

This paper builds upon the concept of an African Renaissance, which seeks to empower African peoples, to rebuild and revitalise people's identities, including the recovery of African women's identity and dignity. Underpinning this cultural revival is the quest to situate African women in a position that ensures they are visible in programmes that seek to end the indignities of poverty and underdevelopment. A topic focusing on the status of married women in emerging African economies fills a gap that would enhance our discussion of the African Renaissance debate. Khoza (1999) drawing on the discussions of those championing the notion of an African Renaissance, points out that the concept entails a process of rebirth, renewal; revitalisation, rededication, learning and value reorientation, positive transformation, taking charge of one's identity, an end to poverty and human deprivation. The African Renaissance seeks to put women at the centre of Africa's development. It is in this context that the discussions on married women breadwinners should be taken. Gender issues are as critical in discussions on African Renaissance as with any other topical issue. This study shows that African culture and tradition need to be re-evaluated to show us the range of possibilities for human behaviour. This paper focuses on married women breadwinners in Masvingo, a provincial town in Southern Zimbabwe. The status of contemporary African married women who happen to be breadwinners is examined in the light of changing power dynamics within households. The results presented in this paper are part of a larger research project whose main focus was on how female heads of households dealt with growing impoverishment in the city. Rising unemployment levels mainly due to retrenchments of men in formal sector jobs, and declining and lower incomes for many working men meant a good proportion of men could no longer function as their households' breadwinners. Increasingly, as the case in Masvingo shows, a number of married women have assumed the role of sole or main income earners in order to ensure their households' survival. The study shows that the role of women breadwinners is not confined to the low-income households only, due to the fact that there are some professional women who are also main income earners in their families. The perceived role of men in households and the reality of the situation on the ground created a contradictory response among married women who continued to refer to their husbands as heads of households, in line with the ideology of female subordination and male dominance. Despite the women being the sole or main income earners they were expected to take a subservient role as far as the family power structure was concerned. As Barros et al. (1997) points out, headship has two components: namely the question of who commands authority and power; and secondly who provides the most in terms of income earning responsibility. With reference to married women in my sample it appears as though power and authority, which are deeply rooted in the patriarchal ideology, are more important than simply earning an income to sustain the household. The main argument of this paper is that despite shifts in terms of household responsibilities and the burden of household survival increasingly being shouldered by married women, household power structures that vested authority in men have remained intact. This is a potential source of intra-household conflicts as men, women and children try to reposition themselves in the light of the breadwinner status roles some of the married women are assuming. This paper seeks to analyse the internal dynamics of households in which married women play a more prominent role in terms of household survival. In the process the issue of household headship is also brought to the fore and discussed in relation to shifts in household responsibilities that are occurring in Masvingo. Under examination is an ideology that continues to regard men as heads of households in the light of little or no provisioning for the household by the husband. When compared to the status of unmarried women, wives in my study faced a system of double disadvantage in that despite their husbands not working they had to defer to the husband in matters of decision making. Secondly married women did not fit into the category of female heads of households, as they were not unequivocally heads. Yet there is a large body of literature focusing on the marginalisation of female heads of households. In fact a number of authors have argued for the need for policy makers to take cognisance of female heads when planning and formulating policies. Married women are excluded from these targeted policies, as they normally are not counted as female heads of households. Among the authors who have argued for the centrality of female heads of households in policy studies are (Buvinic et al. 1983; Dwyer and Bruce 1988; Hansen 1996; Moser 1992; Sithole-Fundire 1995; Vaa 1996). However, as the case of Masvingo married women shows, we need to take more seriously a word of caution from those who have noted that the over-emphasis on female heads of households might lead to the neglect of disadvantaged married women in nuclear families (Allan and Crow 1989; Varley 1994). The data that form the core of this paper are based on

eight married women breadwinners and personal observations during my fieldwork from late 1994 to end of 1995. While the data discussed in the paper might be considered limited and statistically insignificant, they nevertheless provide useful insights into the study of married women breadwinners, and the need to differentiate between the breadwinner's status and that of household head. One of the paper's objectives is to initiate debate as to whether married breadwinners are, in fact, heads of households. Female heads of households in the Masvingo study included mostly single mothers such as widows, the never married with children, divorcees, those in *mapoto* unions<sup>9</sup> and single women without children (those living alone, young or old). Married women breadwinners were not included in the sample of female heads of households as they were not unequivocally heads as far as decision-making was concerned and ideologically they considered their husbands to be the effective heads of household. *Baba ndivo musoro wemba* (my husband is the head of household) was a common statement among the married women. Not one married woman considered herself to be the head of household. Initially I had included married women in my sample of the larger study but later, during data analysis, they were dropped from the category of female heads of household. While the focus of this paper is mainly qualitative, quantitative data regarding the situation of married women breadwinners in Masvingo were also collected. Multiple research techniques were used during the data-gathering phase. Such methods enabled me to gain greater insights into the married women's survival and income earning strategies. Informal conversations and observations in the community were carried out. During my fieldwork, data were gathered through interviews and observations from 58 female heads of households, eight of whom were married women breadwinners. I also interviewed 31 officials. The informants who participated in in-depth interviews from January to May were found using snowball sampling. This sampling technique relied on the women's social networks mostly drawing from their friendship networks. The next sections provide a detailed examination of problems in defining households especially given the temporary nature of households. An understanding of the nature of households is crucial to a discussion of married women breadwinners. It helps in contextualising the study. The section on urban poverty, breadwinner status and household headship examines the link between these issues. A presentation of cases and lessons derived from the married women breadwinners follows. The last section focused on the domain of women, power and the disempowerment and implications in terms of policymaking processes.