

GENDER AND HOUSING: THE CASE OF DOMESTIC SERVICE IN LUSAKA, ZAMBIA

Karen Tranberg Hansen

EMPLOYMENT WANTED

Houseboy for expatriate family in Kalundu area. Must be able to cook and have traceable references. Must like dogs. Good salary and accommodation offered to the right person. [*Times of Zambia*, 2 March 1989]

Cook/house servant with traceable references. More than K400 monthly salary plus accommodation or housing allowance. [*Times of Zambia*, 25 April 1989]

Honest house servant. Must be able to cook and bake. Good salary plus accommodation. [*Times of Zambia*, 23 May 1989]

Expatriate family requires services of a nanny and a housemaid for immediate start. Only experienced applicants with good English, traceable references and own accommodation need apply. [*Times of Zambia*, 13 September 1988]

Nanny wanted: English speaking, clean and of sober habits with own accommodation. [*Times of Zambia*, 5 May 1989]

Housemaid/cook urgently required to start immediately. Must be honest and reliable. Good salary but no accommodation. [*Times of Zambia*, 1 March 1989]

Prospective employers of domestic servants in Zambia do not intimate or speak in vague terms when advertising for household workers. The newspapers' 'employment wanted' columns speak loudly about employer preference, for advertisements for men domestic servants greatly outnumber those for women. A scrutiny of such ads tells in plain words that domestic service is an occupation that puts women and men to work on different terms. Although Zambians would rather not work as servants if they had a choice, domestic service is a crucial occupation for persons with few marketable skills and particularly for migrants newly arrived from the countryside. Judging from my own estimate, this occupation at present forms the largest single segment of the urban wage-labouring population (Hansen, 1989a: 221–2). Given the pressures on the job and housing markets in Zambia's rapidly growing towns, an important inducement for seeking paid domestic work is the prospect of getting housing with the job. Yet, as the newspaper advertisements indicate, domestic service qualifies women and men unequally for housing. Men are more likely than women to get housing with the job, whereas women more frequently than men have to provide their own accommodation.

These distinctions in access to housing are a product of cultural assumptions about gender that have informed the historical reproduction of a dominant convention in Zambia, to wit, domestic service as a man's job. The notion that houses 'belong' to men is part of a widespread ideology of male authority and female subordination within households in much of urban Africa (cf. Barnes, 1990). This ideology is shared by men across Zambia's occupational spectrum, and its consequences for the gendered

meanings of work and of housing can be examined at very close range within domestic service. This article examines how this gender construction enters into and helps to constitute male/female inequality in domestic service with regard to housing that has consequences far beyond individual attempts to find shelter. My observations are based on long-term field research, including archival work, life history collection, and a large sample survey of contemporary servant employment practices in Lusaka.¹ To develop my argument, I first sketch how the colonial city of Lusaka was laid out: for a long time with disregard to Africans, and especially women. Then I identify some legacies of this skewed opportunity structure in the post-colonial city, noting some contemporary changes in these respects. Next I turn to my own study of domestic service in Lusaka during the mid-1980s to describe the unequal involvement of women and men in this occupation. In my conclusions I briefly explore some of the consequences of these processes, asking questions about the possibility of establishing gender awareness in housing policy in Zambia in the future.

LUSAKA: A CITY OF SERVANTS

Much of the urban spatial pattern of Zambia today evolved during the period of British South African Company (BSAC) administration (from the 1890s to 1924) and British colonial rule (1924–64). The major towns in what was then Northern Rhodesia grew from small commercial or administrative centres that arose alongside the construction of the railroad, among them Lusaka, which originated as a railway siding in 1905. From the late 1920s and onward, a series of towns grew up in the wake of intensified copper production in the north. Outside these regions a number of small towns appeared across the countryside.

Regardless of their size and function, these towns were at the heart of colonial administration. Established as white enclaves and built to serve European comforts and needs, they became spatial symbols of and social mechanisms for the extension of central political authority and economic subordination. Using a scaled-down model of the South African native administrative system, the BSAC and its successor, the Colonial Office, viewed towns as places for whites. As in South Africa, the underlying assumption was that towns would never become a permanent home for Africans. Employment was considered the only rationale for Africans to stay in towns, where employers provided them with housing for the duration of their work. African 'locations' and 'compounds' were often constructed as bachelor housing, for workers were assumed to have their homes in the villages, to which they were expected to return when completing work contracts. While housing conditions thus tended to prevent men from bringing wives and children to town, colonial vagrancy and repatriation rules for a long time discouraged women and children from migrating to the towns unaccompanied by men (Heisler, 1974: 63–4).

The tie between African urban employment and housing was part of an interdependent gender division of labour that linked town and country, passing some of the costs of reproducing the urban labour force on to the rural areas, and their women in particular (Cliffe, 1978). The colonial

government used legal measures (e.g. taxes, forced recruitment, the establishment of reserves, and agricultural quotas discriminating against African producers) to create a wage labour force. To earn money for taxes many men had already before the turn of the last century gone to work on white farms and mines throughout the wider region, including Southern Rhodesia, South Africa and Katanga. With the growth of towns in Northern Rhodesia, they also went to work in the towns along the railway, in the small provincial centres, and from the late 1920s on, many sought work in the rapidly growing towns in the north where copper mining had begun on a commercial scale. Despite vagrancy and repatriation rules, women migrated to towns from the earliest years. Barely represented among the wage-employed, many urban women made a living from informal sector activity, especially in personal services, including cooked food and beer and/or marriage or cohabitation (Chauncey, 1981; Parpart, 1986). Their access to accommodation depended significantly on men, who, as noted above, were entitled to housing with the job. For a long time the towns' African male workers did mainly menial and manual labour: in domestic service, on the railway, in the mines, in small industries, or as office orderlies. Those with some education found work, especially from the post-World War II years and on, as church ministers, teachers and lowly government clerks.

Paid domestic service was one of the chief avenues for African male employment within the territory itself, until mining was begun on a large scale in the north in the late 1920s. By 1930, in terms of country-wide figures, more Africans were employed as servants than as farm workers, and only for a brief period during the post-war years did farm workers again outnumber servants. For most of the colonial period, servants were second to miners in the number of people employed. Total domestic service employment expanded between 1929 and 1930, from 8,832 to 12,470. Over the same period, employment in mining grew from 17,608 to 28,004. As the two occupations gained momentum from the same process of overall economic growth, so they declined when the depression hit, and servants and miners were both laid off. In 1933 employment in mines stood at 9,920 and in domestic service at 9,335. When the mines resumed their operation in the mid-1930s, both occupational sectors grew rapidly. From 1938 to 1943 employment in mines increased from 23,754 to 41,987 and in domestic service from 11,511 to 18,000. At the end of the war some 20,000 Africans were employed as domestic servants in Northern Rhodesia (Hansen, 1989a: 156–7).

In the towns away from the mining areas, such as Lusaka and Livingstone, domestic servants comprised the single largest category of wage workers and were outnumbered only during periods of economic boom (e.g. the post-World War II years) by construction workers. When in 1931 Lusaka was selected as the site of the new capital, it was a city of servants in more ways than one. For not only did domestic service comprise the largest segment of the town's paid African labour force, it also presented a microcosm of the rules and regulations that shaped urban space and social structure for all African workers. Prominent among these were the Masters and Servants Ordinance (1908 and later amendments) that stipulated employment terms. And an assortment of statutes on rural reserves, urban

locations, registration and pass requirements constrained residence, labour and mobility in towns and between rural and urban areas.²

Colonial town planning rarely questioned the social order (King, 1977–78). The racial pattern of residential segregation was not challenged in the plan the British architect S. D. Adshead prepared for the new capital, the first example of town planning ever to be applied to Lusaka (Gann, 1964: 259). Influenced by town planning notions then in vogue in Europe, he designed Lusaka as a garden city, generous and gracious, with wide open spaces and trees between residential areas (Collins, 1969: 5–6). Over the course of the following years, different planners reduced the scope of Adshead's plan. Yet it maintained the general spatial structure of a garden city. European residential areas were divided into three sub-zones that varied in terms of Lusaka's changing beauties and housed different income groups. But Africans, the majority of the urban population, were tucked away in the south-western part of the city beyond the splendours of first, second and third-class European housing (Kay, 1967: 115). The planners' hope of restricting African settlement to one part of town was unrealistic because of its sprawl. As the local authority was slow to expand accommodation for the town's rapidly growing African population, the provision of housing still fell in the main on private employers, who were sometimes reluctant to improve it. They did not in fact always house their workers. From the town's earliest years, 'unauthorised' settlements had developed where private white landlords let out small plots to Africans for a fee. And Africans began building without permission on private white, or Crown, land. Here lived Africans in regular employment as well as those who were self-employed and helped establish Lusaka's informal sector. Among them were both women and men, for African women continued migrating to towns in spite of both the colonial and the native administration's effort to keep them in the villages. Today's proliferating squatter settlements in Lusaka take their origin from these practices (Hansen, 1982).

Segregation of sorts also applied to Africans, as Adshead distinguished between 'personal servants and others', making provision for compounds for each (Bradley, 1981: 13–15). While some servants lived in the personal servants' compound, the majority were housed on the employers' premises. If no such housing was available, employers were expected to give housing allowance to enable servants to rent accommodation in the general compound. Domestic servants formed at least 17.5 per cent of Lusaka's paid labour force in 1946, and 22.6 per cent in 1956 (Northern Rhodesia, 1949: 122–3; Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, 1960: 78). A sample survey of African housing in Lusaka 1957–58 lists 18.4 per cent of the African population in servants' quarters, and the 1963 census indicates that some 19.5 per cent of the African population were housed in this manner (Collins, 1986: 125).

A large proportion of Lusaka's servants thus lived in quarters on their employers' premises. This fact did not contradict the prevailing ideology and practice of racial separation. The general rules and regulations that guided African employment set domiciled African servants apart from their white employers, and interactional conventions in private household work distanced them from each other. The racial segregation of society at large

was encoded in the architecture on the white residential plot and in its spatial layout. At the bottom end of the garden, as far away from the main house as plot size allowed, stood the servants' quarters, next to the 'sanitary lanes', that is, the back alleys from which night soil, in the days before waterborne sanitation, and garbage were collected. The quarters, a flimsy one or two-roomed affair, mirrored neither the style nor the amenities of the main house. Even if the latter had piped cold and hot water and electricity, most servants' quarters had cold water only and no electricity. The simple furnishings consisted largely of discarded items from the main house. While working within these white households, servants were never part of them. Conventions that maintained social and spatial distance prescribed etiquette and comportment and masked the physical proximity of servants and employers. Regardless of age, servants were usually called 'boys'. Uniformed, and rarely wearing shoes when inside the house, they were to use the facilities only with the employer's permission, and some areas were off-limit at all times. When on duty, they were not supposed to speak unless they were spoken to. The quarters were not really a private space, for servants domiciled on the premises were on constant call; even if their chores were done, they were still considered available. All aspects of their lives were regulated: where to live (on the plot or in the compound), whether wives and dependants might live in, when and which visitors could call, and what sort of leisure-time activity might be undertaken.

The servants' unequal incorporation into white household space did not always function smoothly. Had it not been for the need for creature comforts, some white employers would rather have been rid of their servants. Such, at least, is the conclusion I draw from a discussion between 1943 and 1947 on the question of how many servants government employees were entitled to, whether they should be single or married, and how they should be housed. One prominent official argued against housing servants on the premises. Prohibiting their residence would result in less noise and friction, more cleanliness and less risk of infection. Such a course of action might work, but only if the servants could be housed within half a mile of their place of work, 'but even then householders would find it most inconvenient to have no servant permanently on call on the premises. There would be difficulty about the morning tea being late and, in the wet weather, even the breakfast.' The next best alternative was to have one servant, without wife and family, on the premises. There would be no women and children to make noise and a servant always on call. The labour commissioner who wrote these remarks noted that, while it sounded attractive to have a single manservant always on the spot, it probably would not work. 'A single native could not be expected to live alone on a stand regularly. He would either go off to seek companionship or take a wife to keep him company' (NAZ/SEC 1/1552, 1943–47a). He in turn suggested that domestic servants should be encouraged to have their wives with them and should be provided with married quarters (Hansen, 1989a: 172).

The discussion about the standards of the servants' quarters remained inconclusive. Everyone agreed that servant housing was deplorable and improvements were in order, but the question of how to bring these about remained. Some of the proposals entailed standards that were likely to have

'repercussions if [African] civil servants found cooks and houseboys in so much better accommodation than them' (NAZ/SEC 1/552, 1943–47b). Other suggestions implied doubt about whether or not the institution of domestic service would persist. Semi-permanent servants' quarters would do adequately, argued the provincial commissioner, because 'long before the permanent quarters envisaged ceased to be serviceable it would probably be found that female servants had replaced male servants and they would be housed in an employer's house' (*ibid.*, c).

In its explicit statements the discussion about servant housing reveals shared white assumptions about gender and sexuality that informed colonial authorities' actions on the servant question and circumscribed the lives of their African servants. At the time these remarks were made, the colony's economy was expanding and labour was scarce. The pros and cons of African women possibly replacing African men in domestic service in order to release the latter for 'more productive work' elsewhere was discussed during the post-World War II boom in the mining economy. While the majority reaction was negative, ostensibly because of problems concerning the training and housing of prospective African women servants, the real stumbling block was underlying assumptions about African women's sexuality that in the view of whites made them unsuitable for domestic service. In plain words, they were too close for comfort. To simplify a complex argument, the race, gender and class dynamics in colonial white households interacted to largely preclude the employment of African women as servants (Hansen, 1990).

The question on which the employability of African women in private household service rested was glossed over by reference to other 'problems'. The matter of housing women servants in the employer's home received some, but not much, attention. Such accommodation, suggested a location superintendent in 1947, would be in the employer's 'own interest, for these girls would at the same time be protected from unwise attention of the local bloods and would be available on the premises to look after European children left in the evening by their parents' (*Livingstone Mail*, 1947: 3). His suggestion did not win much sympathy. Most proposals involved the building of hostels for African women *away from* white residential areas. This practice had already been tried in South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, where African women received basic household training supervised by members of white women's church groups and other voluntary organisations (Gaitskell, 1979; Hansen, 1989a: 125). The idea of building hostels might have been attractive for a variety of reasons. For one, it would restrict the movements of African women in towns and lessen their chances of sexual involvement. In addition, supervision and domestic science training by white women might instil in African women white middle-class values of home and housekeeping. And houseproud African homemakers would likely be less sexually venturesome than women not trained in the domestic arts. In the end, neither government, private industry nor churches were forthcoming in building hostels for African urban women. Meanwhile, white employers kept employing the servants they had been accustomed to for so long: men. Although their accuracy is questionable, the employment figures for domestic service tell the story graphically. Between 1951 and

1957 the number of African women servants grew from 250 to 800, while that of men increased from 30,000 to 33,000 (Hansen, 1989a: 130–1).

To address the fundamental question on which the employability of African women depended, our analysis must transcend the encoding categories of race and social stratification that shaped urban space and structured the economy for the purpose of creating comfort and profit for the colonists. Even if Lusaka was planned, and labour was recruited, with disregard for African women, they were in fact central to the shaping of domestic service and other forms of wage labour. The institutionalisation of a colonial employment convention that construed domestic service as a man's job rested on deep-seated assumptions about African women's sexuality. In the colonial discussions, African women were never present in their own right as autonomous agents with legitimate claims on work and space, but only through their relationship to men as wives and sexual partners. As I discuss next, this gender construction did not fade away with the close of colonial rule but persists in changed form.

MEN, WOMEN, AND DOMESTIC SERVICE IN POSTCOLONIAL LUSAKA

In postcolonial Lusaka the previous era's spatial structure still remains, although the labels have changed, from first-class to low-density residential areas. High-density refers to the former African parts of town, which have expanded. Squatter settlements have filled in the empty spaces encompassed within Lusaka's sprawl and expanded into the peri-urban areas. Housing for all classes is in short supply, and by the early 1980s half Lusaka's population was estimated to live in squatter townships. Anyone of influence, regardless of colour, as well as Zambians of lesser means still employ servants. And servants' quarters continue to be constructed at the end of plots in connection with the building of houses in low-density residential areas.

In spite of the persistence of an entire occupational domain, there have been changes. At independence the rules and regulations that had structured the migrant labour system and given access to housing and work by race were scrapped. The educational system was expanded. But the economy continued to be dominated by mining. Despite the rhetoric of successive development plans, agriculture was neglected. Rural livelihoods deteriorated. The rate of urbanisation, already advanced by sub-Saharan African standards, accelerated from 20 per cent of the total population in 1964, to 43 per cent in 1980, to more than 50 per cent today as more and more people, especially women, moved to towns, anticipating new developments and improved working conditions (Jackman, 1973: 17; Republic of Zambia, 1980a: 8). Although no law formally discriminates against the employment of women save in underground mining and industrial night work, the number of wage-employed women is small. The 1980 census lists 37.3 per cent of all women as compared with 72.1 per cent of men employed across the country (Republic of Zambia, 1985a: 29). Many urban women contribute to shrinking household budgets with informal income-generating activities. With the slowdown of the economy since the mid-1970s' adverse world market effect on copper exports, women have crowded the informal

sector (Hansen, 1989b). The Zambian economy has come to rely on infusions of foreign aid and loans, including substantial amounts from the International Monetary Fund. Several devaluations, decontrol of prices, the 'phasing out' of food subsidies, wage freezes, runaway inflation, and deterioration in services, amenities and urban infrastructure, have turned the making of a living into an uphill battle for most of the population.

Against this backdrop, and notably because of the prospects of getting housing with the job, domestic service continues to be an important occupation. It is a buyers' market, glutted with potential servants who include not only adult men, as in the past, but also increasing numbers of youth of both sexes, and a growing number of adult women. They all seek a job they do not really want, for the gap between servant wages and the wages of other low-paid occupational groups has widened; wages are so low that they barely enable a servant's household to get by from one month to the next. The prospects of saving for a rainy day, for children's education, or for the purpose of moving on to something better are exceedingly small in urban Zambia's constrained economy. The work schedule is tough, for work never stops, and the relationship to the employer often leaves much to be desired. The employers, the majority of whom today are black Zambians, either ignore or are unaware of changes in labour regulations which at least in theory should improve the conditions of servants. It continues to be the employers' responsibility to house low-paid employees, either themselves, in local authority housing, or by paying a housing allowance. There are also provisions relating to the protection of wages, annual leave, paid public holidays, and a pension plan has been established. But many employers find it more trouble than it is worth to observe labour regulations. Turnover rates are high, especially for women servants, but also for employers, as most expatriates work on short contracts and Zambian civil servants are transferred across the country frequently.

These observations derive from a sample survey I undertook in 1983–84 in 187 servant-keeping households in mid- to upper-income areas and company flats in Lusaka.³ According to my own conservative estimate, some 100,000 persons are employed as servants across the country, of whom slightly fewer than 25,000 are women.⁴ This figure excludes young persons who do household work for relatives in exchange for upkeep. The size of the domestic servant work force is almost double that of miners, who numbered 53,740 in June 1983 (Republic of Zambia, 1985b: suppl. 1, 7).

The 'employment wanted' advertisements that preface this article indicate that women and men servants are largely hired on different terms. Unlike the provincial secretary who when commenting on the quality of servants' housing in 1944 implied that African women would soon replace men in service, I do not find that domestic service in Zambia at the present time is undergoing a gender transition in which women are replacing men. Although more women work in domestic service than during the colonial period, they are not for the most part taking over men's jobs but doing something different. As the employment columns demonstrate, most women are hired as nannies and to perform tasks associated with child care. They may do other things within the house, but these are secondary to their main duty: child care. In postcolonial Zambia men thus remain employed

as the chief domestic workers, and the expanded number of women who today work as nannies is contributing to the extension of an occupational domain without transforming its long established gender division of labour.

The opportunity for women to work as paid nannies for other Zambian women who are wealthier than themselves is in the main due to differences in child-bearing and child-rearing patterns between colonial white women and Zambian women today. Some African women certainly did work as nannies during the colonial period, but they were the exception, not the rule. White women more frequently hired 'nurse boys' than nannies to push the pram and to wash the nappies. Some placed their children in creches during the daytime. And they had fewer children than today's Zambian women householders. The colonial practice of sending children to boarding schools in Southern Rhodesia, South Africa or Great Britain relieved white mothers of much of the daily supervision of children. The worry about child care is more acute for Zambian women, who bear children more frequently and at shorter intervals. Even if child care facilities were readily available today, they would be too expensive for most Zambian mothers. Zambian women who work away from home need nannies, and those who stay at home want relief from child care if they can afford it. Because they are cheap, nannies are the solution to the child care problem, although, as I discuss shortly, Zambian women consider it a vexing solution.

The women domestics in my survey fall into three broad categories in terms of marital status: 35 per cent of the women servants (compared to 67 per cent of the men) were married and lived with their spouses; 13 per cent of the women servants had not married (compared with 20 per cent men), and 52 per cent of the women supported their own household after separation, divorce or widowhood (compared to 13 per cent men). The married women were in the main nannies in Zambian or expatriate households; they earned median-range wages; and they all lived out, often walking a long distance to and from work. The young unmarried women were mostly young school drop-outs from rural areas who had come to town, sometimes leaving a child behind with relatives. They worked in the very low-paid jobs, primarily as nannies in Zambian households, and they sometimes lived-in there. The single heads of households tended to be middle-aged, close to or beyond the end of their child-bearing years, often long-term urban residents, who worked in the better-paid jobs, especially in expatriate households with larger servant staffs, and they lived out.

According to the Zambian women I interviewed, 'nanny problems' begin at the birth of the first child. At this point most of them collect, or are brought, a female relative from the countryside, often a teenage child who has dropped out of school, or whose parents are unable to pay her education. Very few such young girls in my survey households went to school at their hosts' expense. They were at the beck and call of the members of the household, with whose younger residents they often shared sleeping space. In return for their work they received food and clothing. They rarely stayed from the birth of one baby to the next before being dismissed. Disliking the strict regime their hosts imposed on them, the young girls wanted freedom to explore urban life. If they stayed longer, they were likely either to be

returned by their urban relations or collected by their rural parents or guardians. The rationale of either party is that young girls should not be 'detained' for too long. For, the longer they remain in town, the more likely they are to become pregnant. And this reduces their marriage potential, especially the size of bridewealth their fathers or guardians may claim.

Once they had had it with their young country relatives, many of the Zambian women I interviewed switched to hiring paid women servants. This change aggravated rather than lessened their problems with nannies. To reduce the problems, many female householders prefer to employ rural women recently arrived in town, for they assume that such new migrants are less enterprising with regard to sex than their more seasoned urban sisters. As in the case of the young country relatives, women householders do not keep these new nannies in long-term employment. Length of stay may give rise to intimate familiarity and a suspicion of sexual relations with the male household head. As long as women householders have pre-school children these problems persist. They contribute to such a frequent turnover of nannies that several of the women I interviewed did not care to, or could not, remember exactly how many they had employed. But relief is in sight once the last-born child has entered school or the older children can be charged with the supervision of younger siblings. At this point, many Zambian women employ men servants. Although those who frame the sexuality issue today are Zambian women, this issue continues to shape the gender construction in postcolonial domestic service, with ramifications far beyond the work place.

DOMESTIC SERVICE, GENDER AND HOUSING

As a cultural rationale the sexuality issue is an excuse for unequal treatment of men and women in domestic service. Zambian women householders allege that their nanny problems are due to the loose morals of their women domestics. In the view of female householders, women domestics are always looking for a man either to marry or to 'keep them nicely', i.e. provide them with shelter, food and clothing. The construction of gender in these attributions draws directly on women's sexuality and it both helps to define and is in turn influenced by women servants' activities. The woman who takes a job as a nanny seeks to quit as soon as she has some economic means from a spouse or partner to support her and her dependants. In the Zambian view, it is not proper for a woman with small children to leave her own household to work in someone else's. Thus poor women's attempts to ensure their own and their dependants' livelihood through male support conflict with middle- to upper-income Zambian women's child care needs.

The acrimony between women in the enclosed situation of domestic and sexual rivalry for male support is shaped by male-female power dynamics within the household and beyond it. The gender dynamics in rural and urban Zambian households rest on an age- and gender-based hierarchy of authority. Regardless of ethnic and class background, men generally assume domestic authority. Research conducted during the colonial period as well as after independence arrives at similar conclusions: marital relations

are riddled with tension, in part due to the persistence of marriage practices permitting polygyny and to the existence of a moral double standard that condones extra-marital relations for men while blaming women for sexual permissiveness (Epstein, 1981; Parpart, 1988; Powdermaker, 1962; Schuster, 1979).

Within the household, and in the wider social context of Zambian society, a woman's rights are mediated through men: fathers, brothers, uncles and husbands. A woman's ability to assert claims on resources is contingent on a combination of kinship, residence and inheritance practices that are much beyond the scope of this article to unravel. Several such practices continue to shape urban gender inequality, as the new statutory laws introduced after independence have not specifically ruled them out. Thus housing or housing allowances are allotted to men; wives get access to housing through husbands; and single heads of households have no access to housing in their own right. Similar observations hold for land, credit and housing materials. These practices create at least two distinct, but interrelated, disadvantages for women with regard to housing. First, when employed as servants, women are less likely than men to be housed on the premises, for employers assume that women servants are dependants in male-headed households elsewhere. And second, when women are forced to seek alternative accommodation their ability to obtain secure housing as opposed to rentals depends on the access of their husbands or partners. The construction of gender in either case is informed by assumptions that make women dependent on men. This gender construction is powerfully reinforced in the legal and many other domains of Zambian society at large, not only for the case of domestic service as I demonstrate below, but for Zambian women regardless of class.

The assumptions that are buried in stories about the easy virtue of women domestics become socially relevant in hiring practices and have consequences for women servants' housing and their wages, as well as for their treatment. Since employers assume that their women servants are dependent members (e.g. wives, partners, sisters or daughters) of male-headed households elsewhere, they are less likely to provide them with housing. My study shows that the vast majority of women servants lived out and that few received the statutory housing allowance to which they are entitled. A few elderly women servants owned their own houses. These had been bought, or built, in Lusaka's squatter areas, typically by departing expatriate employers, as a reward for faithful service. But the vast majority of the women servants lived in crammed rented quarters (mostly one room) in dwellings shared by non-related households in Lusaka's squatter settlements. Hardly any received transport money. Instead they walked to and from work, usually returning after sunset to their own household chores.

Women servants are paid less than men. If female domestics are not already married, their employers expect that they are looking for a male partner and that they will quit once they find him. Employers thus anticipate that women servants have, or will receive, economic support from a man, and that their earnings are only part of a household's income. And because they believe that the personal lives of their women servants ad-

versely affect their endurance as workers and cause their high turnover rates, they are unlikely to increase their wages.

The tasks Zambian women assign to their female servants aim to reduce possible sexual contact with the male household head. Cooking is an excellent example of this because of its sexual connotations. Few of the women servants in my survey were required to cook. When female householders claim that their women servants are poor cooks, they are not speaking about meals *per se* but of the sexual implications of meal-related behaviour and the possibilities entailed in the woman servant making and serving meals to the male household head. As in several other parts of Africa (e.g. Clark 1989), the wife's preparation of food for her husband is a central obligation of marriage. The symbolic and sexual meanings of preparing and receiving cooked food easily create tensions between female householders and women servants. Such tensions give rise to many fears, among them allegations of women servants adding love potions to the food. Since the wife wishes to reduce the likelihood of compromising sexual encounters, she insists on being in charge of her husband's meals and allots the feeding of her children to the nanny. Additional examples of attempts to curtail sexual contact concern other tasks in domestic service. Bedrooms, which colonial male servants freely entered with the breakfast tea, are today considered to be private spaces from which even children, aside from infants, and servants, both female and male, are excluded. And the washing of women's underwear, which colonial male servants routinely did, has today become a private matter handled by women employers and their daughters.

Only because of their need for child care do Zambian women tolerate their female domestics. Because of the sexual double standard for men, women employers anticipate and suspect their husbands' extra-marital affairs, not only with female domestics but also with young relatives, with women they meet at work, in bars and on the street. While women seek to get and to maintain support from men, they know that only a portion of men's income reaches their own households. Unlike in many West African countries, cultural norms in Zambia do not oblige men to distribute part of their resources to wives for household purposes.

Knowing that they cannot rely on men, Zambian women seek to ensure the day-to-day survival of their children and to make some economic gains in their own right. Much like Yoruba women householders in Lagos who found temporary security in marriage, especially during their child-bearing years but not necessarily thereafter (Barnes, 1990: 260), urban women in Zambia look for security through independence as they age. Once their children have grown up, many Zambian women become less concerned with the pursuit of men's attentions and concentrate more of their efforts on making an income they control themselves. This shift helps account for the dual participation pattern I identified in domestic service earlier. The young women who come and go in the low-paid jobs are struggling to establish their own household, for which purpose they need a man through whom access to shelter and other services is mediated. The middle-aged and older women in longer-term employment and with better wages are mostly single heads of households after the death or divorce of a husband. Men may come and go in their lives, for they do not mind being kept nicely,

yet they do not want men around on a permanent basis. Their concern is with security: obtaining a plot, getting the economic wherewithal to begin erecting shelter, extending one room to many, letting out rooms to make a living in retirement.

Yet few women servants can ever expect to own their own home, for several reasons. With the declining number of expatriate employers, women servants' hope of a 'bye-bye' present of a house, a plot and/or building supplies is unlikely to materialise. Most Zambian employers of servants have many claims on their resources from members of the extended family and are themselves strapped for money; they cannot afford such rewards to servants. The single head's prospects of getting a plot in a site-and-service scheme depend on whether men can vouch for her. Should she obtain a plot, her tenure depends on her ability to begin erecting a shelter within a specified time. In order to do so, she needs building materials, which are expensive and often scarce, and she may have difficulties obtaining a loan. Next arise the questions of how to organise the transport of building materials to her site and the hiring of willing, capable and affordable builders. She thus faces several odds that may curtail her progress and quickly turn her aspirations to a house of her own in which to retire as a landlady into a faded dream.

As a heterogeneous category, female-headed households are not situated in the same manner with regard to help from male kin. Women's cultural claims on support from specific male relatives depend on whether they never married, are widows, or are divorcees. If none of their relatives lives in the city, they may be thrown back on their own resources. These, as my study shows, are so limited that the survival of a servant's household from one month to the next is precarious at best. Because of their dependence on men for access to housing, the majority of women servants who are not accommodated on their employer's premises are therefore left with no other option for shelter than renting in Lusaka's already crowded low-income settlements.

CONCLUSION: GENDER AND HOUSING

Gender roles, as Michelle Rosaldo has reminded us, are not the product of the tasks women undertake or of their biology. Rather, their construction is a result of the meanings men's and women's activities acquire through actual social interaction (1980: 399–400). The gender role Zambian women householders attribute to their women servants is a product of the way they interpret sexual activities and interaction in general, and it has consequences far beyond their individual and troublesome interaction with women domestic servants. The connection which this article has sought to illuminate concerns housing, and the way assumptions about gender differentially affect the livelihoods of women and men servants. To spell out some of the short and not so short-term ramifications of my observations, my concluding remarks turn to the issue of female-headed households and housing.

As in the past, domestic service may be viewed as a microcosm through which the gendering of urban space and social structure may be examined at close, and perhaps, dramatised, range. A total of 52 per cent of the

women servants in my study were single heads of households. They are part of an ongoing refiguration of male–female relations in Zambia, where the number of female heads of all households increased by 53.3 per cent between 1969 and 1980 censuses. Over that same period the proportion of female-headed households rose from 23.8 per cent to 27.7 per cent, whereas that of men declined from 76.2 per cent to 72.3 per cent (Republic of Zambia, 1985a: 35). These changes are the result not only of male/female migration and mortality differentials, but also of the troubled male–female relationship in Zambia, and of the effects which economic insecurity are having on rural and urban livelihoods in general.

The growing number of female-headed households bears testimony to women's battles with cultural norms that make them dependent on men. These norms are so deeply entrenched in different layers of Zambian society (e.g. within the household, in employment, in housing) that they persist in everyday social practices in spite of the passing of laws after independence aimed at gender equality. There has been some momentum on 'women's issues' at the level of statutory policy. After a protracted debate, the customary inheritance laws were recently changed (May 1989) to entitle widows and children to part of a deceased husband's resources. Yet cases of the husband's relatives 'grabbing' at the deceased's property, including the house, with disregard for the welfare of the widow and children continue to be reported in the press (Longwe 1990). Women's struggle for autonomy is thus not only a battle with men; it pitches them against the state that for so long has viewed them as subordinate to and dependent on men.

The housing of domestic servants in general and of women servants in particular has not caused any public, or policy-oriented, debate in independent Zambia, except with regard to rentals. Accommodation for low-income workers is at a premium in Zambia's rapidly growing towns, especially against the background of shortfalls in this type of housing caused by the strategy of most local authorities of investing shrinking housing monies in civil service and institutional housing and of promoting private home ownership through the sale of council houses (Republic of Zambia, 1989: 286–7). Although it is illegal, servants' quarters are at times sub-let for money-making purposes or used as a site from which to operate a home-based business. Servants with already strapped budgets thus have to find their own housing in an extremely tight market. Most of the women who were single heads of households in my study lived out. The average size of female-headed households has increased from 3.66 in 1969 to 4.1 in 1980, and the largest such households live in towns (Republic of Zambia, 1985a: 36). Except for the few single heads of households whom benevolent employers had helped buy or build houses, the majority of the female heads in my study lived in rented quarters. In Lusaka Province a total of 31.8 per cent of such units constituted parts of other housing structures, that is to say, overcrowding. In the face of Lusaka's deteriorating infrastructure, its problems with the supply of water and electricity, with sewage disposal, garbage collection, and poorly stocked and staffed clinics and hospitals, such overcrowding poses enormous personal and public health hazards.

Women heads of households who try to make a living by working as

domestic servants are in a bind. Clearly, these oppressive gender relations in housing need more than public policy to straighten them out. They require an easing of the antagonistic relationship between women servants and their female employers. And they demand broad changes throughout all levels of society to filter out deep-seated assumptions about women's place and abilities relative to men that at present discriminate against them in ownership and control of housing and give them differential access to land, credit and housing materials. For such changes to come about, overall economic growth is a must in order to enable the financing of low-income housing and the establishment of lending facilities for low-income groups in general and for women in particular, regardless of their marital status. But, given the tight economic conditions at the present, such a situation is unlikely to arise in the immediate future. One may hope, perhaps, that the present momentum 'women's issues' have acquired in public discourse (as evidenced, for example, in the inclusion for the first time ever of a separate chapter on women and development in the new development plan (Republic of Zambia, 1989: 441–75)) keeps growing, and that external development aid may find new challenges in the long-ignored urban sector so as perhaps to fill in or at least remedy some of the most conspicuous shortfalls. If not, and if Zambians, both women and men, do not themselves redefine gender in terms of rights and claims rather than of dependence and sexuality, cities will remain settings in which houses 'belong' to men and are women's spaces only for reproductive activity.

NOTES

¹ My study draws on extensive archival research in Great Britain, Zambia and Zimbabwe begun in 1982, and field research in Zambia 1983–84, 1985, 1988 and 1989, including the collection of life history data from retired employers of colonial servants in Great Britain and Zambia, elderly servants, and a sample survey in 187 servant-employing households in Lusaka involving separate interviews with the chief domestic servant and the employer.

² Among some of these regulations were the following: the Native Registration Ordinance (1929), the Vagrancy Ordinance (1929), the Natives and Private Estate Ordinance (1929), the Township Ordinance (1929), the Municipal Corporations Ordinance (1929), the Town Planning Ordinance (1929), the Public Health Ordinance (1930) and the Native Beer Ordinance (1930).

³ My sample survey covered Woodlands, parts of Kabulonga, the Asian residential area known as Madras and the 'coloured' residential area known as Thorn Park during the colonial period. The survey also sampled some of the flats operated by institutions such as the Bank of Zambia, the University of Zambia, Zambia Electricity Corporation and Zambia State Insurance Company. Interviews with servants and employers were conducted simultaneously but separately. Four students (two female and two male) from the University of Zambia interviewed the servants in local languages, and a white colleague and I carried out the interviews with the employers, most of them in English.

⁴ Paid domestic service has not been enumerated as a separate occupational category in the Zambian employment statistics since 1968, when a total of 36,491 men and 1,758 women were listed. The Zambia National Provident Fund has of late begun to submit its figures of registered servants for inclusion in the *Monthly Digest of Statistics*. These figures, which are not categorised by gender, represent a severe undercount, since by no means all employers register their servants. Only one-third of the employers in my study had registered their servants. According to these figures, some 45,760 persons were employed in domestic service throughout Zambia's towns as of June 1983 (Republic of Zambia, 1985b: suppl. 8).

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Abstract

Lusaka is a city originally designed and built for European residents, to meet European needs and comforts. In the colonial period the African residents were either domestic servants living within European households' compounds or were other contracted wage-labourers who were confined to the areas of south-western Lusaka specifically allocated to them. Europeans preferred male domestic help;

women and children living at close quarters were thought to be potentially disruptive and were therefore discouraged from moving into the towns. A gender division between town and country was created; so too were cultural assumptions about gender, housing and employment, assumptions still widely held today.

Pressure to find waged employment in Zambia has increased, and as a result the population of Lusaka is growing rapidly and shelter is in increasingly short supply. The article argues that domestic employment is still the largest single segment of the urban wage-labouring population. The historically constructed cultural assumptions about gender and housing have led to differential access to housing for men and women. Now that more and more women are seeking waged employment, the article uses their relation to domestic employment as an instance through which to explore the wider position of women in Zambia, and to initiate, it is hoped, some gender awareness in Zambian housing policy.

Résumé

Lusaka est une ville à l'origine construite pour des résidents européens, pour satisfaire les besoins et le confort de l'européen. A l'époque coloniale, les résidents africains étaient, soit des employés domestiques vivant dans l'enceinte de la maison-née européenne, soit engagés comme ouvriers salariés alors confinés dans des zones, au sud-ouest de Lusaka, qui leur étaient particulièrement destinées. Comme domestiques, les européens préféraient employer des hommes; les femmes et les enfants vivant dans les quartiers proches étaient considérés potentiellement perturbateurs et on les dissuadait de venir s'installer dans les villes. Un déséquilibre des sexes entre ville et campagne se forma; ainsi se créèrent les présomptions culturelles sur l'inégalité des femmes, le logement et l'emploi, encore largement estimées de nos jours.

La pression pour trouver un emploi salarié en Zambie se fait davantage sentir, et, en conséquence, la population de Lusaka augmente rapidement, alors que les abris sont de plus en plus limités. L'article indique que les employés de maison constituent encore la part la plus importante de la population salariée urbaine. En raison des présomptions culturelles sur la différence des sexes et sur le logement, les hommes et les femmes n'ont pas les mêmes accès à l'habitation. A travers l'exemple des femmes en relation avec les travaux domestiques, et étant entendu que de plus en plus de femmes cherchent désormais un emploi rémunéré, l'article examine l'élargissement de la position des femmes en Zambie et souhaite sensibiliser la politique du logement en Zambie au problème de la différence des sexes.