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# “Male Wealth” and “Claims to Motherhood”: Gendered Resource Access and Intergenerational Relations in the Gwembe Valley, Zambia

*Lisa Cliggett*

## INTRODUCTION

The story of women’s economic marginalization as a result of development and transitions to capitalist, cash-oriented economies is not a new one. Scholars from a range of disciplines have detailed the many paths towards the creation of women’s economic dependence throughout the world (e.g., di Leonardo 1991; Mikell 1997). In this chapter, I join this body of literature in telling the history of how Tonga women of Zambia’s Gwembe Valley have lost access to valuable wealth and become increasingly dependent on men for access to material resources that ensure their livelihood. However, demonstrating the transition of women’s economic autonomy to dependence is not my main purpose in this chapter.

I use the context of women’s economic marginalization to examine gendered strategies for mobilizing support from relatives as men and women age. In particular, Gwembe women employ a range of methods for encouraging assistance from children and other relatives that include performing the “rhetoric” of motherhood—behaviors and conversations that emphasize the sacrifices mothers have made throughout a child’s life, and highlight the mother’s entitlement to support from children. Gwembe men, alternatively, spend most of their adult lives attempting to accumulate material wealth which, in their old age, they can use to marry younger wives and encourage support from a range of dependents.

Beyond documenting these different strategies older men and women employ in harnessing support in their old age, this chapter reveals some of the historical processes in the Gwembe Valley that shaped gendered access to resources. In particular, this chapter highlights the household- and kinship-level dynamics that influence who has access to resources like land and cattle, and how men and women have benefited from these resources in different ways. Using data collected during fieldwork in the Gwembe Valley from 1994 to

1998 and from the Colson-Scudder longitudinal Gwembe Tonga Research Project, I argue that it is these gender differences in access to resources and investments in these resources that have led to the very different strategies in how aging parents mobilize support from their children and kin.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding the relationship between parents and children benefits from considering the notion of individual actors within a socially constructed kinship group. The argument presented in this chapter draws on practice-centered theory that sees individuals as empowered to make choices within their social structures (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1976). Rules and norms shape and constrain behavior, but individuals can test the boundaries of those rules and norms through their individual and social actions. The norm of caring for elders in African societies offers an ideal example of how individuals do and do not adhere to these cultural ideals.

During the Southern African drought of 1994–1995, while I was conducting ethnographic fieldwork in the Gwembe Valley, a man abandoned his grandmother in his homestead as he and his two wives and all their children moved to their lakeside gardens to protect crops from invasions of hippos, cattle, and birds. Typically, when a dependent (such as an elderly mother, aunt, uncle, or disabled relative) remains in a homestead, an adolescent child or one of the wives will remain in the homestead in order to care for the dependent woman or man. In this case, the man's nuclear family abandoned the whole homestead and his grandmother with it. Daughters of the elderly woman eventually rescued her, but the abandonment itself suggests that the norm of caring for and respecting elders does not always reflect actual behavior. As this example illustrates, caring for elders is not inevitable or "natural" behavior; individuals make choices as they move through their social worlds.

Notions of the household economy as outlined by Robert Netting and Richard Wilk draw on this sense of practice theory—that individuals test boundaries of rules and norms by their individual and social actions, simultaneously shaping, and being shaped by, those structures (Netting, Wilk, and Arnould 1984; Wilk 1989, 1991). Netting and Wilk see households as a place of action where individuals work both together and apart in their productive and reproductive activity, as the story about the abandoned grandmother shows. Gender differences between husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, and fathers and mothers also illustrate the range of cooperative and noncooperative behaviors within domestic groups.

Theories of intergenerational wealth flows proposed initially by the social demographer John Caldwell help to frame the lifecycle component of the argument presented in this chapter. Caldwell argues that until certain economic conditions are met in developing countries, children represent a material ben-

efit for parents, particularly in old age, and this accounts for high fertility in those places (Caldwell 1976, 1982). In other words, in “nonindustrial” settings, parents have many children because raising children is relatively cheap, and as the parents age, they will benefit from those many children in the form of caregiving and material support.

### FIELD SITE AND METHODS

The Gwembe Valley carries the reputation throughout Zambia as a drought-prone, isolated, and impoverished area. Annual hunger seasons, combined with cyclical droughts, often make subsistence tenuous. Over the past two decades, droughts and “hunger years” throughout Southern Africa have occurred more frequently, and in 1992–1993 and 1994–1995, two of the worst droughts since the 1920s hit Zambia’s Southern Province (Savory 1996). In addition to these aspects of hardship, the Zambian nation has suffered from economic decline since the mid-1970s when copper prices (Zambia’s largest export) on the world market dropped, causing an economic crisis throughout the country. Since that time, Zambia’s economy has fluctuated, with a general downtrend most recently exacerbated by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) structural adjustment program (SAP) launched in the early 1990s. SAPs attempt to improve efficiency of “developing” countries’ economies, most often by encouraging cuts in government spending and subsidies of basic needs for the majority of the population. These programs, including Zambia’s recent experience with the SAP, often result in a rapid rise in costs for basic foods and household needs and increasing unemployment while government offices and government-owned industries (in the case of Zambia, all industries) attempt to “restructure” their operations.

These national-level economic conditions affect both urban and rural populations through increased prices for staples like maize (for food and seed), fertilizer, and other household supplies; staffing and supplying medical clinics and schools; employment options in all locations; and maintenance of infrastructure such as roads and transportation systems. In these austere economic conditions, everyone faces the challenge of daily survival in conditions of increasing scarcity. For the people of the Gwembe Valley, these conditions trigger familiar responses, such as gathering wild foods that satisfy hunger (but not taste preferences), tapping into larger and larger support networks (such as migrants living in areas with better harvests), and trimming down expenses and consumption (Colson 1979: 21–22). In these times of hardship, the elderly often find themselves in tenuous positions at the fringe of the productive domestic unit, at risk of being “trimmed out” and receiving less than their basic needs. Given such conditions, the elderly must become key players in their own survival, negotiating their position and rights to valuable resources with relatives and kin.

Many scholars of social change and African studies know of the matrilineal Gwembe Tonga people due to the research Elizabeth Colson and Thayer Scudder have conducted over the past forty years (Colson 1960, 1971; Colson and Scudder 1988; Scudder 1962; Scudder and Colson 1978, 1981). Their original research agenda focused on cultural continuity and change in the face of massive upheaval caused by the building of Kariba Dam on the Zambezi River and subsequent resettlement of approximately 60,000 Gwembe Tonga. In 1956, Colson and Scudder initiated the "before" study of Gwembe Tonga life ways, and in 1962, after resettlement, they returned to their original sites in order to understand the process of change and adaptation. Since that time, Colson and Scudder have returned to these original field sites approximately every three years and continued systematic data collection on a vast array of sociocultural, economic, political, religious, and demographic information.

In 1994, I joined Colson and Scudder's Gwembe Tonga Research Project (GTRP) as part of the "next generation" that would increasingly manage the project as Colson and Scudder began the process of retirement. In the spring of 1994, I went to Zambia and settled in Sinafala village to begin approximately eighteen months of anthropological research on support systems for the elderly among the Gwembe Tonga people (Cliggett 1997a, 2001a). I made my home base in Sinafala village, located along the lakeshore in Gwembe central and chose Mazulu village, at the north end of the Gwembe Valley, as a comparison site. Sinafala and Mazulu offer good opportunities for comparison for a variety of reasons. Prior to relocation, the two villages neighbored each other, and residents of each village maintained a variety of kinship and social networks. After relocation, those relationships persisted, and they continue to this day (although significantly altered because of the physical distance between the villages). In addition, Sinafala, a village approximately six hours from a paved road by public transport, represents a community relatively distant from town and the day-to-day impacts associated with urban life, but Mazulu, situated fifteen minutes from a major road and transportation route, offers a comparison community with much greater integration into the national economic and political systems on a daily basis. These characteristics offered the opportunity to look at social support networks in two similar populations but with differing economic contexts.

I also conducted extensive interviews in two migration destinations for Gwembe villagers: Chikanta, a frontier farming area on the plateau northeast of the Gwembe Valley, and Lusaka, the capital of Zambia and the primary migration destination for those people seeking wage employment. The data presented in this article come primarily from Sinafala village, although I found the behavioral patterns I describe in all of my research sites, as well as in other areas where I visited briefly.

At the beginning of fieldwork in 1994, I initiated contact with ninety-two individuals aged fifty-five or older, in three different research sites. Lusaka, my urban research site, had no permanently resident elderly people; Zambians attribute the small population of elderly people living in urban areas to the high cost of urban life and the lack of institutional support for seniors in the absence of kin networks. When men or women reach their senior years, they typically return to home villages or establish new farms in frontier land, abandoning their urban homes (see also Ferguson 1999). Although I worked with Gwembe villagers in Lusaka, this population consisted of the children of elderly people living elsewhere.

The Gwembe central village, Sinafala, housed forty-five of the ninety-two elderly people with whom I worked intensively. In 1994–1995, Sinafala had a total population of approximately 500 people. By the end of my fieldwork in 1995, three of these elderly people in Sinafala had died. Mazulu village, with a 1994–1995 population of approximately 400 people, housed another thirty-seven of my study group (by September 1995, five elderly people had died). The frontier farming region northeast of the valley became a popular migration destination for many Gwembe people in the 1980s, including children of many aging villagers. In 1994–1995, I found ten elders living in Chikanta; these aging men and women had left Sinafala village, or retired from urban centers where they had wage employment, to settle with relatives in the frontier. The migrant destination of Chikanta poses challenges for identifying a “total population,” because the region covers a vast area and the residents include migrants from many areas of the country. However, our GTRP data shows that in 1994–1995, approximately 150 migrants from Sinafala, or descendants of those migrants, lived in the Chikanta region. In all three sites, the group of elders with whom I worked constituted the total population of people age fifty-five or older.

The methods of data collection that I employed included extensive open-ended interviews; focused discussions on resource access, support networks, and gift exchanges; and surveys to collect detailed information about family members, residence patterns, and frequency of contact with nonresident kin. I interviewed all ninety-two elderly people in their homesteads and also interviewed most of their children, both in the village and, in the case of migrant children, in their homes in town or other rural areas. With the help of my research assistant, I conducted most of these interviews in Citonga, the local language all Gwembe Tonga people speak.

In addition to the formal data collection techniques I used, I also simply observed the ebb and flow of daily life. I lived in a homestead with a man and his three wives and their thirteen resident children. Sharing meals with this family and other villagers offered a multitude of opportunities to witness village life in action, including many moments of resource distribution, a primary aspect of my research agenda.

## THE ARGUMENT

The Gwembe Tonga Research Project and the questions we ask in this specific ecological setting are part of a broader context of cultural and political ecology. Specifically, development-induced relocation and its aftermath profoundly influenced the Gwembe's past and present. But many other pressures play key roles in the social history of this area. The multitude of microlevel pressures, such as village and chieftaincy political struggles and household and kinship power dynamics, all influence local people's choices, decisions, and behavior.

In the Gwembe, as elsewhere throughout the world, household- and kinship-level dynamics influence who has access to what resources and how they can use them. During my year and a half living in the Gwembe, I saw women mobilizing their relationships to children by calling on concepts of "mother" and the reproductive experience as evidence for their right to demand support. Older women offered the statement, "Don't they know that I'm a human who gave birth to them?" as enough reason for children to give them material assistance in their old age.

Men, on the other hand, most often used their control of resources, especially plow and draft animals, to extract assistance and support from their children. One of the wealthiest men in Sinafala managed to keep four adult married sons living in his homestead and thus contributing to the domestic group in a variety of ways. According to both the father and the sons, these sons exchanged their labor in farming their father's vast fields for the use of his cattle and plows in their own fields.

Another case study reveals a conflict between father and son over use of the father's farming implements and the son's personal cash income. Lazwell and his new wife of four months lived in his father's homestead. His father gave him use of his plow and two cattle in exchange for the labor put into his father's fields. A unique opportunity to build a brick house in the village gave him a small sum of cash as payment for the job. When his father demanded a portion of those earnings, Lazwell refused, claiming that his father had no right to the income and that he already worked in his father's fields. As the heated discussions continued and the conflict grew to include relatives outside the homestead, Lazwell's father finally stated that Lazwell no longer had use of his cattle or plows, and in addition, Lazwell's wife could no longer use any of the cooking pots of her mother-in-law. Faced with the prospect of having no farming implements for the fast-approaching planting season, Lazwell chose to migrate to a frontier farming area where he would work in his cousin's fields in exchange for the use of the cousin's cattle and plow. Such conflicts frequently lead to some kind of migration, whether to town, distant farming areas, or nearby regions with matrilineal kin (Cliggett 2000). Colson (2000) also suggests that the recent shift in witchcraft accusations from more distant male kin to fathers is associated with these types of conflicts between fathers and



their offspring. These conflicts also demonstrate the authoritarian nature of the fathers' relationships with their sons in particular, but other relatives as well (for a discussion of the dynamics between brothers and sisters, see Cliggett 1997; 2001a). Cultural notions of gender and obligation certainly influence these differences in styles of interaction between men and women and their children. The Tonga typically see men as strong, aggressive, and warrior-like, and they view women as more sentimental, nurturing, and protective.

Assistance and obligation are also deeply embedded cultural forms in Tonga society. The long history of food scarcity in the Gwembe Valley has encouraged patterns of pleading (begging) and equally strong social controls that encourage compliance with such pleas. One type of social control comes in the form of spirit beliefs. If an old woman goes to a homestead and asks for food, the people of the homestead will very likely give her a dish of porridge and sauce because of their fear that her bad spirits (*zyelo*) will make children sick when they are angered.

However, the differences between mother-child and father-child relationships are not simply culturally constructed notions of intergenerational relations. Very real differences in material wealth exist between men and women, and these differences influence the leverage with which elderly parents can negotiate their support in old age. In order to understand the contemporary situation of gendered strategies in elderly support, we need to look at the history of women's and men's access to wealth, starting with the role of land and the increasing importance of cattle.

### **The Changing Value of Land**

Prior to the forced relocation of the Gwembe Tonga people, the majority of the population farmed on the alluvial soils of the Zambezi River, using the horticulturalist technology of hand-held hoes and digging sticks. Cereal crops (predominantly millet and sorghum, but increasingly maize), vegetables, and tobacco made up most of their crops. On portions of this land, both dry and rainy season harvests were possible. Alluvial gardens on the riverbanks maintained their fertility over time due to annual flooding and generally allowed two harvests per year. Consequently, these gardens on the riverbanks were highly valued. Corporate matrilineages held communal access rights to this land, but individuals within lineages and clans often competed for the same land, particularly as the population grew. Colson and Scudder document many dramatic stories of witchcraft and murders attributed to disputes over land from that time period (Colson 1960, 1963, 1964; Scudder 1962, 1969).

In the 1950s, a few men began clearing bush areas for larger fields that they plowed with oxen. These fields allowed for more extensive cultivation of bulrush millet and also solved the problems of population increase and of decreasing fertility of some fields (Colson 1960, 1971; Scudder 1962). In contrast to the alluvial gardens that did not require clearing, these "bush

fields” required extensive woodland clearing. The men who cleared these fields had rights over the land. Upon a man’s death, the matrilineal inheritor of the man’s property expected to claim rights to the land. The same inheritance distribution occurred with river land, except that although only men had rights to the large cleared fields (because they had done the work of clearing), women, as well as men, had rights to the alluvial gardens, and daughters, as well as sons, could inherit these riverside gardens (Colson 1963). In the Tonga inheritance system, men are primary inheritors of men’s property, and women usually inherit from women. The growth in bush fields meant that men gained access to land that women had little chance to inherit or clear on their own.

After relocation in 1959, the imbalance in women’s and men’s access to land, and the preference for ox-drawn plows, increased because people were forced to rely more heavily on cleared fields. Most women depended on their husbands for fields and plows in the new location, rather than clearing bush themselves and planting such large areas with a hoe (Colson 1999). In effect, the Tonga agricultural system changed almost overnight. Close to 60,000 people replaced intensive agriculture on alluvial soils with extensive farming on fields cleared from the bush, using ox-drawn plows.

Communities that resettled close to the lake made gardens along the lakeshore. Some of the older women informants described to me how they “grabbed” garden plots next to the lake when they found them and used the familiar hoe to plant. However, because the lake level can change unexpectedly due to variability in rainfall and inconsistent dam releases downstream, these lakeshore gardens, although more fertile than their counterparts on higher land, can be precarious. With little warning, a rising lake will drown grain seed, and a retreating shoreline can reduce the groundwater table, thus drying out germinating seeds. These days, people rely more on rainy season fields, cleared from the bush and plowed with oxen, for their subsistence. Shore gardens, usually planted by women, are most often used during the dry season to grow vegetables that supplement sauces eaten with the carbohydrate staple.

Although Tonga are matrilineal and inheritance ideally follows through the matrilineage (*mukowa*), there is also a patrilineal link (*lutundu*) between fathers and their children that provides the basis by which a father claims his sons’ and daughters’ labor. This link also allows for children to make claims to their father’s property upon his death and the inheritance of his property. Since relocation, the tendency to inherit from fathers has increased, particularly since the passage in 1989 of the new inheritance laws, giving children and wives more legal access to a deceased man’s property. The fact that the men who cleared the fields from the bush in the resettlement areas owned the fields facilitated this transition to patrilineal inheritance. Children could expect to inherit land from their fathers because the fathers held original, and individ-

ual, rights to that land. However, the rights to land could fall to the clan if a man died without allocating the fields he cleared to his children prior to his death.

In addition to increased reliance on large, rain-fed fields and an increasing tendency to inherit from fathers, the growing reliance on cattle and plows for farming accentuated the ties children have to their fathers. Fathers depend on children's labor in fields. In exchange he gives them land and lets them use his plow and oxen for their own farming. The increasing importance of huge cleared fields made plows and oxen critical resources for farming, so that young men were willing to work for their father in exchange for access to farm implements. In effect, the role of patrilineal ties grew in importance as plow farming became the norm. This echoes other Africanist scholars' work suggesting that matrilineal societies often rely on hoe farming but patrilineal societies are plow-based (Goody 1976; Murdock 1949; Schneider 1979).

Most adult women did not have their own fields after relocation, both because clearing the bush demanded male labor and because local gender perceptions allowed women to expect that husbands would provide fields (Colson 1999: 32). Although women could gain access to land via their husbands, both before and after resettlement a field was not allocated to them as "owners," merely as wives farming on behalf of their husbands (Colson 1999: 32). Upon the death of a man, relatives can challenge his wife's right to use his land. A son can claim his father's land on behalf of his mother, but if there are no sons present to help a mother, she risks losing access to the fields completely. In these cases, an old woman becomes dependent on her kinsmen and community for productive land.

One elderly widow in Sinafala village told me about her annual practice of "begging" for land from different relatives and villagers, four years in a row. She said that people were willing to lend her a field once in a while, but that after her using the field for one year, the owner would say "Oh, I'm going to plant that field this year," and they would tell her to ask someone else for some land. Her two sons lived in the capital city, and without their support, she had little help in advocating for extended use of any land.

Over the past four decades, men have continued to clear new fields because of the decreasing fertility of the land originally cleared at resettlement. Gwembe people do not use fertilizer on their fields, but they do have a good sense of how long particular fields require fallowing in order to restore fertility. However, fallowed fields are vulnerable to requests for use from kin and neighbors. For this reason, men are likely to keep rights to older fields, whether fallowing or not, which they can lend to relatives including children, wives, aunts, and cousins. One result of continually clearing new land while simultaneously farming old fields is the increasing loss of soil fertility and the growing problem of erosion, which can be seen as one walks through the village and surrounding areas (Cliggett 2001b; Petit, Scudder, and Lambin 2001).

The changing environment plays a part in the current role of land in the Gwembe.

In the past, land was highly valued, and conflict over land was common. Today in some communities with no remaining woodland to clear, land is still worth fighting for. Colson (2000) tells of a recent murder between two half-brothers over rights to an unclaimed field. But conflicts like this are not as frequent as they used to be, particularly in Sinafala where some virgin woodland remains.

My informants told me that land was not as important as it was when they first settled in the relocation areas. Village fields become less productive over time due to overuse and erosion. In some cases young men don't want their fathers' fields because they are too small for their dreams of cash cropping. When villagers decide they want new fields, they either clear a bit of remaining woodland or migrate to frontiers where they can claim up to 100 hectares of virgin woodland.

Unless soils are clearly high-quality, rainy season fields in the village have become less and less desirable to new generations of farmers. For communities where land used to be highly valued and desired, these changes suggest that the importance of village land has decreased. Unlike the generations before them, young adults told me they were not concerned about land inheritance anymore. When I asked people what they hope to inherit from elders now, they all agreed; they want cattle.

### **The Value of Animals**

Owning animals is both an investment strategy and a symbol of wealth for Gwembe Tonga people. This point became clear to me when I learned that many people in Sinafala do not view one of the local shopkeepers as "wealthy." Jackson has two wives, which is also a sign of prosperity, children in secondary school, a cinder block home, and at least three small businesses that he runs out of his home. In my subjective opinion, Jackson was very well-off; he had a steady income and could feed and clothe his family more than most other villagers could during the drought of 1994–1995. But he did not have any cattle at the time of my fieldwork. For this reason, I was told, Jackson was not a wealthy man. Although cattle don't provide a regular income like a business would, they do provide security for financial emergencies, and also a respected social position.

All Tonga desire cattle, but access to animals is not equal. Women and young people experience more difficulty in accumulating cattle than do older men. This is due largely to the bridewealth system, which gives the majority of cattle to the father of a girl, and to the historically male wage earning possibilities, which give men access to cash with which to buy cattle.

In the Tonga bridewealth system, husbands make cattle payments, most of which goes to the father of the girl. The maternal uncle sometimes receives

one or two head of cattle or oxen, and recently mothers have begun receiving the share that would go to her brother. The husband making the payments often goes to his own maternal uncle to ask for a cow toward the payment, and sometimes a mother will give her son one of her animals.

The system is somewhat unbalanced; fathers can increase their cattle herds by three to five animals through the marriage of a daughter. Mothers and their brothers may receive one or two cows for the same marriage. At the same time, fathers rarely help their sons with marriage payments, but mothers and their relatives are expected to assist a young man if possible. In contrast to men's ability to accumulate cattle quickly, women usually obtain cattle through inheritance or as a gift from a matrilineal relative. A brother can give a woman a cow as his investment toward marriage payment of his nephews (the woman's sons).

These days it is more common for mothers to be given a share of the marriage payments for her daughter. And sometimes brothers give cattle to sisters, so that the options for women acquiring cattle may be increasing. But for the population of senior women during the mid- to late 1990s, obtaining cattle has been difficult throughout their lives.

In effect, men have more, and more lucrative, options for accumulating cattle than do women. Men can build a herd of cattle through the bridewealth system, purchase with wage earnings, and inheritance. Women can inherit cattle or receive them through a gift from a relative (and, increasingly, women are given a portion of their daughter's bridewealth). In Sinafala during mid-1995, senior women (above age fifty-five), on average, had fewer cattle than did men of the same age group (table 10.1), and women also had fewer goats (table 10.2). In addition, homesteads with any resident man over age fifty-five had more cattle and goats than did homesteads with women, but no men, over age fifty-five (table 10.3).

What does ownership of animals mean to daily life in the village? Cattle owners are respected within their community, and they have a secure savings account. I saw distinctions between respected women, and women who were pitied

**Table 10.1. Cattle Ownership in Sinafala by Gender (1995 Data)**

	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>
Total Population (age 55+)	33	10
No Cattle	13 (40%)	0
More than 1 Cow or Ox	20 (60%)	10 (100%)
Average Number of Cattle per Person	4	8

**Table 10.2. Animal Ownership in Sinafala by Gender and Animal (1995 Data)**

	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>
Total Population (age 55+)	33	10
Number of Goats	24 (73%)	6 (60%)
More than 1 Goat	9 (27%)	4 (40%)
Average Number of Goats per Person	5	10
Number of Chickens	14 (42%)	8 (80%)
More than 1 Chicken	19 (58%)	2 (20%)
Average Number of Chickens per Person	10	4

for their poverty in various forms of assistance within the village. When I noticed one young man giving one aunt only a plate of mealie meal but giving her sister a whole bucket of maize, he explained to me that the first aunt was poor, and he gave her that plate out of charity. The other aunt, a relatively wealthy and respected woman, had the potential to help him in the future, so he was willing to give her more maize now. This example supports the argument that material resources influence who supports whom in the village; the change in the value of land and cattle plays a significant role in who has access to what resources.

**Table 10.3. Homestead (Extended Family Group) Animal Holdings In Sinafala by Gender and Animal (1995 Data)**

	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>
Total Number of Homesteads with 1 Resident Woman or Man age 55+	28	10
Homesteads with Cattle	24 (86%)	10 (100%)
Average Number of Cattle per Homestead	9	14
Homesteads with Goats	15 (54%)	6 (60%)
Average Number of Goats per Homestead	9	12
Homesteads with Chickens	25 (89%)	9 (90%)
Average Number of Chickens per Homestead	12	12

### THE LAND-FOR-CATTLE EXCHANGE

As described above, after relocation, land started to lose value. At the same time, cattle ownership increased, and cattle became one of the major local currencies. These changes were taking place from the late 1960s into the 1970s. By the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s, most of my informants agreed that cattle ownership was the number one source of wealth and that desire for land was not so frequently an area of conflict. The exception to this is lakeshore, or tributary, fields that still exist in some communities; the good soil fertility of the lakeshore and riverbank fields make them highly desirable and worth an argument.

Two of the major differences between land ownership and cattle ownership are mobility and gendered access. Cattle, a highly mobile form of property, can be hidden, sold for cash, and given to relatives and friends nearby and far away. In fact, it is common practice to distribute one's herd of cattle among relatives in different regions, as part of risk management in drought-prone regions. Also, when a conflict arises over who should donate animals for slaughter at a funeral, a man who has shared his herd out among a number of relatives in different areas will be more able to claim poverty because the community will not know exactly how many animals he truly owns, and thus he can avoid obligation to slaughter more animals than he feels are his share. The ability to keep one's wealth somewhat hidden is a primary benefit of animal ownership.

Other benefits of animal ownership include income from the sale of milk, renting the animal out for plowing, and the ability to establish support networks and cooperative relationships over distance. A number of men in Sinafala periodically give an ox to a brother or cousin in one of the distant frontier farming areas to help with plowing. The frontier area has frequent outbreaks of cattle-borne diseases, so maintaining a herd in that region is impractical. But using one or two cattle at a time permits completion of farming tasks without risking loss of a herd, and in the sharing of the cattle, brothers reaffirm their supportive relationship. That relationship often benefits the cattle owner in the form of food assistance during droughts and poor harvests. Due to better rainfall patterns and good soils, the frontier region produces a larger and more reliable harvest. Gwembe villagers with links to the frontier know they have a form of insurance through those relationships, and providing use of cattle strengthens those links.

In contrast to cattle, land is fixed in location, and in effect, fixed in social relations. Land, although used and managed by individuals, belongs to a broader group of relatives—usually the matrilineage. Land should not be sold for cash or given for permanent use to someone outside the defined kin group, although this occurs and is disguised as “sale of improvements” such as clearing. A particularly disturbing exception to this rule is the increased sale

of valuable lakeshore land by chiefs to outsiders, such as Afrikaners or Europeans, for commercial developments like fishing enterprises, crocodile farms, and tourism. Aside from this kind of alienation, for the most part land remains in the hands, and in the sight, of owners and users. Land cannot be hidden when conflicts erupt over use or wealth, and land cannot be used to establish insurance networks over long distances.

The other key difference between land and cattle is women's and men's access to the resources. Over the past forty years, women's access to cattle has been limited by a male-focused bridewealth system, lack of significant cash earning options (compared to male migration for wage earning, income from cash crops, and control of resettlement compensation payments), and gendered inheritance practices that keep cattle in the hands of men. In contrast, prior to relocation, women had relatively open and equal access to land, which was highly valued. In contrast to Schneider's (1979) argument that land-based societies are more hierarchical than cattle-based societies, the Gwembe Tonga scenario suggests that the transition from wealth in land to wealth in cattle fostered gender inequality and increased hierarchy.

In this cattle-for-land exchange, men increasingly own cattle, which is increasing in importance for both wealth and status. Land, which used to be a source of women's wealth and status, has lost both its real and its perceived value—land is losing fertility, and young people do not value it in the same way that their parents did.

If we consider what these differences in resource accumulation mean for an older person trying to mobilize support from a child or nephew, we see that older men have the material advantage. In Caldwell's (1982) study of intergenerational resource flows, he suggests that it is the potential to inherit from a parent or other "elder" that motivates young people to provide support. Among the Gwembe Tonga, children typically stand little chance to inherit much wealth from their mothers, but potentially quite a bit from a wealthy uncle, or these days with changes in inheritance systems, from a wealthy father. This begs the question, are older women now destitute?

### **THE RISE IN BEER BREWING AS WOMEN'S INCOME**

Not surprisingly, women have developed their own mobile property in the form of cash from beer sales. This relatively new form of economic activity has supplemented other cash-generating options and has the potential to be highly profitable due to men's increasing desire for drink. In Colson and Scudder's book on the importance of beer in the Gwembe (1988), they describe the rise in production for sale from the mid-1960s until the late 1970s, due primarily to the boom in the fishing industry after relocation. This was the same time that cattle were becoming the major source of men's wealth. Beer brewing gave women a source of income independent of their husbands. Thus,



women were developing a cash income at the same time that men were accumulating cattle. These two very different forms of resources have different potential for investment.

Over time, women can purchase cattle from their beer profits (women can make a profit of between \$10 and \$15 for one batch of beer) and attempt to join the men in accumulation of material wealth and status. But it is more common for cash to be invested immediately into family needs such as school fees and uniforms, medical costs, clothing, or household supplies. Through their less visible and less prestigious material wealth, women continually participate in behaviors that reinforce the cultural construction of the nurturing, protective mother. That is, they invest their income in “mothering” (Clark 1999: 720). This leads us back to the question of women and men’s differing strategies in encouraging support from their children.

### **CONCLUSION: BACK TO INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSFERS**

As I have described here, changes in resource ownership in the Gwembe Valley over the past four decades, particularly in land and cattle, have led to a situation in which older women have become marginalized from prestigious and highly valued material wealth, while men of the same generation have increased their holdings—which is not such a new story. But I am asking what this means in terms of how men and women negotiate their relationships to children, and how they mobilize support as they age.

If a father hopes to keep his children near him and extract some of their labor, he is wise to allow controlled use of his equipment. His best strategy for security in old age is to have amassed enough cattle that he can still attract younger wives and their children.

If she does not have cattle, a woman has little material base with which to encourage a child’s support at the time she most needs it—in her own old age, when she is more likely to be divorced or widowed. Instead, she uses metaphors of the mother-child relationship. But in using such rhetoric, she also reminds the child of her earlier investments—including the breast milk she gave during infancy and the school fees, clothing, and encouragement she gave while the child grew. In contrast to men, a woman’s best security in old age is to have lived out the cultural norm of a nurturing, caring mother. With small investments in her children over time, she can establish a framework for reciprocal support in her old age.

As of the late 1990s, the majority of Gwembe women aged fifty-five and older did not have easy access to cattle or other forms of substantial material wealth with which to influence their personal relationships. However, with changing patterns in bridewealth payment and inheritance, younger women in the Gwembe may have more options for cattle ownership throughout their lifetimes, consequently improving their ability to control

important material wealth by the time they reach their senior years. As the opportunities for women to control property increase, certainly their options for mobilizing social networks will also change, raising the possibility for new styles of gendered strategies of elderly support that will deserve additional investigation.

Ultimately, the analysis of historical changes in access to resources suggests that gender differences in material wealth over the life course play out in men's and women's social worlds in meaningful ways, whether or not women have access to important wealth. Examining the outcomes of differential access to wealth in men's and women's later life reveals important understandings of the life cycle, extended family support systems, and also the creativity inherent in women's and men's negotiations within their social networks.

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