes so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made on the effects on women and men, respectively" (UN as cited in Ackerly and True, 2010, p. 19) – at a standstill. It also reveals systemic and institutional rejection of gender equality as an issue of real importance. And where Sandler points out the changes that have been introduced in the UN system for the better, she also warns against the pitfalls of "institutional inequality – that is positioning an entire organisation or unit and the people in it at a structural disadvantage because they work on gender equality" (2012, p.13). This, according to Sandler, is a result of persistent patriarchal resistance and "feminists' potential to convert any bureaucracy into an instrument of social change remains a matter of debate. It is a particularly piquant question in relation to the complex bureaucratic architecture of international development whose shared normative discourse is, as the World Bank puts it, 'working for a world free of poverty'" (Eyben et al., 2012, p.6).

It is obvious that the feminist bureaucrats also struggle with a number of issues *within* their organisations – the least not being the persistent resistance to the process of gender mainstreaming. This can arguably be seen in the process leading up to the final version of the SDGs. It is within this multi-dimensional, layered and at times conflicted and even shaky context that also the Zambian government and the women's movement in Zambia operates.

## 2.3 The Case of Zambia

The OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), that measures the level of discrimination based on gender, and is based on qualitative and data on discriminatory social institutions, such as “the formal and informal laws, attitudes and practices that restrict women’s and girls’ access to rights, justice and empowerment opportunities”, ranks the level of discrimination “very high” in Zambia (OECD Development Centre SIGI, 2020). In this way, Zambia can be seen as patriarchal society where throughout its independent history, women have been side-lined in the political sphere.

It is in the nature of empowerment that it cannot be given. It has to be taken. If we wait for male patriarchal government to give power to women, we shall wait forever. We would do better to ignore patriarchal claims that we lack prerequisites of education, confidence, or leadership qualities. On the contrary, it is the patriarchal state which has already given us the only necessary prerequisite that we need – moral outrage of our present mistreatment and subordination (Longwe, 2000, p.30).

Zambian feminist activist and development professional Sara Longwe firmly believes that the reason behind the low percentage in the Zambian political decision-making is the lack of political will of the men in power. Whereas in other African countries women have made achievements in gaining seats in the legislature in times of change, throughout the political history of independent Zambia the political domain has been the domain of men, and women have been in the margins of political agenda. Their role has mainly been the one of a support-machinery for each ruling party, then evolving to a women’s movement that has kept its distance from the political parties, as has been described by Gisela Geisler (2004) in her extensive studies of Southern Africa, and Zambia especially.

The women’s movement in Zambia could be seen as a collective of key NGOs with a focus on gender issues, operating both in urban and rural areas. The trailblazers focusing on women’s political participation could be said to be NWLG, also known as Zambia National Women’s Lobby (ZNWL), that was founded in 1991, just before the first multiparty elections. NWLG’s mission was to provide support to and advocate for women’s political participation at all levels and across party lines. The emergence of the organisation caused a lot of confusion in the political parties and the voters as their non-partial line was a new concept in Zambian politics, where women cadre groups had previously been under the control of the parties. NWLG criticised the newly founded government loudly for its lack of political will to take up gender issues. In terms of working for women’s participation in politics, NWLG was still the spearheading

organisation in Zambia in 2006 although a number of other women's organisation have programmes and projects that include advocacy and education for political participation. The main responsibility of NWLG was to support women in politics at all levels.

NGOCC acts as an umbrella organisation for Zambian gender organisations and can be seen as the engine of the Zambian women's movement with its offices in most provincial capitals and some districts. NGOCC has been acting as a connection between the government and the women's movement. The National Gender policy, adopted in 2000, was largely a result of the consultative work of NGOCC.

Despite lacking the necessary coordinated political leverage, NGOs play an important role in Zambian political life. On the other hand, they lobby and advocate for women's equal participation in politics and on the other, they are an important machinery providing the communities with education that is relevant for the realisation of electoral procedures and rights.

As was noted in the introduction, Zambia is a signatory state of the Beijing Platform for Action, probably the most prominent of the UN conventions giving clear guidance to national governments on the inclusion of women in the political decision-making. Zambia is also a signatory state of a number of other regional treaties and protocols, such as the ones listed below.

Zambia is a State Party of African Charter on Human and People's Rights, which stipulates the access of each citizen's right to "participate freely in the government of its country" and of "equal access to the public service of his country" (as quoted in Singogo and Kakompe, 2010, p.20). The Article Nine of the Protocol to the Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa (African Union, 2003), requires that

1. States Parties shall take specific positive action to promote participative governance and the equal participation of women in the political life of their countries through affirmative action, enabling national legislation and other measures to ensure that:
  - a) women participate without any discrimination in all elections;
  - b) women are represented equally at all levels with men in all electoral processes;
  - c) women are equal partners with men at all levels of development and implementation of State policies and development programmes.

2. States Parties shall ensure increased and effective representation and participation of women at all levels of decision-making.

Thirty-six of the State Parties have signed and ratified this Protocol, including Zambia.

The heads of state of the Southern African Development Community (SADC)<sup>5</sup> declared in 1997 their commitment to “ensuring the equal representation of women and men in the decision-making of member states and SADC structures at all levels, and the achievement of at least thirty percent target of women in political and decision-making structures by year 2005” (SADC, 1997).

The failure of most of the member states to act on their commitment by 2005, in 2008 the SADC Gender and Development Protocol recalled the commitment targeting 2015 and its declaration was again signed by all member states (SADC, 2008). However, Zambia has not yet ratified the protocol, and is therefore not legally bound to “put in place affirmative action measures with particular reference to women in order to eliminate all barriers which prevent them from participating meaningfully in all spheres of life and create an environment that is conducive for such participation” (quoted in Singogo and Kakompe, 2010, p. 21). Ratifying the SADC Gender and Development Protocol would entail a fifty percent gender equal quota in all decision-making positions in the public and private sectors, and the use of affirmative action methods. As can be concluded, SADC Gender and Development Protocol was not implemented in most of its member states.

Despite the international commitments, no affirmative action nor quotas are in place in Zambia. This highlights the weakness of the political international commitments that have no structures in place to hold the signatories accountable.

Years	Number of Female MPs	%	Number of Male MPs	%	Total Elective Seats
1964-1968	5	6,67	70	93,3	75
1968-1972	2	1,9	103	98,1	105
1973-1978	7	5,6	118	94,4	125
1978-1983	6	4,8	119	95,2	125

<sup>5</sup> SADC member countries are Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

1983-1988	4	3,2	121	96,8	125
1988-1991	6	4,8	119	95,2	125
1991-1996	6	4,8	119	95,2	125
1996-2001	16	10,6	134	89,4	150
2001-2006	19	12,66	131	88,34	150
2006-2009	22	15,19	128	84,81	150

**Table 1:** Composition of elected members of Parliament in Zambia by sex between 1964-2009 (Singogo and Kakompe, 2010, p.26)

In 2020, Zambia's parliament women hold 17.1 percent of the seats in the parliament (National Assembly of Zambia, 2020). Therefore, Zambia has still not reached the benchmark of 30 percent women's political representation in the parliament although it is a signatory state in the Beijing Platform for Action as well as a member state – and therefore a signatory – of the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development (1997) and SADC Gender and Development Protocol declaration (2008) among others aiming for 50 percent representation. Zambian political parties have not set quotas or amended legislature for affirmative action for adoption of women, regardless of the pressure from the numerous women's organisations in the country.

Despite the shortcomings in concrete legal delivery on women's rights to political participation, the government of Zambia can be seen to have taken some measures for advancement of women in the political structures. Gender in Development Division (GIDD) was established as a national gender cabinet 1996 (Singogo and Kakompe, 2010), much debated National Gender Policy was developed by GIDD and adopted in 2000. The National Gender Policy was seen as ambitious and comprehensive in terms of a guideline yet the extent of its actual full implementation and effect never fully actualised, and it went through a revision in 2014 under GIDD's successor Ministry of Gender and Child Development (MGCD):

- The power relations between women and men in the domestic, community, and public domains which are impediments to the advancement of women;
- a) The feminisation of poverty as reflected in women's limited access to and control over productive resources, social services, remunerative employment opportunities and minimal participation in political and managerial decision-making processes;
- b) Cultural and traditional practices, that systematically subject females to male subordination (GIDD, 2000, and revised by MGCD, 2014, p.2)

The list continues, highlighting among others, issues of access to basic health services, access to adequate food, safe water and sanitation, lack of access to credit, information



technology, education, lack of appreciation of the gender effects in the impact of climate change, unequal customary laws, gender-based violence. The revised policy is an update on the issues of social justice, but also highlights its premise in human rights framework (2014, p.21). Most interestingly, the revised gender policy states under the measures to be taken for increasing women's decision making at all levels of development in the private and public sectors (2014, p.24):

- Creating platforms for women's participation in decision making
- i) Review the electoral system to ensure participation of women.
  - ii) Review and revise Political Party Manifestos to promote adoption of women candidate.
  - iii) Lobby for a quota system of allocation of seats during local and parliamentary elections.

This is a clear change from the previous policy that was far vaguer in terms of the actual measures for ensuring women's participation in formal politics. The Ministry of Gender and Child Development was established in 2011, against the recommendations of the women's movement who were concerned that by forming a separate Ministry for gender equality, the responsibility of gender mainstreaming would be allocated with a separate entity, instead of mainstreaming it to the mandates of all Ministries. So far, this seems to have been an accurate assumption as the effects of the policies and revisions have not resulted in concrete changes.

## **2.4 Gendered Political Sphere in Zambia**

As noted earlier, OECD SIGI ranks Zambia very high in discriminatory practices. This included the lack of legislation to ensure women's political representation. In its Interim Report on the 2006 Tripartite Elections, NWLG stated the three major factors that affected women's participation in decision-making:

- 1) Patriarchal Attitudes, Traditions and Customs
- 2) Individual Impediments
- 3) Institutional Barriers

The factors stated by NWLG are broad and overlapping. Patriarchal attitudes refer to the ways in which gender roles are seen and understood in Zambia, and how they continue to have an impact in what women and men are seen to be most able to do. Formal politics is not traditionally seen as a domain for women and therefore accessing politics is being made difficult for women – consciously or not. The individual impediments refer to the

low education levels and lack of self-confidence and leadership skills. By institutional barriers the NWLG refers to the lack of quotas and lack of access to decision-making positions.

The institutional barriers resulting in low levels, can also be seen as a result of patriarchal patronage system that the parties maintain and use to adopt candidates. Campaigning is expensive and the lack of funding can become an impossible obstacle for any woman wanting to stand in the elections. Parties do not have set quotas to adopt women candidates to stand in elections, and in general, women are not seen as successful in politics, so the parties rather adopt men. Also it has been reported that women who have been selected as candidates are allocated to constituencies where the party does not have such a strong support and areas with more party support are allocated to men, meaning that the actual transformative power for women politicians is weaker (Longwe, 2000). Longwe also argues that men in politics use “dirty tricks” such as verbal sexual harassment to make sure that the women stay out of what is perceived as men’s territory (2000, p.26).

ZARD survey, commissioned by GIDD in 2012 (as quoted by Singogo and Kakompe, 2010) identified particular challenges to women’s political participation, resonating with the identified factors from 2006:

- 1) Family Responsibilities in the Home
- 2) Lack of Support to Women Aspiring to Contest Elections
- 3) Community Attitudes Towards Women in politics
- 4) Lack of Information
- 5) Apathy, Lower Expectations and Less Focus by Women
- 6) Inhibiting Competition by Men

According to the survey, although the community attitudes towards women politics, seemed positive, instead of challenging them, the survey also revealed a “silence resistance from men” who did not seem to have full knowledge or understanding of what the concepts of gender and development, and fight for women’s right actually meant, even thinking it was an actual fight between women and men (2010, p.37).

In a political sphere geared towards men instead of women, despite the apparent public support for women’s political participation and women taking more active role in politics,

the traditional roles that women have in the domestic sphere prevent them in fully engaging in the public political sphere. This is clearly a question of power. As Musheweza states:

This is why it is important to understand where power lies in the process of gender advocacy. Power lies in customary laws and practices which govern the community, the men to whom customs have accorded more power, the government which makes policies, the donors who provide the resources and the women and men at the grassroots who are victims but also agents of change through the socialisation process (2009, p.202).

It is in this context, that change happens slowly and requires constant negotiation.

### **3. Strategies for Change: Theory and Practice of Feminist Activism for Women's Political Participation**

The issue of women's participation in formal politics can be seen as a singular feminist cause within a plurality of contexts and unequal structures of power. Earlier, I presented the challenges to women's political participation through figures of representation, and practices in the context of international treaties and the machinery of international development, also touching on the specific historical context of Zambian gendered political culture and patriarchal structures that hinder a concrete change. It is in this light that it is important to pay attention to how change is being advocated and articulated.

It is quite clear by now that the topic of this study has numerous layers and links to a number of themes in current and historical feminist debates on theory and practice, not least the contested term of 'transnational feminism' (discussed by e.g. Mohanty, 2004, Grewal and Kaplan, 1994 and Naples and Desai, 2002) and how women's solidarity and movements have formed and how they can be described without falling into the trap of essentialism. With a focus on women's movement in Zambia, it also touches on the hierarchies and inequalities between the North and the South that exist within the theories of transnational feminism, as well as the international development machinery, and of course also locally in Zambia between the elite women leading the movement and the rural women as the beneficiaries. In the proverbial 'world of international development' where the ZWM and WfC also operate, the de-politization of the feminist language can be seen due to the chosen strategy against resistance as mentioned earlier in the context and background chapter. This effect has a potential to trickle down the entire framework of feminist activism – and may, or may not, go unnoticed.

This study is however, *not* about *all* of the above. My focus is in attempting to bring the voices of the participant participants to the fore. The theoretical framework for this study and analysis is based on the feminist theory, and more specifically: *anti-essentialism* and *intersectionality*. These approaches offer a lens to study how the concept of gender is understood and constructed, and how it relates to other social divisions to maintain patriarchal, unequal structures of power.

The concept of gender is socially and culturally constructed, shaped and supported. Culture and tradition are often used as a definition and reason for excluding women from certain roles and places in society. But culture also bears multiple meanings. McFadden (2004, p.59) states, that particularly in the African context “culture is best understood as a heavily contested source of identity (in gendered and ethnic terms) and power (in political and material sense), which is located in the historical struggles against colonialism and racism on the African continent and in the recent struggles by women for rights of inclusion into that space called ‘the nation’”. Applying essentialist and descriptive notions to tradition and culture to define and describe the concept of gender, would then limit it and allow allocating it with a fundamental core of meaning that is fixed, and unchangeable.

Ultimately, inequalities stem from power and privilege located unequally in the matrix of intersecting groupings. Gender is not the only denominator to one’s position of power or the position of not having power. One’s gender in relation to their ethnicity (or race), and again in relation to their class (or wealth) places an individual in different locations in the matrix of power, political or material. This intersectional approach to the analysis of inequalities and power reveals what can be lost in oversimplifications and essentialisms.

The stereotypical notions and traditions defining one’s gender and the assigned gender roles are culturally, and historically located. They are therefore not fixed, as culture and tradition are in a constant flux and meanings change over time. What it means to be ‘man’/masculine or ‘woman’/feminine in any given place and time, is socially constructed and as such, created and re-created, negotiated and re-negotiated. However, it is also recognised that essentialism and stereotypes are used at times for strategic purposes. But when and how is it appropriate to give up the recognition of diversity and the importance of multiple inequalities, and when does it become counterproductive?

In this chapter I will first discuss the problem of essentialism as a part of feminist theory. I will go on to discuss intersectionality as a theoretical approach recognising not only plurality and diversity, but also the multitude and simultaneous inequalities. I will then explain how my theoretical framework relates to the analysis of the data in this study.

### 3.1 The Trouble of Essentialism

At the core of feminist theory, the concept of gender defies the notion of an essence that would define what it is to be a woman or a man, or that would result in a fixed outcome of those roles. But at the same time, the plurality has posed a problem for the consideration of ‘women’ as a coherent social group that is the basis for political organisation for the issues of ‘women’. Feminism aims to transform those structures. From that perspective, it can be said, that feminist theory and practice with a socially transformative goal, rely on certain assumptions of shared experience of women, that has the potential of slipping into universalism and/or *essentialism* – which then in turn, potentially further over-simplifies and truncates the diverse experiences/interpretations of femininity cross-culturally.

Therefore, *essentialisation* is problematic in feminist theory. In the transnational sense, the category of ‘women’ as the grounds of global solidarity can then be questioned. Instead, the perceived solidarity is based on the issues of struggle in the global scheme of things that makes women the subjects in the struggle against the global forces working against them in their particular localities. However, advocacy for any gender related change as an organised front or group, for example women's movements or gender NGOs, tacitly assume a level of shared interest and act on behalf of larger groups without having been clearly nominated by them (i.e. women in general). Particularly in reference to advocacy for women's political participation, essentialist notions are often decidedly utilised.

If women are not a socially coherent group, how can women form a unified front for political advocacy? This question gave way to what has been labelled as strategic essentialism: a form of essentialism that allows certain descriptive of shared femininity for the sake of the political gain:

Retaining the idea of women as a class, if anything, might help remind us that the sexual categories we work with are no more and no less than social constructions, subject positions subject to change and to historical evolution. I am certainly not the first feminist to suggest that we need to retain the notion of women as a class for political purposes. I would, however, wish to take this conviction to its furthest conclusion and suggest that it is politics which feminism cannot do without, politics that is essential to feminism’s many self-definitions (Fuss, 1989, p.36).

Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (last accessed on 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2020) defines ‘essentialism’ as “a philosophical theory ascribing ultimate reality to essence embodied in a thing perceptible to the senses” and “the practice of regarding something (as a presumed

human trait) as having something innate existence or universal validity rather than being a social, ideological, or ideological construct”. As social scientist Andrew Sayer notes, the term ‘essentialism’ is often referred to with contempt and with “a concern to encounter characterizations of people, practices, institutions and other social phenomena as having fixed identities that deterministically produce fixed, uniform outcomes” (2000, p.81). Sayer, argues however, that essentialism is necessary for social sciences in order to explain sameness and difference based on shared human characteristics. But according to him, it needs to be done with great caution to avoid “false essentialisation”. As gender is not fixed, but shifting and diverse, it cannot be said to have an essence that would lead to a certain result.

The unintentional and intentional use of essentialism in women’s organisations is quite well documented. For example, Deborah Mindry has documented the use of essentialism by NGOs and women's groups in democratizing South Africa (Mindry, 2001). She describes the relationship between and within the South African women’s organisations as “gendered politics of virtue” that morally justify the ‘do good nature of women’. Mindry describes the recreation of apartheid hierarchies in women’s NGOs through the givers of aid in transnational women’s NGOs, targeting the “grassroots” (black, rural women) through the national or regional NGOs run by the educated class (mostly white women). According to Mindry: “Women in NGOs frequently expressed the belief that they brought compassion and understanding regarding their shared humanity to their relationships and encounters with other women. They generally argued that women had the advantage of being close to the everyday lives of people, that they observed, experienced, understood, and felt the struggles of other women and their families and communities” (Mindry, 2001, p.1198). As a general rule, men have no such virtues. Based on this essentialist assumption of a virtuous woman, and no apparent conceptual understanding of gender as a social construct and/or performance, the women’s NGOs perpetuated the division and hierarchy of pre-democratic South Africa, revealing persisting structural inequities based on race and gender.

Social economist Naila Kabeer (e.g. 1999, 2004) discussed the feminist agenda in the development policy setting, and argues that for development policy purposes, adoption of essentialist tones has been helpful in advocacy for feminist issues in, for example, the World Bank, UN agencies and the OECD (2004, p.17). But again, what Kabeer calls

‘women’s empowerment’, a popular concept in the development dialogue mainly in 1990’s until mid-2000’s, has not been brought forward as a self-serving idea in itself. Instead, women’s empowerment, and therefore women’s rights have been promoted because of a multitude of expected desirable effects, such as good governance, transparency and accountability that are seen to follow the inclusion of women. Development policy deals with measurable results. The problem is that ‘women’s empowerment’ and what its quantifiable indicators should be, is as difficult to define as is the diversity of realities.

Kabeer calls this form of essentialist strategizing: instrumentalism<sup>6</sup>. Deploying instrumentalism for policy purposes, according to Kabeer, has had its effect on the political edge of women's actual political demands, in other words, feminist agenda: “replacing intrinsic arguments for feminist goals with instrumentalist ones” (2004, p.18).

In the same vein as averaging and reducing women’s experiences to descriptive and strategically essentialist simplifications of women’s shared experience as the basis for women’s solidarity, Kabeer points out that women’s empowerment has also models of the ‘empowered woman’. Kabeer calls these the “the virtuous model of the empowered woman” (2004, p.49): altruistic, dedicated to collective family welfare, responsibility, much similar to what Mindry called ‘the politics of virtue’. This is also connected to the instrumentalist language of policy, where women’s engagement will lead to greater good of everything.

Mindry emphasises that such use of universalist and essentialist notions is risky. The problem is that the stereotypical notions of gender do not change the notion itself or detach the gendered role from its context, and to an extent also re-enforce the understanding of a descriptive, innate feminine nature, in other words, essence.

As Diane Fuss (1989) describes, this type of politically strategic essentialism can act against itself: by “deploying” essentialism, it is possible to “naturalise” the category of the natural” (ibid, p.21). In the same vein, she continues:

“at a provisional return to essentialism can successfully operate, in particular contexts, as an interventionary strategy, I am also compelled to wonder at what point does this move

---

<sup>6</sup>A philosophy advanced by the American philosopher John Dewey holding that what is most important in a thing or idea is its value as an instrument of action and that the truth of an idea lies in its usefulness' (Gouinlock, J. As cited in Encyclopedia Britannica, last accessed on 25<sup>th</sup> January, 2015)



cease to be provisional and become permanent? There is always a danger that the long-term effect of such a “temporary” intervention may, in fact, lead once again to a re-entrenchment of a more reactionary form of essentialism” (1989, p.32).

Feminist philosopher, activist and post-colonial thinker Gayatri Spivak has also engaged in the essentialist debate and strategizing through essentialism: “it seems to me that this critique has to be persistent all along the way, even when it seems that to remind oneself of it is counterproductive. Unfortunately, that crisis must be with us, otherwise the strategy freezes into something like what you call an essentialist position” (Spivak, 1989, p.127). Spivak therefore places the responsibility with those who chose the strategy of essentialism. The problem is that essentialism was seen as erroneous as a descriptive claim about the social reality of women’s lives, and very risky with the potential to perpetuate the oppressive cultural / social norms. At the same time, it also seemed necessary as a tool of feminist politics and feminists’ role in social criticism. It is then the feminists’ responsibility to continue the critique and control the uses of essentialism. As Fuss has stated: “We need both to theorize essentialist spaces from which to speak and, simultaneously, to deconstruct these spaces to keep them from solidifying” (1989, p.118).

It can be concluded that for the sake of argument in activism, the use of essentialist notions or instrumentalising the category of ‘women’ are understandable and maybe even acceptable, but its use has to be controlled and conscious. However, as Mindry and others would show, this is not always the case and promoting the ‘do-good nature’ of women becomes counterproductive and perpetuates the oppressive structures of power that the action is at least arguably attempting to change. It feels like a trap that also the women’s movement in Zambia and others have, at least partly, fallen into. By doing so they perpetuate an understanding of gender as a category of analysis that has fixed meanings that would bring certain predictable changes, if operationalised on its own and as described.

Attaching fixed qualities and value to the concept of gender on its own is far too narrow to capture the plurality of the different experiences of diverse backgrounds and overlapping divisions of gender, class, sexuality, ability, race, ethnicity, and so on. None of these categories bear a universal fixed meaning. As such, a larger range of categories help to define the power that clusters around certain categories more so than the others, without

placing them in a set hierarchy either. However, all of the categories are defined in and according to their unique locations.

### **3.2 Intersectional Approach**

The notion of multiple inequalities based on different groupings: race and gender to begin with, has been recognised for a long time, as would be pointed out by a large number of feminist scholars. It can be seen dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century in the US, and internationally to 1960's resulting in Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination of Women (CEDAW) in 1976 (Hancock, 2013, p.263). The Black feminist tradition, as Hancock (p. 264, italics in the original) also emphasises, is decidedly marked with:

“(1) Goals of empowerment and liberation; (2) Focus upon Black women’s experiences and knowledge—what Collins later termed “Black feminist epistemology”; and (3) Commitment to Black women’s self-determination—power over their political, economic, reproductive and artistic lives as *Black women*, not as disaggregable identities of Black + woman”.

Hancock’s definition of black feminist tradition can be seen quite US centred, but outside the US, intersectional analysis was carried out by feminists of colour in criticism of marginalisation of women in the post-colonial and national narratives, and the hegemony of Western (or white) policy and knowledge formulation creating further power inequalities.

Law Scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw was the first scholar to use the term ‘intersectionality’ in her essay “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: a Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” (1989), and a few years later she continued the intersectional analysis in the context of black women’s experiences of sexual violence in America and the legal system. She successfully illustrated the differences of intra-group experiences and systemic marginalisation of black women (and women of colour), at the convergence of gender and race, rather than when categorised separately and independently. As noted above, drawing from a substantial amount of work by feminist women of colour scholars before her, Crenshaw’s work has been considered to be very important for the development of identity politics especially in the US where the anti-racist and anti-sexist movements seemed to be working in isolation

from each other without recognising the differences in the structures of power attached to the categories of gender and race within the named groupings.

There is much to be said about the need for clarity of conceptualisations that would lead to a more inclusive and diverse feminist theory at the time of Crenshaw's essay and the introduction of the term. It is important to understand the emergence of intersectionality in its historical context. It can be seen as a turning point in the wider context of history of feminism and feminist theory – creating a deeper understanding of the intersections of race and gender: “Race is gendered and gender is already raced” (Steinbugler et al 2006, cited in Ackerly and True, 2010), that the predominantly white feminists had previously not been able to grasp.

Rather than as theory per se, Crenshaw herself has considered the term as “a metaphor” (Carasthatis, 2014, p.304) or “a framework for analysis” (Hancock, 2013, p.261), or “a lens” or

“a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other. We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality or immigrant status. What is often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts” (Crenshaw in Steinmetz, 2020).

Although Crenshaw's background is in legal studies, intersectionality was embraced, and the analytical approach applied across disciplines studying complex social phenomena. In the social sciences, and more specifically feminist theory, it is seen as an “approach” that allows the overlapping, or intersecting, systems of oppression to be seen:

“Intersectionality calls our attention to the fact that any situation, person, or research phenomena can be understood only in terms of intersecting and overlapping contexts and social forces such as race, age, gender, sexuality, income, nationality, historical moment, among many others. Consequently, attention to intersectionality provokes feminist inquiry to attend to the complexity of a problem that might serve to exclude or hide important dimensions that may be crucial to creating and/or sustaining a situation or problem” (Ackerly and True, 2010, p.30).

It is the vagueness of the term and fluidity of its conceptual operationalisation, that has been both criticised and thanked, even celebrated (e.g. Davis, 2008). Pragmatically speaking, intersectionality can be seen as a corrective measure or a paradigm, bringing into analysis a dimension or dimensions of inequality that have previously not been taken fully into consideration. Considering that the term and its use as an analytical tool have gained

popularity among feminist researchers across disciplines, it is arguably also very easy to misinterpret and misuse in a way that leaves the analysis lacking depth and focus. Crenshaw herself among others has pointed out that the usage of intersectionality has been somewhat “superficial” (Carasthatis, 2014, p.305) and that intersectionality is “not a mechanism to turn white men into the new pariahs” (Steinmetz, 2020).

In her 1991 essay “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color”, Crenshaw differentiates between 1) structural intersectionality as the qualitative difference of the experience of women of colour in comparison to that of white women, therefore operationalising intersectionality of race and gender, 2) political intersectionality of marginalising women of colour through separation of the intersecting categories of race and gender, and finally 3) representational intersectionality that focuses on subordination through the reproduction of racist imagery and stereotypes of black women that in turn will have to be analysed through intersectionality to address the issues of both gender and race.

Intersectionality ties in closely with the studies of belonging and ‘politics of belonging’, as well as identity and difference. These conceptualisations recognise the need for contextualisation and also have the innate understanding that each category is an axis, rather than a fixed and box, therefore a division (e.g. Yuval-Davis, 2006a and 2006b, discussed more in detail below).

With her work on differentiating difference between black and white women, and power positioning of race and gender, Crenshaw also places her research and work firmly within Black feminist theory, and the context of history and identity politics in the US. This has been a source of critique that feels partially unfounded as the essay was transparent in its context and does not claim otherwise. The post-colonial feminists have contested the intersectional approach first for its US centricity, then for its Eurocentricity and focus on the Western social divisions, that are not comparable to other contexts and their social divisions. There seems to be a fundamental suspicion of the approach:

“I suggest that as we saw with the governmentalisation of gender, the easy acceptability of intersectionality for international funding agencies should give us pause. The term intersectionality seems to work not for feminism, but for states and international funding agencies (Menon, 2015)”.

Menon has a point, as the UN and the rest of the international development machinery have also adopted ‘intersectionality’ for their policy formulation work, but the results have been confusing. Without a doubt, creating all encompassing policy responses to address complex social divisions and oppressions globally can be challenging. The result can be depoliticizing for the term and the approach.

Similar to the term and ideology of ‘transnational feminism’, intersectionality has to be carefully contextualised. Transnational feminism is platform for joint feminist action that is based on an understanding that connects through causes rather than a shared idea and identity of what it means to be a woman. Intersectionality brings out those differences.

Conversely, intersectionality as an analysis should not set limits to what social divisions for analysis should be, although the apparent limitlessness can appear daunting. The differentiation of differences for analysis should be aware of the cultural, political and shaping the inequalities (Yuval-Davis, 2006b, p.199). The focus is on the intersection of power within a specific context, not the social identity per se:

“Social divisions are about macro axes of social power but also involve actual, concrete people. Social divisions have organizational, intersubjective, experiential and representational forms, and this affects the ways we theorize them as well as the ways in which we theorize the connections between the different levels” (ibid., p.198).

As the interpretations, critiques and celebrations of the approach have been numerous, intersectionality has also offered a lens for looking at how “intersecting forms of domination create both oppression and opportunity” (Steinbugler et al., 2006, p.808). That is, those who enjoy normative or non-marginalized statuses such as Whiteness, maleness, heterosexuality, or upper-class status do not simply experience the absence of oppression but enjoy direct social and material benefits. Hierarchies of power are also cross-cutting, and it is then likely that a person will be simultaneously advantaged by particular identities and disadvantaged by others.

## 4. Methodological Choices

*On September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2006, I sat in the back of one of many pickup trucks along with representatives from a number of NGOs. We were driving up and down Cairo Road the main street of the Zambian capital Lusaka, in the afternoon rush hour, chanting 'Vote for women!' and handing out t-shirts with the same slogan printed on them. The Zambian tripartite elections were taking place in late-September, and as a new intern at a local NGO, Women for Change, I was quickly caught up in the local politics in a very concrete manner. Just a few hours before, the Zambian Women's Movement had officially launched a campaign to support women candidates in the elections. Rallying on Cairo Road was a part of the campaign launch before the campaign took to other parts of the country. I felt enthusiastic and inspired! I was part of it! (Written based on my own notes, 2006)*

In this chapter, I present the methodology for research during my nearly seven-month internship in 2006-2007 with Women for Change (WfC) in Lusaka, Zambia. In the centre of the thesis as primary data, are ten (10) interviews conducted with WfC member groups during the organisation's workshop in the Southern Province of Zambia. Secondary data for contextual understanding consists of four (4) interviews with the key persons of women's organisations during the time of my internship in Lusaka, and the materials and field notes from my internship.

### 4.1 Feminist Research Ethic

“What is important for your research is not a *consistency* of research method from plan to published account, but rather *continuity in the thoughtfulness* that you exhibit about your project throughout” (Ackerley and True, 2010, p.38, italics in original).

My study has made use of a number of methods for the collection of data, primarily interviews, participant observation and ethnography, and data analysed according to the thematic content analysis. However, I began my research journey with a specific mindset and interests, and I have made an attempt to follow the feminist ethical considerations throughout the process. The feminist research ethics are coined by the following four elements by Brooke Ackerley and Jacqui True: “(1) attentiveness to power, (2) attentiveness to boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, (3) attentiveness to relationships, and (4) commitment to self-reflection” (2010, p. 40). These elements, and attention to e.g. absences, silences and differences, according to Ackerley and True, will when realised, guide the research process to a more dynamic direction with actual transformative potential.

It is also important to note that feminism is anti-essentialist in the sense that gender is a social construct that defies an essential core or meaning, the idea of essence. Gender does not bear an innate meaning derived from the biological notion of sex but takes its meaning from a set of socially constructed meanings and manifestations. Therefore, gender is adaptive as well as potentially transformative. My understanding of identity and diversity relies on feminist intersectionality that in turn places value on a range of identity markers such as gender, class, race, ethnicity and places individuals and groups in their specific contexts, culturally and socially.

For the purpose of this study and based on my understanding of the Zambian context, I have initially assumed that women as a group remain marginalised in the Zambian political sphere. The reason for that lies in the institutionalised cultural understanding of gender roles and their relational power. With that assumption in mind, I have then attempted to reflect on the feminist research ethics' key elements throughout the process: the power of knowledge and its construction, the visible and invisible boundaries between the groups and knowledge of those participating and contributing to the study, the relationships with those involved in the study and between the participants, and consistent self-reflection in order to situate myself and my privileges of class, race and position in the power dynamic elements. Some of these explicit reflections will be shared in the following sub-chapters. Further on, the reflections and considerations are not necessarily explicit but rather the guiding principle.

## **4.2 Methodology**

The field work for this thesis was the period of my nearly seven (7) months' internship with WfC in Zambia. I was conducting the research while I was a master's student at the University of Jyväskylä, participating in an exchange programme at the University of Zambia in Lusaka, and an intern at WfC between 25 August 2006 – 5 February 2007. I had my desk in the information and advocacy department, which is led by the Information Manager, and worked together with two information officers in a role that involved me in the day-to-day activities of the office and the organisation. This study is not ethnographic in the sense that my goal would have been to produce an ethnographic account as the product of my research, but I used ethnography as a method that “simultaneously combines

document analysis, interviewing of respondents and informant, direct participation and observation, and introspection” (Denzin, 1978, p.183 cited in Patton, 2002, p.265).

Although “Vote for Women”-campaign was the starting point for this thesis, my aim has not been to analyse the end result of the elections but to examine in which ways the interventions for women’s broader inclusion in formal politics can be analysed. The joint campaign of the women’s movement for promoting women’s political participation cannot be said to have been well-planned or successful, and its effects cannot be extensively measured. Nor is it the only effort made by the Zambian NGOs to address the question of women’s participation in politics and decision making in Zambia.

Women’s NGOs, or NGOs focusing a majority of their work on gender, play an important role in their operational areas in advocating for, among other things, human rights and gender awareness through training and sensitisation in rural and urban communities in Zambia and elsewhere. WfC included these workshops in their operations, too. Before the elections, they also held workshops on democracy and electoral processes for their members in the rural areas. Workshops were also generally part of their annual plans and operations. I did not have the opportunity to participate in the workshops so my knowledge on them is based on the documents used in the workshops. I have used the annual plans and annual reports to understand the activities of Women for Change in their operational areas.

### **4.3 Data Collection**

The primary data for analysis and the core of the thesis consists of ten (10) semi-structured interviews with WfC members, conducted during a nine-day seed multiplication workshop in the Choma district of southern Zambia in December 2006.

My secondary data consists of four (4) semi-structured interviews with representatives of the Zambian women's movement, more precisely from the core organisations of the “Vote for Women!”-campaign, conducted in January-February 2007 in Lusaka. I have also used WfC's organisational documents: annual reports, strategic plans, workshop guidelines and notes, and organisations' other information materials to form an understanding of the historical, political and organisational context. Also, as a part of secondary data, I have



used my notes of personal communication and discussions throughout my internship at WfC between August 2006 – February 2007.

The interviews with both of the participant groups were focused semi-structured interviews (see Appendix I) which could be defined as an interview that focuses on certain topics and themes, and questions around these topics yet offers the researcher some freedom to change the wording and order of the questions according to the interview situation (Hirsjärvi and Hurme, 2008, p.47). Most importantly, I chose to use this particular method as it focuses on the participants' own experiences and views on a topic that was considered an important

Focused semi-structured interviews start from the assumption that the participants have experienced a certain event, and can give their personal accounts about it, and that way the interviews serve to gather data on events that the researcher has no access to, to observe the event (Hirsjärvi and Hurme, 2008, p. 48). In this case, the wider context was the 'Vote for Women'-campaign, that includes also the organisations' preparations and activities, before and during the elections, as well as the individual decision-making process of each participant in the actual elections.

The ten interviews with WfC members in the rural areas were conducted in the Zambian villages of Kayoba and Mapunza in the Choma district of the Southern Province of Zambia, on two days during a nine-day workshop in December 2006. The interview questions are in Appendix I. The participants were all active members of WfC: five women and five men, who had taken part in WfC's "Civic Education, Gender PEM (Popular Education Methodologies), and Leadership Training" in 2005 or 2006, lived in the Choma district, and were ethnically Tonga. All participants lived in the rural areas, and their main income source was agriculture, mostly subsistence farming. The participants' education levels were similar, all had attended school to at least to the equivalent of current Zambian school system's grade 7<sup>7</sup>, and majority to grade 10, all were literate and had a t least basic conversational knowledge of English. The age range was more diverse: 36 years to 75 years, although six out of ten participants were in their 40's.

---

<sup>7</sup> Grades in the current Zambian education system: primary education go up to grade 7, basic up to 9, and fee-paying grades of senior secondary from 10 to 12 (From my notes, 2006).

	Sex	Age	Education according to current school system
R1	M	36	Grade 9
R2	M	44	Grade 9
R3	F	48	Grade 9
R4	F	41	Grade 9
R5	M	47	Grade 9
R6	F	42	Grade 7
R7	M	51	Grade 9
R8	F	47	Grade 7
R9	F	85	Grade 8
R10	M	50	Grade 7

**Table 2:** Interview Participants

Identifying participants for the interviews in the rural areas was relatively easy as I found out that the WfC members, and people in general, were keen to share their views about politics and to answer my questions. As was previously mentioned, I conducted the interviews during a nine-day workshop organised by WfC and the interviews proved popular, offering myself, the interpreter, and the participants an opportunity to take a break from the classroom setting of the sometimes laborious seed workshop. My position as an intern with WfC was, no doubt, also very helpful in peaking the participants' interest as WfC as an organisation had a very good reputation in the rural areas where they worked. This was quite evident from the warm welcome the WfC vehicles and staff received in every household they visited.

The interviews lasted between 20 and 30 minutes and covered the main topics of the training the participants had previously attended but also voting and the participants' opinions on Zambian politics in general, and the September 2006 elections. The final section of the interviews was particularly focusing on women's political participation in Zambia and how the participants viewed the issue of gender in relation to politics. The interviews were conducted in English when possible, and when the participant felt more comfortable using Tonga<sup>8</sup>, then through an interpreter whom I had carefully instructed on

---

<sup>8</sup> The most common language in Choma district (From my notes, 2006)

the interview process. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed, and later checked for accuracy by a translator who is fluent in both Tonga and English, who then verified the interpreter's translations to be accurate and giving a full account of the participants' responses.

The four interviews with the Zambian women's movement's representatives, three women and one man, were conducted between 30 January – 1 February 2007. The three female participants: Executive Director Emily Sikazwe from WfC, Communications and Advocacy Coordinator Leah Mitaba from Non-Governmental Organisation Coordinating Council (NGOCC), and Executive Director Priscilla Mpundu from Zambia Association for Research and Development (ZARD), were at the time active and central figures in the women's movement, and all had a long professional history in development and gender related work in Zambia. The male participant, Public Relations Officer Nelson Banda from NWLG then, had a history in working in NGOs in Zambia but was relatively new to the field of gender activism. I chose not to use these interviews as part of the analysis but they form an important part of the larger body of data for contextual and historical understanding.

The main reason for interviewing these participants was that the organisations they represent, were all local Zambian NGOs, but also formed the core of the “Vote for Women!”-campaign and had a role in the campaign's organisational body. The interviews lasted from 35 to 60 minutes and covered issues of the Zambian women's movement and the organisation of “Vote for Women!”-campaign. All the interviews were conducted in English and recorded and transcribed. I also made notes by hand during the interviews about the points that were strongly emphasised during the interviews.

As an intern at WfC, I was not merely observing my working environment but actively participating in the office life and all activities. I had open access to the organisation's information materials, and other relevant materials that I have also included in the body of data without specifically referring to them. The WfC team was a close-knit community and we spent time together in and out of the office and as a result, I felt I had built good working relationships and friendships with the staff. Engaging in my working environment in that manner then also gave me new perspectives on the issues that the organisation dealt with, and 'how things worked'. Writing a research diary and field notes about the day-to-

day discussions and activities at the office and especially, while in the villages, then helped me reflect – or to introspect on - my findings and develop my thoughts further.

I was assigned to the information and advocacy department at WfC and I was therefore a member of the campaigns team, designing information and promotional materials for the “Vote for Women!”-campaign, but we also designed and produced information materials on other more general focus areas of WfC. I had access and permission to make use of the organisation's strategic plans, annual reports and training materials, all of which I familiarised myself with to gain better understanding of their methods and approach.

#### **4.4 Challenges**

It is important to note, that although Zambia is ethnically diverse, with 73 languages representing at least the same number of ethnic groups and sub-groups, the Southern Province and especially Choma district, are predominantly ethnically Tonga and the main language is Tonga. Where my co-workers at WfC were all fluent in English, the organisation worked in communities and locations where the main language was not English. For me, this presented some challenges, which I will now explain.

Shortly after the elections in 2006, I visited Choma district for the first time to observe a workshop on agricultural methods. I had intended to conduct interviews with the workshop participants during this workshop. My initial plan was to conduct guided group interviews in order to keep the atmosphere somewhat relaxed and informal in order to capture what I considered *real* opinions. I asked a younger, Zambian WfC volunteer to interpret the interview situations when we would find groups of WfC members outside the workshop. The participants had not been informed of the interviews beforehand. However, I very quickly understood that this was not the way forward. Even without understanding more than a few words of Tonga, I could pick up on the interpreter taking a facilitating role and leading the conversation and the direction of the answers. As a result, I could not differentiate between the participants’ answers and the interpreter’s opinions. It was further confirmed when I asked a co-worker to listen to the recordings.

It could therefore be said that my first interview attempt in the rural areas was not successful, but it certainly made me reflect in more detail on the process of interviews and

preparing for any surprises. For the next scheduled workshop in Choma district, I decided that the interviews would be conducted individually and in private, to give the participants the space and confidence to voice their true opinions, and also to give the interviews a more formal meaning. I asked a co-worker, a senior WfC fieldworker, to give feedback on the interview questions and to interpret the interviews. She also informed the workshop participants of the workshop of the possibility to take part in the interviews beforehand. This way we had our participants identified quickly and they were fully engaged in the interviews, with full understanding of the interview topic and the interviews' purpose. I believe, that having a well-known and respected fieldwork facilitator supporting the interview process was instrumental in getting the interviews completed and properly captured.

Changing my approach with the interviews was also very important to conduct the interviews following the common ethical guidelines and the principle of transparency of qualitative research. At the beginning of each individual interview, I explained why I was conducting the research to all of the participants in Choma and Lusaka, and what I would do with the results. I also answered any questions they may have had about the research and made it clear that they had the right to choose to not participate should they so decide. I asked for permission for the voice recording, that all agreed with.

I decided to not share the individual participants' names or other identifying details in Choma apart from their sex and age, although a few of the participants quite clearly articulated that they would have preferred their names to have been included in this thesis. For the sake of the anonymity of the rest of the participants in Choma, I have decided not to do so as their wish was to not share their identities. I have shared the names of the ZWM participants in Lusaka with their full consent, although I have not used the interviews for analysis for this study.

#### **4.5 Thematic Analysis**

According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 78), thematic analysis as a method is remarkably flexible and free of theoretical dependency. As a flexible and therefore at best also transparent method, it marries well with the feminist research ethic – requiring reflection and attentiveness throughout the process.

Epistemological pluralism goes hand in hand with methodological and ethical pluralism, and methodological pluralism implies pluralism in the choice of methods. When there are different sets of rules, principles and procedures as to how to produce knowledge in Feminist Studies, it is more or less self-evident that this entails a great deal of diversity when methods are to be chosen in individual research projects (Lykke, 2010, p.160).

As Lykke points out above, knowledge production in feminist studies does not prescribe a methodology or a set of analytical tools but rather the plurality of approaches could be seen as a guide to the researcher's relationship to the data and the participants. Therefore, thematic analysis as a methodological choice has allowed me (the researcher) to reflect my data against the larger framework of feminist theory and identifying the concepts that bear meaning and connect the theoretical framework to the data.

As I already noted in the introduction, the theoretical framework and the following analysis and discussion in chapter five is broken into two distinct sections, that I see as two inseparable sides of the same coin. First, the "Vote for Women!"-campaign provides a context for the entire study and an example of the problematic use of essentialism as a campaign strategy. But it also draws the attention to the essentialist notions that emerged from the primary interview data and allowed an analysis of somewhat stereotypical traits and roles. Second, the data also allowed to analyse other perceived and experienced social divisions through the intersectional approach. In a way then, I have chosen to do two analyses that I have seen as complimentary and providing the context and the layers within the context.

"Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Throughout the interview process, and during the transcription process of the interviews, I noted some commonalities and patterns already from the interviews in relation to the larger framework of feminist theory – this was of course inevitable as my entire approach for the research was decidedly feminist to begin with, and my initial, broader research question was focusing on the articulation of gender difference in political public discourse in Zambia. But it is worth it to note, that this initial noting of patterns, according to Braun and Clarke (ibid.) can also be seen to mark the beginning of thematic analysis.

Braun and Clarke (ibid.) describe the process of thematic analysis in six steps which I have summarised as 'knowing your data well, coding, identifying themes, reviewing themes,

defining and naming themes, and producing a good quality report with meaningful extracts of data' (2006, p.87). These are the steps that I have attempted to follow in this study. The first step I took was to transcribe the interviews as the primary data. Then, I returned to the transcripts and read the transcripts repeatedly to re-familiarise myself with them. I also re-familiarised myself with my interview notes. This was a necessary step as the initial transcription and the beginning of the actual analysis of the data were far apart. Through this repeated reading I could again identify the central elements before starting the coding process.

The thematic analysis began with descriptive coding of the interesting and emerging elements. After the initial coding, the data and codes were re-read, defined, and the codes were then grouped together under the emerging themes. Throughout the coding process and the collation of the codes, the connections to the theoretical framework and central concepts of essentialism and the use of intersectional approach became clearer.

After the coding process, and collation of codes into themes, my analytical approach became two-fold. First, making use of some of the secondary data (see Image 1 in Chapter Five) combined with the interview data for analysis of what I think of as the challenge of essentialism. Second, analysing the data using intersectional approach that has allowed me to discuss the participants' views on social divisions beyond gender, allowing me to include other social divisions, and test the approach in the context of this study.

#### **4.6. Thematic Framework of This Study**

“Rainbows include the whole spectrum of different colours, but how many colours we distinguish depends on our specific social and linguistic milieu” (Yuval-Davis, 2006b, p.203).

Ultimately, a social division is described through common understandings of what makes one person or group the same or different from another and those descriptions often seem pre-defined, nearly essential. “Different social divisions, such as class, race and ethnicity, tend to have certain parameters in common. They tend to be ‘naturalized’, to be seen as resulting from biological destiny linked to differential genetic pools of intelligence and personal characteristics” (Yuval-Davis, 2006b, p.199). But even though certain descriptions or social divisions may seem ‘natural’, the narrative of the same might be different in another context, or time and place.

As described in Chapter Two, the analysis of this study is twofold. First, I am focusing on the concept of gender and its strategically essentialist utilisation in what ultimately is a feminist campaign. Specifically in this context, my argument is that the essentialist notions of gender become counterproductive when they fix the person's needs and capabilities to certain tasks or roles and rule out other possibilities.

Second, I have analysed the data through the intersectional lens, and looked for other ways in which social divisions are described, but also how they intersect with gender. The thematic framework is visualised in Table 3 and illustrates the identification of themes from the data through excerpts from the primary interview data.

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<b>1. Gender</b>	- Gender traits - Gender roles	R2 (man): "I think it's woman is the best candidate to choose because most of the time the woman has that kind of kindness. Patience to the people. Unlike the men. Men...are normally fond of cheating"
<b>3. Class</b>	- Education - Wealth	R6 (woman): "Because of like education background most of us are not educated since those people they consider people that are educated. Learned. And then also wealth. We don't have like help pockets for us as women."
<b>3. Ethnicity</b>	- Familiarity - Traditions and Customs - Rural vs. Urban	R8 (woman): "I was considering somebody of my tribe, coming from here. Tonga by tribe, Southern, particularly as a president. And for the councillor I wanted to put somebody we already knew."

**Table 3.** Thematic Framework

The sub-themes of 'gender' were clearly divided into gender specific traits and derived from the traits, gender specific roles. The descriptions of gender through traits and roles allowed me to discuss gender on its own but also highlighted that social divisions are not clear-cut categories but axis-like. The same data excerpt can and most likely will fall under more than one theme (social division) and hence, highlight the intersections as described below.



Gender/Ethnicity: I have chosen the term ‘ethnicity’ for the theme describing shared experiences of togetherness and familiarity and traditions and customs that could also be named more broadly as ‘culture’. Ultimately, this theme is about belonging and sameness, and in contrast, about difference between groups defined by language, or e.g. tribe. It includes the codes that describe cultural aspects and traditions, and how the political decisions (i.e. voting decisions) were made based on a feeling of common understanding, and the common tribal nominator. Tribal identities are arguably very strong in Zambia, and different political parties are identified with certain Provinces and tribes that are often identified through language. In Southern province i.e. the area of Tongas, the default political party was United Party for National Development (UPND) and it was the contextual silent understanding that was shared between the participants and myself.

Gender/Class: the third theme, or social division I identified was ‘class’ where I included the sub-themes of education and wealth which were descriptions of differentiating divisions and to an extent, the differentiators specifically between the rural and urban areas. Both were seen as the enablers for entering the political sphere and also seen as something that was difficult to gain.

## **5. Results**

In the context of my study and to answer the research questions, anti-essentialism and intersectionality have both offered a lens or approach within the wider frame of feminist theory, allowing the themes and social divisions for analysis to emerge from the interview data and the advocacy materials in a complimentary manner. In this chapter, I will present the findings of my thematic analysis of the interviews and the secondary data in dialogue with my research questions and literature concerning essentialism and intersectionality.

Basically, my argument is that when essentialism is considered categorically limiting for the plurality of women's realities, intersectionality and intersectional approach for analysis can be operationalised as a corrective measure for the inclusion of silences and the diversity of social divisions hindering women's participation in politics. Where the central arguments were those well-known in the communities, and the needs of women were often discussed in very essentialist, and therefore, limiting tones, the field interviews conducted in this study highlighted two other social divisions and intersections for discussion, namely, class and ethnicity. In this analysis I am first looking at the use of essentialism and assessing its short-comings as a strategy for women's participation in politics, and then, attempt to assess intersections of gender/ethnicity and gender/class as the corrective measures for the essentialist one dimensional view.

### **5.1 Strategic Essentialism and the Limits of Transformation**

Essence, as discussed earlier, is a notion of an innate quality of a human, a biologically driven meaning or a trait that one possesses. Described simplistically, a woman's essence is in her biologically determined child-bearing and caring ability that would determine her values and actions as caring and considerate. Men's essence on the other hand, is defined by competition, hardness and aggression that are founded in his natural instincts of being the protector and the provider. It is of course shown that these are not innate features in either feminine or masculine expressions of gender, and are shaped socially and culturally, therefore also being ever changing. However, essentialist notions of gender were a strong theme emerging from the interview data throughout. Generally, women and men and the differences between them were described by stereotypical notions of gender traits and roles. In this first section of the analysis, I will focus on these notions and descriptions.

Essentialist position, as coined by Spivak (1985), is reached when strategic essentialism reaches the point of counterproductivity and begins to reproduce the stereotypes as truths. As discussed earlier, the use of essentialist tones to grapple the issues of gender inequality is quite well documented. Whether applying gender stereotypes in an instrumentalist manner, for example for gender sensitive policy-making purposes, it is a question of making sweeping generalisations of ‘what women are like’ and ‘what women stand for’. At the same time then, the strategic choice eats away from the transformative power of the concept of gender.

Below are excerpts from the interviews where the participants have described good leadership and then women in more general terms, yet still in the context of politics. I have then compared how the descriptions of good leadership compare to the descriptive gender traits (Table 4). It is interesting, yet also quite illustrative of how strategic essentialism works. According to all interview participants women would be more than suitable to take part in formal politics if judged by their innate qualities and having the qualities to improve the ways in which the decisions were made, and actions taken. Women were even described to be good leaders and very clearly possessing the needed qualities.

<b>Good Leader</b>	<b>Gender Traits</b>
"Somebody who is humble. You can just tell by looking. Somebody who is humble and listens to the cry of the people, able to listen to their problems. To respond to their problems" (R6, woman)	"I think it's woman is the best candidate to choose because most of the time the woman has that kind of kindness. Patience to the people. Unlike the men. Men...are normally fond of cheating." (R2, man)
"A good leader must be somebody who is a hard worker and somebody who listens to problems of people" (R1, man)	"For example, women, they are not like all that harsh they are always kind. Unlike men, you can speak of something, they are hard in their hearts. Now women they are kind." (R4, woman)

"A good leader is somebody who is supposed to be listening to the views of the people and when he is sent by the government he is supposed to take the report back and then he's supposed to look after the people that put him in that place...in the seat" (R2, man)

"When a woman is trying to say, it means something. She means what she says. But a man would just say, he won't do. He'll just say "I will do this.." just keep on promising but nothing, negative. Mmmm.." (R3, woman)

"A good leader must be somebody who understands and listens to the cry of the people. When they hear.. heard something he has to call the people, sit them together and reason together. If they agree or they disagree then he decides." (R8, woman)

"Because women... most of the dictatorship leadership is done by men. But women are democratic leadership. Most of them" (R1, man)

**Table 4.** Notions of leadership traits and women's gendered traits as articulated in the interview data.

Yet, in the end this seems to be cancelled out for no other reason than 'how things are' or the men not being comfortable with female leadership, and as stated by nearly all participants:

"They're... Zambian men are... don't expect our nation to be ruled by a woman. Because men cannot allow a women to rule our country. Because most of the political parties formed in Zambia are led by men" (R5, man).

It could be said then, that as described by Spivak (ibid), an essentialist position for the use of essentialism as a strategy has been reached rather quickly in the participants' views on the transformative capabilities of women in politics.

### **5.1.1. Gendered Needs and Gender Roles**

The 'Vote for Women!'- campaign, as shown in the campaign poster (Image 1), focused on issues that are generally seen as women's interests due to their caring traits and their roles as mothers and caregivers, or in the women's domain of family centres issues i.e. health services, social security, food security, youth and children, education, gender sensitivity. It was evident from the interviews that every campaigning political party represented by male campaigners had brought up the same array of issues and local challenges, e.g. lack of fertilizers, roads, healthcare, education and clean water. These were – and still are – the biggest challenges in the rural areas in Zambia.

However, the Women’s Movement campaigned exactly on the same themes but added the dimension of gender, and more specifically: women as the innate experts in the issues of family and care. The main argument was that they had more legitimacy behind their promises due to their gender. Women’s capabilities are recognised but they are also assumed without reference to the wider framework of the existing political power structures that work against them. For example, women’s participation in politics will result in poverty reduction at large:

“If we have many women in politics, they’ll be helping more people and then poverty will be reduced – yes, it will be lessened. Yes. Than when you have a lot of men in politics that are greedy.” (R6, woman)

Through their roles as mothers, sisters, grandmothers, and aunts, their needs were the families’ needs, and their perceived political vision limited, if not reduced, to these areas:

“Women have motherly love. They are always kind. And they always feel [more] pity than men. Men – they need to take time for them to like pity for somebody, for the needy, for the vulnerable. And then, unlike the men – they [the men] are so hard and harsh, rude.” (R6, woman)

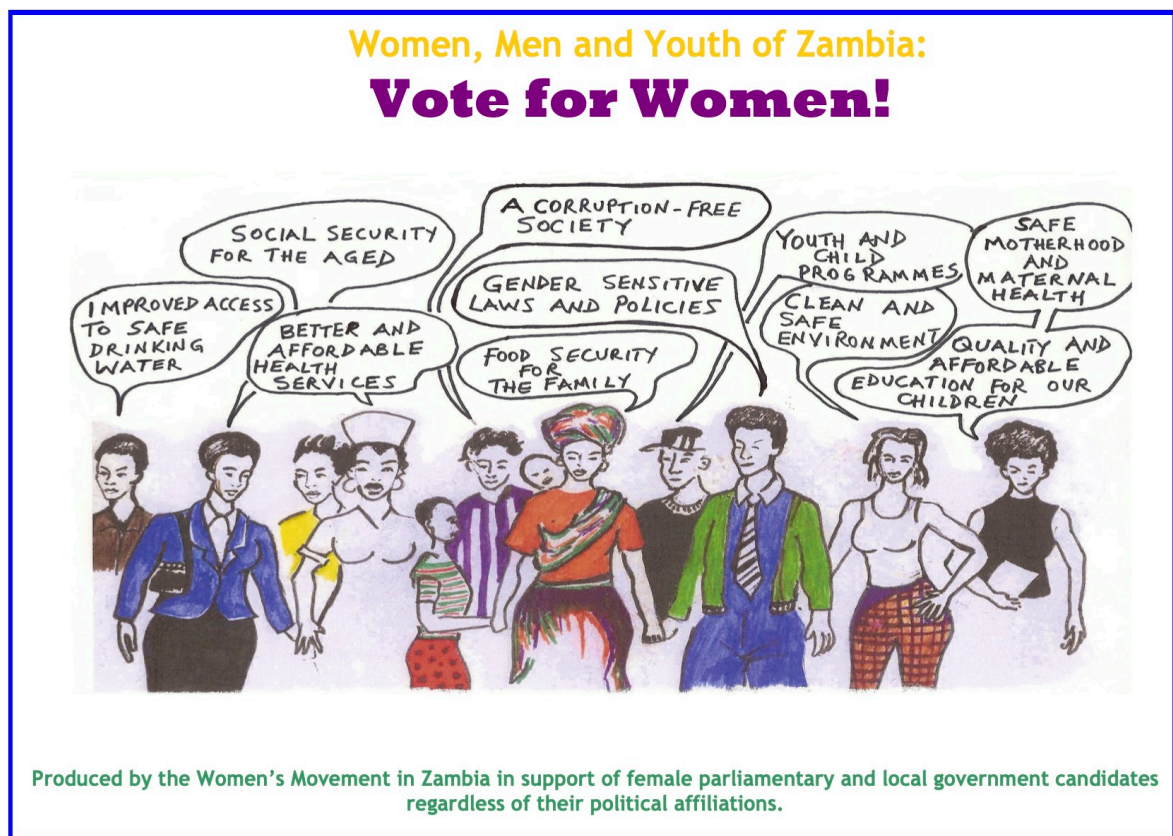


Image 1: Vote for Women!-campaign poster, Women for Change 2003

The campaign's approach was a safe one, but not necessarily considerably political, and even less transformative. It relied heavily on the perceived needs and roles of women in the communities, therefore perpetuating these needs and roles. It did not touch upon the issues that are recognised as clear hindrances to; first, the adoption of women as candidates at any level, and second, the unequal structures of the political decision-making.

As described above (Table 4), notions of women describe them as kind, altruistic, even humble, and attentive to other people's needs and opinions. Particularly kindness is seen as a differentiating factor between men and women, where men are cold-hearted and greedy. A good leader on the other hand, is someone who is humble, attentive, and responsive to other people's problems, and is not corrupt:

“You know, women are the kind of stable people. They are trusted in most cases. Women are trusted in most cases. As we have seen in the last government. Leadership of the last government, no woman is now on the court answering charges of - you know - stealing money and other things. It's only men who are involved. So it's better to choose the - I mean women behave properly.” (R2, man)

Based on these descriptions and following the logic of causality, there should be great numbers of women active in formal politics at all levels, which evidently is not the case. Instead, the notions of women perpetuate the stereotype of women's do-good nature, and their altruistic essence, therefore also binding them again to the familiar sphere of family and household. In Zambia, the political sphere is dominated by men and many have argued that it is also consciously allowed to remain as it is perceived: harsh, hard, selfish and rude. And that women are kept out by men by maintaining this image (e.g. Longwe, 2000, Singogo and Kakompe, 2010). As already discussed earlier in this study, woman cannot enter the political sphere without being corrupted in the process and therefore also losing the dignity and goodness that a woman has 'naturally'. In this sense, women with their assumed virtues; altruistic needs and roles as the caregivers, would bring also those qualities into the realm of politics but would not be able to change it. On the other hand, they might not survive the harsh realities and would not have the skills to fight to get their voices heard and policies introduced. Or they would 'become like men' and adopt the rude and selfish ways of men, but by doing so become arguably even more morally corrupt than their male counterparts in the eyes of the society at large.

In this tug of war, the bigger picture of political decision-making is lost, including the wider political programmes of the parties and their focus areas, as well as the

policy-making roles of the decision-makers. A candidate – a woman or a man - with a gender-sensitive and socially conscious agenda might be fighting a losing battle as the structures remain unchanged. Therefore, the campaign and its instrumentalist approach of using the gender roles and gendered needs can be seen over-simplifying the need for sustainable and inclusive policies, and not making the full use of the transformational power of what the gendered agenda actually could have been.

## 5.2 At the Intersections

All in all, the “Vote for Women!”-campaign did not achieve anything remarkably politically transforming, and it may have not been realistic to expect it to do so either, since its foundation was in the prevailing deeply gendered structures of divisions of labour in the public and private spheres of the society. However, the hindrances to women’s political participation are known and discussed, the reasons are known, but hardly ever clearly brought to the public agenda as issues or needs for conscious societal change. Or even more so, as issue of rights rather than a ‘nice-to-have’.

### 5.2.1 Gender/Class

Class as a recognised social division was discussed mainly through individual education background and economic status, and women in general, were seen neither as educated nor as having access to funding that is required for political participation. It is a premise of this study that if ‘gender’ is discussed in a vacuum without looking at how it intersects with other perceived social divisions i.e. people’s actual realities, and as an issue in its own right, it remains as a ‘women’s issue’ and therefore not an issue that encompasses all social divisions affecting all levels of the society. It becomes easier to shrug off and be handled by the women themselves to get educated on how to become active in politics:

“They can do so [become active in politics] once they use their initiative. Because you can be a politician but when you are voted into office.. you for... the way you talk [and] work... if you don’t know the ways of working, but if you just know how to speak properly or tell her to campaign proper so that she can be voted for. But the skills of getting better things for the people, if you don’t have such skills, you can’t be [voted in]. So long as they are educated they can do better” (R5, man).

This participant identified the lack of knowledge and skills on the side of women but did not go into identifying ways in which the education could be supported by himself or the community, for example. There is a notion of ‘proper talk’, ‘proper work’ and ‘skills’ that

you either possess or you do not in order to do meaningful work as a politician, i.e. the desired qualities and status of a politician that women in particular do not possess.

“R4: On part of us women, maybe we are the ones that can see we are lacking information.

Interviewer: Ok... What kind of information?

R4: Maybe that.. if you want to stand as a candidate you don't know what steps to take and then how do I stand myself there” (R4, woman).

The knowledge needed was quite clearly identified, and it is on the due processes of how things are to be done.

“Women can be leaders. Only that they are scared. If they were not scared, we would have been voting for them” (R3, woman).

This participant raised an important issue that ties in with both the knowledge but also the confidence that can be derived from knowledge and education. This is an issue acknowledged by e.g. Singogo and Kakompe, 2010. It was also discussed in terms of the exclusivity of the working language of the political system in a country that is divided by a total of 73 languages:

“Yes.. the candidate who's actually supposed to be voted for... Qualifications.. one of the qualifications [is that] you need to be able to speak English but if you don't know how to speak English then the way is blocked already” (R8, woman).

The political system is not perceived inclusive and the lack of inclusive policies to embrace diversity and equality through language does not seem to be on the agenda to date.

It was quite clear that generally, women were not considered educated enough, nor having the confidence to be adopted as candidates or even if adopted, to be voted in. This was discussed by both men and women during the interviews. It was not clear where the education should come from per se but it was clear that this was definitely a major issue and weakness on women's side although the education level of interviewed women and men was very similar, as I have presented earlier in Table 2. However, women's confidence levels could also be a symptom rather than the actual illness, as Sara Longwe had pointed out and was quoted on earlier in this study. In her words, the lack of qualification is a 'patriarchal claim' and that as such, makes the claim irrelevant (Longwe, 2000, p.30).

On top of gaining social status through education and qualifications, a more practical issue for women's political participation is that of economic status and lack of funding channels:



“because of like education background most of us...we are not educated since those people they consider people that are educated. Learned. And then also wealth. We don't have like help pockets for us as women” (R8, woman).

Funding is required for registration of candidates and funds are required for campaigning. The major political parties in Zambia seem to choose not to use these funds for the adoption of women candidates or their consecutive campaigns. Alternative channels either do not exist or they are not transparently made available. The status that knowledge on the system and available funds combined could create to navigate the system. As was highlighted in a story by one of the participants, of a woman who had wanted to run as a candidate in the local elections, but had failed:

“She did not get in contact with those ward people, ward committees. She just contacted some of the individuals. She ignored the ward committees. So that's what caused her not to do well. Because those individuals were just there after money. But she never knew that” (R5, man).

The core of the problem, though is in the structures that support the men, and not the women, and hears the men, and not the women:

“Women they don't have much resources. So that thing is like bringing them down. Even though they will speak no-one will hear them” (R3, woman).

Ultimately, this a choice made by the political parties and it speaks volumes in terms of the prevalent system's lack of adaptability and thinking ahead:

”Men they are greedy upon their knowledge they have. They don't want to excel to their friends, they don't want to share. As a result they are just doing things alone, by themselves” (R3, woman).

The prevailing political system works in a way that women are in a position where they have no support systems, financially or in terms of mentorship and guidance. All of the interviewed women expressed the need for more equal representation in the political system, and both men and women acknowledged that the system as it was built, was not supporting that. Rather than a revelation, this is a confirmation of the structures that support inequality rather than inclusivity.

### **5.2.2 Gender/Ethnicity**

As mentioned earlier, ethnicity as a social division is about commonalities and shared feelings of belonging that encompasses traditions, shared cultural values, language and geographical area. As I have also mentioned earlier, the Southern Province is considered

ethnically Tonga, and generally, the political party of the Tonga is UPND. Traditionally, the Tonga society is matrilineal, and polygamous i.e. the men can marry more than one woman. This is still practiced, especially in the rural areas. The traditions are valued and customary law and judicial system runs along the national legal system, that at least on paper, overrides the customary one.

According to the interview participants, shared ethnicity tied to the place and its customs, and the understanding of the local (or rural) issues is of great importance. It was even clearly stated:

"I was considering somebody of my tribe, coming from here. Tonga by tribe, Southern, particularly as a president. And for the councillor I wanted to put somebody we already knew" (R8, woman).

The sense of belonging or a feeling of common understanding was highlighted in many of the interviews through discussions of agricultural issues. E.g. of some party candidates had come from the urban areas and had not understood how much fertilizer was needed for a five hectare plot. This sense of rural versus urban areas was also one that raised suspicions on the candidates' abilities to really understand what the local needs were.

Despite the clear sense of pride in the Tonga culture and tradition, the customary laws were also criticised. The criticism of the customary law was not done by everyone but the negative impacts were acknowledged when customary law came up in discussion. For example, land ownership is a contested issue in general in Zambia, but more particularly, women are not able to own land under the customary law and this is recognised as an issue of blocking financial independence as well as a major issue affecting women's rights in general:

"We wanted a thing... a situation whereby women... to become independent, whereby we can be given a land, maybe to have a title deed, now which is not acceptable here for us in Zambia. Women are always oppressed" (R, woman).

The customary law again came up when discussing the hindrances to women's political participation and leadership roles:

"There is that fear, fear in that comes to woman. Fearing for unknown. Then the customary law which says woman can never be a leader no matter what. So they're always like put down. They can have the knowledge but there is that fear which binds them" (R3, woman).

Speaking about issues such as child marriage were also clearly difficult but nevertheless recognised as a clear issue standing in the way of women even reaching the position where they could be educated or politically active:

“Then again we should start from the grassroot by pushing...you know...girl children to school than breaking them on the way. There’s a tendency to some parents, say when the child reaches about 17 years, you know, some scapegoat to say that I don’t have money. But in the real sense that child should be...get married so that they could have the...you know...the dowry” (R2, man).

These issues with customary law explicitly expressed in the interviews would have far more political fire power than portraying women as the innate experts of healthcare policy by default. Of course, these issues are known and there are several government and NGO led initiatives to e.g. stop child-marriage but the root reason of inequal structures of power and financial inequality are issues yet to be fully resolved.

### **5.3 The Limitations of the Study**

The analysis of essentialist notions of gender and the analysis of the intersections of gender/class and gender/ethnicity have complimented each other in this study, and have highlighted the weaknesses of the campaign approach. It could be seen that the campaign reduced the issue of women’s political participation with the use of strategic essentialism, and as a result, the campaign could be described an apolitical political campaign, with good intentions but very little transformative power. Shifting the analysis to the intersections of gender/class and gender/ethnicity helped to highlight gender related issues that have transformational power if incorporated as part of a clear agenda – feminist or otherwise.

Thematic analysis is often criticised for allowing only surface level and semantic analysis, looking at what is seen, not necessarily enabling the silences to be felt more. The data collected through the interviews and the results of the analysis correspond on the surface level to the already identified hindrances to women’s political participation. Namely, these are e.g. the fixed nature of gender traits and roles, and especially, the rural women’s incapacitation to socially move on the different axis of social divisions and their intersections. In other words, the analysis of the data confirms that women are not educated or wealthy enough to fully participate or become active in the political sphere. This is due to their natural gender traits and belonging to an ethnic group that defines their roles

through customs and traditions. The issues of girls and women that are known, such as child marriage, came up in passing rather than as patriarchal symptoms behind women's limited possibilities to get educated, and further on, participate in politics.

In terms of the data collection, the tight schedule did not allow for fully immersive interviews where I could have prompted for elaboration on some of the emerging themes. Although the interviews were semi-structured, the possibilities to probe for more details on the emerging issues was limited, mainly in terms of time and access. I believe the study would have benefited from more immersive initial coding and organising to themes, and reflection after the full round of interviews were conducted, finally following up with the participants to validate and further discuss the emerging themes. This would have had a positive impact on the richness of the analysis, and it would have also helped me to develop a stronger thematic framework, with even stronger linkages to the theoretical framework. That way, the questions asked would have had more emphasis on the potential for initiating campaigning for actual change.

## 6. Conclusion

You need not be afraid to give us our rights for fear we will take too much, for we can't take more than our pint'll hold.<sup>9</sup>

Women's political participation measured by substantial representation in the legislation is only one dimension of gender inequality in political participation – but one that is very clearly defined. The quality of women's political decision-making power cannot be measured through quotas of representation in national parliaments. The success of feminist agenda is truly measured by gender sensitive, inclusive and socially conscious policies that draw from an inclusive agenda. In Zambia, neither can be measured since women continue to be categorically excluded from formal politics.

Like the other women's movements in the region, the Zambian women's movement is built to rectify the historical exclusion and marginalisation of women in formal politics, which in turn has its roots in the patriarchal – and colonial - traditions, laws and political culture of the country. The movement itself – a sum of its many organisations – is clearly linked to the global women's movement and transnational feminism that lean heavily on the common understanding of global social justice and human rights – as well as an assumed shared agenda that evolves around gender.

In this context and the 2006 Zambian tripartite elections as the backdrop, I went on to criticise the strategic essentialist approach of the women's movement's election campaign. I analysed the experiences and views of the voters - also active beneficiaries of the women's movement's other initiatives - using the intersectional approach. In conclusion, I believe that the use of strategic essentialism is counterproductive to any gender related advocacy work. Strategic essentialism is a reductionist approach that limits any potential for transformative use of the concept of gender and cuts off the political edge of campaigning for any gender based issues or human rights.

The intersectional approach then allows a wider spectrum of experience to emerge, together with the linkages between them, with an understanding that the intersections are

---

<sup>9</sup> An excerpt from Sojourner Truth's speech 'Ar'n't I a woman?' from Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio in 1851 as cited in Stewart, J. (ed.), 1991: p. xxxiv

not the same for everyone yet have enormous potential for transformation from a place of accessible analysis. To an extent, this study is not uncovering anything new but rather contributing to what is already known. But in doing so, I would like to think it is a contribution to the transnational feminist agenda and a call for sharpening the arguments locally.

The women's movement and its role in developing the agenda for women's rights activists in Zambia is clear. It has however, been also questioned if this 'women's movement' truly represents all women in Zambia, or is it a somewhat elitist club that wields power over what gets to be discussed and what does not. In the times when many of the organisations mentioned in this study, are struggling financially as the international funding for the causes of women's rights is falling, it would be a healthy topic for discussion and review.

I believe it is also timely that I take this opportunity to answer the question that I was asked at UNZA in 2006, sparking the beginning of my long and precarious thesis journey. It's not a simple answer, but from my feminist stance, it is a clear one: "Yes, you should vote for women just because they are women. But you should also vote for them because you want to support women to take up public positions where they will be held accountable for their electoral promises, and deliver policies that have real, positive effect on the development of the nation and the constituencies of women, men and children, and to transform the political culture to be more inclusive and representative".

## Epilogue

The numbers for women's representation in politics may not have changed much in Zambia since 2006, and women remain grossly underrepresented at all levels of the political structures. According to Lusaka Times (19 March, 2019), Zambian Gender Minister Elisabeth Phiri had commented that "educated women in Zambia, as in many other countries are shunning politics because its male-dominated landscape has often been hostile and unpleasant to the female gender". This would then make one quickly conclude that indeed not much else has changed either.

Quick google search of women in politics in Zambia brings up a few shining examples of a new, younger generation of women taking space in the Zambian politics. *Buumba Malambo* is a social worker who has been elected as local ward councillor in Magoba, close to Lusaka. According to Deutche Welle's (2019) story, she endured harassment and intimidation from the competing candidates and despite the perceived ethnic lines, won the local elections, mainly with the women's vote. Since the elections, she has received a number of young leader awards and seems to be using her popularity to build social safety and security networks. Another example is the new political party Socialist Party Zambia's national spokesperson *Rehoboth Kawfabulula*, a 21-year old law student (Lusaka Times, 2020) whose nomination seems to have been both welcomed and condemned. Since her nomination, she has become the face of the new party and very successful in highlighting the new party's values that seem to have been built on the core needs for development; education, health and agriculture (Socialist Party Zambia website, 2020) as well as inclusion and social justice. With her leadership, the party is gaining popularity especially among the youth in Zambia.

For both of these women to have entered the political sphere, it has required support from their political parties and their communities, both financially and morally. It has been a conscious decision of going against the prevailing structures for inclusivity and transparency. That is leadership through example.

For me, it was important to end this thesis journey on a positive note and to have finally done that now, I want to thank my brother Janne who always thought I would.

## Bibliography

Ackerly, Brooke and Jacqui True (2010): *Doing Feminist Research in Political and Social Science*, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke

African Union (2003): Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, [https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/37077-treaty-charter\\_on\\_rights\\_of\\_women\\_in\\_africa.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/37077-treaty-charter_on_rights_of_women_in_africa.pdf) (last accessed on 7th October, 2020)

Basu, Amrita (2004): “*Women’s Movements and the Challenge of Transnationalism*”, Curricular Crossings: Women’s Studies and Area Studies, A Web Anthology for the College Classroom from the Five College Women’s Studies Research Center. <http://www3.amherst.edu/~mrhunt/womencrossing/basu.html> (last accessed on 24th January, 2015)

Braun, Virginia and Victoria Clarke (2006): *Using thematic analysis in psychology*, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Vol. 3, Issue 2, pp. 77-110: journal

Bunch, Charlotte: Women’s Human Rights. The Challenges of Global Feminism and Diversity in DeKoven, M. (ed.) (2001)

Carasthatis, Anna (2014): *The Concept of Intersectionality in Feminist Theory* in *Philosophy Compass*, 2014, Vol. 9, Issue 5, pp. 304–314: journal

Crenshaw, Kimberlé (1989): *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: a Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics* in *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, Vol 1989, Issue 1, Article 8, pp. 139-167: journal

Crenshaw, Kimberlé (1991): *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color* in *Stanford Law Review*, Vol.43, No.6, pp. 1241-1299: journal

Davis, Kathy (2008): *Intersectionality as a Buzzword. A sociology of science perspective on what makes a feminist theory successful* in *Feminist Theory*, Vol. 9, No.1, pp. 67-85: journal

DeKoven, Marianne (2001): *Feminist Locations: Global and Local, Theory and Practice*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick

DW, The 77 Percent (2019): *Buumba Malambo – Zambia’s rising political star*, video article: <https://www.dw.com/en/buumba-malambo-zambias-rising-political-star/av-50573948> (Last accessed 30th September, 2020)

Electoral Commission of Zambia (2015): 2015 Presidential Election [http://www.elections.org.zm/results/2015\\_presidential\\_election](http://www.elections.org.zm/results/2015_presidential_election) (last accessed on 26th January, 2015)

Eyben, Rosalind, Joanne Sandler and Aruna Rao (2012): *Strategies of Feminist Bureaucrats: United Nations Experiences* in *IDS Working Paper*, Vol. 2012, No. 397.



- Fuss, Diana (1989): *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference*, Routledge, New York
- Geisler, Gisela (2004): *Women and the Remaking of Politics in Southern Africa: Negotiating Autonomy, Incorporation and Representation*, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala
- Goetz, Anne Marie and Shireen Hassim (2003): *No Shortcuts to Power: African Women in Politics and Policy Making*. Zed Books, London
- GIDD (2000): *National Gender Policy*, Republic of Zambia, Office of the President, Cabinet office, Lusaka
- Gouinlock, James. S. (2014): Instrumentalism (John Dewey) in *Encyclopedia Britannica* <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/160445/John-Dewey/283728/Ends-and-goods> (last accessed on 26th January, 2015)
- Grewal, Inderpal and Caren Kaplan (1994): *Scattered Hegemonies. Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*. University of Minnesota Press, London
- Hassim, Shireen (2006a): “*Democratization: A View from Africa*” in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 2006, Vol. 31, no. 41, pp. 931-934: journal
- Hirsjärvi, Sirkka and Helena Hurme (2008): *Tutkimushaastattelu. Teemahaastattelun Teoria ja Käytäntö*. Gaudeamus, Helsinki
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, IDEA: *Gender Quotas Database*, <http://.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas> (last accessed on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2020)
- Inter-Parliamentary Union, IPU (2020): <https://www.ipu.org> (last accessed on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2020)
- IPU Parline Database, *Global Data on National Parliaments (2020)*: <https://data.ipu.org> (last accessed on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2020)
- Johnsom-Odim, Cheryl: *Who’s to Navigate and Who’s to Steer? A Consideration of the Role of Theory in Feminist Struggle* in DeKoven, M. (ed.)(2001)
- Kabeer, Naila (1999): *The Conditions and Consequences of Choice: Reflections on the Measurement of Women’s Empowerment* in UNRISD Discussion Paper No. 108, Geneva
- Kabeer, Naila (2004): *Resources, Agency, Achievement: Reflections on the Measurement of Women’s Empowerment* in *Discussing Women’s Empowerment – Theory and Practice*, Sida Studies No. 3, pp. 17-57
- Longwe, Sara Hlupekile (2000): *Towards Realistic Strategies for Women’s Political Empowerment in Africa* in *Gender & Development*, Vol. 8, No 3, pp. 24-30, 2000: journal

Lusaka Times (2019): “Educated women in Zambia are shunning politics because its male-dominated, hostile and unpleasant landscape”, <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2019/03/13/educated-women-in-zambia-are-shunning-politics-because-its-male-dominated-hostile-and-unpleasant-landscape/#comments>, published on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2019. (Last accessed on 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2020)

Lusaka Times (2020): “Fred M’membe’s Socialist Party Appoints 21 Year old Youth as Party Spokesperson”, <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2020/07/01/fred-mmembes-socialist-party-appoints-21-year-old-youth-as-party-spokesperson/> (Last accessed on 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2020)

Lykke, Nina (2010): *Feminist Studies : A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing*, Taylor & Francis Group, London

McFadden, Patricia (2004): *Cultural Practice as Gendered Exclusion in Discussing Women’s Empowerment – Theory and Practice* in *Sida Studies* No 3, pp. 17-57

Mendoza, Breny (2002): *Transnational Feminisms in Question* in *Feminist Theory*, Vol 3, No.3, pp. 313-332, 2002, Sage Publications, London: journal

Menon, Nivetida (2015): Is Feminism About ‘Women’? A Critical View on Intersectionality from India in *International Viewpoint – News and Analysis from the Fourth International* <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article4038> (last accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2020)

Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/essentialism> (last accessed on 25<sup>th</sup> January, 2015)

Mindry, Deborah (2001): *Nongovernmental Organizations, “Grassroots” and the Politics of Virtue* in *Signs*, Vol 26, No 4, pp. 1187-1211, 2001: journal

Ministry of Gender and Child Development (2014): *National Gender Policy*, Republic of Zambia, Lusaka

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade (2003): *Feminism Without Borders. Decolonizing Theory, Practising Solidarity*. Duke University Press, London

Mushemeza, Elijah Dickens (2009): *The Contribution of Women in Influencing Legislation in Uganda (1995-2005)* in *African Development*, Vol. XXXIV, Nos 3 & 4, pp. 167-206, 2009: journal

Naples, Nancy A. and Manisha Desai (eds.)(2002): *Women’s Activism and Globalization, Linking Local Struggles and Transnational Politics*, Routledge, London

National Assembly of Zambia (2020): *Members of Parliament by Gender*. <http://www.parliament.gov.zm/members/gender> (last accessed on 17<sup>th</sup> February, 2020)

National Women’s Lobby Group (NWLG) (2006): *Interim Report of 2006 Tripartite Elections*, NWLG, Lusaka

OECD Development Centre (2014): Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI): Zambia. <http://genderindex.org/country/zambia> (last accessed on 17<sup>th</sup> February, 2020)

Patton, Michael Quinn (2002): *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Sage Publications, London

Powley, Elizabeth (2008): *Engendering Rwanda's Decentralisation – Supporting Women Candidates for Local Office*. Hunt Alternatives Fund: The Initiative for Inclusive Security [https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/1084\\_defending\\_childrens\\_rights\\_no\\_cover.pdf](https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/1084_defending_childrens_rights_no_cover.pdf) (last accessed on 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2020)

SADC (1997): SADC Declaration on Gender and Development, <https://www.sadc.int/documents-publications/show/829> (last accessed 1st October, 2020)

SADC (2008): SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, [https://www.sadc.int/documents-publications/show/Protocol\\_on\\_Gender\\_and\\_Development\\_2008.pdf](https://www.sadc.int/documents-publications/show/Protocol_on_Gender_and_Development_2008.pdf) (last accessed 1st October, 2020)

Sandler, J. (2012): *Inside the UN bureaucratic machine: what prospects for UN Women?* in Eyben, Rosalind, Joanne Sandler and Aruna Rao (eds.) (2012)

Sawer, M. (2000): *Parliamentary Representation of Women: From Discourses of Justice to Strategies of Accountability* in *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 21, No.4, pp. 361-380: journal

Sayer, Andrew (2000): *Realism and Social Science*, SAGE Publications, London

Singogo, K. And Kalenga Kakompe (2010), *Women in Zambian Political Governance. Documenting Women's Representation in the Parliament and the Executive*. Final Report, Zambia Association for Research and Development (ZARD), Lusaka

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty and Jenny Sharpe (2003): *A Conversation with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: Politics and the Imagination* in *Signs*, Vol.28, No. 2, p.609-624: journal

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1985): *Criticism, Feminism and the Institution. An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* in *Thesis Eleven*, Vol. 10-11, No. 1 pp. 175-187: journal

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1989): *In a Word. Interview with Ellen Rooney*, in *Differences: Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 pp. 124-156: journal

Steinbugler, Amy C., Julie E. Press and Janice Johnson Dias (2006): *Gender, Race and Affirmative Action. Operationalizing Intersectionality in Survey Research* in *Gender & Society*, Vol. 20 No 6, December 2006 pp. 805-825: journal

Steinmetz, Katy (2020): She Coined the Term ‘Intersectionality’ Over 30 Years Ago Here’s What It Means to Her Today, Time, 20 March 2020: online:  
<https://time.com/5786710/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality/?fbclid=IwAR1Nnhgg75ISyVswqoUDpBEQXazRkNRFocIMh04vMb-64BuFTTBVT0Cplz8> (last accessed 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2020)

Stewart, Jeffrey (ed). (1991): Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Bondswoman of Olden Time, with a History of Her Labors and Correspondence Drawn from Her "Book of Life" (Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers), Oxford University Press, New York

Tripp, Aili-Mari (2001): *The Politics of Autonomy and Cooptation in Africa: The Case of the Ugandan Women’s Movement* in The Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. 39, No. 1, pp. 101-128, journal

Tripp, Aili-Mari (2000): Women and Politics in Uganda, University of Wisconsin Press, London

UN (1953): Convention on the Political Rights of Women,  
[https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1954/07/19540707%2000-40%20AM/Ch\\_XVI\\_1p.pdf](https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1954/07/19540707%2000-40%20AM/Ch_XVI_1p.pdf)  
(last accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> October, 2020)

UN (2000): United Nations Millennium Declaration, UN General Assembly, New York.  
<http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>, (last accessed on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2015)

UN (2020a) Millennium Development Goals, <https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/> (last accessed on 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2020)

UN (2020b): Sustainable Development Goals <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>  
(last accessed on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2020)

UN (1995): The Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Beijing.  
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf> (last accessed on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2015)

UNDP Zambia (2014): MDG Overview  
<http://www.zm.undp.org/content/zambia/en/home/mdgoverview/> (last accessed on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2014)

UN Women (1979): Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm> (last accessed on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2020)

Yuval-Davis, Nira (2006a): *Belonging and the Politics of Belonging* in Patterns of Prejudice: Boundaries, Identities and Borders: Exploring the Cultural Production of Belonging, Vol. 40, Issue 3, pp.197-224: journal

Yuval-Davis, Nira (2006b): *Intersectionality and Feminist Politics* in European Journal of Women's Studies, 13 (3), pp. 193-209: journal.

Zambia Weekly (2015): Editor's Note, Issue 215, Vol. 6, Issue 88, p. 2, Lusaka, 16<sup>th</sup> January 2015

# Appendices

## Appendix I: Semi-structured interview questions

### **Background Information**

- Age
- Sex
- Village
- District
- Education?

### **Civic Education Workshop**

- What makes a good leader?
- What does democracy mean to you? Is it important to have democracy?
- Is voting important? Why?
- Do politicians keep the promises they make during their election campaigns? What are the ways to hold them responsible for their promises?

### **Zambian Tripartite Elections 2006**

- Did you vote in the elections in September? If yes, did you vote at all three levels: presidential, parliamentary and local government? If not, why?
- Did the election campaigns reach your village? What issues did the campaigners discuss? What promises did they make?

### **Decision-making process**

- What things did you consider when you decided who to vote for in the elections?
- Was there any particular reason why you voted for the candidates that you did? What were they?
- What kind of effect do you expect the leaders to have in your personal life?
- What kind of effect do you expect the leaders to have in your community?
- Do you think the leaders are able to change things? How?

- Are you able to effect the ways in which the changes are made? How?
- If you are not happy with decisions that are made and have an effect on you, how and where would you express it?

### **Women in politics**

- Were there any women as candidates in your constituency? If not, why do you think there was not any? If yes, did she campaign in your area?
- What issues do you think women in politics would discuss or hold important?
- What issues do you think men in politics would discuss or hold important?
- Do you think women and men have different ways of leading? How do they differ?
- Why would you vote for a woman?
- Why would you vote for a man?
- Do you think there should be more women in politics in Zambia? Why?
- How can women become more active in politics?