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Cities as catalysts of social change?

Reflections from Zambia.

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Across the world, people in urban rather than rural areas are more likely to support gender equality. To explain this global trend, this paper engages with geographically diverse literature and comparative rural-urban ethnographic research from Zambia. It argues that people living in interconnected, heterogeneous, densely populated areas are more likely to see women performing socially valued, masculine roles. Such exposure incrementally erodes gender ideologies, catalysing a positive feedback loop, and increasing flexibility in gender divisions of labour. Women in densely populated areas also tend to have greater access to health clinics and police, so are more able to control their fertility and secure external support against gender-based violence. However, the urban is not inevitably disruptive. Experiences of the urban are shaped by international and national policies, macro-economic conditions, and individual circumstances. Through this comparative ethnography, this paper contributes to literature on the drivers of change and continuity in gender ideologies.

1   Introduction

Globally, there appears to be greater (and more rapidly growing) support for gender equality in urban rather than rural areas. Urban residents are typically more supportive of girls' education, women's employment, and female political leadership. Why is this? And what does it tell us about the causes of egalitarian social change?

The aim of this paper is to explore and explain rural-urban differences in gender ideologies. Since this is a global phenomenon, the literature review draws on a geographically diverse range of studies. By adopting this international outlook, this paper contributes to a growing body of work that seeks to understand the urban (its core characteristics and implications) by examining its manifestations in different contexts (Jarvis et al. 2009; Robinson 2011). This epistemology also helps shed light on further socio-economic and political factors of significance, besides the urban.

After reviewing the literature on existing findings and explanations of rural-urban differences, the paper presents ethnographic research from rural and urban Zambia. My evidence indicates two key features of cities: (1) greater exposure to women undertaking socially valued, masculine roles (which undermines gender ideologies); and (2) greater access to health clinics and police (which increases women's ability to control their fertility and secure external support against gender-based violence). These are not inevitable characteristics of cities, nor are they impossible in rural contexts, but they are more common in cities.

This comparative research contributes to urban geographies by highlighting the effects of interconnectedness, heterogeneity, and population density. These key characteristics of cities[1] appear to disrupt gender inequalities. Had I focused on the urban alone, I would have blinkered myself to its distinctive attributes and advantages. For example, feminist geographies of the urban tend to see persistent gender divisions of labour and inequalities,

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[1] Theorists disagree over (i) how we should conceptualise 'the urban'; (ii) whether economic agglomeration is inevitable; and, given the diverse histories, economies, spatialities and imaginaries of cities across the Global North and South, (iii) whether we should even posit a singular definition of 'the urban'. Scott and Storper (2014) suggest that cities are all driven by and produce economies of agglomeration. Others differ (Amin and Thrift, 2002; Brenner and Schmid, 2015; Lall et al, 2017; Parnell and Pieters, 2016). But all still recognise that cities bring together, juxtapose and (through mutual learning, new alliances as well as contestation) enable the recalibration of intersecting regional and transnational flows of ideas, information, histories, ambitions, performances, media, labour, commodities, capital, and competing authorities. Interconnectedness, heterogeneity, and population density appear to be common denominators, with broad agreement (Amin 2007; Brenner and Schmid 2015: 177; Simone 2013; Scott and Storper 2014).

emphasizing minimal benefits for low-income women compared with their wealthier counterparts (e.g. Chant 2013; Chant and McIlwaine 2016; Hansen, 1997). Some theorists doubt everyday urban encounters with difference might reduce prejudice (Amin 2002; Valentine et al. 2014). These pessimistic portrayals draw on research in towns and cities. But I suggest that we may enhance our understanding of the urban by taking a step back, traversing the rural-urban spectrum, and investigating differences in more sparsely populated, remote, and agrarian localities.

This paper also fine-tunes our theorisation of gender norms. Some theorists understand norms as iterative, embodied, social performances (Butler 2004:48-51). Others emphasise 'collective definitions of socially approved conduct': not individual consciousness, but 'properties of a community' (Pearse and Connell, 2016: 31-34, 46). But how exactly do these social practices and discourses influence individual behaviour? To understand why gender norms change or persist, we need to focus on people's reasons for acting (their beliefs and desires), not just their behavioural expressions, or social aggregates.

Here it is helpful to distinguish between two kinds of gender beliefs: an individual's internalised stereotypes (assumptions about a person because of their gender) and their norm perceptions (beliefs about what others think and do). This distinction accommodates the possibility that someone is privately critical of gender stereotypes, yet complies due to concerns about how they will be perceived and treated by others. Internalised stereotypes and norm perceptions are both developed through observation and personal experience. By interacting with others, people learn which behaviours are widely practiced and supported in their communities. The belief that peers will chastise deviation furnishes individuals with a self-interested reason to conform.[2]

The concept of 'norm perceptions' explains the path dependent nature of gender relations, as it articulates the causal relationship between wider practices, individual psychologies and behaviour. Together with internalised stereotypes, such perceptions may inhibit social change. By contrast, conceptualisations of 'norms' as aggregate features of a given society struggle to elucidate their causal connection to individual behaviour.

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[2] This emphasis on other people's expectations and concerns for social respect echoes earlier ethnographies of Zambia (Crehan, 1997).

The overarching argument of this paper is that norm perceptions are more likely to be disrupted in diverse, interconnected and densely populated places, i.e. cities. By presenting a positive narrative from Zambia, this paper nuances pessimistic portrayals of African cities: as 'crowded, disconnected, costly and closed for business; marked by entrenched gender inequalities (Lall et al, 2017; Chant and McIlwaine, 2016; Davies, 2006; Hansen, 1997).

2   Literature review

2.1   A brief survey of existing findings on rural-urban differences

A growing body of literature suggests that increasing support for gender equality is largely concentrated in urban areas. Mixed methods research in 20 middle- and low-income countries suggests that young urban women are 'beginning to envision a future similar to young men: education, independence, greater financial autonomy, and shared responsibility for their family' (Boudet et al. 2012: 97). Urban focus groups are more likely to endorse female labour force participation and describe 'good husbands' as those that take on unpaid care work (Boudet et al. 2012: 38, 41). Youth in Gabarone (Botswana) likewise gave dichotomous portrayals of urban men sharing care work (partnering with employed, strong, assertive, urban women) and rural patriarchs (leading submissive, passive, rural women). They further presented urban gender ideologies as dynamic and changeable, but the rural as static (Giddings and Hovorka 2010). Little's (2002: 87) overview of rural life in the Global North similarly underscores 'the strength of traditional ideas concerning gender roles… and the lack of (overt) contestation of these roles'. These rural-urban differences in gender ideologies seem to hold even when we control for individual-level characteristics such as age, education, occupation, marital status, wealth, and media access (Alesina et al. 2016; Snow et al, 2013; Uthman et al. 2009). Place matters, seemingly more so than education or wealth.

However, these trends do not hold universally: self-described rural (as opposed to urban) residence is strongly associated with conservative gender ideologies in western but not eastern Germany (Dirksmeier 2015). Rural-urban differences in gender ideologies may also change over time. In the USA—when we control for age, race, education, marital status, and income—urban residents are more likely to express support for women's leadership and employment. But these rural-urban differences reduced between 1974 and 1998, as rural residents increasingly endorsed gender equality (Carter and Borch 2005).

There are also rural-urban differences in practices. For all 83 countries with available Democratic and Health Surveys data, fertility is consistently lower in urban areas (although it remains high in the poorest slums (Martine et al. 2013)). At an aggregate level, urban girls are more likely to marry and become pregnant later. They tend to have better access to sexual and reproductive health services (although this clearly varies with individual-level characteristics such as wealth (Chant and McIlwaine 2016: 56; Klugman et al. 2014: 110; UNFPA 2007: 28)). The prevalence of (and support for) female genital cutting is also lower (and falling more rapidly) in urban areas (UNICEF 2013). Gender inequalities in education also seem to be closing more quickly in urban areas. In China over the past three decades, the gender gap in education has dramatically reduced in urban but not in rural areas (Zeng et al. 2014). In urban sub-Saharan Africa, gender disparities in primary and secondary education have almost entirely closed. Meanwhile, rural gender inequalities persist.

Some evidence suggests that urban marriages are more egalitarian. In Bangladesh and Zambia, there are statistically significant associations between urban residence and a woman's participation in household decision-making (Boateng et al. 2014; Head et al. 2015). Further rural-urban differences are illustrated in Figures 1, 2 and 3.

Figure 1: Women's acceptance of wife beating wanes along the rural-urban spectrum in Zambia and sub-Saharan Africa

Respondent agrees to any of the following justifications of wife beating:
(1) Woman burns food; (2) Woman goes out without telling him; (3) Woman refuses sex; and (4) Woman neglects children.
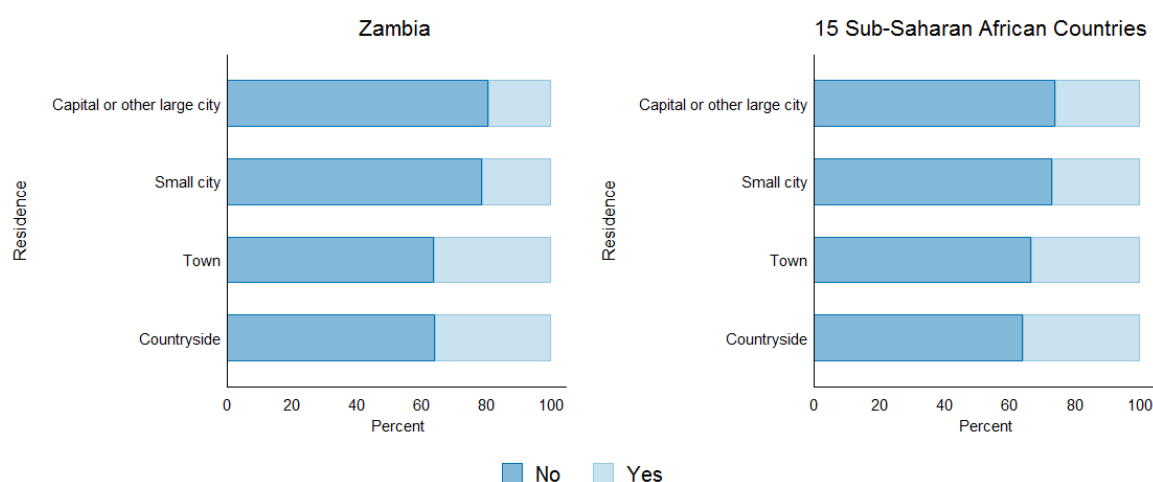
Source: Integrated DHS https://www.idhsdata.org/idhs/

Source: Author and Swiss 2016.

4

Figure 2: Rural men and women are more likely to express a preference for male leaders in Zambia and sub-Saharan Africa

Statement 1: Men make better political leaders than women, and should be elected rather than women.
Statement 2: Women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men.
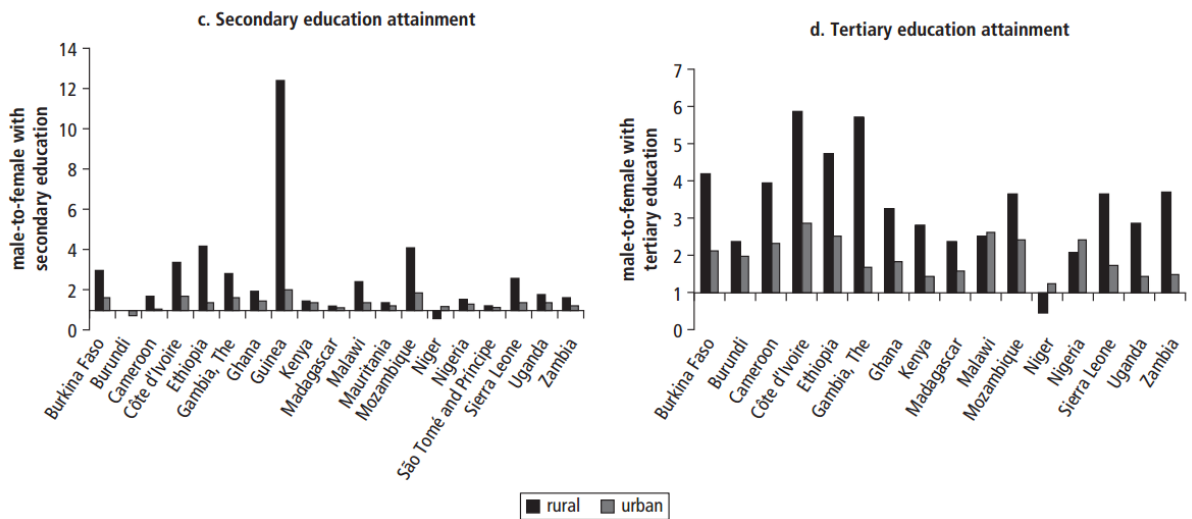

Source: Afrobarometer Merged Wave 5, 2015. http://www.afrobarometer.org/data/merged-round-5-data-34-countries-2015

Source: Author and Swiss 2016.

Figure 3: Rural-urban differences in literacy and school enrolment

5

c. Secondary education attainment   d. Tertiary education attainment
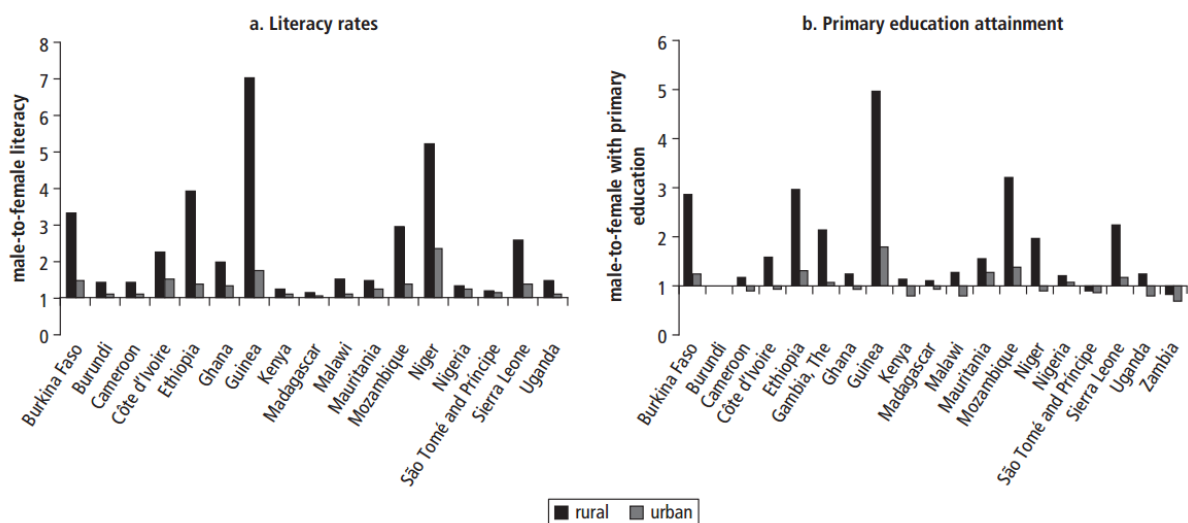
Source: Kolev and Sirven (2012: 46–7).

But urban practices are not always more egalitarian. Although people in urban areas of sub-Saharan Africa are less likely to justify gender-based violence, they are more likely to report it (Alesina et al. 2016). Urban rates of gender-based violence seem especially high for young, poor, and/or gay women (ibid; Chant and McIlwaine 2016: 137–48). Another example of urban gender inequality is that in urban India, where there is greater access to reproductive technology and sex-selective abortions, parents are more able to realize their pre-existing preference for a son (Subramanian and Corsi 2011). Between 1985 and 1995, urbanization was similarly associated with more sex-selective abortions in South Korea. However, over the long term, sex ratios have become more equitable in South Korea, with dwindling son preference in urban areas (Chung and Das Gupta 2007). What drives such change and continuity in gender ideologies and practices?

2.2 Four hypotheses about rural-urban differences

This section considers four different hypotheses about rural-urban differences in gender ideologies and practices. These include spatial variation in (1) economic opportunities, (2) access to services, (3) anonymity, and (4) propinquity and heterogeneity. Clearly there are no monocausal explanations. My interest concerns their relative importance.

One possible cause of rural-urban differences in gender ideologies is that there are better economic opportunities for women in urban areas. These may motivate urban families to

invest in girls' education, increase women's social respect, and improve women's ability to survive independently outside marriage (as argued by Boudet et al. 2012: 55, 90; Bradshaw 1995, 2013: 84; Chant and McIlwaine 2016; Giddings and Hovorka 2010; McIlwaine 2013: 77). Meanwhile, rural women's economic dependence on their husbands may incentivise compliance with patriarchal practices (as Mwansa, 2013 suggests of Eastern Zambia).

However, economic opportunities might not be the underlying cause of rural-urban differences. For itt begs a further question: why are there more economic opportunities for women in urban areas? In Zambia, for instance, 45% of rural women in the labour force are unpaid family workers, against 16% of rural men, 6% of urban women, and 2% of urban men (CSO 2011: 118). Why are women so much less likely to be paid for their work if they live in rural areas? Moreover, economic returns do not always appear sufficient to reduce rural gender bias in education (as Field and Ambrus 2008 and Maertens 2013 find in Bangladesh and India). Third, employment does not necessarily enhance a rural woman's status. In Egypt, paid work does not increase the likelihood that rural women will express gender egalitarian beliefs or participate in decision-making (Salem et al. 2015). Additionally, across 20 countries, 'urban men were generally more likely than rural men to voice appreciation for wives who earn income… Often their quite active economic participation may go unrecognized or even be hidden because of the status their communities attach to being "just a housewife"' (Boudet et al. 2012: 38; see also Crehan, 1997 on male authority persisting notwithstanding men and women's economic interdependence). It may be that women's income generation is less widely accepted in rural areas and less likely to catalyse ideological change due to some characteristic of rural environments. This warrants further investigation.

A second possibility is that rural gender inequalities are reinforced by poor access to services. In rural England, women's employment is constrained by inadequate public transport and childcare (Hughes 1997). Living further away from the police, rural women might also be less able to secure external intervention against gender-based violence (as suggested by McIlwaine 2013). Additionally, remoteness from health services might decrease the likelihood of contraceptive use—increasing girls' school dropouts, curbing their human capital, and dampening employment prospects. Greater distances to water and electricity create higher domestic workloads for women in rural (than urban) areas (as found in Benin, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Madagascar, Malawi, and South Africa (Blackden and Wodon 2006; Laderchi et al. 2010: 239; Robles 2010: 309)). This limits their available time for leisure, employment and political participation (as Chimba, 2005:67; Liatto-Katundo, 1993 suggest of Zambia).

But spatial variation in access to infrastructure and services does not appear to provide a full explanation. Also significant are different gender ideologies: urban men typically perform a greater share of care work (Levtov et al 2015). Likewise, there seem to be rural-urban differences in demand for services. In Ethiopia, Honduras, and Kenya, men (who tend to be pronatalist) exercise greater influence over reproductive decision-making in rural areas. Accordingly, 'improvements in service and infrastructure in rural areas, although necessary, may not be sufficient to enable rural women to implement their preferences as fully as urban women and thereby close the rural-urban gap in fertility and contraceptive use' (Dodoo and Tempenis 2002: 67). Further, although urban residents tend to have better access to infrastructure, this may not hold for slum dwellers (Chant and McIlwaine 2016: 93).

A third hypothesis is that urban areas enable anonymity, and thereby weaken social control (as argued by Wirth 1938). The multiple, non-overlapping social networks created by urban population density impede the circulation of information ('gossip'), allowing people to keep different domains separate. Urban anonymity arguably fosters female autonomy. '[In town] a woman is independent. You are free to do as you please. There are no homestead people watching you,' explained a Xhosa South African participant (Mayer 1961: 249–25). By contrast, in small, tightly knit rural communities, deviation from gender norms is more visible and more closely monitored. To quote one rural Norwegian adolescent, 'in the rural parish everybody knows what you do… all the old ladies are sitting ready with their binoculars and telephone… [They would] probably impress any Al-Qaeda member. Because it is in the rural parishes the old ladies with the inclination to spread gossip are those who in one way or another "know your mother"' (Haughen and Villa 2006: 187). In rural areas, where more people know what you think and do, it may be more difficult to evade social sanction. For example, in south-western Kenya, 'girls noted that the close knit nature of the community made it difficult to get [contraceptives] privately' (Milligan 2014: 469). By contrast, middle-class families in urban Zambia, with perimeter walls ensuring privacy, might be able to redistribute unpaid care work without anyone else knowing or judging (Author 2016).

However, greater anonymity in urban areas would only explain why urban residents are more able to behaviourally deviate from widely shared gender ideologies, not why those ideologies are different in urban areas. For instance, anonymity could explain rural-urban differences in the *prevalence* of female genital cutting, but perhaps not rural-urban differences in (privately expressed) *support* for this practice (as recorded by UNICEF 2013).

Moreover, even if urban residents are under less surveillance from their kin, they may still care about how they will be perceived and treated by strangers—as illustrated by much feminist urban geography. In Delhi:

> Women are under constant scrutiny: for what they wear, how they behave, where they are going, who they are with, at what time of day or night. They are under pressure to conform to familiar boundaries of tradition and class. Challenging these boundaries carries the risk of psycho-social dissonance and assault of various kinds. (Butcher 2015; see also Thomas 2005 on South Carolina.)

Urban men likewise perform gender, equally aware of public appraisals of their conduct and concerned about social respect—in schools, at work, and on the street (as Ferguson 1999: 114 observed in Zambia).

The central limitation of the preceding hypotheses is the need to further explain rural-urban differences in gender ideologies. Much feminist geography suggests this is a key factor (on Britain, Nicaragua, and more globally, see Bradshaw 1995, 2013: 84; Jarvis et al. 2009: 113; Little 2002: 87; McIlwaine 2013: 77). So why might gender ideologies differ between rural and urban contexts? Perhaps there is something particularly disruptive about cities? Tonkiss (2005: 95) writes of early 20th-century London: 'if the pace, diversity and instability of urban life disturbed established social forms, this included gender roles and codes of conduct.' Exposure to heterogeneity (my fourth hypothesis) has been central to classic and contemporary characterizations of the urban: 'as both Georg Simmel and Henri Lefebvre paradigmatically recognized in different moments of 20th-century capitalist development, this transformative potential inheres in the social, economic and cultural differentiations that are produced through urbanization, which connect diverse populations, institutions, activities, interactions and experiments in specific sociospatial configurations' (Brenner and Schmid 2015: 177; see also Amin 2007; Simone 2013; Scott and Storper 2014).

But *why* might heterogeneity catalyse social change? Perhaps living in a large community increases *tolerance* of diversity, of others doing things with which one personally disagrees (as found by Dulani et al. 2016 and Huggins and Debies-Carl 2015). But while tolerance might explain reduced social condemnation and neighbourly interference (e.g. not chastizing outspoken women), does it really capture *positive* support for gender equality (voting for

women, educating one's daughter)? An alternative possibility, suggested by Jarvis et al. (2009: 113), is that urban heterogeneity disrupts gender ideologies:

> Globalising and world cities… experience… increased exposure to different cultural and social norms, because of their very openness, and therefore have the capacity to induce gender liquefaction—melting, blending and re-solidifying new gendered norms... A global or world city, therefore, has to have the capacity to create and maintain different gendered forms that can only thrive in this rich, diversified urban environment, else it may become the stage for a conservative backlash.

This raises an interesting question: why does exposure to alternatives sometimes (but not always) trigger backlash? Urban heterogeneity clearly does not render gender equality inevitable. For centuries, London women have predominated in low-status, low-paid jobs. Prejudices (of all kinds) persist, notwithstanding diversity (Amin 2002; Valentine et al. 2014).

Further, what kinds of exposure are catalytic? Exposure to abstract ideas of equality (gender sensitization, facilitated by urban-based NGOs); media exposure to Western ideas (as suggested in Giddings and Hovorka 2010); or physically encountering alternative possibilities? UNICEF (2013: 36–7) suggests that because urban areas are more 'culturally diverse' there is a greater likelihood of mixing with groups that do not practise female genital cutting. Through exposure to and association in urban environments, where uncircumcized girls do not suffer a loss in social respect, people may come to question their internalized ideologies and also their norm perceptions (beliefs about what others think and do). But is such heterogeneity an inevitable feature of the urban? Informed by this literature, the remainder of this article explores the extent of rural-urban differences in Zambian gender ideologies and practices, as well as their possible causes.

3   Methodology

This study primarily draws on ethnographic research. Through life history interviews and group discussions, participants were invited to share their perceptions and explanations of rural-urban differences. Participants included 21 men and 37 women: 43 from rural areas (34 of whom were circular migrants) and 15 urban residents. The study was initially based in the largest city in the Zambian Copperbelt: Kitwe (with a population of 506,045). I had previously undertaken a year's ethnographic research here, exploring processes of social change.

Previous informants from the central market introduced me to rural-urban circular migrants—most of whom were fish wholesalers from the same village, Chinsanka. This was a remote location: over 10 hours' drive north (along deeply potholed, waterlogged, untarmacked roads) in Luapula Province. This small fishing village of 1,298 residents, perched on the sandy (largely infertile) banks of Lake Bangweulu, became my second research site.

Image 1: Looking onto the still waters of Lake Bangweulu

Source: author's photograph.

Although respondents largely comprised low-income market traders, fishermen, and homemakers, this paper is also informed by my previous research with a greater socio-economic range of urban participants: domestic workers, unemployed men, teachers, wealthy business people, and parliamentarians (Author 2014, 2015a). I use this earlier data to explain how people's experiences of the city are shaped by their socio-economic circumstances.

Having developed rapport, I invited participants to narrate their life histories; reflect on their experiences of different spaces; describe gender ideologies and practices in those spaces; and identify salient influences. They subsequently shared and debated differing perspectives in group discussions. We spoke in village and town Bemba (two slightly different vocabularies, in which I am fluent).

Despite such efforts, I was nonetheless conscious of the limitations of interviews, which only provide insights into how a person seeks to present themselves and their communities at that particular moment. Participants may have caricatured the urban/rural, obscuring diversity or confounding normative and descriptive truths. Some participants spoke for others, blaming rural girls for their lack of concentration in school. Such narratives are still illuminating, however, as they reveal people's expectations of rural girls. Another concern was that participants' constructions of the past might have been biased by memory loss and current

beliefs. Accordingly, I drew on historical ethnographies, and further triangulated discourses by speaking to other family members. But I may have misread their portrayals. In discussions about gender equality, participants might have endorsed widely circulating normative claims, to which they might not have conformed in practice. To minimize peer influence, I also facilitated individual interviews. But their narratives may have been affected by my identity: a white European, possibly presumed to endorse gender equality. However, feigned agreement is not consistent with my observations of our interactions. Participants seemed to particularly enjoy relating *their* stories about their communities. They also (often repeatedly) encouraged me to share *their* priorities, such as marriage, childbearing, and wearing African attire. I adopted the latter—much to my hosts' delight.

Narratives were triangulated through observation. Besides studying gendered interactions in public places (leisure, trade, mourning, and politics), I also lived with participants. Since I did not observe all participants' lives, I retain scepticism about claims made. They may only reflect aspirations or beliefs, rather than practices.

Data was recorded, transcribed into English, and then transferred into software enabling qualitative text analysis (NVivo 10). The data was then coded, using emergent themes and subthemes. Names have been changed to preserve anonymity.

4   Local context: Kitwe and Chinsanka

The British colonial government and mining companies curbed women's participation in the largest economic sectors: mining, domestic service, and rural-urban trade. Emergent norm perceptions of male breadwinners endured for as long as they were enabled by macro-economic conditions. During the early decades of independence, high international copper prices, limited mechanization, state-directed industrialization, and investment in social services meant that men could largely provide for their families single-handedly.[3] Resulting gender divisions of labour prevented popular exposure to women demonstrating their equal competence in socially valued domains. Older urban participants narrated that women from across the socio-economic spectrum typically underestimated their own abilities. Those who deviated from widely shared gender ideologies (outspoken women, for instance) were typically reprimanded. Outliers seldom undermined people's assumptions about women in general, and

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[3] The 1969 census presents Kitwe's working African population as comprising 36,017 men and 3,283 women (CSO 1973: 8).

hence did not create a positive feedback loop (Author 2015b; Chimba, 2005; Epstein 1992; Hansen, 1997; Ferguson 1999; Powdermaker 1962). Women's median age at first marriage was similar in rural and urban areas in 1992: 17.2 and 17.5 (CSO et al. 1997: 4).

This historical analysis suggests that the urban is not inevitably disruptive. It also undermines some hypotheses about rural-urban differences. Even if there are economic opportunities in urban areas, they may be extremely male-dominated (even in services – domestic work, teaching, and clerical jobs - Hansen, 1997). Further, increased anonymity through population density does not appear to enhance women's status or autonomy—at least not in this context of economic dependence on male breadwinners and widely shared gender ideologies. Nor does proximity to services entail women's bodily autonomy. In previous decades, clinics might request a husband's letter of permission before issuing contraceptives (ZARD 1996: 42).

Significant rupture has recently occurred in urban areas. Worsening economic security (from the early 1980s, with trade liberalization, privatization, public sector contraction, resultant job losses, the introduction of user fees, and HIV/AIDS) led households to perceive female labour force participation as advantageous (as also observed by Barankariza, 2016; Chileshe, 2014; Hansen, 1997; Mususa, 2010). The resulting critical mass of women in paid work is increasingly interpreted as signalling that other people now regard women as suited to socially valued roles—thereby shifting norm perceptions. Seeing women demonstrating their equal abilities in historically male-dominated domains also appears to have undermined gender stereotypes relating to competence and status. Shifts in perceived interests have thus catalysed behavioural change, amplified exposure, and fostered a positive feedback loop. '*Abanakashi kuti babomba incito sha baume*' (women can do what men can do) has become a popular urban expression of gender equality. '*Ifitenge kuntanshi, amatoloshi kunuma*' (skirts to the front, trousers to the back) is another slogan, favoured by low-income, urban political activists. It means women should lead. '*Tuli cimo cine fye*' (we are one and the same) is a third—voiced by women and men alike (Author 2014, 2015a, 2015b; Mususa, 2010).[4]

Image 2: 'Women can do what men can do': two co-workers in Kitwe

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[4] This is not to imply that gender ideologies have been eradicated in Kitwe; only to highlight social change. Discrimination and hierarchical practices persist (Barankariza, 2016; Hansen, 1997; Mususa, 2010).

Source: author's photograph.

Gender ideologies in rural areas seem more resistant to change, however. Rural gender inequalities were historically reinforced by men's privileged access to income-generating opportunities in urban areas; Christianity; male bias in government interventions; and declining soil fertility, which undermined the socio-economic value of women's agricultural work (Gordon 2006; Harrison 1995; Moore and Vaughan 1994; Poewe 1981). Men were revered as breadwinners. They were also regarded as more competent in socially valued domains. *Incito sha banakashi* (women's work, both agricultural and domestic) was widely devalued, and commonly referred to as *ukwikala* (just sitting).

Rural gender practices seem to persist, despite urban disruption. Over the 1990s and 2000s, rural-urban differences widened for women's median age at first marriage, contraceptive use, fertility rates, and teenage pregnancy. Between 1992 and 2013/14, the fertility rate fell drastically in urban areas (from 5.8 to 3.7) but barely changed in rural areas (from 7.1 to 6.6) (CSO et al. 1993: 28, 2015: 85). Teenage pregnancy declined by almost a third in urban areas (from 29% to 20%), but only marginally in rural areas (from 40% to 36%) (CSO et al. 1993: 35, 2015: 77). The proportion of child marriages in rural areas is almost double that of urban areas (39% versus 18%: Malé and Wodon, 2016). Young women in rural (rather than urban) areas are also more likely to report experience of emotional and sexual (though not physical) violence (Kusathan et al, 2015).

Even when there are professional opportunities in rural areas, they are male-dominated. Although women account for a larger proportion of the labour force in rural areas (49%, compared with 37% in urban areas), they are much more under-represented in professional (i.e. high-status) employment in rural areas (36%, contrasted with 44% in urban areas) (CSO 2012: 227–8). This seems to count against the hypothesis that rural-urban differences stem from better economic opportunities for women (and the lesser importance of physical strength) in urban areas.

Rural-urban differences are also manifest in gender ideologies. People living in a large city are statistically less likely to justify wife beating than their countryside compatriots when educational level, work status, and wealth quintile are controlled for (Author and Swiss 2016; see also Figure 1). These beliefs also seem to be changing more rapidly in urban areas (Figure 4). Clearly, apparent urban change might only reflect more feigned egalitarianism in the wake of urban-centred NGO campaigns. But this would still be an important form of social change: a shift in beliefs about what is socially acceptable ('norm perceptions').

Figure 4: Percentage of respondents who agreed with at least one justification for wife beating
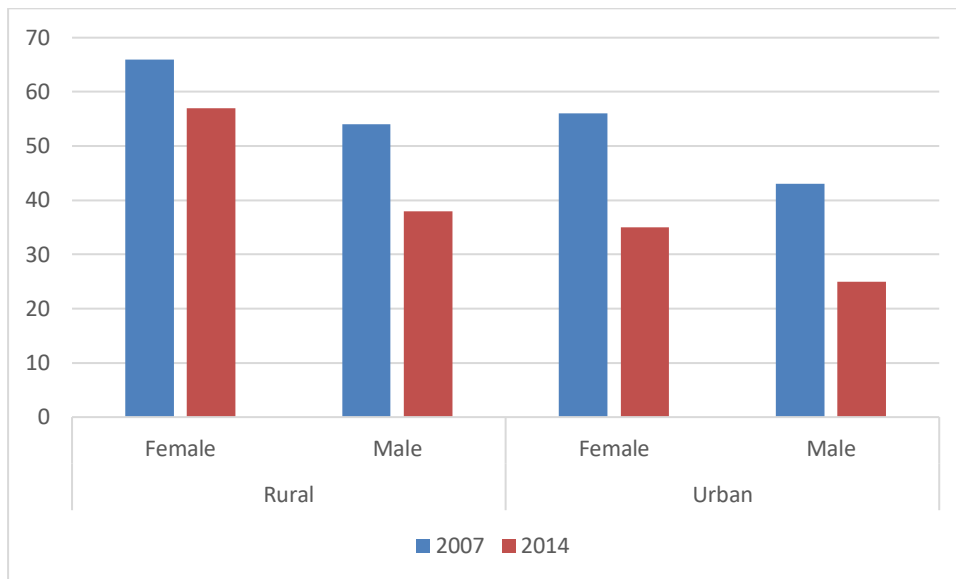
Source: CSO et al. 2009: 264–5, 2015: 265.

In 2010/12, 19% of urban and 32% of rural respondents endorsed the claim that 'men make better political leaders than women' (Afrobarometer 2016). This is consistent with my observations: there was more overt resistance to (and condemnation of) women's leadership in rural areas. While public discussions were always male-dominated, women seemed more vocal in Kitwe than in Chinsanka. These trends persisted even when gender-balanced composition had been mandated, such as in Chinsanka's Area Development Committee. Some rural participants even denied the possibility of women leaders—in government, religion, traditional authority structures, or agricultural cooperatives.

Rural women in my sample primarily identified as wives and mothers, often doubting whether they could survive independently outside marriage (as also observed by Mwansa, 2013). While young urban women are also eager to marry, it is rarely their highest priority. Employment comes first. Further, their entrepreneurial success is likely to be lauded by urban men. Although gender inequalities persist in Kitwe, they are more frequently punctured by diverse, disruptive discourses (compared with Chinsanka). Moreover, there is greater public awareness of such contestation. By contrast, even if rural participants privately disavowed norm perceptions, they typically perceived themselves as powerless to change the status quo.

But rural-urban differences are not always apparent. Exceptions include proclivity to justify a woman refusing sex with her husband, as well as women's participation in household decision-

making regarding their own healthcare and large purchases (CSO 2015: 267; Author and Swiss 2016). Further, in both rural and urban areas, men's share of care work remains minimal (Author 2016). Curiously, these domains of rural-urban commonality all concern domestic spaces. Rural-urban differences seem much greater in the public domains of education, employment, and leadership. Why might this be?

Rural-urban differences appear to be especially large in Zambia. This might be due to counter-urbanization in the 1980s and 1990s (Potts, 2016). Given low historical rural-urban migration, most urban Copperbelt residents were born in the urban Copperbelt, not in rural areas. Further, because support for gender equality really only increased in the 2000s, urban-rural migration in the 1980s–1990s would not have exported gender equality to rural areas. Countries with higher historical and contemporary rates of intranational migration would likely have smaller rural-urban differences in gender ideologies.

5   Explanations of urban change and rural continuity in gender ideologies and practices

Rural-urban migrants, as well as long-term rural and urban residents, emphasized two key features of Zambian towns and cities: more women undertaking socially valued roles, and greater access to services. They further narrated how these both unsettle gender ideologies and practices. Exposure to women demonstrating their equal abilities in socially valued roles appears to undermine gender ideologies relating to competence and status. This seems to foster a positive feedback loop, with growing flexibility in gender divisions of labour. Meanwhile, greater proximity to services in urban areas makes it easier for women to control their fertility and secure external intervention against gender-based violence.

I will argue that these two phenomena (exposure and services) are more likely in more interconnected, heterogeneous, densely populated areas. Through multiple sightings of others doing things differently, people come to question their prior assumptions, revise their norm perceptions, and become more inclined to adopt alternative practices—thereby fostering a positive feedback loop. Services are also typically more proximate in densely populated areas. Neither is an inevitable consequence of urbanization, however. Nor are they impossible in rural contexts.

5.1 Exposure to flexibility in gender divisions of labour

Rural isolation seems to reinforce continuity in gender beliefs and relations. In Chinsanka, men are widely perceived and revered as providers. As Sarah (a 30-year-old rural homemaker and mother of four, who—unlike her brothers—had not completed school) explained:

> It's men who provide for us, who buy us everything. Husbands help parents [financially] but we women don't do it much. We don't really concentrate on school… We get pregnant. You're finished now, it's over… A boy will make her pregnant and he will return to school; whereas the girls' parents will refuse to educate her again. They'll say 'you will get pregnant again,' thinking it's a waste of money. (Translated.)

Indeed, when interviewed separately, her mother, Mary (55), maintained:

> Rural girls—paying for their education is a waste of money. They're just interested in men. (Translated.)

These gender ideologies persisted even when I was accompanied by Grace, my rural host, who had recently returned from selling fish in Kitwe. Such outliers did not appear to diminish stereotypes about rural women. Perhaps this was partly due to their limited visibility: besides being few in number, they also performed their economic roles outside the village, out of sight. With limited exposure to alternative discourses and practices, women tend to adopt widely shared ideologies, lack confidence in the possibility of social change, and thus limit their aspirations to marriage and motherhood (see also Mwansa, 2013).

This explanation of rural-urban differences was shared by rural-urban circular migrants, who drew on their experiences of cities, towns, and villages. They explained that rural gender divisions of labour perpetuated gender ideologies, reinforcing gender inequalities in education and early marriage.

> Bwalya (47, father of five, circular rural-urban migrant, fish wholesaler): Girls don't get far ahead in school; they give up quickly. Boys concentrate more than girls. But in town girls stay in school. They aspire to be like other women who are working. (Translated.)

Nsenga (41, circular migrant, fish wholesaler): In the village, there are no educated women for girls to look up to, so they don't aspire for employment. (Translated.)

Annie (45, widow, circular migrant from Mansa (the largest town in Luapula), who travels to Chinsanka and Kitwe to trade fish): But here in town, there are nurses, teachers, doctors. Girls think, 'if I am educated then I can be a doctor.' Here in town children see everyone going to school, but in the village they just see two people. So what can they be envious of?. (Translated.)

Nsenga: Here in town a woman may stop school to give birth, then she will be desperate to return to school and finish. But in the village they just give birth and it's all over. It's because of early marriage. There's nothing else they see and aspire to. (Translated.)

Here Nsenga suggests that it is rare for women to undertake socially valued roles in rural areas. Their work is typically devalued. Cooking, cleaning, sweeping, fetching water and firewood, as well as weeding and planting (for subsistence agriculture) are commonly referred to as *ukwikala* (just sitting). Expectations of marriage and motherhood seem to shape girls' commitment to education, as well as their parents' and teachers' support. These ideologies help explain persistent gender gaps in school attendance and literacy in rural areas (CSO 2011: 57, 2015: 25; Mwansa, 2013).

Urban experiences are quite different. For instance, on the bustling commute to town, traders might pass a woman clad in blue overalls (a powerful symbol of masculine minework), another in orange up a pole (repairing electricity cables). Waiting for the bus, they might overhear a proud father telling a colleague that his daughter has topped the class. A pick-up truck passes, laden with building supplies, driven by a woman, possibly heading to her plot nearby. When the bus arrives, they clamber aboard, squeezing in between smartly turned-out schoolgirls and businesswomen. Neighbouring female passengers are discussing trade union politics and an upcoming meeting in Lusaka. The crackly radio announces an upcoming church service led by a female pastor. News items mention the Auditor General and other high-profile female compatriots. The bus pulls over at a garage, to be refuelled by a female attendant. All this on a routine, unremarkable bus journey. Yet these sightings are powerfully disruptive—collectively, at least. Cumulative exposure to diverse forms of flexibility in gender divisions of

labour seems to enhance women's confidence that they too can succeed in historically male-dominated domains—as illustrated in the following life histories:

> Grace, my rural host (circular migrant, fish wholesaler): I was very happy when I came to town because I was learning many things that I didn't know before. I saw many women with businesses… They show it's possible. I won't suffer… In the village they just rely on their husbands, who give them food. The person who stays behind in the village and the person who comes to town are different in intelligence… Many women have begun to learn because if they get married quickly they will be suffering. They've awoken now. (Translated.)

> Annie (45, outspoken widow, circular migrant from Mansa): Historically they sat on women's rights [a common figurative expression]… We were scared, thinking that if our marriages end then we'll suffer… My husband refused me doing business. I just stayed at home, looking after our children and parents… But later I saw educated women providing for their children. I came to think that maybe I could do what they are doing… Working women provide for their families and their parents without a beloved. So upon his death I drew on his pension from being a government driver, I started to look after my children and do business… I have freedom to work wherever I want. I can't go back again into marriage because I have the intelligence to think for myself. (Translated.)

Seeing women undertaking the same roles as men and outperforming them (in terms of income generation) appears to undermine not only women's gendered self-perceptions but also people's assumptions about women in general:

> John (43, rural-urban migrant from Chinsanka): Upon coming to town, I saw a woman who was safeguarding money, educating her children… Historically we used to think a woman would just destroy money and business but actually they work very well indeed… Travelling is very important: seeing how our friends stay caused me to change my views and my way of living. (Translated.)

Urban working mothers are commonly portrayed and indeed celebrated as 'strong', 'fighting' (translated) to provide for their children. These masculine accolades reflect the broader sense in which gender ideologies about women's lesser competence and status are being undermined through growing exposure to women demonstrating equal competence in

masculine domains. This erosion of gender ideologies is distinctly partial, however. Gender ideologies still persist: it is primarily stereotypically masculine (rather than feminine) attributes that are valorized. *Incito sha banakashi* (women's work) tends to be unseen and unappreciated. Further, this terminology (physically 'strong', 'fighting') exemplifies rural influences on urban discourses (i.e. rural-urban interconnections), although their meanings have modified in this cash-based, mechanized economy marred by financial hardship.

In towns and cities there seems to be greater likelihood of associating with people who reject gender ideologies. Discussion may lead others to question their ideologies—as I observed on multiple occasions. For instance, when rural migrants portrayed rural men as doing more work, urban women sometimes interrupted, suggesting alternative perspectives, which migrants subsequently endorsed. Additionally, many (but not all) rural-urban migrants told me that they had heard about gender equality and women's rights in the urban market. Contemporary discourses of gender equality often mention high-profile women in government and civil society. Newspaper and radio reports of women being employed in mines, banks, and universities provide further disconfirming evidence about gender ideologies. While it is problematic that government initiatives on gender are typically limited to awareness-raising (Author 2015a), such lip service still appears significant. It is often interpreted as legitimizing equality, thereby shifting norm perceptions.

Importantly, however, associating with people who reject gender inequality is not an inevitable consequence of urban residence. Both now and during the colonial period, urban homemakers (with multiple children and a heavy burden of care work), home-based traders (often with narrow social circles), and domestic workers (labouring alone under a madam) are less exposed to egalitarian discourses. With limited exposure to egalitarian discourses circulating in public spaces, they may presume that others tolerate gender-based violence and hence endure it in silence (Author 2014, 2015b).

Rural women appear even less likely to be exposed to egalitarian discourses. While Zambian media often marginalises women's voices and contributions (Chimba, 2005; Moma et al, 2009), it does include some egalitarian programmes, so it is notable that the proportion of women who report no weekly media access is almost three times higher in rural areas (45.1% versus 16.6%) (CSO et al. 2009: 39). Further, even when people do have radio access (e.g. the 69% of rural men who claim to listen at least once a week (CSO et al. 2009: 40)), they often dismiss broadcasts about high-profile women as showcasing outliers. Egalitarian

discourses appear most significant in conjunction with first-hand evidence of women's equal competence in socially valued domains (Author 2015a). This is limited in remote rural areas.

Rural gender ideologies are not endorsed universally. Some villagers came, over the course of our interactions, to express vehement resentment of gender inequalities.[5] They nonetheless conformed due to concerns about norm perceptions or economic dependency (shaped by historical legacies of gender bias in education and employment). For example, although Grace earned money in town, she gave it all to her husband. Despite being greatly frustrated by this practice (getting visibly angry in our discussions, shouting even), she felt powerless to change it. Aware that it was uncommon in urban areas, she sighed: 'those in town, they are lucky, they have so much freedom' (translated). Indeed, the proportion of women reporting that their husbands control their earnings is three times lower in urban Zambia: 7.7% versus 24.3% (CSO 2015: 255).

Although Grace privately disavowed norm perceptions, she (and others like her) seemed to perceive herself as powerless to change the status quo. Similarly, even if male migrants come to question the acceptability of gender-based violence or child marriage through urban exposure to egalitarian discourses, this is not always sufficient for behavioural change back home. Men often seemed reluctant to speak out and intervene in neighbours' disputes due to concerns about social repercussions. Without confidence in changes in norm perceptions, individuals often seemed reluctant to rock the boat. Such confidence may be less likely to develop in remote areas, as homogeneity constrains exposure to alternatives and thereby impedes a positive feedback loop.

5.2   Proximity to services

Participants also emphasized spatial variation in access to government services such as clinics and police. People in more sparsely populated areas typically live further away from police posts (CSO 2011: 249). The nearest police station to Chinsanka is two to three hours' drive away—longer if the deeply potholed dirt road is waterlogged. Rural girls and women are thus less likely to be knowledgeable about, familiar with, or financially able to access these services. Indeed, rural Zambian women are less likely to report that they have recently obtained help from the police (Afrobarometer 2016). Rural men may thus be less likely to fear external

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[5] I *think* they became more open with me because we by cultivated rapport over time. However, it is also possible that I inadvertently facilitated critical reflection and a shift in their internalized gender ideologies, or that they presented themselves as more egalitarian because I unwittingly signalled approval for such.

sanction. Spatial variation in access to services (rather than individual circumstances, such as wealth or internalized gender ideologies) was reiterated throughout my sample.

> Precious (30, circular migrant): In our village, if he beats her, we just sit. But in town they go to the police… Here they are near the police, there at the village it's far. So we can't manage. You need to find a vehicle. (Translated.)

> Sarah (30, rural homemaker): If we have police then we can overcome the problem. They will be afraid. (Translated.)

> BanaBupe (37, married, urban market trader): We urban women, we're not afraid of our husbands. If my husband hits me then I'll take him to the police. We have rights, to go to Victim Support. They'll write the case down. But village people don't take them to the police… They're scared… Also, there aren't many police in the village. The government ought to put police posts in the village and laws saying that a woman who is beaten should take her husband to the police. Then fear in marriage will end. (Translated.)

While urban women (like BanaBupe) might have exaggerated their assertiveness (to position themselves as uniquely modern), and rural women (like Sarah) might have been mistaken about the counterfactual consequences of police proximity, both sets of personal accounts were consistent with circular migrants' portrayals of different spaces. Collectively, this data indicates that rural women are often privately critical of gender-based violence yet constrained by insufficient institutional support.

Besides providing a deterrent, police posts also appear to influence norm perceptions. Some interpreted police intervention as state authorization of women's bodily autonomy, legitimizing their own ideologies. Distance from services may thus explain why people in more sparsely populated areas are more likely to support wife beating (see Figures 1 and 4).

Healthcare is another important service that is often closer to those in densely populated areas. Proximity makes it easier to learn about and use family planning services. Chinsanka was two hours' walk from the nearest clinic. Distance may partly explain lower reported use of contraceptives, higher unmet need for family planning, and higher rates of teenage pregnancy in rural areas. When we control for individual-level variables (age, marital status, wealth, employment status, education, etc.), urban women are 1.6 times more likely than their rural compatriots to use modern contraceptives (White and Speizer 2007, drawing on

data from 2001–2). Further, when rural women's access to health services increases, so does their use of contraceptives. Rural women who were visited by a health worker were 1.83 times more likely to report using modern methods (White and Speizer 2007). This indicates that rural-urban differences in contraceptive use are largely a consequence of differing service access.

Higher fertility rates in rural areas may reinforce gender inequalities: increasing the likelihood of school dropout, increasing the volume of care work, limiting labour market participation, reinforcing economic dependency on men, and discouraging marital separation. As Precious (30, circular migrant) despaired: 'we have many children, we won't manage alone' (translated).

Obviously, proximity to services only disrupts gender inequalities in conjunction with effective and properly funded government policies. It is only in the past decade that the Zambian government and cooperating partners have facilitated more gender egalitarian, youth-friendly family planning. Prioritization of family planning is emphasized in the Sixth National Development Plan 2013–16 as well as the National Health Strategic Plan 2011–15.

Similarly, only in the past two decades has there been in-service training on gender-based violence for the Victim Support Unit as well as the judiciary. The National Plan of Action on Gender-Based Violence was established in 2008, followed by the Anti-Gender-Based Violence Act (2011) as well as the Gender Equity and Equality Act (2015). As BanaBupe (37, married, urban trader) remarked: 'the government of Kaunda [1964–91] didn't legislate that we could take husbands to court. But this time, *you lock him up*!' (translated). These domestic changes partly reflect effective transnational feminist organizing, global shifts in norms, and increasing financial support. Overseas development assistance for gender equality from OECD-DAC members tripled between 2002 and 2012, from USD $8 billion to $24 billion (OECD-DAC 2014).

6   Discussion

Consistent with earlier literature, my participants emphasized gendered differences between villages, towns, and cities. They attributed more gender egalitarian ideologies and practices in the latter to greater exposure to women in socially valued roles and proximity to services.

While the significance of proximity to services is well established (Chant and McIlwaine 2016; Hughes 1997), the point about exposure seems more novel. Seeing a female mechanic may

enhance another woman's confidence in the possibility of herself performing a historically male-dominated role, making her more inclined to follow suit. Through multiple sightings of such deviation and diversity (mineworkers, electricians, trade unionists, businesswomen, preachers, and household heads), others may come to question their ideologies and adopt alternative practices—creating a snowballing effect. Multiple sightings are more likely in interconnected, heterogeneous, densely populated areas. Seeing a critical mass of women performing work previously presumed to be beyond their capabilities appears to undermine internalized gender ideologies. It also seems to be perceived as signalling that *other* people regard women as equally competent. This shift in norm perceptions seems to foster a positive feedback loop, with rising support for female education, employment, and leadership in urban areas. While this may be reinforced by exposure to abstract egalitarian discourses and global cultural diffusion, first-hand evidence of women's equal competence seems particularly disruptive (see also Bradshaw 1995 and Chant 2016 on exposure to female household headship).

Continuity in gender ideologies and practices seems more likely in remote rural areas—although this should not be interpreted as obfuscating diversity, overlap, or interconnections within the rural-urban spectrum. Remoteness seems to limit people's awareness of alternatives, reinforce gender ideologies, and dampen confidence in the possibility of social change, thereby discouraging contestation and reproducing gender divisions of labour. This hypothesis is consistent with a number of studies illustrating the mutually reinforcing relationship between rural gender ideologies and divisions of labour (on Bangladesh, Botswana, Britain, Honduras, Malawi and Zambia see Bradshaw 1995; Chisamya et al. 2012; Giddings and Hovorka 2010; Little 2002; Mwansa 2013). Similarly, with regard to homophobia, racism, religion, and xenophobia, Warf (2015: 935) argues that 'communities lacking cultural diversity often suffer a wet blanket of conformity that acts as an echo chamber in which alternative views and lifestyles are not imagined.'

Curiously, diversity and density do not seem to disrupt all gender ideologies and practices. Urban Zambian slogans about gender equality rarely include shared care work. In Kitwe, care work is more commonly undertaken indoors or inside fenced gardens, out of public sight and scrutiny. Thus the few men who do perform care work remain largely invisible. Hence people presume it is uncommon. These norm perceptions seem to discourage shared care work (Author 2016). This seems to undermine the anonymity hypothesis about the catalytic effects of reduced social monitoring in cities.

My hypothesis is that gender ideologies in other geographical contexts (both urban and rural) will weaken with growing exposure to flexibility in gender divisions of labour. This is borne out by earlier research in India (Beaman et al. 2012). Quotas for female leaders in randomly allocated villages in West Bengal are associated with a lagged increase in girls' aspirations and educational outcomes, as well as a reduction in their time spent on care work and the gender gap in parents' aspirations for their children (Beaman et al. 2012). Rural social change may also occur through exposure to egalitarian alternatives through watching television—as found by research in Brazil (La Ferrara et al. 2012). Both studies seem to count against alternative hypotheses that rural-urban differences are due to spatial variation in anonymity or economic opportunities. My argument is not that urbanization is likely to undermine the *power* of norm perceptions, but rather that it may change their descriptive and normative *content*.

This article contributes to the literature on egalitarian social change, at least in the sphere of gender relations, in four ways. First, while some (such as Collins 2002) suggest masculinities and femininities are primarily about power inequalities (rather than difference), my research suggests that gender status beliefs (that men are more worthy of respect and influence) are predicated upon assumptions of men and women's different competencies. These appear to weaken with exposure to women performing work previously presumed to be beyond their capabilities. This theory could be tested by examining whether there are places in which exposure to flexibility in gender divisions of labour does *not* undermine gender ideologies. Second, this article illustrates how such exposure may come about: through shifts in perceived interests, i.e. worsening economic security in the Zambian case. Third, my comparative rural-urban research indicates that a shift in perceived interests is not sufficient to broaden people's horizons such that they begin to contemplate or have confidence in the possibility of flexibility in gender divisions of labour. Fourth, it illustrates the importance of norm perceptions.

The snowballing process of egalitarian social change seems more likely in diverse, densely populated, connected areas where there is increased exposure to (and association with) alternative, heterogeneous ideologies and practices. But whereas others have suggested that urban heterogeneity merely fosters *tolerance* of difference (e.g. Dulani et al. 2016; Huggins and Debies-Carl 2015; Tonkiss 2003; Warf 2015), my argument is that such exposure may erode *perceptions* of difference (between men and women) and thereby cultivate support for equality. It is not that city-dwellers cease to condemn outspoken women; rather, they come to champion women leaders.

My historical and internationally comparative approach reveals that the urban is not inevitably disruptive. Experiences of the urban are shaped by international and government policies, as well as by macro-economic conditions. In a context of widespread financial insecurity, urban Zambian women's labour market participation is widely applauded. Because flexibility in gender divisions of labour is seen as advantageous, the snowballing process traverses a downward slope and gathers pace.[6] Here gender may be unique. For other forms of prejudice (e.g. between households), deprivation may compound antagonism (see Amin 2002 on racism in northern British towns). Equally significant are individual-level circumstances such as age, wealth, sexuality, and occupation. Homemakers, home-based traders, and domestic workers may be more socially isolated and thus less exposed to urban heterogeneity of ideas and practices. The mode of encounter may also be important. Mere proximity may not undermine assumptions of difference (Amin 2002; Valentine et al. 2014). But what happens when people *can* demonstrate equal competence? Because they are 'at work', 'fighting' to provide for their families in a context of worsening economic security, the urban women in my case study are increasingly seen and evaluated in these terms. The disruptive nature of the urban also varies across different domains of gender relations, with remarkably little change occurring in the private sphere. The challenge now is to further investigate when, where, and why cities can catalyse social change, as well as how these processes might be amplified.

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[6] This was not the case in the 1960s and 1970s, when urban men could largely provide for their families single-handedly.

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