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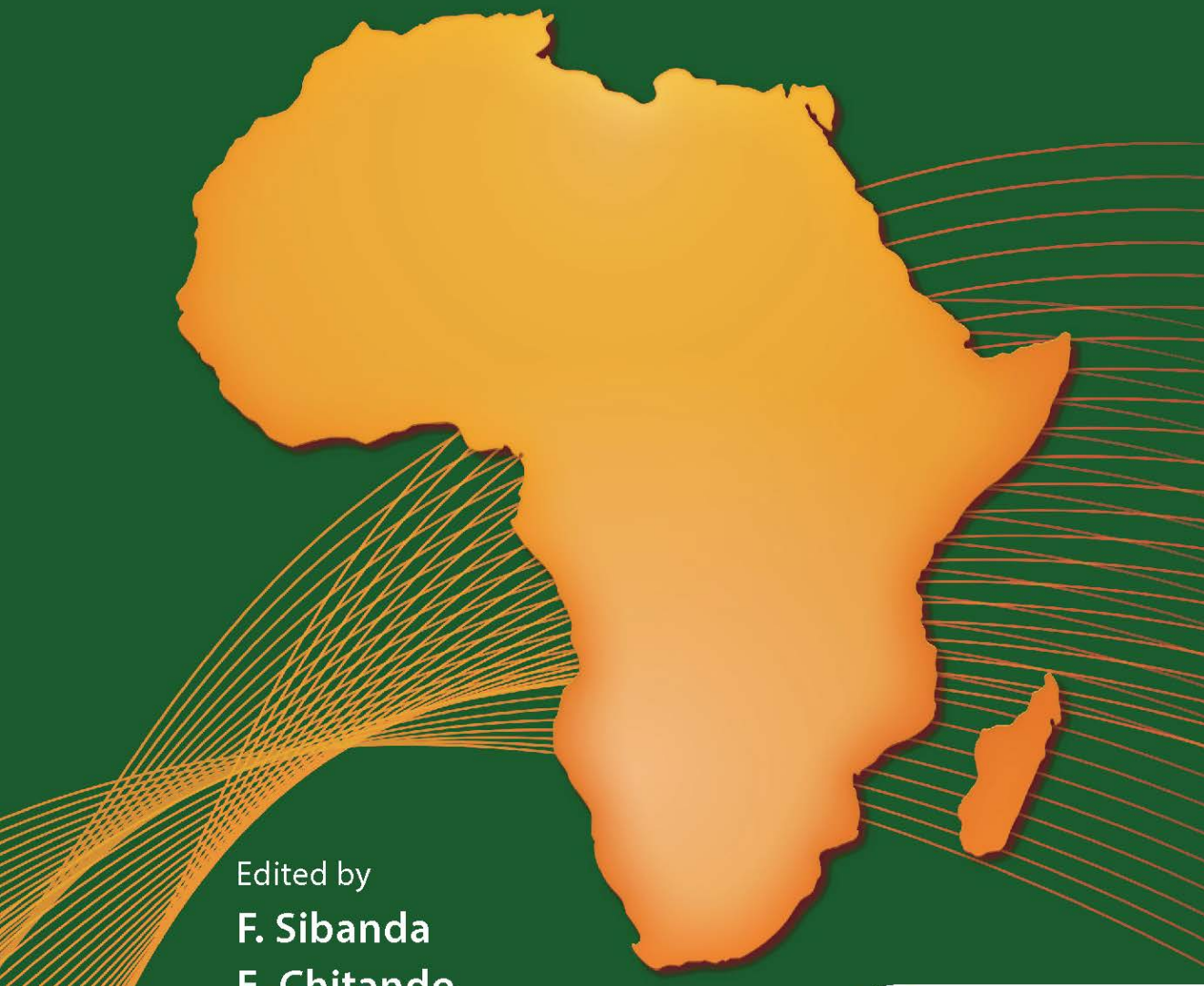

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22 Raised but silenced: The need to elevate women traditional leaders to represent rural women in Zimbabwe

Esther Humbe[1]

INTRODUCTION

The call for women's empowerment has garnered momentum in today's world, and Zimbabwe is no exception. This is a virtue that might find women rising to high levels in all sectors of leadership. In 2013, Zimbabwe adopted a new constitution which recognises the role of the institution of traditional leadership that operates alongside modern state structures.[2] This has seen women rising into chieftainship offices. According to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Gender Protocol Barometer of 2018, there were only 6 female chiefs and 15 female headwomen in the country out of a total of 272 and 452, respectively.[3] In Zimbabwe's Council of Chiefs, which consists of 35 members, there is only one female member. Zimbabweans can applaud that they now have women traditional chiefs; however, the ratio of representation female in the council of chiefs makes one wonder whether these women really represent their female counterparts. The issue that emerges is that women have found their way up the leadership ladder, but not yet at desirable rate, and the practical question is what to do about it. The present study focuses on the problem of limited representation of women in Zimbabwean traditional leadership, which makes the voices of rural women silent on their plight, particularly in areas of economics and health, where rural women suffer disproportionately.

This study underlying this chapter makes use of a transformative leadership theory (TLT) which aims to create meaningful change by addressing societal inequities and empowering marginalised groups.[4] TLT is an inherently normative and critical approach, grounded in the values of equity, inclusion, excellence and social justice. It critiques inequitable practices, oppression and marginalisation wherever they are found, and it offers the promise not only of greater individual achievement but of a better life lived in common with others.[5] Transformative leadership extends its impact to broader societal transformation. It benefits those who have historically

1 Lecturer. Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Department, Bondolfi Teachers College.

2 Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013.

3 Lupande F. 2021. "Women in Traditional Leadership", *The Sunday Mail*, 14 March.

4 Shields CM. 2020. "Transformative Leadership", *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*, 29 May.

5 Shields, "Transformative Leadership".

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faced oppression and exclusion.[6] The theory is relevant to this study, as it deals with a group of people, females, to be specific—who were not recognised as fitting to become traditional chiefs. Transformative leadership is therefore valuable in a given social context, as it can bring about changes that are needed in society. Indigenous societies in Zimbabwe need to change their view of traditional leadership so that the number of female traditional chiefs increases across the country. The basic premise of transformative leadership is that everyone can lead. Transformative leadership is focused on social justice.[7] This theoretical framework suggests that women can and must become traditional chiefs.

The study underlying this chapter was qualitative in nature and involved collecting and analysing data to understand how patriarchy, traditional religion and traditional law have been used to bar women from becoming traditional leaders, even though the Constitution of Zimbabwe requires equality and recognition of women in acquiring leadership positions, including traditional chieftainship positions. Data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews, as well as library research to confirm and critique the findings. A total of 15 participants from Hwange, in Matebeleland south province, and Buhera, in Manicaland province, were purposively selected with their consent for face-to-face and telephone interviews. The interviewees were both males and females of ages between 35 and 65 who included 3 traditional leaders, a chief's advisor, 3 ordinary males and 8 females. These had the knowledge and experience of living in areas under the jurisdiction of chiefs. For ethical considerations, the researcher had to seek consent and approval from the participants to gather data through interviews and further assured her participants anonymity and that pseudonyms would be used. The data was analysed to establish why there are very few women traditional chiefs in Zimbabwe and to make recommendations for increasing the numbers of female traditional chiefs. For example, the establishment of a Women's Council of Chiefs (WCC) would address the plight of women in indigenous communities on issues such as gender-based violence, femicide, sexual abuse, child marriages and virgin girl pledging, as well as securing access to and control over land.

In this chapter, I first examine the sources of women's subjugation in Zimbabwe, including family, social and religious sources, and how this subjection silences the voices of rural women in the current tribal leadership system. Second, I examine legal frameworks for the elevation and equality of women in Zimbabwe, including international and regional human rights norms and Zimbabwean law, particulary the Traditional Leadership Act (1998), the National Gender Policy (2013-2017) and the Constution of Zimbabwe (2013), culminating in a discussion of the decision handed down in the *Mlotshwa* case in 2020, which involved elements of each of these legal frameworks. Third, I examine performance-based biases that continue to affect women in Zimbabwe, as reported by interview subjects in the study underlying

6 Montuori A and Donnelly G. 2018. "Transformative Leadership", in Neal J (ed). *Handbook of Personal and Organisational Transformation*. New York: Springer.

7 Montuori and Donnelly, "Transformative Leadership".

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this chapter. Fourth, the chapter explores a range of possible institutional means for elevating women traditional leaders, ultimately proposing the establishment of a Women's Council of Chiefs as a means of elevating them to leadership in ways that encourage them to hear and represent the voices of rural women.

SUBJUGATION OF RURAL WOMEN USING AFRICAN CULTURE AND TRADITION IN ZIMBABWE

Zimbabwe has existed for centuries under traditional leadership systems dominated by patriarchy.[8] This patriarchy has thrived through the vehicle of indigenous African culture and tradition, in which certain practices that are oppressive towards women in communities cannot be contested or questioned. In most cases, the indigenous African culture is portrayed as a closed and separate space for Africans that should be free from external influence. For example, women rights activism or democracy may be deemed as challenging the sanctity of culture and tradition.[9]

The subjugation of women in the patriarchal society of Zimbabwe starts from within the family. According to Maureen Kambarami, a psychologist, the family as an institution is a brewery for patriarchal practices by socialising the young to accept socially differentiated roles.[10] Indigenous African males are socialised to view themselves as leaders, breadwinners and heads of households, whilst females are taught to be obediently led and submissive housekeepers, as is couched in various names given to boys and girls.[11] Names assigned to boys show leadership, dominance and strength, such as Tungamirai (lead), Tongai (rule) and Shingai (be brave), as compared to those assigned to the girls, which show dependence, humility and weakness such as, Gamuchirai (accept), Nyarai (be shy) and Pfavai (be humble). The cause of such differentiation and discrimination is the fact that society views women as sexual beings and not as human beings. This was emphasized by a male participant in the present study, who said that there is no greater expectation for a woman than being taken care of and bearing children for us.[12] He viewed women as assets. Women are constantly defined in relation to men, and they are defined as dependent and subordinate to them. As a result, women are socialised to acquire those qualities which fit them into a relationship of dependence on men.[13]

8 Dodo O. 2013. "Traditional Leadership Systems and Recognition: Zimbabwe." *International Journal of Gender and Women's Studies* 1(1):29–44.

9 Nkala GS, Khumalo NB and Baloy, C. 2018. "Women and Traditional Governance Systems: A Case of Vukuzenzele Village, Mzingwane District, Zimbabwe", *Oral History Journal of South Africa* 6(1):13.

10 Kambarami M. 2006. "Femininity, Sexuality and Culture: Patriarchy and Female Subordination in Zimbabwe", Understanding Human Sexuality Seminar Series. Fort Hare: Africa Regional Sexuality Resource Centre in Collaboration with Health Systems Trust, South Africa and University of Fort Hare.

11 Kambarami, "Femininity, Sexuality and Culture".

12 Interview with Josh Mhute by E. Humbe. Buhera, Zimbabwe, 12 February 2024.

13 Kambarami, "Femininity, Sexuality and Culture".

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This reinforcement and control of men over women is vivified in marriage and payment of *lobola* (bride wealth).

The patriarchal society of Zimbabwe is well lit with proverbs, which illuminate the peripheral treatment of women. According to Jacob Mapara, a researcher in Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) among the Shona people, and his colleague Simangenkosi Thebe, a researcher in (IKS) among the Ndebele people, the Shona and Ndebele proverbs are said to be coined from the experiences of people as they observe life and, for this reason, they are described as statements of general truths. There are some proverbs that were passed from generation to generation which were discriminatory and derogatory towards women.[14] A proverb identified by Mapara and Thebe, which boosts male dominance from boyhood forward: "*Mwanarume ihona yeutare*" (A boy child is like a bone of iron). Iron is a very important metal, and it played a significant role in the civilisation of pre-colonial African states. It is thus perceived as a symbol of power and wealth. The comparison of the boy child to iron means that he is regarded as one of the main stays of the family as compared to the girl, child who would get married and therefore does not build the family.[15] Such a proverb perpetuates the subjugation of women starting from her paternal family to her marital family. A married female participant commented, "*Hapana chandingataura kana kupedza nokuti musha une varidzi.*"[16] (There is nothing I can say or finalise because this home has its owners). The implication of this being that the husband is the owner of the homestead and has the final say in decision making. It is the iron analogy which is used to oppress, break and destroy the woman's voice.

Patriarchal attitudes are similarly found in Christianity, and these have strengthened the traditional customs which men use to subjugate women. For example, in the Bible, in the letter to the Colossians 3:13, according to Paul, the woman is expected to submit to her husband.[17] The same can be said of the Zimbabwean educational system, which is structured in a way that maintains inequalities between boys and girls. For example, the textbooks that are used in schools depict boys as tough, rough and mentally skilled, while girls are depicted as soft and gentle people who enjoy carrying out household duties.[18] Even the uniforms for boys and girls are differently designed in such a way that girls' uniforms are flared dresses or skirts, which are not suitable for rough play or tree climbing.

What has been highlighted in the foregoing paragraphs are some of the difficult circumstances which stifle women in their religious and socio-cultural life. Many communities in Zimbabwe appear unprepared to break with age-old norms which disenfranchise women and accept their incorporation into meaningful traditional

14 Mapara J and Simangenkosi T. 2015. "It has Always Been a Men's World: The Woman as Other in the Shona and Ndebele Proverb", *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 2(4):198-214.

15 Mapara J and Simangenkosi T. 2015. "It has Always Been a Men's World".

16 Interview with Tsitsi Gwere by E. Humbe. Buhera, Zimbabwe, 12 February 2024.

17 Bible, Colossians 3:13.

18 Kambarami, "Femininity, Sexuality and Culture".

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leadership roles. These sources of subjugation affect particularly Zimbabwe's rural women, whose voices are particularly silenced.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE ELEVATION AND EQUALITY OF WOMEN IN ZIMBABWE

This section presents the Zimbabwe legal framework for the elevation of women. Culture is contested and dynamic, as cultural values, norms and practices can be challenged, subverted and amended over time.[19] Because of cultural norms which have suppressed women, Zimbabwe has made great efforts through law to promote gender equality, thereby allowing women to rise and get into leadership positions. This has been done through signing and ratifying conventions around participation of women in leadership besides crafting own laws and policies towards the same goal. These include international agreements such as the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)[20] and the Beijing Platform for Action of 1995.[21] They include regional agreements such as the Southern Africa Development Community Protocol on Gender and Development.[22] They also include constitutional provisions and national legislation, including the Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013[23], the National Gender Policy, 2013-2017[24] and the Traditional Leaders Act, 1998.[25]

The Constitution of Zimbabwe

This study proceeds, first, to look at the Zimbabwean Constitution, 2013 to understand its provisions on gender equality. The Constitution provides that everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law. Section 56(1) also provides that woman and men have the right to equal treatment, including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres. Gender, sex, culture and custom are specified prohibited grounds of discrimination.[26] The Constitution also specifies that "all laws, customs, traditions and cultural practices that infringe the rights of women conferred by

19 Nkala et al, "Women and Traditional Governance Systems".

20 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, G.A. res. 34/180, 34 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 46) at 193, U.N. Doc. A/34/46, *entered into force* Sept. 3, 1981, art 27(1).

21 UN Women. 2015. *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Beijing +5 Political Declaration and Outcome*. New York: UN Women.

22 Southern African Development Community (SADC). 2008. SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, 17 August.

23 Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013.

24 Republic of Zimbabwe, Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development. 2013. The National Gender Policy (2013-2017).

25 Traditional Leaders Act [Chapter 29:17] 25/1998, 22/2001 (s. 4), 17/2007, 3/2016 (Part CXVII)

26 Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013, ch 4, s 56(1)

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the constitution are void".[27] Further, every person and agency of the government, at every level, is required to respect and promote the rights enshrined in the Constitution.[28] The constitutional provisions accord every Zimbabwean citizen access to equal opportunities for example, in the domain of leadership regardless of sex.

The Zimbabwe National Gender Policy

The Constitution of Zimbabwe adopted in 2013 is widely acknowledged for its firm commitment to gender equality. The National Gender Policy, likewise, seeks to achieve a gender just society where men and women enjoy equality and equity and to participate as equal partners in the development process of the country.[29] The policy goal is to eradicate gender discrimination and inequalities in all spheres of life and development.[30] There has been a corresponding increase in awareness and sensitivity to equal gender representation in public institutions and development planning at grassroots,[31] for example in traditional chieftainship. The National Gender Policy strategies include identifying harmful laws, cultures and traditional practices that infringe on women's and girls' rights and that impede the gender equality objectives and lobby for their elimination.[32] Gugulethu Nkala, a scientist, and her research colleagues affirm the National Gender Policy view, saying that, many African women do not want to do away with tradition, but only the oppressive aspects thereof.[33]

The Traditional Leaders Act

Traditional leadership is guided by the Traditional Leaders Act of Zimbabwe, a piece of legislation that sets the parameters of how business should be conducted in the countryside. The Act provides: "Subject to subsection (2), the President shall appoint chiefs to preside over communities inhabiting Communal Land and resettlement areas."[34] It is, however, spelt out in the Act that the President of Zimbabwe shall give due consideration to the prevailing customary principles of succession.[35] The Constitutional provision that woman and men have the right to equal treatment, including the right to equal opportunities in politics, has seen women elevating to traditional leadership posts.

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27 Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013, ch 4, s 80(3).

28 Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013, ch 4, ss 44 – 87 (Declaration of Rights).

29 National Gender Policy (2013-2017).

30 National Gender Policy (2013-2017).

31 National Gender Policy (2013-2017).

32 National Gender Policy (2013-2017).

33 Nkala et al, "Women and Traditional Governance Systems".

34 Traditional Leaders Act, s 2 Part II dealing with chiefs.

35 Traditional Leaders Act, s 2

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In the rural communities under study participants gave evidence to notable changes which they witnessed. A female participant happily acknowledged the change, saying "We now have a female headperson who listens to every plight of women."[36]Another male participant said, "At first I had difficulties accepting the elevation of a woman to traditional leadership, but as she undertook her duty I have since understood that we are undermining great potential in women in our communities."[37] His viewpoint was supported by two other male participants who saw women leading successfully. One other female participant further alluded to the importance of having female traditional leaders, saying that she always sees a mother figure in the female leader in her community because she is friendly, patient and approachable.[38]

From the information gathered from the participants, it was notable that there were both males and females who accepted change as traditional leadership posts are taken up by women. This elevation has been noted also in other parts of Zimbabwe, as Fungai Lupande, a news reporter at *The Herald,* has reported that Chief Masembura and Chief Musana of rural Bindura in Mashonaland Central province are discarding ancient customs through bequeathing influential leadership positions to women in their jurisdiction.[39] At Chief Masembura's court, for example, three women have taken up positions as senior court officials, helping him dispense justice to his people. He selected a woman, Tendai Chiveso, to become a headman, and this has been an eye-opener for many on what women can do in positions of leadership.[40] In rural Bindura, some traditional leaders are deserting established conventions and redefining the institution, through the inclusion of women in their communal leadership setups.[41] Mtshana Khumalo, the National Chiefs Council president said every traditional leadership structure in the country now includes women. "We now have women as village heads, as chiefs, as headmen, and as assessors. They also enjoy those cultural chores equal to men which were taboo before the enactment of the Constitution."[42]

CHALLENGES IN INTERPRETING THE TRADITIONAL LEADERS ACT

Even though there are notable changes in rural communities of Zimbabwe in regards to the elevation of women to traditional leadership, there is a challenge in interpreting this piece of legislation, especially the idea that the appointment of chiefs by the president follows customary principles of succession. As has been observed by Gugulethu Nkala and her fellow researchers, who are authorities in

36 Interview with Mercy Runde by E Humbe. Buhera, Zimbabwe, 7 March 2024.

37 Interview with Regi Guyo by E Humbe. Hwange, Zimbabwe, 25 February 2024.

38 Interview with Thembie Senga by E Humbe. Hwange, Zimbabwe, 13 February 2024.

39 Lupande, "Women in Traditional Leadership".

40 Lupande, "Women in Traditional Leadership".

41 Lupande, "Women in Traditional Leadership".

42 Daniel G. 2024. "Mutsvangwa Calls for More Women Chiefs", *Newsday*, 29 Februrary.

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traditional leadership affairs, it is a known fact that a woman will become chief only if there are no rightful male heirs to take the position.[43] Despite the fact that the Traditional Leaders Act is clear in stating that chieftaincy and village headship were hereditary, one traditional leader responded saying, "The norm is that after the death of a chief or village head, the heir to the throne is the first-born son."[44] In situations where the first-born son could not assume his duties as chief, his male sibling would take the position, as was clarified by one elderly participant.[45] These responses reinforce the view of Nkala and her colleagues that female children in the family only take the position if there are no male heirs to take the position.[46] Manipulation of the Traditional Leaders Act by the patriarchy results in women finding it difficult to contest for inclusion in traditional leadership.

However, the present study has also established that because of women's emancipation through the Zimbabwean Constitution, female traditional leaders fight their way up the traditional leadership ladder. The effects of how or whether, women are raised is testified in a court case *Silibaziso Mlotshwa Versus District Administrator, Hwange District N.O Ors*,[47] in which High Court in Zimbabwe ordered a woman be recommended for Mvuthu chieftainship vacancy. The Mvuthu chieftaincy fell vacant when their chiefly father died leaving only three daughters. The eldest of them, Silibaziso Mlotshwa, might have seemed the obvious choice to succeed to the Mvuthu chieftainship. Instead, her uncle, Saunders Mlotshwa, got the nod from the government's district administrator to assume the chieftainship. This followed a meeting of the Mlotshwa men at which they said a female chief "would be an insult".

However, the High Court in Bulawayo ordered that the administrator propose the daughter's name for the vacant position. The judge said it was unconstitutional to discriminate against her and that the earlier recommendation that the uncle should take the throne was unlawful,[48] the grounds being that the process of appointment was not incompliance with Section 3 of the Traditional Leaders Act read with the constitution of Zimbabwe in particular Sections 51, 56 and 63.[49] An order was given that defendants ensure compliance with the Traditional Leaders Act in the choice of a substantive Chief Mlothswa for Hwange District, Mvuthu area within 90 days of granting of the order, failing which the plaintiff, being the eldest daughter of the late

43 Nkala, "Women and Traditional Governance Systems".

44 Interview with Tinos Mpala by E. Humbe. Hwange, Zimbabwe, 19 February 2024.

45 Interview with Menas Nkosi by E. Humbe. Hwange, Zmbabwe, 16 February 2024.

46 Nkala, "Women and Traditional Governance Systems".

47 *Silibaziso Mlotshwa v. District Administrator, Hwange District N.O Ors* (HB 161-16) (discussed in "Zimbabwe High court compels adherence to the constitution in chieftainship selection", Southern African Litgation Centre, 29 June 2020.

48 Rickard C. 2020 "High court in Zimbabwe orders women be recommended for Mvuthu chieftainship vacancy", *African Legal Information*, 9 July.

49 *Silibaziso Mlotshwa v. District Administrator, Hwange District N.O Ors* (HB 161-16) (discussed in "Zimbabwe High court compels adherence).

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Chief Mlotshwa (Mvuthu) and being heir apparent and with no legal impediment prohibiting her to be substantive Chief Mlotshwa, be declared as such under the Traditional Leaders Act and the relevant customs, practices and norms.[50]An order was also given that any of the defendants who opposed the relief sought were to pay the costs of suit on an attorney-client scale.[51]

After the court session the Mlotshwa family reverted to their previous position, and Silibaziso did not get the opportunity to take over the throne. The elders of the Mlotshwa family stood their initial ground on not having a female chief rule them. In an interview, a female participant noted that "It is pity that Silibaziso's efforts were futile."[52] Three more female participants were angered by the outcome blaming the court for not enforcing its ruling. Another male participant remarked, "Whatever happened within the Mlotshwa family was not good, because the sudden shift of mind-set from Silibaziso who had been resilient in wanting to take over her rightful position as hair to losing interest has made us have a layman's thinking that threats and pressure from her family elders made her think otherwise and let her uncle take over the throne.[53]

THE TRADITIONAL LAW OVERRIDES COURT RULING ON CHIEFTAINSHIP SUCCESSION

Even though the court ruled in favour of Silibaziso Mlotshwa the reality on the ground was different. The decision made by the Mlotshwa elders shows that the traditional law has great impact on traditional chieftainship in rural communities of Zimbabwe. Because of this there is no space for transformational leadership in the communities under study. It was noted in *Mlotshwa* court case that there have been delays in aligning the traditional laws to the current Zimbabwean Constitution and that the Traditional Leaders Act is still lagging behind awaiting alignment. The delays are perpetuating marginalisation of women from traditional leadership offices. For instance, the Act does not provide a dispute resolution mechanism regarding the appointment and succession of chiefs.[54]

What is not in dispute, however, is that chieftainship wrangles now fall, by constitutional provision, to be resolved by the president on the recommendations of the provincial assembly of chiefs Section 283.[55] There is therefore reluctance by the provincial assembly in resolving the *Mlotshwa* case. This is also supported by

50 *Silibaziso Mlotshwa v. District Administrator, Hwange District N.O Ors* (HB 161-16) (discussed in "Zimbabwe High court compels adherence").

51 *Silibaziso Mlotshwa v. District Administrator, Hwange District N.O Ors* (HB 161-16) (discussed in "Zimbabwe High court compels adherence").

52 Interview with Naume Mbedzi by E. Humbe. Hwange,Zimbabwe, 25 January 2024.

53 Interview with Witnes Sakala by E. Humbe. Hwange,Zimbabwe, 16 January 2024.

54 *Silibaziso Mlotshwa v. District Administrator, Hwange District N.O Ors* (HB 161-16) (discussed in "Zimbabwe High court compels adherence").

55 Traditional Leaders Act, s 2.

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political journalist Gibson Mhaka, who argues that the *Mlotshwa* case reflects how existing traditional systems and cultural norms actively exclude and disadvantage women from standing at all levels of traditional leadership.[56]

The present study, thus, advocates for a transformative leadership theory that aims to create meaningful change by addressing and empowering women traditional leaders. The Traditional Leaders Act gives patriarchy greater ground because the High Court's decision fell short in practical implementation of its decision because the uncle is the one who took over the chiefly roles after the High Court's ruling. In view of the subjugation of women discussed in the previous section and the *Mlotshwa* case highlighted above, the study identifies the following biases that stifle women from holding higher offices in traditional leadership and also being included in supreme traditional leadership councils at national level.

PERFORMANCE-BASED BIAS AND THE UNDERRATING OF WOMEN LEADERS

Despite having an aspiring woman leader prevailing in the *Mlotshwa* case, it remains the case that women leaders are not taken seriously in Zimbabwe, especially in the rural communities, which still uphold patriarchal norms and values. Women's performance is underrated, because they are believed to lack leadership skills. The reality on the ground in Zimbabwe is that women are still treated as second-class citizens who are not yet ripe for leadership. The pervasiveness of this idea in rural communities means that a female chief is looked at with a critical eye and through a spectrum of performance-based biases.[57] These include cultural, attribution, likeability and maternal biases.

Cultural bias. Patriarchy has thrived through the vehicles of culture and tradition, where certain practices that are oppressive towards women in communities cannot be contested or questioned, just because they are culture and tradition.[58] Because of this cultural bias, there are some communities which are reluctant to be led by a woman.[59] Conflicts with other rival households wanting to take over the chieftaincy are rife when the leader is a woman.[60] In an interview, one male participant boldly said, "I will never sit in a court presided over by a female chief as culture has always had it that traditional courts are for men only".[61] An elderly female participant asserted that, "Culturally when a woman had an issue to be presided over in a

56 Mhaka G. 2021. "Traditional systems, customs suppress women aspirations for leadership", *The Chronicle*, 9 February.

57 Dalla-Camina M. n.d. "Bias, Leadership and Creating Change", *WomenRisingCo.com.* Online at: https://womenrisingco.com/articles/bias-leadership-creating-change/

58 Nkala, "Women and Traditional Governance Systems".

59 *Dalla-Camina,*"Bias, Leadership and Creating Change".

60 Lupande, "Women in Traditional Leadership".

61 Interview with Joe Misi by E Humbe. Buhera, Zimbabwe, 20 January 2024.

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traditional court she would be represented by her brother."[62] The cultural norm of not having female participants in a traditional court makes it difficult to have the same gender lead in such courts.

Attribution bias. In most cases, the society concentrates on the weaknesses of women. In what seems a clear example of attribution bias, women are not credited for success but blamed for failure.[63] This is very common in a home set-up when a woman is blamed for the failure of a child, and the father praised for the success of a child. One female participant confirmed this in saying, "It has become a norm to hear a spouse saying, 'you see what your child has done', whenever our child does a something wrong as if he is no longer child's parent also."[64] Women are therefore, blamed for errors done by other people. This bias is carried further into leadership issues where the female leader receives critical scrutiny when a problem arises within her leadership territory. This makes women shun leadership posts.

Likeability bias. A woman's likeability crashes with her assertiveness, but if she is too nice, she is perceived as less competent. There is masculinisation of leadership whereby a competent leader is expected to be fearsome, bold and authoritative. In most cases, women lack these attributes. A female participant said, "There are many instances where a woman who is able to stand her ground in any circumstance, being labelled a man".[65] In the view of Gibson Mhaka, this is because women are socialised to be likeable,[66] and to speak, walk and behave in a certain way, and when they behave in a way that is out of these cultural expectations they are shamed by society.[67]

Affinity bias. The indigenous society does not have space for women grooming into leadership roles. Since men hold more powerful positions, it is easy to mentor men to positions of traditional authority than women in what seems a clear example of affinity bias.[68] This is because women have been labelled as the weaker sex and not worthy of grooming for leadership in most patriarchal societies. The idea of the inferiority of women in short means that men or most men are of the opinion that they are better beings than women whom they label as less human. In Shona and Ndebele culture, it is not uncommon to hear men ask one another, "*Vakadzi vanhu here*?" (Are women human beings?).[69] Although allowed to lead or participate in traditional governance, women were not supposed to dominate these systems. Men highlighted that they were not comfortable with a leadership dominated by

62 Interview with Gogo Reki by E Humbe. Buhera, Zimbabwe, 13 Jamuary 2024.

63 *Dalla-Camina,* "Bias, Leadership and Creating Change".

64 Interview with Rita Mwembe by E Humbe. Hwange, Zimbabwe, 3 February 2024.

65 Interview with Molly Mseni by E Humbe. Hwange, Zimbabwe, 10 January 2024.

66 *Dalla-Camina,* "Bias, Leadership and Creating Change".

67 Mhaka, "Traditional systems, customs suppress women aspirations for leadership".

68 *Dalla-Camina,* "Bias, Leadership and Creating Change".

69 Interview with Daniel Mzembi by E Humbe. Buhera, Zimbabwe, 12 January 2024.

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women, and that the only acceptable situation is where men dominate and women are a minority in leadership.[70]

Maternal bias. It is a basic traditional norm that women are hindered from participating in traditional activities at some point in their lives because of their sexual reproductive nature in childbearing and their maternal roles.[71] Because of this norm, most women are exempted from taking up traditional leadership positions which need active involvement at any given time. A middle-aged woman noted with concern, "There are moments when a woman is not allowed to be actively involved in public due to her biological make, for example when having her menstrual days or soon after giving birth."[72] The enforcement of traditional gender roles, defined largely by women's sexual and reproductive capacity, tends to maintain women in inferior power positions dependent upon men for status and resources. Women also suffer from societal perceptions that their role in the family overrides all other roles.[73] The social norms make it more difficult for women to leave their traditional domestic roles outside homes and participate in public leadership.[74]

From the biases noted above, on issues of traditional leadership, indigenous society, is not influenced by the dictates of the Zimbabwean Constitution but by the cultural belief systems which continue to look down upon women as second-class citizens. Based on these views, women are underrepresented in traditional leadership due to societal attitudes and cultural institutional obstacles. Therefore, the present study recommends a pragmatic measure to increase women's representation and participation in high echelons of traditional power

INCREASING WOMEN'S TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP: TOWARD A WOMEN'S COUNCIL OF CHIEFS

This section of the study makes a conclusion and gives recommendations for increase of women in the Zimbabwe Council of Chiefs and probably a standalone Women's Council of Chiefs. This would increase of representation of rural women and empower them in traditional matters.

Women's quotas in the Zimbabwe Council of Chiefs

The Zimbabwe Council of Chiefs is an assembly of traditional leaders in Zimbabwe, established as an institution under the Constitution of Zimbabwe.[75] The council

70 Nkala, "Women and Traditional Governance Systems".

71 *Dalla-Camina,* "Bias, Leadership and Creating Change".

72 Interview with Grace Phiri by E Humbe. Buhera, Zimbabwe, 15 January 2024.

73 Mwale C and Dodo O. 2017. "Sociocultural Beliefs and Women Leadership in Sanyati District", *Journal of Social Change* 9(1):107-118.

74 Mhaka, "Traditional systems, customs suppress women aspirations for leadership".

75 Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013, ch 15.

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represents all traditional leaders and is headed by the president of chiefs and deputy president, who are usually elected to power for five years. Women traditional leaders are entirely absent from the national Senate, where 10 seats are reserved for traditional chiefs. These chiefs are nominated by the National Council of Chiefs.[76] Journalist Gibson Mhaka notes that while the government of Zimbabwe has subscribed to international agreements and instituted national policies to improve women's representation, there is every indication that customs and traditions still constitute an obstacle to women's enjoyment of their human rights.[77] In his comments from the sidelines of the 2018 SADC summit, Chief Charumbira (a male) concurred with Mhaka, admitting that the numbers of female chiefs were low because of cultures that were slow in opening up to accepting female chiefs. He mentioned that there were only six female chiefs out of a total of 286 chiefs in Zimbabwe.[78] Statistically, women constitute about 4.7 per cent of the total composition of the Zimbabwean chiefs. In the same vein, Chief Ndube (a female) avers that although the representation of women in politics has increased over the years, women traditional leaders were still playing less significant roles as compared to their male counterparts.[79] This sentiment shows that as women have gained recognition in Zimbabwean politics through the government's introduction of the women's quota systems in institutions like the parliament, so the same should be implemented in the council of chiefs to increase the number of women representatives and thus ensure transformative leadership.

Quotas are increasingly utilised policy tools to upsurge women's participation in electoral processes. The implementation of quotas can lead to increased women in the Council of Chiefs. This is supported by the words of Chief Charumbira when he said that "we also accept that the increase in the number of female chiefs is good for our image as the Chiefs council, and to show that we want to have the other side of gender dimensions in our chiefdoms".[80] Adopting a women's quota in the electoral system of choosing traditional chiefs in the Council of Chiefs could have important implications both for its national and international reputation. The women's quota in the Zimbabwe Council of Chiefs would need constitutional support to be sustainable, and it would also have to be backed by political will and support from civil society organisations. Having such a policy would bring collective voices from women, who are a largely excluded group in the decision-making process about rural women's affairs. The use of quota systems, such as affirmative action policies, in traditional leadership would be a significant development for substantial progress in achieving gender equity and equality in traditional leadership. Increasing the presence of women in the Zimbabwe Council of Chiefs would ensure their active

76 Muradzikwa T and Madziwa P. 2023. "Experiences of female traditional leaders in Zimbabwe: An Intersectional Analysis" (briefing note). London: ALIGN Advancing Learning and Information on Gender Norms.

77 Mhaka, "Traditional systems, customs suppress women aspirations for leadership".

78 Langa, V. 2018. "Governments urged to install female chiefs", *Newsday*, 21 August.

79 Mhaka, "Traditional systems, customs suppress women aspirations for leadership".

80 Langa, "Governments urged to install female chiefs".

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participation and effectiveness in the representation of diverse viewpoints and interests of women.[81] This would also neutralise the dominance of men in the council, which was created by the underlying societal and institutional factors that limit women's opportunities. Thus, in addition to the increase of women in the Council of Chiefs, this study advocates for the establishment of a Women's Council of Chiefs.

Establishment of a Women's Council of Chiefs

The present study supports national efforts to stamp out challenges that hinder achieving gender equality in traditional leadership. Failure to do so will simply mean that that there is no real empowerment of rural women. To ensure transformative leadership the study made use of some already existing efforts that have been put in place by the government for socio-economic emancipation of women like the Women's Bank and a standalone ministry for women called the Ministry of Women Affairs. In higher and tertiary education, there is the Women's University in Africa (WUA). There are also organisations thriving in the country like Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ), with its central role as provision of a focal point for activism on women's and girls' rights.[82] Through the Women's Council of Chiefs that this study has proposed, there will be implementation of women substantive representation to overcome the cultural and social barriers faced by women in participating in traditional leadership and its supreme decision-making body. For instance, substantive representation demands the creation of a democratic space where women can engage in traditional leadership matters without the influence of men. In the context of this study, the notion of women in substantive representation refers to the extent to which the appointed women chiefs represent the views, interests and needs of rural women in the traditional decision-making process.[83] It involves not only the formal representation of particular groups of women, but also the consideration and incorporation of their actual views, needs and experiences into policy-making processes. The Women's Council of Chiefs will be guided by the Traditional Leaders Act, which specifies roles of people serving as chiefs to include promoting cultural values, facilitating development and resolving disputes in their communities.

Through the Ministry of Women Affairs, interpreting the Zimbabwean Constitution in light of the Traditional Leaders Act should seriously be considered on the issues of the representation of female chiefs. This will increase women's participation in traditional leadership at all levels. There is a knowledge gap among women in rural areas on issues such as leadership and governance. Tracey Muradzikwa, a political scientist, and Prince Madziwa, a researcher on experiences of female traditional

81 Akiyode-Afolabi A. 2020. "Political Participation, Feminist Organising and the Creation of Inclusive Democratic Space", *Feminist Reflections* #3. Maputo: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

82 Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe. Online at: https://www.wcoz.org

83 Akiyode-Afolabi, Political Participation, Feminist Organising and the Creation of Inclusive Democratic Space

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leaders in Zimbabwe have noted that rural citizens tend to find traditional leaders more trustworthy than elected officials because of their close community involvement.[84] More institutions should create dedicated platforms, functions and roles for female traditional leaders as a way to tackle discriminatory gender norms for example, having women's organisations mobilising women in rural areas and teaching them about the constitution, their privileges and rights.[85]

The present study concludes that the absence of women's participation in higher echelons of power, such as the Zimbabwe Council of Chiefs, and their rare selection in traditional leadership shows that indigenous societies are not yet transformed to embrace gender equality. The main argument of this study has been that disenfranchisement of women in indigenous communities from their rights as enshrined in the Zimbabwean Constitution can only be addressed if Zimbabwe establishes a Women's Council of Chiefs that indigenous women can count on in their fight for equal opportunities and safer motherhood. Having more women traditional chiefs would be a positive development in representation for rural women.

84 Muradzikwa and Madziwa, "Experiences of female traditional leaders in Zimbabwe".

85 Lupande, "Women in Traditional Leadership".

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