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Deconstructing decolonisation and the postcolonial urban woman in Luangala's the chosen bud

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ABSTRACT

This paper deconstructs the decolonisation of the postcolonial urban woman by critically engaging with the rural-urban dichotomy in African literature, particularly through Luangala's The Chosen Bud (1991). The central research question addresses whether the decolonisation of the urban woman requires a rejection of western feminist frameworks in favor of context-specific approaches. Using textual analysis, the paper examines the portrayal of women in urban and rural spaces, revealing how colonial legacies shape gender dynamics in both settings. Drawing on postcolonial and afro-feminist theoretical perspectives (Adichie, 2017, Tamale, 2020; Mbembe, 2021), the study critiques the simplistic binaries between rural and urban, and how these frameworks misrepresent the complexities of African women's identities. By analyzing the characters' roles within the text, particularly through the experiences of female characters the paper demonstrated that African women's gender roles are fluid and influenced by both precolonial and colonial contexts. The paper argues for a decolonisation approach that considers African women's unique historical and cultural experiences, emphasising the need for localized narratives over universal feminist frameworks. Through an analysis of The Chosen Bud, this paper demonstrates that the urban woman's identity is not solely the product of westernisation but is also shaped by the intersections of colonial legacy, local traditions, and personal agency.

Keywords: Decolonisation, colonialism, Afro-feminism, Western feminism, postcolonial

INTRODUCTION

The concept of decolonisation in relation to the postcolonial urban woman has been a subject of growing academic interest, yet much of the discourse remains narrowly defined by binary oppositions, especially the rural-urban dichotomy. Decolonisation is here taken as the desire by many former colonies to reverse the cultural effects of colonialism as a way of detaching themselves from the hegemonic influence of those that had colonised them. As Mbembe (2021, p. 3) notes "colonisation was perceived as neither a destiny nor a necessity as the decolonised community tried to establish itself on its ruins. It was thought that by dismembering the colonial relationship, the lost name would resurface." Hence, for many nations post-independence was characterised by breaking

down anything that was considered colonial with the hope that once this was out of the way (in ruins) a lost precolonial indigenous culture and tradition or name would resurface. Yet, the preoccupation with the rural-urban binary assumes a stark contrast between the "authentic" rural woman, tethered to indigenous customs, and the "corrupted" urban woman, seen as a victim of colonial and western influences. This paper argues that such a dichotomy fails to capture the complex realities of postcolonial gender dynamics and that decolonising the urban woman which Siluonde (2022; 2020) argued elsewhere remain overshadowed if not considered.

Central to this discussion is the need to examine the lived experiences of urban women within their specific historical, socio-economic, and cultural contexts. As this paper will show, decolonisation does not necessarily entail a return to rural or precolonial norms but rather an interrogation of how colonial structures and ideologies, such as missionary education (Kalusa, 2022) and patriarchal gender roles, continue to shape gender relations today.

The publication which is partly set in colonial and early postcolonial Zambia recounts the story of a young girl, Leira (the Chosen Bud) who begins to appear to the villagers of Malenga village in Eastern Zambia after she and her son die mysteriously. Through flash backs and flash forwards the reader learns about the protagonist's birth, marriage and events leading to the mysterious death. Alongside this narration is the story of Leira's cousin, Kalimbambo, a prominent government minister, who is responsible for her death through a sacrifice he has made in order to win elections. The politician turns to black magic upon losing popularity in his constituency (Malenga Village) as a result of corruption and neglection of his constituents. A witch doctor now assures him of success on condition that he sacrifices a relative, in this case Leira, who is most loved by his family. By examining the dynamics related to the female characters in *The Chosen Bud*, we will see that the dichotomy between rural and urban, traditional and modern, is far more fluid and intertwined than commonly portrayed.

Theoretically, our argument is grounded in Bhabha's (2018; 2004) contestation that for the migrant the idea of 'being at home' and 'not being at home' is not a destination but rather always the negotiation between the two. This is especially significant to the urban-rural dichotomy which amid decolonisation discourse conceives of two eternally opposed entities where migration to the city as arrival at a destination – colonised and westernised. Inversely, the view that decolonisation can only be said to have been achieved by arrival at a reverse destination – decolonised and re-indigenised. On the contrary and pertinent to the thesis of this article, Bhabha (2018, p. 6) opines that the fate of any migrant is to "negotiate the anxiety of the uncanny— the ambivalence between "being-at-home" and "not-being-at-home". Here the uncanny represents all those unhomely things that are bound to emerge besides the grand narratives of home (westernised or indigenised). Hence, rather than settle for the narrative of the return (home) with regard to decolonisation and the urban woman, we explore the nature of negotiations between indigenous culture and the city's culture. We are interested in the unhomely places that emerge resulting in new identities that do not fit neatly into the decolonisation discourse on returning to an intangible lost culture. This is because following from the discussion so far, the village and the city, are not static or impermeable entities.

Also anchoring the paper is the theoretical idea that the postcolonial experience be viewed as an eruption in infinite directions that cannot be reduced to a fixed enunciation of decolonisation. Anchoring this thought is first of all Mbembe's (2021, p. 5) argument that "having a past in common does not necessarily mean sharing it." Instead, as we observe with Kalimbambo's first and second wife (Esineya and Daisy respectively) who are both city dwellers at some point, their individual experiences are different. With that in mind, the decolonisation of these urban women reveals a different side of decolonisation – one that "inaugurated a time of branching off toward innumerable futures" (Mbembe, 2021, p. 7). and "dynamic trajectories" (Bhabha, 2018, p. 8). As will be illustrated with Luangala's (1991) women,

loss and adoption of culture is not a linear and slavish movement from indigenous to westernised and back to indigenous as decolonisation suggests.

This is further related to Afro-feminist ideas with their focus on context-specific attention to postcolonial African women and their experiences. A view which in itself already conflicts with decolonisation that intends to restrict cultural reversal to general colonial biases suffered by both African men and women. This is because first of all, generalising colonial experience does not consider the two-tier colonial experience and gender hierarchy related to the African woman. Particularly under colonialism,

> Indigenous people under the colonial "civilizing mission" were viewed as lesser humans (nearer to animals…). In the colonial/modern gender system, indigenous females were reduced to "instrumental vehicles" for the reproduction of race and capital (Tamale, 2020, p. 5).

So, while both men and women were colonised and considered like animals, women, unlike men, were further permanently relegated to reproduction and domestication.

This does not mean that African women did not perform such and other gender roles before colonialism but the missionary and colonial system enhanced the domestic position of women as a result of religious and colonial perceptions of gender roles. As Musonda (2020) observes in his study of underground miners in the Copperbelt Province in Zambia, "the political economy of gender relations between African women and men was altered by colonialism." This is why we are interested in exploring the new structural drivers of gender inequities in the text under analysis. Particularly, the effect of such a shift in the conception of gender roles on how women identify in both the rural areas and the urban areas where women such as Esineya migrate to. Of specific concern are the implications of emerging identities on decolonisation related to urban immigrants. A dimension that would otherwise not be appreciated or considered in generalised studies of colonialism and decolonisation in relation to the African (urban) woman.

Literature Review

Decolonisation, particularly in the context of gender, remains a central area of postcolonial studies. Scholars have long debated how colonial legacies shape the gendered experiences of African women, both in urban and rural settings. One key area of focus has been the rural-urban dichotomy, which often frames the urban woman as a product of westernisation and the rural woman as the "authentic" bearer of indigenous cultural practices. This framework, however, has been criticised for oversimplifying the complex realities of postcolonial women's identities.

Decolonisation and gender decolonisation has traditionally been conceptualised as the process of undoing the colonial structures that have permeated African societies, including gender hierarchies. As Tamale (2020) argues, the colonial period introduced rigid gender roles that were often at odds with precolonial African gender relations, where roles were more fluid and less governed by patriarchy. The impact of colonial rule, particularly through missionary education, created a binary system that reduced African women to domestic roles, reinforcing patriarchal structures. This historical context is essential to understanding the postcolonial urban woman's experience. Kalusa (2022) further highlights how the colonial encounter introduced specific gender expectations, which were then reinforced through education and missionary ideologies. These shifts, as Kalusa notes, were often internalised, making the task of decolonising gender relations in postcolonial Africa particularly challenging.

Afro-feminist scholars like Emejulu and Sobonde (2019) have critiqued Western feminist frameworks for imposing a universal model of gender oppression that overlooks the unique experiences of African women. Afro-feminism, according to Tamale (2020), emphasises the need for gender analysis to be grounded in African cultural contexts and histories. This perspective challenges the colonial conception of the African woman as oppressed, instead focusing on how African women negotiate their identities within the intersection of local traditions, colonial legacies, and contemporary realities. Emejulu and Sobonde (2019) , for instance, contend that the imposition of western notions of

gender, particularly through colonialism, has distorted African women's roles, which were originally defined in more communal and fluid terms.

The rural-urban dichotomy, while frequently used in postcolonial studies, has also been critiqued for its binary construction of African identity. This dichotomy often places the rural, indigenous woman as a symbol of purity and tradition, in stark contrast to the urban woman, who is seen as assimilated into Western values and practices. However, as Mbembe (2021) suggests, the rural-urban distinction is not as rigid as it appears. Instead, these spaces are in constant negotiation, with urban women negotiating their identities through multiple and layered influences, both colonial and indigenous. Scholars like Musonda (2022) argue that the migration of women to urban areas during and after colonialism should not be seen merely as a shift from "traditional" to "modern" identities. Rather, it is part of a complex process of self-reconstruction, wherein African women in urban spaces retain elements of their cultural heritage while also engaging with new socio-economic realities.

Literary scholars have begun to explore how African literature reflects the complexities of urban women's identities in postcolonial settings. In *The Chosen Bud,* the urban experience of women like Esineya is central to understanding the negotiation between colonial and indigenous legacies. Esineya's character illustrates the tension between traditional gender roles and the pressures of urban life, exacerbated by colonial influences. Scholars such as Serpell (2019) and Siluonde (2022) have demonstrated how in many African novels, urban women are not merely victims of colonialism or passive recipients of western culture; rather, they actively negotiate their position within both the family and the broader socio-political context. This negotiation is especially evident in the case of characters like Nanzama, whose subtle influence on Chinsamba's marriage decision illustrates how gender roles in both rural and urban contexts can be more fluid than they appear.

While western feminism has traditionally been applied in the study of gender in postcolonial Africa, this framework has been critiqued for its tendency to generalize women's experiences across different cultural contexts. As Adichie (2017) asserts, the narratives of African women need to be understood on their own terms, separate from western feminist paradigms that often view them through the lens of universal victimhood. This critique is echoed by Musonda (2022), who calls for a more contextualized approach to gender analysis in postcolonial African societies. The decolonisation of the urban woman, as this paper will argue, cannot be fully understood through the frameworks of universal feminism or a simplistic return to precolonial traditions. Instead, it requires an analysis that takes into account the layered experiences of African women in postcolonial urban spaces.

METHODOLOGY

The research took on a qualitative, interpretive approach, using *The Chosen Bud* as a case study of the fictional representation of postcolonial urban women in the context of decolonisation and feminist discourse. *The Chosen Bud* was purposively sampled as a case study because it is particularly suited to address the research question due to its rich depiction of gender dynamics, colonial influences, and the tension between rural and urban identities. The novel uniquely portrays the lives of female characters, such as Esineya and Nanzama, as they navigate patriarchal structures shaped by both precolonial and colonial influences. The complex interplay between rural and urban spaces in the narrative makes it an ideal lens through which to critique the binary of rural-urban dichotomy in the context of gender and colonialism. By focusing on this specific text, the study was able to delve into how the urban postcolonial woman's experience is not a simple reversal of rural patriarchy but a negotiation of shifting power dynamics influenced by colonial and postcolonial contexts. While other postcolonial texts also address themes of gender and colonialism, *The Chosen Bud* offered a distinctive approach through its exploration of rural-urban migration, the impact of missionary education, and the nuanced portrayals of female agency within colonial gender

hierarchies. This specificity of focus makes it an exemplary case for the study of decolonisation and the postcolonial urban woman.

A textual analysis of key scenes and character interactions within *The Chosen Bud* was the primary method used in this study. The analysis focused on identifying and interpreting representations of gender, power, and colonial influence. This involved close reading of passages that illustrate the evolving roles of female characters in the urban and rural settings of the novel. The process of analysis was aided by a coding scheme that drew on postcolonial, feminist literary and Afro-feminist theoretical frameworks (Adichie, 2017; Bhabha, 2018; Tamale, 2020; Siluonde; 2020; Mbembe, 2021; Siluonde 2022). During data collection, data was arranged into emerging themes guided by codes such as women's identity in the rural-urban corridor; African women and the colonial experience; the precolonial woman; gender roles. During the data analysis stage, thematic analysis was used to arrange data into themes or patterns emerging from the scrutiny of various characters, settings, dialogues, experiences, and interpretations using the codes and theoretical frameworks employed. This cross-textual approach, combining the primary text with secondary data, allowed for triangulation of findings, ensuring a more robust understanding of the narrative strategies and thematic concerns in the novel. This is in addition to providing additional layers of interpretation and further substantiating the analysis.

Ethical considerations are paramount in qualitative research, especially when dealing with sensitive topics like colonialism, gender, and identity. In this study, ethical principles were maintained by ensuring that the text was analyzed with respect to the author and his narration of the lived experiences it represents, acknowledging the complex cultural and historical contexts in which these experiences occur. The study also aimed to present the voices and perspectives that he gives to the female characters in a way that avoids oversimplification or misrepresentation. Additionally, all secondary sources were properly credited.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The textual analysis of *The Chosen Bud* reveals a rich tapestry of themes that intersect around the notions of decolonisation, identity, and gender dynamics within postcolonial African society. However, to make the analysis more cohesive, we streamlined the discussion by focusing on two central themes: the rural-urban dichotomy and cultural hybridity. These themes are pivotal in addressing the complexities of decolonisation and the postcolonial identity of African women, which are intricately woven throughout the narrative.

Cultural Hybridity: Dressing as a Metaphor for Identity

One of the most striking aspects of *The Chosen Bud* is its portrayal of the urban woman's shifting identity, symbolized through clothing and appearance. Dressing is not merely a superficial aspect of character development; it is a powerful metaphor for the intersection of indigenous and colonial cultures. Daisy, as an emblem of the "town wife," (Luangala, 1991) embodies this hybridity. The tension between her dress and the Malenga villagers' perception of her is a symbolic representation of how postcolonial women navigate between competing identities. We are for instance informed that upon seeing her for the first time:

> People dropped their faces in horror. Kalimbambo's woman was just as good as naked because everybody could see even the little piece of cloth which she had wrapped her buttocks with! Now all the people, even the young children, knew very well that it was taboo for a woman to show her knees to the people. The elders felt insulted. (Luangala, 1991, pp. 79-80)

The people are horrified, feel insulted, and consider Daisy's dressing a taboo because it goes against their expectations of how women must dress – never to show her knees 'to the people' – in public. It also reflects their disdain and view of everything from the city as a perversion of indigenous precolonial culture. This is because urban migration "set in motion the process of cultural degeneration, ultimately corroding the moral fiber of African

society (Kalusa, 2022, p. 2)." This means that migrating to the city was viewed as deterioration of indigenous culture in all areas including dressing.

However, this hybridity is not passive; it is performative. Daisy's choice of attire—especially her more "modern" urban clothing—elicits reactions from the villagers, showcasing their perception of cultural purity and the imposition of colonial norms. Yet Daisy's dress also becomes a tool of resistance, as she challenges the expectations of both urban and rural communities. This negotiation of identity through dress reveals the complexities of cultural exchange and the blending of traditions. It is not simply a rejection of indigenous culture but an active, sometimes subversive, reformation of it within the context of a changing social order. The analysis can thus pivot around how cultural hybridity is not just about a superficial layering of cultures, but an active negotiation in which characters like Daisy assert their agency by blending, rejecting, or adapting cultural elements according to their personal histories and social contexts.

Furthermore, one notes that the abhorring of Daisy's dressing is more indicative of the imaginary distinctive lines between urban and rural lives than reality. The blurring of which threatens the whole edifice of decolonisation premised on recovering something which was or/and is lost by urbanization of the postcolonial woman. In the novel, the assumed contrast between village/rural (moral) dressing and urban/colonised (immoral) dressing is soon dispelled by apparent similarities between Daisy's and the dressing of Malenga women during the dance competition where *Chinsamba* first meets Leira's mother, *Nanzama*:

> the latest fashion these days was…accompanied by a loin cloth. They also took a square and folded it diagonally. They tied this folded scarf, using the two long corners, round their waste to hold the loin cloth. The two loose corners, round their waist would be left dangling behind, making a V-shape on their buttocks. This loose flap exaggerated the tenderness and vibration of their buttocks. (Luangala, 1991, p. 20)

The description of the loin cloth and v-shape on their buttocks is not far from Daisy's dressing described earlier as revealing and considered immoral by the villagers. The very fact that in one instance Daisy's dressing manifests itself as a difference (immoral) to the villagers, yet in another setting, as a similarity, splits the difference into two directions – similarity and difference at the same time, thereby emphasising the blurred rural urban (dressing) distinction. Making it more difficult to fathom the nature of reversal that must take place for the urban woman to be considered decolonised.

In addition, the artifice of signification where the relationship between the signifier (pre-colonial culture) and signified (the village) is absolute breaks down and together with it the whole basis on which decolonisation set on returning to a pristine precolonial culture. It is not only the multiplication of signifieds through the merging of difference (the villagers' response to Daisy's dressing) and similarities (Daisy's dressing and the Malenga women's dressing at the dance), but also the different levels of meaning that gesticulate towards Mbembe's (2021) view of both African colonial experience and decolonisation as a branching off into infinite directions or trajectories as Bhabha (2018) observes. For instance, at one level the villagers consider Daisy's dressing as immoral. While at the same time missionaries are said to have been motivated to change African dressing for what they termed [dark] tribal tradition and custom' (Kalusa, 2022). Ironically, when these graduates later migrated to town and began to dress differently (or like Daisy), they were considered immoral.

What can be drawn from this movement from immoral (village dressing) to moral (Christened dressing) and back to immoral (urban dressing) is that the transformation of African culture was never simply a movement from one signified (village) to another signified (urban) and then back to the former as decolonisation dictates. Rather, it may have been a launch from the same root (village) but towards infinite possibilities as signifieds with varying trajectories and results. That is, sometimes characterised by a slight shift into a different trajectory resulting in the subtle difference we witness in Daisy's dressing and

that of the Malenga dancers. Other times, a large shift resulting in the difference between how the villagers expect Daisy to dress and how she actually dresses. The many possible trajectories and detours, entangled and shifting relations between signifier and signifieds makes it difficult to imagine the kind of linear reversal that decolonisation set on the return to indigenous culture suggests.

The Rural-Urban Dichotomy: Fluidity and Power Dynamics

While much of the literature surrounding postcolonial African women discusses the rural-urban dichotomy in absolute terms, *The Chosen Bud* complicates this simplistic binary. The novel presents urban and rural spaces as interdependent but not always in a harmonious way. A position which would only be reliable if considered from the postcolonial, third wave or afrofeminist standpoint where African women issues are considered "with… awareness of culture and context (Mohoyan, 2022, p. 5)." Indeed, the villagers in *The Chosen Bud* may share some cultural practices with the urban women, but they do not universally accept the ways in which urbanization has influenced individual identities, particularly with women like Esineya.

What is crucial in this discussion is the power dynamics embedded in these cultural transitions. Esineya's transition from village life to city life is for instance not just a geographical shift; it is marked by her transformation into a traditional housewife, a role imposed on her by colonial values rather than one she embraces willingly (Musonda, 2022). The city, which is supposed to represent modernity and progress, ironically traps Esineya in a cycle of domesticity. It is for this reason that in the colonial period of the novel for instance, Esineya stays at home and takes care of it because her husband is the provider and sole 'bread winner' (Musonda, 2022) who, as the term implies is expected to take care of the family financially. This means that, while precolonial society may have had gender roles, these were largely unfixed but colonialism and missionary education inadvertently heightened gender roles and patriarchy (Tamale, 2020; Kalusa, 2022) while condemning African women such as Esineya to domestication and male chauvinism.

This dynamic is evident in the relationship between Kalimbambo and Esineya, where the imposition of colonial norms on gender roles, particularly through missionary education, deeply impacts their relationship. For Kalimbambo's maltreatment of Esineya and disregard for extended family is further exacerbated by his encounter with his white employers and their families in fictional Ndola and Lusaka in *The Chosen Bud* (Luangala, 1991). This is apparent for instance, in Kalimbambo's reaction to Esineya who tries to calm him down as he is shouting at his grandfather, Sicholo, who has visited the city from the village: "I say sut up fucking you !!!' roared Kalimbambo as he charged. And then he cut her [Esineya] short with such a whack across the mouth that she fell back. She was very lucky in that she fell on her back." This incident is reflective of a broader societal trend in which patriarchal and colonial values conspire to reinforce gender inequalities. That is through the disregard of the presence of Sicholo – which could be influenced by western and missionary conception of a family as 'nuclear'. In addition, while some African cultural beliefs consider wife-bashing normal, the irony of Kalimbambo beating his wife when he is westernised, modernised and educated brings to question the rural/urban dichotomy where village culture should have remained in the village. Again, it is possible to assume that his treatment of Esineya is heightened by the colonial and missionary gender hierarchy (Tamale, 2020) where a woman is considered an appendage of a man. The effect of external forces is once again apparent in Daisy and other women who take up jobs in the urban areas of *The Chosen Bud.* In response to the changing socio-economic context Daisy takes up a wage-earning job and employs a maid to take care of her children. This introduces another dynamic because while western feminism might for instance view this as an act of emancipation, the African, specifically Zambian women of the time in which the novel is set were rising to the social economic challenges in their country. As Musonda (2021, p. 376) observes of the 70s and 80s in Zambia: "As economic conditions deteriorated, more and more women began to take up income-generating activities to compensate for their husbands' declining real wages. It was, therefore, not

strange to witness women who had originally settled in the towns as housewives later taking up wage earning jobs in Africa and specifically Zambia. Daisy and her maid can be classified as part of the emerging working class responding to an evolving socio-economic environment. The difference between the western feminist motivation for urbanisation and the environment or context influenced one raises pertinent questions about the relatedness of western feminism to African women's colonial, postcolonial experience and consequently decolonisation.

an women working class and not emancipation seekers, as western feminism would have them be.

In fact, unique African women experiences highlighted in the novel demonstrates that cultural hybridity is not a seamless fusion but one that is sometimes shaped by power structures that favor the colonial over the indigenous. Specifically, because on one hand, African women suffered social injustices from mainstream colonisation. On the other hand, they suffered abuses that were overshadowed by mainstream colonialism and universal feminism with the assumption that both black and white women suffered and fought the same injustices. Yet, this is dispelled by the fact that, as one observes from Kalimbambo's comparison of white and black women during colonialism, the two groups have never been equal. Rather, as Tamale (2020, p. 5) observes, "white women were subordinated to white men but always remained more empowered than indigenous men and women who were imagined as degenerate." So, as long as black women were viewed as lower (less human) than the white women, they were twice subjugated in that they were also colonised together with their men at another level. Yet, from a feminist perspective it means they were never at the same level with the white women they were purported to fight the same biases with.

The hierarchy involving the degenerate position of African women is apparent in *The Chosen Bud* where Kalimbambo has an affair with a white woman whom he considers superior to him by virtue of her being white but also being the bosses' wife – a white man. While, at the same time, the fact that he has an affair with this white woman without regard for his African wife, Esineya, demonstrates a difference in status between the two women (black and white) involved. The same disparity and hierarchy is implied by Kalimbambo's comparison of the white 'donna' and other white women he observes while in Europe to African women: To him African women were "rough, always dirty and always smelling of bad rotten teeth. [Yet] The armpits of the women [t]here smelt of good perfumes, but those of the Africans only smelt of dirty sweat (Luangala, 1991, p. 181).

Certainly, Esineya and the African women who are degraded on account of them being black, cannot be said to suffer the same biases as the white. The latter are, as demonstrated in the examples above, favoured by the same colonial system that disfavoured their African counterparts. The hierarchies observed here, where the white woman is tellingly superior to the black woman entails that western and universal feminism can never be a yardstick for African women's liberation and decolonisation because of the unique nature of African women's colonial experience and grievances. Perspectives which would remain overshadowed if decolonisation, particularly of the urban woman, neglected African women's double voiced colonial experience – in relation to mainstream colonialism on one hand and universal feminism on the other hand.

The colonial gender hierarchy above regarding Esineya and the Donna can be contrasted with women in Malenga village like Chikasi who exhibit a fluidity in their gender roles. This demonstrates that patriarchy was not a fixed structure but something that could alternate with matriarchal practices depending on context. This had a way of ensuring that the relationship between women and men was such that, patriarchy never got out of hand to the point of chauvinism, subjugation and other social injustices against women. In agreeing that absolute patriarchy only came with missionary and colonialism, Musonda (2022, p. 64) notes that in "in precolonial Zambia, marital relations were defined by…interdependence, requiring the cooperation of husband and wife". This

interdependence creates a loose definition of gender roles in marriages and the possibility of women taking up decision-making and leadership positions. As is the case with all the marriages in *The Chosen Bud*, the paternal grandmother leads the marriage process. This is in full cognizance of the fact that while this appears like an honour on the surface, it was this same responsibility by which they were judged and held accountable for maintaining their culture – more than the men. It has even been suggested elsewhere that in many African communities, women's movements to urban centres were restricted/controlled (Simelane, 2004) because of being custodians of culture.

Yet, for the sake of this discussion our interest is how the first person Chinsamba (Leira's father) tells about his intentions to marry Nanzama, in *The Chosen Bud*, is his paternal grandmother Chikasi who responds with authority, saying: "I have no objection to that family. They are very good people as I have said already. I will talk to your mother and your uncle. I know that they will not say no also" (Luangala, 1991, p. 27). Furthermore, Chikasi is in charge of the whole marriage process and presides over the early days of the marriage till after the first child is born. It is clear from the response that the grandmother is here in control. Hence, the fact that decision making powers alternate between women and men in Malenga village runs contrary to the strict subjugation one witnesses in Kalimbambo and Esineya's city home. In fact, the situation above is juxtaposed with the meeting called when Leira begins to appear to the living. We are told that women were not allowed to speak in this meeting demonstrating the variations of women's gender roles in different contexts in the village.

Actually, the non-fixed gender roles of a woman are at the heart of texts such as Achebe's (1958) *Things Fall Apart* which write back to western stereotypes about women's position in the African society. Achebe (1958) uses characters such as the priestess Chiolu to demonstrate how, in positions where women were supposed to be in charge, not even men could oppose them. This is what one notes in Okonkwo's failure to stop the priestess from taking Enzima to the hills, or in this case, when Chikasi assures Chinsamba that no one would object to what she had agreed to in *The Chosen Bud*. This points to the ironical realisation that the domesticated status of women we observe in Esineya (in the city) as opposed to the social positioning of old women (young woman would not hold the same status and esteem as a grandmother) like Chikasi in Malenga village was a colonial and missionary construct and not an eclectic reflection of the African woman. Suffice to say that any attempt at decolonising the postcolonial urban woman would first have to consider that the real image of African women includes narratives of women such as Chikasi and Chiolu. As Adichie (2017) remonstrates, it is such accounts that stir the African woman narrative away from universal feminist constructs by evidencing that, African female heroes exist outside mainstream universal feminism. Moreso, these are perspectives that would be missing from decolonisation that unquestioningly postulates that reversal means returning to a subjugated, backward indigenous woman.

However, the assumption in this paper is not that women in both urban and rural spaces automatically relinquish their personal agency. This is because such a position does not fully account for personal agency and the women's active participation in shaping their identities. For instance, Esineya's decision to mostly stick to her ethnicity after she joins her husband in the city challenges the automated linear dichotomised shift from indigenous traditional culture to western or colonial culture in the city. Instead, through her we learn that rather that slavishly adopt foreign culture (by rural-urban dichotomy standards) during colonialism, "colonised populations worldwide appropriated western material objects, ideologies and technology to" suit them" (Kalusa, 2022, p. 3). As such, we observe how she is among those that have physically shifted to the city, while remaining culturally rooted in the village.

This is evidenced by the fact that, according to Luangala (1991, pp. 66-67), when contrasted with Daisy (the 'town wife'), the villagers praise Esineya for taking care of them when they visit the city and attending " to all their needs" (66-67). Needs which we soon learn from a village elder are

synonymous with being fed. As one village elder in the text observes: "all our wives and daughters know this very well that when they see a visitor arriving, they should first of all beat him on the stomach with a cooking stick" (Luangala, 1991, p. 148). As such, despite being in the city, Esineya does not abandon this culture of greeting visitors with a cooking stick. This demonstrates how women engage not only in resistance to society's demands but also subtle domestic resistance even when their husbands desire the opposite. As is the case with Kalimbambo who does not allow his village relatives to visit his city home yet, Esineya welcomes them as she does Sicholo. The fact that she does not completely and slavishly adopt urban ways or her husband's wishes with regards to hosting visitors demonstrates the complexity related to how African urban women identify. This extends to, the idea of complete reversal or return when some aspects of indigenous culture were never lost in the first place.

In fact, we observe a similar pattern in Nanzama's influence over Chinsamba's decision to marry her. She subtly subverts the expected patriarchal narrative by demonstrating the power women still hold in negotiating their roles, even within the confines of traditional expectations. Actually, in indigenous precolonial culture and other African cultures, many cases that are misconstrued as patriarchy mask layers of matriarchy. One, for instance, observes how Chinsamba in *The Chosen Bud* is assumed to have initiated marriage to Nanzama because he approached her and her family and later paid her pride price. Yet, close scrutiny reveals that Nanzama initiated the whole process by drawing Chinsamba's attention and inconspicuously influencing his choice of a bride. At the dance in *The Chosen Bud* we are told that:

> she seemed to be dancing specifically for him to see. For she would always choose to dance in front of him. Facing him and casting stolen glances at him. She would deliberately stretch her arms and back like a bird and push out her full bossom, almost right in his face. Whenever she turned to face the spectators outside the circle, she would give Chisamba a chance to see the whole of her very well developed behind (1991, p. 18).

In the end while Chinsamba thinks he has chosen her, Nanzama has orchestrated the whole thing by only behaving this way to her preferable suiter – she is more in control than Chinsamba and other people realise. This ability to subtly influence while unseating men from their role as initiator of marriage conflicts with the colonial and universal feminist notion of a powerless, subjugated village women. This subversion of the patriarchal hierarchy in African male and female relationships where others, including the man involved, does not notice a usurpation of his authority is a common feature in Zambian fiction and by extension society.

In fact, Nanzama's behavior is reminiscent of insights from other fictional works and research on African women urban immigrants. Specifically, in Serpell's *The Old Drift* (2019, p. 515), where a girl named Naila, in a futuristic Zambian city is portrayed as being charge of her sexual experience without her man realizing it. As she tells her friend Tabitha: "the dick isn't even all that—I've just trained it. Like a pet snake. 'A *Kundalino*'." As Siluonde (2022, p. 47) notes, this idea of "taming and training Joseph's penis demonstrates how Naila and not Joseph is in control of her sexual experience. In fact, the depth of this control is highlighted by how Naila manages to control her orgasms while having sex." It is this propensity for women to be in charge, while at the same time not destabilising a man's claim to the position of authority that one witnesses in a study of Copperbelt women in the face of shifting socio-economic status of their men. As the mining industry collapsed, unbeknown to outsiders, women began to co-finance and in some cases solely finance their homes while they let men retain their role as head of the house (Musonda, 2022). Hence, whether in the village or urban areas, African women exhibit unique and nuanced gender relations which transcend simplification related to absolute patriarchy or fixed idea of decolonization.

CONCLUSION

This paper has demonstrated that the rural-urban dichotomy is far more complex than a mere opposition of two cultures. It is a dynamic interplay, influenced not only by historical and colonial forces but also by the agency of women who choose, adapt, and resist according to their needs and desires. Characters like Esineya, Chikasi, Nanzama, and even Daisy suggest a more nuanced relationship with both urban and rural identities. Esineya creates and negotiates her own identities which do not fall neatly into any pre-inscribed categories. Esineya's decision not to sever her ethnic ties to the village while physically adjusting to city life is a case in point. In addition, by focusing on cultural hybridity as a performative negotiation and examining how power dynamics shape cultural retention, this article reaffirms the importance of a context-specific approach to decolonisation. The argument moves beyond the oversimplified notion of a linear return to indigenous identity, demonstrating instead that the complexities of African women's experiences require a more nuanced understanding of identity and cultural change in postcolonial contexts.

Furthermore, decolonising the urban woman requires an approach that stirs the liberation of the African woman away from universal feminism to a uniquely contextual colonial and postcolonial experience on African terms. This is one that first of all takes into consideration the two-tier colonial subjugation suffered by African women that prevents a universal feminist assumption of common social injustices suffered by women globally. As has been demonstrated through Kalimbambo's hierarchised treatment of his wife, Esineya and his mistress, the white 'donna', black and white women were never equals during colonialism. Hence, any conversation related to decolonisation and the postcolonial woman requires more nuanced attention to Africa's unique colonial and postcolonial experiences outside the confines of universal feminism.

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