Production, Consumption and Gender Conflicts in Rural Zimbabwe

Susan Jacobs, St. Mary's College, University of Surrey, United Kingdom

[to cite]:
Susan Jacobs (1991), "Production, Consumption and Gender Conflicts in Rural Zimbabwe", in GCB - Gender and Consumer Behavior Volume 1, eds. Dr. Janeen Arnold Costa, Salt Lake City, UT: Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 253-262.

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/15553/gender/v01/GCB-01

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
INTRODUCTION

In this paper I discuss how consumption helps shape and is shaped by gender divisions in Shona-speaking areas of rural Zimbabwe. The paper deals with consumption and relations of consumption in a social context in which there is relatively little, at least in terms of goods, to consume. While the white minority and a tiny but growing African middle-class is affluent, the mass of the African population, both rural and urban, remains impoverished. I also write about consumption in a culture which, I will argue, is 'production-oriented'; this factor in itself influences consumption patterns and conflicts. Despite the emphasis on production, consumption in rural Zimbabwe as elsewhere is central, and is relational and social rather than passive or private (Douglas and Isherwood 1980; Appadurai 1986, 31).

The framework of the discussion is influenced by Alan Warde's suggestion that we attempt to meticulously conceptualize what is meant by consumption, since at present too many discrepant activities are indicated by the term. "It seems particularly necessary to clarify the nature of the cycle of production and of consumption" (1990, 3). It is also necessary, he suggests, to distinguish at least four elements in these cycles: the process of production; the conditions of access; the manner of delivery and the environment of enjoyment. In discussing contemporary gender conflicts, I attempt, where possible, to distinguish these episodes in the consumption process. Where appropriate, I attempt to distinguish in what ways class divisions are significant in consumption patterns and conflicts.

I have referred several times to 'rural Zimbabwe:' before proceeding further, a note about what is meant by the term. Rhodesia, like South Africa, was officially divided into distinct geographical areas which coincided with the racial divisions created. Rural areas were divided in the following way:

(a) Mining compounds, where mainly males lived, both African workers and some European managers;
(b) Commercial Farms (now called Large-Scale Commercial Farms): very large agricultural estates owned by white farmers;
(c) Native (or, African) Reserves (now Communal Areas); land 'reserved' for Africans, usually in barren areas, and (theoretically) held communally under the jurisdiction of a chief;
(d) Native Purchase Areas (now Small-Scale Commercial Farms): land set aside for freehold purchase by Africans.

Guerilla war tactics against the white settler regime began in the mid-1960s and ended with the Lancaster House Agreement of 1980. Since independence, the main changes to the above divisions have been that black middle class people now live in racially mixed suburbs in the main cities; a growing proportion of large farms are owned by black commercial farmers, and another land-use category has been created. This is termed:

(e) Resettlement Areas: Lands are bought from white farmers by the state for redistribution to peasant farmers according to various 'models'. The most important of these are 'Model A', in which land is distributed in twelve-acre plots on an individual family basis and held on a series of state permits; and 'Model B', or state agricultural production cooperatives. Although formally men and women are equal members of cooperatives, in Model A, land is redistributed to the 'household head', nearly always deemed to be the husband; a limited number of female-headed households (i.e., widows/divorced) have also been resettled.

My own research was carried out in both resettlement models in the northeast of the country in 1984, in areas of settlement of the majority Shona-speaking population. It included use of various methodologies-observation;large group meetings of women (in which 650-700 women were contacted) and a survey of 206...
Model A and 110 Model B settlers. So in this paper I will make much reference to gender relations within RAs and particularly on 'Model A' farms. However, I also make reference to various studies carried out within Communal Areas (henceforth, CAs), where 56% of the population of nine million live (Moyo 1986).¹

History and Background

The major line of cleavage drawn by the colonial and then the settler state was, of course, racial, between Europeans and Africans/ 'whites' and 'blacks.' Class divisions among Africans were only allowed to develop to a limited extent since white settlers did not wish to face black competition. At the same time, gender divisions among black people became exaggerated.

Pre-Colonial Position of Women

Strong gender divisions did exist within pre-colonial Shona (and Ndebele) societies. Both were male-dominated; nevertheless, women had a limited range of rights and a degree of autonomy. Shona society was patrilineal, patrilocal and polygynous for those men who could accumulate the bridewealth. The economy of the Shona peoples in the 19th Century was based on subsistence production and on plentiful supplies of land. The chief was caretaker and dispensed land use-rights. Women did the bulk of tedious agricultural labor, although men did participate in agricultural work. A wife (or, each wife) had her own plot on the family fields, allocated by the husband. On part of this she could produce a crop for her own use. Women had rights to produce from 'their' plots and had control over granaries of staple foods (Holleman 1952; Pankhurst 1986a).

The economically based sources of power and social esteem were limited. Men had authority over land use and could convert any surplus into livestock and eventually into more wives. Women could own cattle, but had no right to husbands' herds, nor could they control the surplus from family fields. Within the household economy, women had responsibility for meeting needs for food but men had the power to allocate resources.

Women's household economic activities, must, as elsewhere, be seen in the light of the spheres of biological and labor reproduction (Edholm et. al. 1977), of kinship and of sexual relations. Women acquired status through bearing children, especially sons; a barren Shona wife could be divorced and would thereby lose access to the resources mentioned and would lose custody of children aged over seven. A woman could also be divorced for a range of other reasons, including laziness; insubordination; adultery; refusal of sexual intercourse and attempted use of contraception (Goldin and Gelfand 1975; Weinrich 1979).

Settler Colonialism, Reserved Land and Migrant Labor

Expropriation of land belonging to black Zimbabweans, which began in the 1890s, was the main means of solving European settlers' needs for land and for cheap labor. By 1902, three-quarters of African land had been expropriated. The land division was legally enforced by the Land Apportionment Act of 1930, which established exclusive European rights over half the total land. (See Arrighi 1973; Palmer 1977; Phimister 1988). Hut taxes and later, a poll tax, were imposed, so that African men were forced into wage employment in mines, agriculture and in European households. Women were not in general incorporated into the proletariat.

Whenever it was feasible, Shona men chose the 'peasant option' of becoming settled, cash-cropping agriculturalists, marketing their goods to settlers (Ranger 1985). But this choice became more and more constrained by overcrowding, deterioration of land as settler fears about competition from African agriculture grew.

Most women, along with children, were left behind in Reserves. In many areas women became the main farmers when large number of able-bodied men worked elsewhere, sending home remittances when they chose to. The poor land in the Reserves meant in most cases that little surplus could be grown for cash. Thus rural wives' dependence upon remittances from husbands increased (Bush and Cliffe 1984).

When Native Purchase Areas were set up on about 8% of land (later, this percentage was reduced), male peasants could obtain title deeds. Some succeeded in becoming wealthier peasants or even small capitalists, often through the strategy of marrying numerous wives and using

²⁵⁴
them as ‘cheap labor’ (Weinrich 1979, Cheater 1981).

Women’s Legal Position and Colonialism

Women’s status in the system was often misinterpreted and further reduced by the system of Customary Law enacted (Snyder 1982, Kazembe 1986). However one views women’s pre-colonial situation, it is certainly the case that with colonialism, women’s customary rights were diminished and their position reduced to one of legal minority. Most African women became unable to make contracts, to represent themselves in court, or to marry without the consent of a male guardian. At the same time, younger men able to engage in wage labor and to earn cash to pay for their own bridewealths were for the first time able to partially escape from constraints imposed by the community and by their lineage elders (Chigwedere 1982). In particular, this meant that it became much easier for men to divorce wives, and that women had little recourse to protection by the man’s family (Pankhurst 1986b).

PRODUCTION, CONSUMPTION AND CULTURE IN RURAL AREAS

Possessions

In the aftermath of colonialism, even though Zimbabwe is well off by African standards, there exists little for most rural people to consume. A rough indication of living standards is given by the national per capita GDP figure of about US$500 p.a. (Stoneman 1991); figures for rural areas would be much lower. A middle-stratum RA farmer in a relatively well-favored ecological area, for instance, might possess the following: a plough and two oxen; some goats; a few agricultural implements plus others such as an axe and water-carrying can; seed for crops and perhaps a scotchcart. Household implements would include aside from the thatch huts making up the homestead (usually 2-3 and a granary): several pots and pans; gourds; cooking spoons and knives; several enamel cups and plates; reed mats and/or a mattress; perhaps a wooden chair or stool (for the man); blankets; towels; perhaps a musical instrument; and several items of clothing and a pair of shoes for each adult household member.

Many RA peasants are worse off than this: female-headed households in particular are clustered in the poorest peasant stratum (Bush et. al. 1986). and in general, RA peasants are better off than those in CAs, who usually hold less land (Central Statistical Office 1985) and who often lack the crucial possessions of agricultural implements and/or draught animals (Weiner 1986, 72).

The above listing of property applies to men. Married women hold property of their own only in exceptional circumstances. Customarily, a divorced woman was entitled to take away with her only her cooking pots, gourds, some items of clothing and income gained through activities such as midwifery, craftwork and spirit mediumship. Today women have lost rights to retain a separate income through the interpretation of “Customary” Law (see below). A woman should receive cattle and/or goats through payment of bridewealth upon the marriage of a daughter; however, few women own either cattle or goats. In my survey I found only 10% of women held any cattle. If for married men access to resources is (according to land-use area and individual circumstances) via individual accumulation, chiefly allocation of the state, for women access to resources is through the husband. This factor constitutes the basis of female dependence.

Production and a ‘Protestant Ethic’

I have stated that Zimbabwean rural culture is production-oriented. What I mean by this is that most people do not engage in conspicuous display, and that they are focused more upon production than upon consumption. I believe that this statement can be generalized at least to the upper strata of CA farmers; however, since this section is based upon my impressions and observation, I confine my remarks to RAs.

People’s everyday conversation gives some indication of their preoccupations. In RAs, everyday talk of small farmers centers around the production process - weather (especially the ever-present fear of drought); seeds, crops, pests; the state of the soil; how to recruit labor; the possibility of obtaining credit, and so on. Farmers are also very concerned with marketing their produce, particularly since transport to main roads and to State Marketing Board pick-up points (e.g. for maize, tobacco) is a major problem. But even
the concern to realize exchange values does not obscure the focus upon productive activity. To a great extent this focus cuts across gender divisions. This is not to say that 'men's talk' and 'women's talk' is the same: as is common, women are more concerned with children, other villagers and health issues, while men discuss politics more frequently. But like men's, women's public talk is heavily concerned with agricultural production and other income-generating activities.

Why the focus on production? It would be crude and overly deterministic to assume that it is because people own little that they are little oriented to consumption. But I would argue that productive activity sets the context for processes of consumption. And it may be the case that farmers are highly interested in consumption, and well understand that increased production is, among other things, a means to this end. In one sense, it is 'obvious' that production is more central to small scale producers than to members of more highly-industrialized societies since production is the basis of their lives in such an immediate way. Zimbabwe's particular history, in which most smallholders have not had the opportunity to meet their needs, also plays its part. The political context of RAs is significant, since settlers do have the opportunity to increase production and are strongly encouraged to do so by the state and by state intermediaries such as AGRITEX (the agricultural extension service) officials and by the Resettlement Officer, who has jurisdiction over RAs.

Ideological as well as political and organizational factors also operate. I suggest that a 'Protestant Ethic-like' ethos predominates within RAs. (Again, I believe that it is common, though less strong within many CA groups.) I use the term 'Protestant ethic' more loosely than did Weber, not to refer specifically to Calvinism but to a complex of traits, including a work ethic; personal qualities of self-restraint; dislike of material or emotional show; and emphasis on productive investment in pursuit of profit-making.

People adhering to many Christian churches and sects live within the country as a whole as well as within rural areas. A large minority of people consider themselves 'traditionalists,' adhering to the precolonial lineage-based animistic religion. Whatever their religion, many people voiced and carried out a strong work ethic. However, the expression of a 'Protestant ethic' was clearest not among Protestant church or sect but among Apostolic (Vaspostori), an African Christian sect. Vaspostori are forbidden to drink and smoke; observe the sabbath on Fridays; are discouraged from paying large bridewealths and are encouraged to be industrious, to invest and to be polygamists. Although wives here may be viewed partly as 'consumer goods', their main value, according to men I interviewed, lies in their labor and in their capacity to aid in the husband's capital accumulation. Hence, part of the reason for the emphasis on production lies in a particular cultural ethos, best embodied by the Apostolic sect but by no means confined to it. I have discussed this ethos as if it were a gender-neutral phenomenon. In fact men and women are affected differently by it, as I discuss later (see Section IV).

CONSUMER CULTURE

Even in the picture I have sketched, there exists room for aspects of consumer culture. Featherstone (1990, 5) notes that the terms are used in three ways: (i) consumer culture as premised upon the expansion of capitalist commodity production; (ii) consumer culture as a way to create social bonds or else social distinctions; and (iii) as an important source of pleasures and dreams.

That such limited consumer culture as exists is due to capitalist development requires little comment. Commodities such as salt, sugar, oil, matches, blankets, clothing and golden syrup were introduced with settler colonialism and became widely used from the early 1900s (Phimister 1986). The aspirations and attitudes I have described are quintessentially petty capitalist. And, of course, the whole framework of peasants' (and others') lives was formed through Rhodesian and transnational capitalist development.

Instead, I take up the ways that commodities and consumption can be used to create social bonds and social divisions; the former is emphasized by Douglas and Isherwood (1980). In rural communities such bonding is carried out through social rituals in which consumption plays an important part.

Drinking of tea, an expensive commodity,
especially in Women's Clubs (organizations mainly devoted to collective income generation) is significant for women, and reinforces social bonds. For men, and to a lesser extent women, drinking beer with friends is an important social focus. Commonly in CAs and in towns, this takes place at beerhalls. However, since beerhalls are often sites of prostitution as well as drunkenness, beer-drinking also constitutes an important source of gender conflict (see below). In RAs (and in some CAs) beerhalls are usually distant from villages, so beer is brewed by women for income.

'Beer-drinking' may reinforce community solidarity when spirits are brewed in honor of ancestral spirits, so that a whole village (or lineage group, or cooperative); takes part. Villagers participate regardless of their other (Christian) religious affiliations. Beer-brewing festivities are seen to be particularly important within RAs. People have been recently resettled, often from some distance, and in general have formed few social bonds. A second example of goods creating social solidarity is the possession of radios. Radios are rare but are highly desired, in order to listen to news bulletins; sports; music; plays and so on. A man owning a radio often finds his homestead to be a social center. This is a society in which education and information are highly valued and highly politicized.

To turn to the divisive potential of consumption: it is common to mention that consumption goods may be used as markers of social class and of social status (Preteceille and Terrail 1985). Marking of 'distinction' (Bourdieu 1984) is obvious when households/men possess expensive consumer goods such as beds, sofas, bicycles, radios and brick homes. Where capital goods (lorries, tractors) are owned, the social gap created is immense. Such goods do not have to be conspicuously displayed, since it is clear which villagers own what.

A less obvious example from the same research concerns how distinction may be created with regard to those 'primary production commodities' (as Douglas and Isherwood term them), foodstuffs. The diet in Zimbabwean rural areas is a simple and relatively unvaried one. The staple food, sadze (mealies, a maize porridge) is eaten two or three times each day. Breakfast may consist of tea, if possible with milk and sugar, or else a milk curd drink, along with sadza or else home-made bread. Other meals consist of sadze with a relish, usually made of vegetables (greens, okra) with seasoning of oil, onions, salt and/or peanut butter. Meat or chicken is added upon occasion but is rarely available. Other occasional dietary additions include tinned fish; roasted maize, Coca-cola, beer, eggs, other vegetables (tomatoes, pumpkins) and melons.

In my survey, 25-30% of married men interviewed claimed that they had eaten meat the previous day. Since enumerators had usually been present during the day in question and since most people eat meat infrequently, it was clear that this was untrue. It seems that for a man to admit that he could not afford to eat meat was a humiliating mark of 'lack of distinction.' However, once the cases mentioned were eliminated from analysis, it still appeared that women, predictably, ate less well than men. That is, they reported eating less food and their diets consisted more uniformly of sadze and green vegetables. However, curiously, no clear class or stratum difference in diet emerged for either sex, nor was one observed: higher class position did not automatically result in consumption of a more varied diet. Again, this tends to tie in with my observations on 'production-orientation.' Despite this, it was clear that it was this question on consumption which seemed to arouse most emotion and to have resonance concerning personal worth and social status.

GENDER AND CONSUMPTION

Class differences as expressed in consumption may sometimes take subtle forms, perhaps reflecting what is even today a relatively undifferentiated peasantry. However, gendered consumption patterns are more obvious; perhaps these reflect the profound nature of gender divisions. It is true that feminists have often rejected an exclusive focus on household consumption as obscuring the production of use-values within households (Warde 199); however, it is also the case that Zimbabwean women themselves recognize consumption alongside production as an important sphere of struggle. I discuss gender conflicts over production/consumption under four headings: productive resources; services; women's income; and men's expenditure. These are not meant to be exhaustive, but the topics provide useful illustrations of matters of contention in
contemporary Zimbabwe and of the constraints facing women.

Productive Resources

Land is one of the most important of productive resources. Because men hold nearly all land titles, married women's access to land is necessarily through husbands. At least in some areas no women were allocated land on which to grow 'their' crops (Pankhurst 1986b). In my sample, over one-third of wives had been allocated a small amount of land (usually 1/2-acre) on which to cultivate food crops. Although women do grow crops for sale, their first concern is improvement of diet. It is common, then, for women to grow crops such as vegetables and groundnuts on their land. Hence conflicts occur over women's wish to be allocated land, and over which crops to plant, with men usually more oriented to cash-crop production.

Even though women do most agricultural work in CAs, and substantial amounts in RAs, decisions such as what to plant, where and when to plant, when to harvest, etc. are seen as the husband's. Some writers hold that women gain a measure of autonomy in this respect while husbands are away (Callear 1982, Cheater 1984) but others (Muchena 1982, Mubi 1983, Pankhurst 1986b) hold that husbands retain rights of control even during prolonged absence. The differing accounts may reflect ambiguity, and possible change, with regard to this realm.

Women do call for rights to land. For instance, one post-independence report (Muchena 1982, 28) recorded 99% of women interviewed as demanding rights to land on their own account. In my survey I found substantial but smaller numbers (48%) of married women calling for land rights. The Legal Age of Majority Act (1983) [LAMA] technically means that rural women can now hold land and other property, since they are no longer 'legal minors.' However, despite representations from the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs and despite the planned expansion of resettlement, the government has no plans to grant land titles to wives on an individual basis (i.e., by granting each partner six acres). The argument made is that such a practice would lead to fragmentation of land (Official, Ministry of Lands, June, 1984).

Land rights are important, but rural women complain as well of lack of access to other productive resources. Even if women had independent access to land, they would also require access to other resources such as labor, inputs, draught animals, implements and credit in order to run viable smallholdings.

Services

A second set of conflicts I group loosely under the heading 'provision of services.' The main labor and reproductive services a man was customarily expected to provide were building of huts and fencing, herding cattle, ploughing, ability to impregnate his wife and satisfaction of her sexual needs. Women had some means of enforcing these expectations through family and community pressure, as noted. Today, this is much less the case. Although a woman would still be likely to leave a sterile husband, it is widely reported that rural women cannot enforce the expectations that the husband perform agricultural labor (Mubi et. al. 1983, Muchena 1982, Pankhurst 1986b, Zimbabwe Women's Bureau 1981). A rural woman today is expected to do tasks such as ploughing in addition to other agricultural labor, housework, cooking and bearing and raising children. Unlike women, men are well able to enforce their rights to these services. Food and (again) sex seem to be the areas of most emotive conflict. A woman's refusal to cook food or to have sex is deemed to constitute insubordination. And men's complaints about the quality of cooking are frequently accompanied by wife-battering; women allege that this scenario often occurs when men return home after drinking.

Aside from the frequently carried out threat of violence (seen as legitimate if not 'extreme,' i.e., leading to serious injury), men are able to exert leverage in claiming their consumption rights to services by threatening divorce. No recent national figures are available, but it is not an exaggeration to suggest that most Zimbabwean women greatly fear divorce. Very few women, rural or urban, are in a position to support themselves, so that divorce frequently leads to destitution (Mpofu 1983). Divorce can also mean the loss of a woman's children. Although the 1985 Matrimonial Causes Act has altered the legal situation so that custody should go to the most suitable partner (ZANU 1986), in rural areas few women would be familiar with the new law or

Women's Income

A third arena of conflict concerns women's income. Given that a married woman has little property, many women seek (or hope) to gain their own incomes, either through wage labor or else through petty commodity production (termed 'income-generation').

The question of married women's earned income is one of the most hotly-contested in contemporary society. In the colonial period, men were able to gain possession of income previously considered to be the woman's (her mavoko property 'of her own hands'), the justification being that women were minors. Although resented by wives, this practice is still common today. Hence May (1983, 68) cites cases in which even husbands of urban, salaried women workers, including nurses, demanded direct payment of wives' wages. Even after legal majority was granted, women on cooperatives I studied reported that they had to pay over their (annually paid) wages to husbands or risk being beaten.

Not all men insist on access to wives' income, and some women are able overtly to challenge the practice. But it is likely that most women do not feel themselves to be in such a strong position in their marriages to risk such a challenge. Instead, Pankhurst relates that it was common in the CA she studied for women to withhold some of their income, to hide it where possible and to try to ensure that the husband remained ignorant of its existence (Pankhurst and Jacobs 1988). These strategies were seen as necessary, in that women had no other way to gain control over money.

Men's Expenditure and Female Conflicts

Discussion of the 'environment of enjoyment' of consumption is, in rural Zimbabwe, more relevant for men than for women. Women are more restricted in the amounts and types of commodities to which they have access, and are restricted, to an extent, geographically. For instance, although no strict gender segregation operates, it is only recently that married couples have begun to 'go out' together (Weinrich 1982), and respectable women do not go in beerhalls - one of the main sites of 'enjoyment.' Respectable women are not really meant to be consumers, other than of basic commodities; they are envisaged as producers. The 'Protestant Ethic' applies to both sexes but more strongly to women. Or, another way to put the matter might be that men are allowed 'escapes' from production which are mainly denied to women. These escapes are much tied up with urban life and culture. Most men migrate for at least part of their working lives. The money they earn, as noted, is seen as entirely theirs. Although they are under social obligation to send remittances to wives, children and parents, many do not do so, or only send them intermittently. Even when a man does remit his income to family in rural areas, it is accepted that he will retain part of it for his own use and consumption. This pattern is, of course, common in many areas of the world (Pahl 1983, Dwyer and Bruce 1989). Where men remain in rural areas, it is still their prerogative to dispose of income and to consume as they wish, notably on drinking and on associated extra-marital sexual activity.

Women greatly resent these male freedoms and express both sexual jealousy and anger of expenditure of cash much needed within households. However, in practice there exist few sanctions which wives can take against husbands.

Instead, their resentment may focus upon other women, especially urban, wage-earning women. This feeling is heightened by the association made between female wage labor and prostitution, stemming from the time when prostitution on mining compounds was the main paid labor available for women (van Onselen 1980, Weinrich 1979). There exists an implicit, underlying dichotomy here between rural-dependent-'good' and urban-free-evil. One aspect of the dichotomy is that urban women are seen as able to consume, particularly to buy clothing and make-up. Of course this idea of a 'free,' Westernized (and glamorous) woman is not accurate: male control over nearly all women's income has been discussed. Nevertheless, this image is magnified by two developments new since independence. The first is advertising aimed at middle-class urban African people. This group is small but since newspaper readership is widespread in Zimbabwe (Lewin 1984), it is likely to affect the 'dreams' and aspirations of many rural and urban poor people. A second development is that a small group of (mainly) urban women have, since independence, been able to enter sectors of white-
collar work previously barred to them (Jacobs and Howard 1987). The sight of well-dressed young women - women who are free to consume - was relatively unknown and is disturbing to many. Rural women, as well as men, often fear competition from such women. Women’s fears are not surprising, since men may ridicule rural wives for lack of stylishness while at the same time denying them resources to achieve the new ideal.

These fears were evident in reactions to the government’s ‘clean-up’ campaigns of 1983. The ‘clean-ups’ were ostensibly directed against prostitutes; in them, thousands of urban women were arrested and held; some were released upon production of a marriage certificate or proof of employment, but many were sent to an RA in the hot and humid Zambezi Valley. Some were never subsequently released; others were subsequently divorced by their husbands since they had been suspected of prostitution. These campaigns were directed at all strata of women (even some black bourgeois and white women were arrested, as well as many of the poor); however, the women most likely to be arrested were young, well-dressed ones who were most likely to be in waged employment (Jacobs and Howard 1987, Jacobs 1989). The clean-ups embodied the fears of many men about changes, especially legal ones, in gender relations. But they also expressed rural women’s feelings about competition from urban women, seen as better-off and Westernized. During the campaigns, ZANU Women’s League organized rural women in marches against ‘prostitution.’ Although reportedly, some rural women felt urban ones were being scapegoated, others eagerly participated (Laing 1983).

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have moved from discussion of the focus on production in rural Zimbabwe to ways in which consumption does figure, and to gender conflicts over production and consumption. I have argued that conditions of production and consumption are very different for women and men, so that while most men have access to goods and services, that of women is largely through men. Delivery of goods and services is, in the main, through the state (grain distribution, marketing boards) or through spouses. Although women are sometimes included in state distribution, where delivery is through private proprietors, they lack access by virtue of lacking money. Lastly, I have argued that ‘environments of enjoyment’ are highly restricted for rural women. All of these factors express gender inequality and lead to conflicts between the sexes as well as to conflicts among women. Differences in consumption patterns and possibilities, while not the only factors operating to divide women (and men and women), constitute one important focus of antagonism.

1 Due to the disruption of the war, few studies of CAs were carried out before the mid-1980s, and studies have been limited even since that time. Therefore, the evidence I cite is necessarily patchy.

2 In colonial times, a few urban women were allowed to become ‘emancipated’ and were thereafter subject only to Civil Law; they were therefore, allowed to hold property. Some middle- and upper-class women, urban and rural, so hold property themselves. However, most [of the few] rural women in this position are widows or divorcees.

REFERENCES


Laing, R. (1983), Personal Correspondence, Bindura, December.


