




Minority within Minorities: A Critique of Cultural Practices which Influence Gender Inequalities among the Nambya in Zimbabwe.

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Abstract

The chapter is a contribution towards the discourse on gender and power in the context of Nambya women in Hwange district in Zimbabwe, who have suffered from multiple marginalisation due to their cultural practices, ethnicity and gender. Of significance are the cultural practices embedded in marriage, ritual practices and family dynamics which are patriarchal which has resulted in the side-lining of Nambya women to become second-class citizens and minoritised in the wider society. The chapter investigates the roles of Nambya women, their cultural practices and the impact of marginalising women among the Nambya ethnic group. The study will utilise the phenomenological approach to understand women in Nambya and this chapter seeks to unmask hegemonic masculinities that disempower women under the pretext of upholding Nambya cultural practices. It also seeks to contribute to debunking cultural practices and values which disempower women and create gender inequality among minority ethnic groups like the Nambya in Zimbabwe. The chapter recommends the debunking of cultural practices that limit women reaching their potential.

Keywords: Gender, Marginalisation, Ethnicity, Minority, Patriarchy, Cultural Practices



Introduction

The marginalisation of women due to patriarchy and ethnicity continues to be the feminist concern in the gender and power discourse in modern society today because they both breed gender inequalities by making women minorities in domestic and public spheres (David 2000:85). Nambya women, who are from a minority ethnic group in Zimbabwe, have been victims of gender inequality because of their ethnicity and the Nambya hegemonic masculinities need to be interrogated in the gender, religion and cultural discourse. The Nambya ethnic group is a product of the pre-colonial Nambya state of north-western Zimbabwe and although it has been known since early colonial times, (Kearney 1907:59) it has received little scholarly attention. It should be noted that colonialism, traditional structures, backwardness, race ethnicity and patriarchy are critical in gender and power politics as it has been the ground for the marginalisation and minoritisation of women (Amadiume, 2001:47).

Ethnicity and patriarchy emphasize that men have excessive powers over women and affect the status of women thus the discrimination of women because of their ethnic background and gender only serves the interests of men (Makaudze 2015:266). The fact is that ethnicity in the Zimbabwean and Nambyan patriarchal culture are to be blamed for women's minoritisation and the Nambyan women have become invisible, marginal and a minority gender. This indicates that they have become a minority within a minority and it is from this context that the minoritisation of women in a multicultural society has become topical among gender advocates, feminists and scholars.

Minoritisation along with gender and ethnicity has become an impediment to human and social development in many multicultural societies. This is true for the Chibarwe, Kalanga, Koisian, Nambya, Ndau, Shangani, Sotho, Tonga, Tswana, Venda and Xhosa tribes as they are considered minorities in multicultural Zimbabwe where ethnic groups like the Shona and Ndebele dominate in the cultural landscape and spaces. In multicultural societies and patriarchal societies

institutionalised systems advance male ideology (Zivave 2018:12). As a result of male dominance in these multicultural societies, women are objectified, suppressed, have limited access to resources, are forced into marriages and enjoy limited reproductive right. This is the case for Nambya women who face minoritisation stemming from politics of dominance and the Nambya patriarchal tradition.

Nambya is considered a minority patriarchal ethnic group in Zimbabwe because their population is relatively low (Jonhera, 2023:1179). Zimbabwe is characteristically, a multilingual and multicultural nation which comprises several of ethnic-minority groups, including Nambya, Tonga, TjiKalanga, Venda, Doma, Xhosa, Dombe and Ndau (Ndhlovu, 2006:308). This suggests that Nambya women belong to a minority ethnic group of about 100,000 people, based in Hwange in the north-west of Zimbabwe (Jonhera, 2023:1182). Within the Nambya ethnic group, women are inferior because they are subordinated and their voice is stifled within the broader context of a male-dominated society and are excluded from the public domain (Rawat, 2014:44). This inferiority status of women among the Nambya is caused by patriarchal beliefs and practices which consider female sexuality as cursed, inferior, subjugated, weak and subordinated whilst considering men as superior, strong and ruling (Zivave 2018:1).

Nambya women have been dominated by other ethnic groups as well as men in their own culture and dominance by other ethnic groups is due to Nambya being a minority in Zimbabwe and minorities are often restricted from participating fully or effectively in economic, social and political life (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioners, 2006:1). Minority women have been imaged as chattels and are subjected to male violence (Zivave, 2018:2) which causes cultural prejudice and discrimination and since the Nambya society is patriarchal, they are guilty of conspiracy because they side with the patriarchal institution and tradition in making Nambya women a minority within a minority (Zivave, 2018:2).

The presentation of Nambya women in their cultural context reflects hegemonic masculinity, which positions men as superior to women, not allowing for any sort of weakness or 'feminine' emotions i.e. nurturing, sadness, sensitivity, and caring/kindness (Uchendu 2007:280). Nambya ethnicity in a broader perspective and Nambya patriarchal culture in a narrower perspective have thus been instruments for advancing the dual-minoritisation of women in Nambya whilst promoting male dominance. The Nambya ethnic group epitomises a typical patriarchal African society in which a system of social stratification and gender variation enable patriarch in all spheres of life.

Patriarchy is defined as a system that is male dominated (Connell, 2005:129). It subordinates women by putting men in positions of influence, lowers the position of women in the social hierarchy and privileges male counterparts. It is a social and ideological construct which considers men as superior to women (Rawat, 2014:45). There is thus a need to offer scholarly attention and a feminist critique of the dominant patriarchal culture of the Nambya which has minoritised women in modern society based on oral evidence from Nambya and observations of the cultural aspects of the Nambya. Nambya society has patriarchal features that are typical of most societies in the Western world. Women are typically viewed and often treated as less than equal to men, with a common saying that the role of women lies in the kitchen (Makama, 2013:101). Patriarchy encourages male leadership, male domination and male power (Shoko, 2022:21) and is a system in which women are subject to economic dependence, violence, domestication and the peripherals of decision-making. It is the thrust of this paper that will bring about scholarly attention to the Nambya ethnic group in Zimbabwe so that gender equality is fully attained in a multicultural society.

Who are the Nambya People?

The BaNambya people are the native inhabitants of the area around Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe (Ncube 2004:2). They are also known as BaNyai, who are Bantu-speaking people found

in the northwest of Zimbabwe in the Hwange chieftaincy. Nambya people are originally Shona people who migrated from Great Zimbabwe after it had collapsed (Nhongo 2015; Sagiya 2019:2). It is argued by recent ethnographers that the development of the Nambya state was contemporaneous with other Zimbabwe cultural states and not the result of a direct migration from the Great Zimbabwe state (Sagiya 2019:2). According to tradition, the Nambya migrated from Great Zimbabwe going northwest of Zimbabwe where they passed Fungautsi (Filabusi) then went to Gwararavaranda (Gwabalanda) and Mopane (Lupane) where they proceeded to Binga where they found that the BaTonga were already there. They embraced some of the BaTonga people's way of life there and proceeded to reach the Zambezi River that they found navigating northwest. They settled in Hwange where they established a capital known as Bambusi and Shangano (Makuvaza 2008:22).

The Nambya culture in North-western Zimbabwe is best known for the stone-built sites of Shangano, Bumbuzi and Mtoa. Nambya oral traditions identify these sites as successive capitals of the Nambya state. Shangano was named the state's first capital; from there, it was moved to Mtoa and subsequently to Bumbuzi (Hayes 1997:385). The capitals that they constructed were similar to that of Great Zimbabwe and it is for this reason, that many scholars believe that the Nambya people came from Great Zimbabwe and conquered the Kalanga, who also influenced their culture (Shenjere-Nyabezim 2020:14). They also interacted with the Ndebeles who also later influenced their culture and thus today. Nambya culture is a hybrid culture composed of Shona background with some Tonga, Ndebele and Kalanga interaction (Sagiya, 2019:3). The Nambya people are under the paramount chief known as Whange who is a man (Nhongo, 2015:1) and they live communally, with men being the heads of the family. The leadership of men in the domestic and public sphere among the Nambya is significant in the gender and power discourse as women do not make decisions and all positions of authority are occupied by men. It is in this context that Sagiya (2019:6) believes that patriarchy therefore is an element of Nambya culture and colonialism cemented patriarchy

among them. Colonialism also brought ethnic demarcation by establishing provinces such as Mashonaland West, Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East, Manicaland, and Matabeleland North and South respectively which pushed women to the periphery. It brought a lot of cultural discrimination against women by men as it favoured men which implies that settlers brought a dominant colonial ideology that codified the position of Zimbabwean women into minors under the control and guidance of their fathers and husbands (Seidman 1984:421). The colonial system thus had a huge impact on indigenous women's cementing patriarchy into African society through the belief that men are better than women and deserve more power. As a result, men took occupations which allowed them to be assertive and control women and by so doing, the system advantaged men instead of women by making men decision makers, leaders and custodians of the family system. This created a gap between men and women who in traditional African society lived a more complementary life as compared to what was introduced by coloniality (Okome, 2003:68).

The concept of Minoritisation

The concept of minoritisation is mainly used in religious, cultural and ethnic studies to refer to numerically superior people (Atkinson 2000:185; Armstrong 2020:2). However, in this context, it refers to "sexual minorities" which refers to a social category that somehow helps describe and explain how women have been peripherised and subordinated in the social world due to their historical background, ethnicity and gender (Zivave, 2018:5). The objective in this paper is to determine how women have been relegated to the periphery due to historical background, ethnicity and gender. To do so, hegemonic masculinities that are embedded in ethnic politics and patriarchal cultures that would not allow for the promotion of gender equality in society are unpacked. The main contention of this paper is that Nambya women have suffered from varied institutionalised cultural and ethnic practices which have led to minoritisation. The argument, broadly stated, is that hegemonic masculinities harm minority ethnic groups rather than dominant cultural groups and that minority

cultures, nations and ethnic groups also suffer from dominant cultural groups. This has hampered the goal of multiculturalism because the protection of minority cultures is underestimated resulting in gender inequality.

The concept of ‘minority group’ should track what is wrong with the world and should help achieve justice and political equality (Haslanger 2000:31; Haslanger 2012:32 & Armstrong 2020:2). The argument is that; hegemonic masculinities should not be understood as the disbandment of indigenous culture but as debunking cultural practices that dehumanise women as part of the social group because hegemonic masculinities make women oppressed, exploited, dominated or simply marginalized. Overall, the belief is that Nambya women have been culturally and ethnically minoritised resulting in gender inequalities and social injustice in society.

Hegemonic Masculinity theoretical framework

Indigenous culture has a lot of patriarchal influences in social, religious and political spheres. It is a reality that the socio-cultural status of women has been negative in patriarchal societies (Zivave 2018:2). The domination of men in the socio-cultural context of Nambya women as well as the minoritisation of Nambya as an ethnic group has affected women more than men. The study will thus employ a hegemonic masculinity theoretical framework that articulates male dominant roles over females. Fundamentally, hegemonic masculinity is mostly attained through institutions such as marriage and cultural practices, which exclude or oppress females (Connell 2005:130). Since hegemonic masculinity differs by race, class and time, there will certainly be a Nambya dominant hegemonic masculinity which is based on the cultural practices of Nambya. It should be noted that Nambya are found in a “multicultural society with diverse religion, ethnic culture and economic class” (Zivave 2024:89) but they are considered a minority due to their numerical deficiency in the wider Zimbabwean society. In many multicultural societies, women are stereotyped because of their gender because ethnic boundaries and patriarchy in Zimbabwe have erased the complementary nature of men’s and women’s responsibilities (Shoko 2022:47).

In indigenous societies, women have been dispossessed of power and are now dependent upon men for their survival even today (Connell, 2005:132). Hegemonic masculinity adopted among the Nambya ethnic group has largely been influenced by the colonisation of all Zimbabwean ethnic groups by colonialists who imposed a form of a dominant, masculine culture on Zimbabwean men when they minoritised women by relegating them to the periphery and this was also reinforced by the patriarchal culture and a neo-colonisation agenda (Zivave, 2024:82). This hegemonic masculine culture prevents women from being active members of society (Rawat, 2014:48). Masculinity in Zimbabwe is largely formed along ethnicity, but there are dominant masculinity traits common to every man which makes women dominant (Jonhera, 2023:1184). For example, Nambya men are socialised to dominate women in every aspect of life which makes them superior and marginalises women from decision-making and public spheres.

Nambya men “discriminate against and dominate women because they live with the neo-colonized masculine ideologies of the colonizers, treating women as inferior” and minorities (Jaiyeola & Aladegbola 2020:4). Nambya men through the Nambya culture have practices that perpetuate gender inequality like Kuthobela, kutangila “child pledging”, seeking permission from male counterparts to do some activities as well as, exclusion in decision making and legal issues. Consequently, women in minority ethnic groups are driven into poverty and being dependent with a subordinate status (Metcalf & Afanassieva 2005:397). The gist of this discourse on gender marginalisation is that Nambya’s hegemonic masculinity is a product of ethnic minoritisation and patriarchy. Women have become a minority within their ethnic group resulting in gender exclusion as reflected by their marriage practices, land ownership, rites of passage and social organisation of the Nambya. Therefore, it will be appropriate to contextually explore the minoritisation of women in Nambya culture using cultural lenses and the roles society assigns to women as each society acquires peculiar knowledge based on the meaning constructed by their society (Barker 2012:22).

The Minoritisation and Marginalisation of women in Nambya culture

The roles of women in Nambya culture are a representation of the wider gender roles of women in various ethnic groups in the indigenous society. Gender roles in the Nambya culture provide a lens through which gender and power can be reconstructed and deconstructed. It should be noted that most gender roles of the Nambya people are the result of cross-pollination of culture which came through historical interaction with other ethnic groups. Historically, the Nambya culture is better understood from the archaeological findings at ancient capitals like Bambusi, Shongano and Mtoa which were the centres of political power (Shenjere–Nyabezi, & Gronenborn 2021:2). Power at such sites was in the hands of men and not women and it is from this discovery that one may argue that patriarchy flourished at ancient capitals as women were sidelined from the political activities of the Nambya Empire. Men were the heads of family and community affairs, however, some would argue that in ancient indigenous societies, women were complementary to men (Shoko 2022:21). Women assisted the men in looking after the family and creating cohesion in the society and in support of this, Taiwo (2010:1) avers that African women played a key role in the education and the teaching of children social, ethical and moral values which were part of the cultural standards for evaluating proper societal behaviour. Women, like men were valued in traditional African society for their complementarity in contributing to the welfare of the family and society. African women have always been noted for their salient activities such as procreation, childcare and collective preparation of the young ones for communal co-existence (Shoko 2007:12), however, women in traditional Nambya society had various limited roles in social, religious and political spheres.

Marriage practices

Among the Nambya there is a cultural practice known as Kungwina Mumba or wife inheritance which happens upon the death of the groom (Zivave, 2024:84) and the brother of the groom takes over the wife of the deceased. Women are never consulted

and do not have the right to consent. If the widow refuses to be remarried to the brother of her deceased husband; all the dowry 'malobolo' and 'ishasha' the money paid for appreciation of the wife is returned (Sigiya, 2019:6; Zivave, 2023:1). This means that women in Nambya owe their ownership to their male counterparts and are not independent due to cultural practices like wife inheritance which subject women to violence and discrimination. Wife inheritance creates a situation where women are controlled and suffer under sexual subordination thereby exposing them to higher risks of reproductive health challenges like maternal mortality, STIs and HIV/AIDS (Gwatimba, Raselekoane & Nwafor 2020:148). Despite advancements in modernity and human rights, women are still marginalised among the Nambya (Sigiya, 2019). This reflects that marriage practices perpetuate gender injustice and further peripherisation of women.

Furthermore, marriage is understood as a union between men and women who live together as husband and wife or wives. The marriage institution among the Nambya has largely been polygynous which is a form of polygamy that is practised to the disadvantage of women. Polygamy was meant to cater for the excessive number of females (Makaudze 2015:269), however, this has led women to be objectified and dependent upon men because of the bride-prize payment and the view of women as subordinates rather than marriage partners. Among the Nambya, women have been oppressed by those considered affluent in the society such as kings, chiefs, traditional healers, great hunters, farmers and iron smiths who practised this form of marriage among the Nambya

Nambya women are also sacred religious practitioners who can act as healers. As Lagerwerf observed, most African women can be pronounced as diviners, priestesses, healers, rainmakers, or participants in certain rights (Lagerwerf 1995:833). This concurs with the majority of divination studies done in African Traditional Religions that reveals that there are more women diviners than there are men (Olupona 2002:148; Idumwonyi, 2012:3). In alignment to this, Nambya women are also healers who use physical and spiritual methods to heal various ailments such as colds, flu and stomach pain by using remedies such

as boiling leaves of certain trees. Women are repositories of indigenous knowledge systems as far as family and community health matters are concerned (Shenjere-Nyabezi & Gronenborn, 2021:3). Healing, therefore, is not only confined to men but transcends all genders. Most women are diviners and it is even argued that Nambya female (in'angas) healers are better than their male counterparts in both divination and cure, however, due to hegemonic masculinities, healing in indigenous society is imaged in masculine terms even though women are also healers in the Nambya society (Jonhera, 2023:1180). When a woman becomes the host of the spirit, she is addressed in masculine terms and her ordinary status changes because of that. This means that women in the Nambya culture have little power outside their spiritual role. Although women have a lot of roles in domestic spheres and the public sphere in traditional society, their portrayal and status are seen in an ambivalent way.

Mediatory role

Nambya people believe in the existence of the human world and the spirit world. For this reason, women in Nambya act as spirit mediums between the two worlds. During libation which is known as Kutebula where ancestor veneration is done, women play a role as spirit mediums called Mande. Ancestral veneration is the heartbeat of religious life in Africa (Shoko 2007:25; Mbiti, 1969:2). Furthermore, ancestorhood is not only male fraternity as the existence of female ancestors is believed among Nambya. There are also female ancestors whose influence is to protect the living in most cases (Zivave, 2023:2). As indicated, women are spirit mediums 'Mande' who preside over religious ceremonies, for example, rainmaking (kupindula imvula) at Chingehali near Kamativi and Chilanga (Shenjere-Nyabezi & Gronenborn 2021:2; Zivave, 2023:4). They had the authority to officiate in any religio-cultural function of the Nambya people although women who acted as spirit mediums were restricted from marrying. This is because marriage is considered profane. For, Cheater (1986:67) the medium's life is 'sacralised'. It is this sacralisation which restricted women from being spirit mediums and as such, this is an expression of gender injustice. Cheater (1986:67) further

argues that women who became spirit mediums after they were already married would effectively terminate sexual activity and move into separate living quarters in order to meet the needs of the spirit. Reproduction rights are infringed as women are denied the chance to have children when they become spirit mediums (Neusu, 1983:2). The authority of the spirit overrides the gender identity, role and obligation of the medium and thus mediumship in this context, limited restricted women's fundamental rights.

Women and their sexuality

Among the Nambya, adultery committed by women is largely frowned upon. Many indigenous cultures express leniency on male sexual behaviour but are very proscriptive when it comes to female sexual behaviour (Dube 2018:3). Similar ideas are also observed within the Nambya culture, where male promiscuity is seen as tolerable, whereas female promiscuity is defined in terms of taboo. Seen in this light, women have often been depicted as willing accomplices, initiators of deadly sexual acts and dangerous temptresses (Gwekwerere, Magosvongwe, & Mazuru, 2012:13). In this regard, the women in Nambya culture are blamed for the sexual crimes that they commit with men while men are glorified. This is seen by the prevalence of adulterous affairs among Nambya which makes female sexuality a minority as compared to male sexuality.

Lobola/dowry

The coming of colonialists worsened the position of women among the Nambya. Dowry was done as a form of appreciation of women in the Nambya culture, however, colonialism commercialised dowry thus resulting in the objectification of women. This means that dowry as a cultural practice of the Nambya with livestock changed to cash and it is the dowry in cash that inflated the bride's wealth and these commodified women. Therefore, dowry cemented patriarchy as men controlled and exchanged women from father to husband whereas before the coming of the white colonialists, dowry was considered a symbolic exchange of gifts between the bride and groom's families to

show mutual respect and to prove that the groom could provide for the daughter (Zivave 2018:15). Heavy, colonialist-imposed taxes caused men to suffer financial constraints, causing them to exert control over the dowry as a source of income (Jaiyeola & Aladegbola 2020:6) and this made Nambya women a minority within the wide public sphere as well as their ethnic tribe. The development of legal colonialist systems established customary laws on issues of marriage and divorce, based on the testimony given by men, which led to many discriminatory customary laws in post-colonial Africa (Makaudze 2015:268).

The chapter is premised in decoloniality theory, which “challenges and reformulates the communicational scientific discourse by criticising the mediating power of Anglo-American hegemonic thinking, to obtain a native cultural paradigm” (Huerfano, Caballero and Rojas, 2016: 68). This reformulation of scientific discourse is important for embracing African knowledge and belief system in the preservation of the natural environment. As such, decoloniality is vital for “remaking the world such that enslaved, colonised and exploited peoples can regain their ontological density, voice, land, history, knowledge and power” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2014: 183). It is a theory that re-configures itself within a biased global dictatorship and policemen where western countries dictate and monitor environmental preservation and conservation strategies of developing countries within the context of rapid environmental degradation. This results in liberation and democratisation of epistemological spaces for all so that environmental sovereignty is attained. The crisis is mainly manifesting itself in biased policing epistemologies where African knowledge and belief system is condemned at the expense of western conservation strategies and foreign beliefs (Shizha 2006). Through decoloniality, Africans engage in dealing with the environmental challenges in Africa in a way that is in sync with African belief systems and cultural practices. Coloniality is seen when western strategies are imposed on Africans to deal with environmental challenges. It is evident in the organisation of power, identity or humanity and humanism, and in the structures of knowledge; hence, the idea of coloniality of power, identity and knowledge

(Zondi, 2015: 20). Coloniality emerges when African ways of preserving the natural environment are dismissed on the basis of lacking scientific grounds and efficacy. Decoloniality, then, engages in a struggle to unmask coloniality wherever it is hidden or overt in preservation of the natural environment. As such, decoloniality exposes the double standards of westerners in their response to the environmental challenges affecting Africa in the 21st century. It disempowers coloniality in its quest to glorify western epistemologies while downplaying African epistemologies which restores “African humanity, social transformation and economic development” (Kaunda, 2015:76–77). To be precise, decoloniality theory, in this chapter, enables African scholars to advocate for the democratisation of environmental strategies and environmental sovereignty in eradicating global warming, climate change, land degradation, eutrophication and siltation of rivers. This would result in decentering global epistemological gendarmes within a context of the environmental crisis in Zimbabwe.

Socialisation

Nambya women are the primary agents of socialisation as they are the teachers of Nambya beliefs and practices who instil knowledge and traditional values in children through exemplary life, storytelling and ritual practices. Women, especially grandmothers taught children through children’s games and songs and other oral art forms like taboos, riddles and even folktales. Women are, therefore, great teachers who could even study children’s behaviour and give advice based on their life experience and wisdom (Makaudze 2017:12). Old women trained the young to display Unhu/Ubuntu which are moral principles among Africans and promoted African culture through dance, music, art and clothing. Women were therefore endowed with power and reason to nurture and cultivate the cultural beliefs and language adoption in the kids (Shoko 2022:16). The moral fabric as well as enterprise skills of the Nambya community were based on women, as they had a broad knowledge of moral issues, how to fend for families as well as healthy life skills. This shows that women among the Nambya though accorded an inferior status in society, were

sources of the indigenous knowledge system and good agents of socialisation.

Virginity tests

Virginity is widely celebrated and respected among the Nambya and upon marriage, the Nambya would celebrate the virginity of the bride. Tradition has it that the groom would carry a calabash full of traditional beer to the in-laws known as BaTetzwele which symbolised that the bride was a virgin and was also done to thank the family of the woman for socialising with the bride according to the norms and values of the Nambya. If the bride, however, is found not to be a virgin, the woman becomes a disgrace to her family. Women are considered morally inferior to men and cannot trust their judgment (Phiri 2001:88) and it is from this cultural practice that women are branded morally bankrupt which affects them psychologically. Although virginity tests are done as part of the Nambya culture, the practice is harmful and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women or the Convention against Torture is against virginity tests and female genital mutilation (FGM) (Msuya 2017:30). This is why the Beijing Platform for Action refers to “harmful traditional practices” (e.g.: paras. 114 (a), 119, 225, 232 (g), 274 (c) (UNESCO 2020:1). Virginity tests are a harmful cultural practice that “negatively affect the fundamental rights of women and girls, such as their right to life, health, dignity, education, and physical integrity.” (Maathai 2009:3).

Land ownership

Women in Nambya have also been side-lined in terms of land ownership. During the pre- colonial period, women were complementary to men, and they owned small pieces of land where they could till, sow seeds, and harvest. The land was communally owned, and everyone had a responsibility towards land, but colonialists interrupted this as asymmetrical land ownership was created. Land defined women and their role in African societies, but colonialists alienated it (Ramsay 2011:16). When colonialists took land from indigenous people, men took

the remaining land and women depended on men. Land now belonged to white men, followed by white women and black men respectively. Colonialism, therefore, resulted in the gradual displacement of women in production activities, resulting in men controlling the cultivation of cash crops (Jaiyeola & Aladegbola 2020:6). The Land Apportionment Act, which was introduced by colonialists gave white people the right to land ownership and black men were pushed to marginal areas (Gudhlanga 2005:55) and this affected women who, in past, had the right to own a piece of land among the Nambya. Women were stripped of everything they owned and this affected their status in society. There was clear land alienation which impacted women as minorities in ethnic groups considered as minorities thus, they became more dependent on men resulting them being marginalised to the periphery. Colonial authorities exclusively considered men when establishing local political offices, disregarding women's pre-colonial political activity (Shoko 2022:7), thus, the land grabbing by the colonialists created male supremacy socially, physically and emotionally causing the loss of female identity and the creation of social hierarchies. Colonial authorities exclusively considered men when establishing local political offices and disregarded women.

Leadership position

Leadership positions and decision-making in the Nambya culture are largely a preserve of men. As minority and indigenous women, Nambya women are under-represented and misrepresented in communal as well as national decision-making processes or leadership structures. Chiefs and village heads are offices which belong to men which restricts women and because of the current minority status of the Nambya women, difficulties or restrictions in exercising their political rights are experienced as they cannot fully participate in the political process which mainly uses the languages of dominant cultures. They are required by cultural norms within their communities or their family to accept male leadership and challenging men in positions is widely considered as overstepping the boundaries of acceptable gender roles by trying to enter the 'male' world of politics, or scepticism at

their ability to take on such roles (Atkinson 2000:187). It is these cultural beliefs that strengthen hegemonic masculinities by perpetuating gender-based discrimination against Nambya women.

The impact of minoritisation of the Nambya ethnic group on women

The coming of the colonialists in Africa brought about many changes to the lives of the Africans as it created politics of dominance, ethnicity and gender binaries (Zivave, 2023:2). The indigenous people who celebrated their cultural diversity as Bantu people were subjected to ethnic division by colonialists and provinces within ethnic divisions were created which affected Nambya women whose ethnicity was unrecognizable by the colonialists. The way Nambya women have been double minoritised is because of colonial demarcations, ethnic grading and the cementing of patriarchal culture and they were reduced to subordinates and minorities due to colonial policies which made women equal with children and so were taken as minors. Patriarchy and culture, however, should not be blamed for women's subordinate positions that they hold today but rather to colonialism as being the main cause of female subordination today (Makaudze 2017:12) It is the Victorian principles during colonialism that made women confined to the home, with the kitchen being her point of call.

The coming of colonialists in the 1890s brought so much socio-cultural and religious transformation to the Nambya (Siedman, 1984:421). Nambya traditions and practices in terms of religion, society, education, and gender relations changed resulting in the change of power dynamics between genders. Shenjere-Nyabezi and Gronenborn (2021) believe that Nambya women have been stripped of their roles and power through hegemonic masculinities brought by the colonial powers who created gender binaries. The creation of social classes and gender demarcation, which is part of the Victorian culture, isolated women from their regular roles in domestic and public spheres leading to the minoritisation of women

(Shoko, 2022:14). This is the reason why Nehanda among the Shona ethnic group is considered a model of women in fighting hegemonic masculinities introduced by the colonialists (Chakona 2012:11). One can therefore argue that Nehanda formed the basis of fighting hegemonic masculinities as she fought against the marginalization and male dominance in politics and religious activities brought by whites. The coming of colonial power pushed women to the periphery as all public and political domains preferred men (Shoko, 2022:15) and this action further reduced the status of women whose position was far much better if not equal to that of men before the coming of colonialists. The so-called African civilisation and industrialisation by colonialists brought great disruption to precolonial socio-economic and political systems among native people (Okome, 2003:69). Men became leaders in both domestic and public spheres as well as in other social and religious circles.

In 1980, the colonial rule ended and it left an indelible mark of cultural extermination and dilution (Zivave, 2023:2). Africans were left with no culture as colonisation had already passed on their cultural practices to indigenous people through Christianity, education and political institutions (Okome, 2003:70; Zivave, 2023:2). This is also true for the Nambya people who forfeited their unique and valuable culture in preference for the colonial culture and Christianity. Furthermore, the demarcation of Zimbabwe into provinces promoted ethnicity, exclusivism and hegemonic masculinities. The Nambya were categorised under the Ndebeles after their location was named Matabeleland North which made women more inferior than their male counterparts. In both its colonial and post-colonial forms, the African State has discriminated consistently against women (Okome 2003:69) and the ethnicised provinces together with the cultural factors resulted in the peripheralisation of women. This adoption of colonial provinces which advanced Western culture created new ethnic elites and male elite structures which disfranchised women through gender stereotypes. Some stereotyping was created entrenching patriarchy and gender inequality, resulting in women being a minority within a minority because Nambya

became a minority ethnic group with a lower ethnic rank than other ethnic groups. As such, Nambya women were affected and a gendered social order was then created resulting in permanent consequences on the psychosocial dynamics of gender (Muwati & Gambahaya 2012:100). Nambya men were elevated to a higher social class because of colonialism and this led Nambya men to perceive themselves as superior to women as they were the providers and women became the providers. As a result, a Nambya dichotomous type of social order was then created with Nambya women occupying the inferior position even in the economic sector.

The minoritisation of women in the Nambya culture in Zimbabwe takes intricate forms grounded in patriarchal tradition and culture. The situation is worse in many African societies where colonial legacies and patriarchal culture assign superior roles to men and subordinate roles to women (Jaiyeola & Aladegbola, 2020:4). Nambya women are minoritised because of their ethnicity and their gender from birth to marriage, are objectified and have no rights due to many factors including “traditional practices that prefer a boy child above a girl child, early and forced marriages for girls, and domestic and sexual violence” (Olawoye, Omolulu, Oderinto, Adeyemo & Ositimehin 2004:13). Like other women in Zimbabwe, they are portrayed as “unfulfilled, voiceless, dependent and gullible” (Mguni, Furusa & Magosvongwe 2006:8) which is caused by patriarchy, a social system where men appropriate roles and keep women in subordinate positions (Fiorenza 1995:25).

Patriarchy results in the minoritisation of women as it makes men dominate society and defines the socio-cultural roles of women. Patriarchy ultimately is a “gendered power system: a network of social, political and economic relationships through which men dominate and control female labour, reproduction and sexuality as well as define women’s status, privileges and rights in a society” (Chakona 2012:11) and is the foundation of the hegemonic masculinities. Patriarchy promotes a negative attitude towards female sexuality, which leads to negative portrayals of women thereby cementing gender imbalance (Zivave 2018:4) and is therefore the basis for

women's relegation to the periphery (Zivave 2018:4). This is evident in the Nambya society where women are domesticated and have a marginalized lifestyle with women being expected to be subservient and women are limited and given patriarchal parameters due to cultural norms and taboos. Therefore, Nambya women, many of whom are affected by culture, are minoritised, discriminated and subordinated due to societal and cultural expectations of the Nambya culture. Throughout history, women have faced serious challenges as patriarchal ideologies have left many women at the bottom of the heap and the history of women in Zimbabwe shows the multiple struggles that women have endured. Society should reflect critically on the silent and undeclared war between women and men and review its negative attitude towards women (Chitando 2007:212). This observation is valid in light of how women in Nambya are portrayed, treated and side-lined. They suffer from patriarchy as well as their ethnicity, which has compounded a lot of challenges for Nambya women in contemporary society.

The implication of Minoritisation and Marginalisation of Nambya Women for political participation and feminist leadership

The collusion between patriarchy and ethnicity has created many challenges among the Nambya ethnic group in Zimbabwe thus making it impossible for women to compete for political power and actively engage in politics. Nambya women are socialized to accept the private sphere as their domain and this is because the Nambya culture expects women to be subservient and any venture into politics results in women getting pejorative labels such as loose and immoral resulting in their political lives and leadership roles being restricted.

Marriage practices, socialisation, female sexuality, lobola payment, virginity tests and restricted land ownership are major factors which push away Nambya women from political participation. This is because these factors are entrenched in patriarchy and feminist leadership is seen as uncultured and thus the political and cultural environment has not been

conducive for Nambya women to venture into the public sphere. Nambya women are also objectified and seen as sex objects, making them a gender that satisfies men at home while the political space is for men. This suggests that there is gender inequality within the Nambya ethnic group, marginalisation of women within Nambya culture, and cultural stereotypes about women's participation in governance issues and Nambya women are subjugated and limited in their representation in political life. Nambya women who want to venture into politics face gender stigma from their male counterparts as giving women peripheral positions within the family and feminist leadership is considered a socio-cultural taboo. Cultural and ethnic practices have acted as catalysts in the marginalisation of Nambya resulting in the limitation of women in political activities and women are confined to home and are limited from taking political offices in both the traditional leadership and contemporary governance.

The restrictive nature of the Nambya culture has created some feminist leadership gaps. Batliwala (2022:15) asserts that in most organisational structures the top man characterises the dominant leadership paradigm. This reflects that the marginalisation of Nambya women lies in the dominance and individualism of men as the Nambya society reflects the masculine leadership model. Men dominate at home and in the public sphere while equally complementary women occupy lower positions in both the private and public spheres. Within this overall power structure lies multiple forms of hierarchy caused by the lack of education, resources and cultural support that makes women ineffective leaders than men which means that Nambya women face many barriers like gender stereotyping, political and cultural socialisation as well as a lot of family obligations that may deter them from political participation. Chigudu (2014:21) believes that women face similar barriers like the glass ceiling, lower pay, "old boys" networks, nepotism and cronyism, racism, casteism, homophobia, ableism, class as well as ethnic and religious biases in many organisations. The Nambya society closely resembled a hierarchical society with gender binaries and the masculinity and minority status

excludes Nambya women people from leadership roles. Gender biases favour men because of their experience, education, and social and intellectual capital (Batliwala, 2022:6) and thus minority ethnic women, like the Nambya are far away from leadership positions because of the male leader prototype that characterises their society. The ladder to leadership for Nambya women has some systematic challenges which include patriarchy, ethnicity and confined stereotypes resulting in them being considered inappropriate for leadership roles.

It is undeniable that Nambya women have witnessed serial prejudice in cultural settings in Hwange district in Zimbabwe, however, they seemed to exhibit complementarity with the patriarchal culture, particularly through participation in various family and religious activities. Succinctly put, women in the Nambya community are not fully considered inconsequential in matters relating to politics and leadership positions and through feminist leadership, Nambya women can ensure social cohesion and the overall development of the society. Nambya women's political participation and feminist leadership are critical for enhancing sustainable development, however, religion embeds patriarchy that has a significant influence on people's lives through the promotion of gender equity.

One may argue that mitigation measures which limit the minoritisation and marginalisation of Nambya women lie in empowerment and debunking of socio-cultural myths to achieve gender parity. Feminist leadership calls for women's political empowerment and equal access to leadership positions and calls for the use of power and privilege to create a more just and equal world regardless of being a minority ethnic group or not (Batliwala, 2022:7). This means that the Nambya people need to transform themselves and dismantle discriminatory power structures that exist within their culture which is critical in attaining Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and a more equitable world. The limited growth in Nambya women's political participation due to minoritisation and marginalisation threatens feminist leadership and the success of the SDGs is jeopardized.

Recommendations

The prevalence of hegemonic masculinity in public institutions and Nambya cultural practices has made women become double minorities and the study recommends the following:

- Colonial legacies that continue to affect women in contemporary society should be outlawed.
- Nambya women should reject harmful cultural practices which relegate them to the periphery.
- Nambya women need to be educated that gender equality does not mean the destruction of their community identity. Any cultural practice that demotes women to the periphery should be foregone.
- Provide quotas related directly to minority women like the Nambya which enables them to participate in local and national governance issues.

Conclusion

The Nambya people have certain practices reflecting their beliefs and values which promote gender imbalance. Such practices like virginity tests and marriage practices have distorted social cohesion and unity by creating gender binaries and most of the cultural practices have cemented hegemonic masculinities leaving most women at the mercy of men. These women are in many cases confined to domesticity and are restricted to procreation and household chores which has created difficulties for Nambya women to attain economic and socio-cultural independence. Ethnicity encumbrances steeped in patriarchy put women in a position of disadvantage and patriarchies define the constructs of masculinity and femininity, and as a practice, they foster hegemonic masculinities. It is for this reason that this paper calls for the removal of hegemonic masculinities embedded in cultural practices from a feminist point of view. Any cultural practice that limits women from reaching their potential in politics, economic and social spheres based on minority ethnic status is considered a caricature and needs to be disbanded so that human and social development can be achieved. This chapter has demonstrated

that the minority status of Nambya women has resulted in their marginalisation and the Nambya community has key elements of gender prejudice and gender imbalance in a patriarchal space. It is practically evidenced in Zimbabwe's political activities and leadership positions that Nambya women have been silenced to become voiceless and this has called for feminist leadership discourse where Nambya women ought to be visible in governance issues rather than be confined at home. Feminist leadership is therefore critical in addressing and dismantling structures of inequality and promoting equality and justice for minority women including the Nambya.

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