

Status and *Good Behaviour* - How Women in Patriarchal Zimbabwe Influence Power Holders

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Abstract

In rural mining communities in Zimbabwe, the changing fortunes of the mining industry have had both positive and negative effects on the economic as well as social and cultural realities of women and men. Women in particular are aware of the threats to their social fabric that accompany this increased economic activity. In the face of these challenges, many women are seeking to engage with local and national government, as well as with mining companies, to address their concerns. However, in order to do so they need to overcome status inequalities that are associated with patriarchy. Taking the view that power is not only about domination/oppression (power over) but also a question of empowerment, expressed as “an ability or capacity to act (power to)” this study analyses how women increase their status so that they can influence decision-makers in their favour. A case study approach was taken, and involved a series of interview and focus group discussions with 12 women and 6 men, analysed using an interpretivist approach. The study finds that while women recognise the disempowerment that comes with patriarchal power over them, they increase their power to effect action and change by increasing their status through wealth, relationships, and in particular by adhering to societal expectations of *good behaviour*. However, the majority of these opportunities do not fundamentally challenge patriarchal power, but instead, women are *doing gender* in accordance with societal expectations and thus they are “earning the right” to be influential in the public sphere. This has implications for development projects and approaches which aim to empower women, as they will need to take greater account of the trade-offs (or *patriarchal bargains*) that women strike before status equality can be achieved.

1 Introduction

The setting for this research is Shurugwi, a growing mining town of about 20,000 people in south-central Zimbabwe. It is situated on the Zimbabwean Great Dyke, a geological feature rich in mineral deposits, and gold and chrome mining play an important role in the local economy. There are at least 4 major mining companies in the wider region around Shurugwi, as well as other formal small-to-medium sized mining operations. Artisanal

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mining² has also been part of the local economy for more than half a century, and for many marginalised families in the area, this has been an important source of (alternative) income (The Sunday News 2015; Zimbabwe Independent 2013).

The impacts of mining (both large-scale and small-scale) on communities in developing countries where mining takes place have been discussed extensively in literature, both from an economic and a rights-based perspective,³ and the important, and often unsatisfactory, relationship between the mining industry and host communities is often acknowledged. In particular, the negative effects of mining on communities has been the subject of research and reporting (Mutuso et al. 2014, Stevens et al. 2013, Hilson 2002). However, there is a gap in the this literature regarding gender sensitive approaches, acknowledges that the issues researched might have different emphases for men and for women, or recognises the agency of women towards positive change. When gender is discussed in relation to the extractives industries the emphasis most often is on livelihoods options for women in the mines, especially those associated with extraction activities (Lahiri-Dutt 2011; Eftimi et al. 2009). Authors such as Lahiri-Dutt (2011) and Ward et al. (2011) have presented some cases where the concerns of women in mining communities, have been at the centre of finding equitable resolutions to conflicts between communities and other stakeholders of the mining process. And, building on recent studies undertaken by activists and NGOs to identify what issues affect women and how they address them (see also Muchadenyika et al. 2015), the present study takes a much closer look at the interplay between gender, mining issues, and the power to address them. In this paper, we will explore these power dynamics in a rural mining community in Zimbabwe, looking at what personal and political strategies women use to shift power, and to increase their influence, in society.

2 Literature

Like many African societies, Zimbabwean society is strongly patriarchal. The relationship between men and women is one of male domination and female subordination (Kambarami 2016), which in general deprives women of the power to influence processes and functions in society. Using feminist critical theory to analyse this situation allows us to question whether and how this social system can be dismantled in favour of a more equitable system.

2.1.1 Re-thinking power using a feminist lens

Essentially, power is the capacity to effect action, whether by others or by oneself. Foucault, Lukes and others' theorisation of power focused on seeing power as a question of domination. When developing his three-dimensional view of power, Lukes admits that all

² Artisanal and Small-scale mining (ASM) is commonly understood as informal mining activities, often by indigenous individuals, groups or communities, and carried out using low technology or with minimal machinery.

³ Reports such as the UN Economic Commission for Africa report on Minerals and Africa's Development: The International Study Group Report on Africa's Mineral Regimes (2012) and the International Council on Mining and Metals report on Trends in the Mining and Metals Industry (2012) unpack the historical and present global trends and challenges.

dimensions have “the same underlying conception of power, according to which A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B’s interests” (1974: 30). But he recognises that power can also be seen as the power to *change the wishes of actors* not necessarily through domination but by influencing them to act in your interest.

This conceptualisation of power has been taken up by feminist writers trying to re-interpret power as transformative power: Miller (1992) writes that power as domination is particularly masculinist, and that from a woman’s perspective, power may lie much more in “the capacity to produce a change – that is, to move anything from point A or state A to point B or state B” possibly while enhancing, rather than diminishing, the power of any involved actors (Miller, 1992: 241). Rather than focusing on the agent and their intent, this transformative power, or *power to*, focuses on the *process* of achieving an end. This is linked to *empowerment*, which describes “the capacity of an agent to act in spite of or in response to the power wielded over her by others.” (Allen, 1998:34). This feminist conceptualisation has also proven to be a useful framework for development theory, and has been used widely in development practice, thus validating its use for this study (VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002; Chambers, 2006; Newbury and Wallace, 2015). In community development paradigms, *power to* takes on a strong meaning, as it describes opportunity for agency even in the face of oppression.

The interrelationship between power as domination (*power over*) and power as empowerment (*power to*) has further been explored by Allen (2011) using the ethnomethodological approach to understanding gender which was put forward by West and Zimmerman in 1985, who described “doing gender” as an accomplishment of social interactions, which manifest at institutional and cultural level. So while, given existing societal arrangements, “men are doing dominance and women are doing deference” (West and Zimmerman, 2002:21), because gender is “done” rather than passively experienced, “there is both activity (including resistance) and agency at its foundation” (2002:99).

Allen further links “doing gender” to the idea of accountability within societal relationships as a powerful mechanism of social control and domination: “To do gender is to be held accountable in ongoing social interactions for one’s adherence to or transgression of social norms of gender” (Allen 2011:301). The “doing of gender” becomes “situated conduct that is locally managed with reference to and in light of normative conceptions of what constitutes appropriate behaviour for members of particular sex, race, and class categories” (Fenstermaker and West, 2002 p.212). Women are thus constantly subjected to an assessment of whether or not they are behaving acceptably, and this study provides some insight into this concept, particularly exploring how one’s legitimacy as a social actor is dependent upon an acceptable rendition of “doing gender.”

2.1.2 Women, power and influence

How, then, do women successfully increase their power and influence? Feminist literature has explored this widely (see Allen 2011) as has development literature (see Domingo et al.,

2015), which brings a relevant angle to this study. Morriss (2002) has attempted to clarify the difference between power and influence. While he acknowledges that there is significant overlap in the meaning (and usage) of these two terms, he describes influence as “an exercise of power, but not as the possession of power” (p. 12). Domingo et al. (2015) consider that influence is at the heart of decision-making power, and that it depends on women being able to create the space and develop the capacity to participate in decision-making processes. O’Neil and Domingo (2015) describe the political economy of women’s decision-making as having three main components: 1) social structures, rules and norms, and people’s capabilities, which together shape power relations between women and men; 2) the broader political opportunity structure, which creates or closes possibilities for political action and change; and 3) women’s actions in decision-making processes to advance their objectives. The first of these components is particularly relevant to the research undertaken here, which unpacks the social structures and gender stereotypes that frame women’s space for action in patriarchal Zimbabwe.

2.1.3 Intersectionality

A second framework underpinning this research is the understanding of the importance of intersectionality (McCall, 2005), as it mirrors the complexity of social reality, and proposes ways of researching it. As such, it is a key aspect of describing the capacity of women to take power as a function of the various levels of (dis)advantage that define them. The most common dimensions of intersectionality used to inform feminist experience are race, class and gender. However, other categories have also been used to unravel experiences on the margins of society. These include, as examples, age, disability, sedentarism or sexuality, but could be broadened out, depending on the scope of study (Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2011). This is a useful concept to keep in mind for this research, as the status inequality that persists in society undermines women’s access to power, but their capacity to influence may arise out of an entirely different set of capacities, which may depend on various dimensions of intersectionality.

3 Methodology

The research questing underpinning this study was framed as: “What strategies can women adopt in order to influence power holders with regard to their priority concerns?”

The methodological approach chosen for this study is based on a case study approach, a methodology well suited to research in the feminist tradition, where case studies have been used to provide meaning and nuance to theory (Reinharz, 1992:164, 166). Situating this study within feminist critical theory has enabled an interpretation of findings towards an agenda of change, as the “the emancipatory function of knowledge is embraced” (Scotland, 2012:13). I have selected qualitative methodologies in line with an interpretivist approach in order to allow issues such as power, domination, and gender to be considered from the perspective of the informant (Bryman, 1984:77-78).

Field work was undertaken in Shurugwi and Harare, Zimbabwe, in July 2015. The field methodology that was used to gather data was based on undertaking interviews with 6 women from the community, a focus group discussion with 9 women in the mining community of Shurugwi (5 of which also participated in the focus group discussion). Of these 6 women, 2 were under 35 and 4 were over 35; 3 held public roles such as community health worker, elected councillor, etc. and 3 did not hold a public role; 2 were acknowledged as well-off by peers, and 4 were acknowledged as less well off by peers. We adopted this sampling method, based on the “maximum variation sample” method, to facilitate the gathering of a wide variation of opinions and experiences relating to the study (see also Hennink, 2011, p. 91). In addition, we conducted 4 key informant interviews with staff of ZELA⁴, the “gate-keeper” organisation, which provided us with additional context to the information provided by community women, and enabled us to develop a better understanding of emerging issues. All interviews/discussions were held in both English and Shona, were fully translated during data collection, and were recorded.

Data analysis consisted of detailed coding and interrogation of information, triangulation with data from key informants, and interpretation against the theoretical framework.

4 Results

The first step in analysis was to assess whether there were situations in which women have successfully been able to use their influence to further their, and their communities’ interests. Once we had evidence of this, we further explored what women felt gave them this power to influence. On this basis, we could then assess what had enabled women to achieve this, with a view to identifying possible enablers – or hindrances – towards women’s empowerment.

4.1 Examples of influence by women in the public domain in Shurugwi

Analysing interview and focus group material, we identified at least seven strategies that women in Shurugwi have successfully used to influence power holders in the public domain, either within their community or beyond (see Table 1).⁵ Power holders included people in local authorities, in statal or parastatal structures, in political parties, or in mining companies.

Table 1: Strategies that women in Shurugwi have used to successfully influence power holders.

| How women influence power holders | Examples |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| By influencing local politicians, eg. | “Anyone is free to talk to the councillor about anything that |

⁴ Alternative Mining Indabas – public meetings organised by ZELA (see next footnote) to discuss mining issues, to which public sector, private sector and civil society representatives are invited.

⁵ Other and additional strategies would be adopted by women to influence power holders in the household; however, as the study focused on the public domain, these were not explored in this study.

| | |
|---|---|
| councillors, MPs, through formal channels | is not right”, eg. a group of women raised the issue of illegal gravel digging and woodcutting, upon which the Council appointed a team of guards to police this. <i>(Focus Group Discussion with women)</i> |
| By lobbying the Board of Trustees of the Community Trust (CSOT) | "We asked the CSOT to provide funds for an expecting mother's shelter." <i>(Widow, middle aged)</i> |
| By putting themselves forward to being elected to a political position, eg. councillor | "I was able to ... get the mining company to fix the sewage leakage into the local river." <i>(Female councillor)</i> |
| By participating in “invited” spaces, eg. Engagement Forums on CSR, Alternative Mining Indabas ⁶ | "ZELA ⁷ has empowered us, now we can even stand up and question what is happening in the community" <i>(Focus Group Discussion with women)</i> "We asked for an irrigation scheme, and the mining company has put an irrigation system in [our Ward]." <i>(Focus Group Discussion with women)</i> |
| By using media to bring visibility and attention to an issue of concern | "You can see me on the TV, speaking about the price of gold, and that the government should recognise ... that we do not have enough resources to produce more." <i>(Older widow, involved in artisanal mining)</i> |
| Through leadership of “informal” interest groups with advocacy agendas | I will take the women and say, our permit has expired. Let's go [to the ministries] and ... negotiate with them." <i>(Older widow, involved in artisanal mining)</i> |
| By being related to or friendly with a person in a political position | "I told the councillor, and she was able to make sure that orphans in my community were being looked after properly." <i>(Young married woman, otherwise with little influence, who was a friend of the councillor's daughter)</i> |

Overall, women spoke confidently and openly about how they have been able to influence power holders at various levels, and on various issues. The (female) translator used for this study exclaimed after one of the focus group discussions: “You know, it’s really interesting, the women I’ve met in these discussions ... are so vibrant, and so noisy, like when you are talking to them they want to be heard, they will not let anyone step on them.”

In each of the above cases where women have been able to increase their influence on power holders in their community or beyond (see Table 1), women had taken the step out of the household and into the public domain. The importance of this step was also highlighted in a recent study by Newbury and Wallace (2015), which looked at women’s participation in informal community decision-making spaces. They found that women negotiate their way through a series of private and public spaces, building on the empowerment they receive from previous successful experiences of participation and influence. We concluded, therefore, that the women interviewed in Shurugwi have

⁶ Alternative Mining Indabas – public meetings organised by ZELA (see next footnote) to discuss mining issues, to which public sector, private sector and civil society representatives are invited.

⁷ ZELA – Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association – a civil society activist organisation which works with communities affected by mining

experienced a certain level of empowerment – some more than others – whereby they have, in a strongly patriarchal society, been able to claim their space for public influence.

4.2 Intersecting categories that give women influence

Once we established that in the Shurugwi community, women experience a degree of empowerment, and are able to influence power holders on certain issues, we asked women interviewed what they thought gave them the power to influence.

It became clear that the process of claiming that power is dependent on a number of intersecting factors which determine a woman’s capacity to become a legitimate actor in their community and beyond. Not every woman has an equal capacity to influence others. The women interviewed helped to describe what factors, whether personal, cultural, economic or other, could give a woman the power to speak, be heard, and listened to.

A picture emerges from the interviews which allows for the ranking of factors that determine a woman’s power to influence (Figure 1).

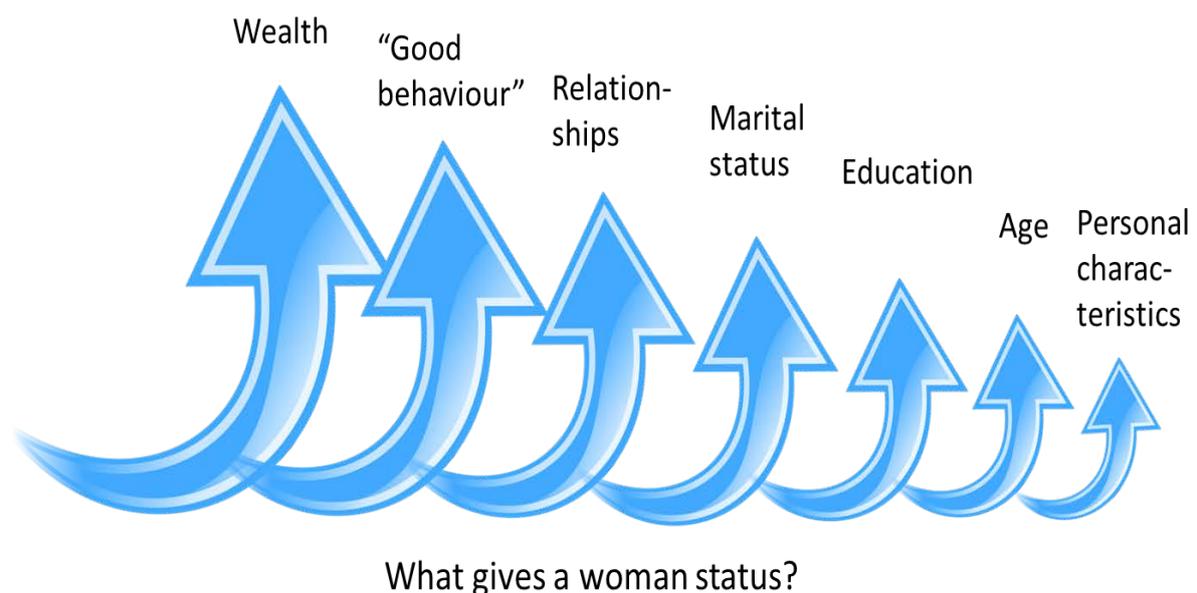


Figure 1: Relative importance of factors which give women the power, in the Shurugwi community, to influence others.

The study does not compare the power of women to influence with the power of men to do so. Instead, it compares the power of some women to influence with the power of other women to do so. It is clear from some of these intersecting factors that each woman negotiates her own legitimacy; that some women, especially those with wealth, are advantaged in this regard, but that other, cultural factors have a strong effect on the capacity of women to influence others in their community and beyond.

4.2.1 Money

In the community studied, wealth was identified as the most significant purveyor of power, though it intersects significantly with others drivers. Money gives you power because it enables you to philanthropically contribute back into the community, thereby increasing your legitimacy as person of influence. Also, money allows you to fulfil the requirements of a community leader, such as providing transport for people to participate in relevant meetings – this was, for example, a reason given as to why it is better to elect a wealthy person to a political position. Indeed, the data showed that within the small sample for this study, women with money were more actively engaged in strategies of influence (as in Table 1 above).

4.2.2 “Good behaviour”

An unexpected, yet very important factor in determining a woman’s influence in the community was the concept of “good behaviour”. “Good behaviour” related to two different aspects of social comportment, one being in relation to a woman’s conduct towards other members of the community in general, and another being in relation to a woman’s conduct towards her husband, and in particular, her sexual conduct.

Description of “Good Behaviour” in literature

“Zimbabwean culture expects of its members the practice of good moral values. Moral rectitude is viewed as an absolute good that must be practiced at all times and preserved at all costs. These cultural values manifest themselves in many ways such as giving due respect to other people, especially one’s parents; cordial reception of visitors and strangers, the elderly; and doing good to others and for children; ... When a Zimbabwean demonstrates a good balance of this cultural code, they are described as being in possession of *unhu/ubuntu* ‘good behaviour/humanity’ (author’s italics)” (Matambirofa, 2013)

“Shona communities are based on a morality ethic of the communitarian philosophy of *Ubuntu*: ‘I am because we are.’ The husband’s relationship with his wife and general relationships with the nuclear family are highly affected by the attitudes in the extended family system. [...] If it is discovered that a wife is not subordinate to her husband, she can be isolated by the extended family” (Rutero, 2015)

As an example of the former, one interviewee said, “in a community age [does not] matter most, it’s mostly what you do for the community, So actually even if someone is still a young girl, people will listen to her as long as she is doing good things for the community.” When questioned what gave a woman more power, money or “good behaviour”, women interviewed indicated money gave you more power, however, they also pointed out that a person with wealth was expected to contribute to the community in accordance with “good behaviour”, and not to do so diminished their legitimacy as a public figure. This highlights how intersectional factors interact to strengthen (or weaken) a woman’s place in society.

In terms of the sexual implications of “good behaviour”, if a woman wanted to have influence in the community, she would be expected to be above suspicion and reproach with regard to her sexual conduct, and one aspect of this would be that she would have to

account for her presence at all times. This concept carried significance whether a woman was married, single or widowed. One interviewee, a widow, said that as she had not been seen fooling around (sexually) since her husband's death, people gave her due respect. Another said that "if there is a meeting, and if it is running late, if it is someone who is not married, and they haven't been home yet and it is dark, people will say, oh, no, she's doing something mischievous, or looking for men, or something...". The implication behind this was that the single woman would lose credibility and with that, the right to participate in community affairs.

The concept of "good behaviour" seemed to have very strong implications of disempowerment of women, and in order to understand this more completely, we will return to it below.

4.2.3 Relationships

In two interviews, the importance of having a relationship with a person in a position of power was mentioned, in particular in its capacity to confer influence on the former. This was highlighted when a young married woman, who would otherwise be at the bottom of the "pecking order," mentioned this as an example of what gave her power. Because she was a friend of the councillor's daughter, she was able to approach her about an issue of social concern in the community, and was able to resolve the issue. Two interviewees also mentioned that their husband's position conferred influence on them – in one case she was the widow of a soldier, and in the other, the wife of the local school's headmaster. Both of these would have been seen to be positions of power within the community.

4.2.4 Marital Status

Marital status is the site of a complex interplay of power and culture. The research sample included single, married and widowed women, and both individually and in the focus group the importance of marital status to the power of women was repeatedly mentioned. In the cases analysed in the study, there was a clear impact of patriarchal rules and norms, with a strong sense of empowerment for those women who were married – this being the most acceptable marital status for women. For example, single women and divorcees were considered to have less status than married women – "*A married woman has more power because they are a Mrs.*" In general, all women agreed that if you are married you get more respect than if you are unmarried.

However, further discussion revealed that there are significant drawbacks to being married, especially if you want to have influence. It emerged that widows, unmarried women and single mothers have more capacity to be influential because they are not held back by their husbands – they are more mobile, and do not have to ask for permission to act/participate: if you are married, "you can't do anything your husband does not allow you to do".

However, how much influence widows have depends on how you behaved when your husband was alive. In fact, widows remain at the mercy of their deceased husband's family, who seem to have strong patriarchal power to undermine the legitimacy of her public

persona: “It goes back to the “good behaviour,” if the husband's brothers say she is a good woman, then everyone can listen to her.”

4.2.5 Education and age

As a purveyor of influence, education and age were not identified as strong factors in this study. While education was accepted as something that was needed for leadership positions, it was clear that other factors were more significant in conferring political or leadership power, such as money, relationships and “good behaviour”. This is in contradiction to much development literature highlighting the importance of education to empower women (for example Kabeer 2005), and could be explained by the focus of the study on social and economic issues related to mining, which moved education as a contributing factor into the background.

Age also did not come through as an important determinant of influence, and may not be as important to society as it was traditionally. This is supported by various comments which stated that age gives you less power than money, a position of leadership, marital status, and good behaviour.

4.2.6 Personal characteristics

An interesting additional aspect of influence was voiced by a number of women, and related to personal characteristics that a woman with influence would exhibit. These included: being known to be honest and trustworthy, being empathetic and naturally approachable, speaking louder and faster, being tall and light-skinned, being passionate about the work, and willing to volunteer their time. While this is a small sample of personal characteristics that women with influence might possess, it is important to capture the fact that there are individual as well as social determinants when it comes to identifying what gives a woman power.

4.3 Negotiating status in a patriarchal context

What the study found was that women, in order to have influence in a patriarchal society, take advantage of intersecting factors that give them greater status and legitimacy. Some of these factors are economic, such as wealth and education, while others are personal, such as age, marital status, and personal characteristics. Thirdly, there are also social factors, such as who you know (relationships), and the concept of “good behaviour”, which permit a woman to actively negotiate for herself increased power and legitimacy in the public sphere within the community and beyond.

Zimbabwe is a strongly patriarchal society, and traditional rules and codes are described, from the perspective of the study interviewees, to be stacked against women. This came out clearly in the discussion with women around “good behaviour”. Women were being held accountable for their social behaviour (Allen 2011), in this case adhering to prevailing norms of social and sexual acceptability. However, this did not close down all options of influence to women. As Kandiyoti (1998) has described, gender relations “present varied

and changing possibilities for power and autonomy even for the relatively disadvantaged. Thus, women's attachment to and stake in certain forms of patriarchal arrangements may derive neither from false consciousness nor from conscious collusion but from an actual stake in certain positions of power available to them."

"Good behaviour" also reflects what West and Zimmerman have called "doing gender", whereby women negotiate power by managing their behaviour so that "the outcome is seen and seeable in context as gender appropriate – that is, *accountable* (West and Zimmerman 2002, p. 12, author's emphasis). Thus the practice seen in Shurugwi of women actively negotiating for influence using "good behaviour" as a vehicle can be seen as an example of what West and Zimmerman were describing: As individuals self-categorise, and self-regulate to ensure compliance with prevailing normative expectations, they do so within a framework of patriarchal accountability, whereby compliance leads to enhanced status, and in this case study, enhanced status leads to influence.

5 Conclusion

It became clear from the research that while wealth is a key factor in giving women the power to influence, women, especially those without access to wealth, also use the concept of "good behaviour" to negotiate for themselves a legitimacy from their community and their society, which allows them to become a public actor. This negotiation, however, does not challenge the restrictive aspects of patriarchal society, or the gender stereotypes which are designed to maintain an imbalance of power between men and women; instead, they are striking what Kandiyoti (1988) has called a "patriarchal bargain": by complying with expected social norms, and by being accountable to their community, they are earning the right to participate in public decision-making fora. While this seems, from the feminist perspective, like an unsatisfactory gain, it became clear from the research that as a result of this "bargain", there were many examples of women's voice being heard and taken into account by power holders (see again Table 1).

The dynamic nature of this process once again leads us to understand the possibilities for change and shifts in power such as feminists and development professionals would be seeking. As Fenstermaker and West describe, "only by conceiving of social inequality as the product of *ongoing interactional accomplishments* can we understand how social change occurs. Thus, we see the notion of social process itself as the source of both change and the inevitability of it" (Fenstermaker and West, 2002: 212). Unfortunately, in this case study, we did not find evidence that women are using the opportunities afforded by actively "doing gender" for "conscious and consequential opposition to systems of domination" (Fenstermaker and West 2002 p. 211). There is little evidence that they have progressed from using "good behaviour" as a tool in order to increase the *effectiveness* of their agency, to challenging or *transforming* the restrictive aspects of patriarchal rules and norms (Kabeer 2005). In essence, women in Shurugwi have not been able to empower themselves beyond

the spaces acceded them by those in power, as described by Lukes in his third dimension of power.

This finding is important in the sense that it is the transformative change that development practitioners are seeking through their engagement with communities where power imbalances and gender inequality are keeping women poor and marginalised. As one woman in the study summarised well: “We do these workshops on gender based violence and empowerment, [but] when we go back into the community, we abide by the patriarchal authority.” A recommendation from this study would be to place more emphasis on understanding the social accountability mechanisms such as “good behaviour” and “doing gender”, rather than assuming that empowerment is simply a transfer of power from power holders (such as rich men in a patriarchal society) to the powerless (such as poor or rural women in such a patriarchal society).

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