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Alice J. Hovorka

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The No. 1 Ladies' Poultry Farm: A feminist political ecology of urban agriculture in Botswana*

ALICE J. HOVORKA

Department of Geography, University of Guelph, Hutt Building, Guelph, ON, Canada

ABSTRACT *The research draws on a feminist political ecology perspective to demonstrate that agrarian restructuring and rural–urban transformation in Botswana offers women opportunities to renegotiate their marginalised positionality within the commercial urban agricultural sector in Greater Gaborone. Men and women participate in equal numbers, and both perceive of this sector as offering them new and accessible avenues for economic and social advancement. Although there is continuity of women's social and economic disadvantage relative to men from rural to urban contexts, women are actively making claims on land and capitalising on their traditional roles and responsibilities associated with poultry production. This negotiation of continuity and change in gendered positionality reflects and indeed suggests positive changes for women in urban Botswana, pointing specifically to the transformatory potential of urban agriculture despite existing constraints at the sectoral level. The research highlights the ways in which women are (re)defining their constraints, and seeking out alternative opportunities for empowerment and action. To this end gender remains an integral part of and key element to understanding agrarian restructuring and rural–urban transformation in Botswana.*

Botswana's Changing Landscape

In the early morning dawn, Mma Dikoko¹ speeds along a dirt road in her small bukkie² on the outskirts of Gaborone City, determined to reach her poultry farm in time to supervise the slaughter of 3500 broilers scheduled for that day. Like a number of other women in Greater Gaborone, Mma Dikoko has found herself a niche in a commercial poultry subsector that has emerged largely in the context of agrarian restructuring couched within rural–urban transformation in Botswana over the past decades. Not only has the agricultural landscape begun to change in form and function from subsistence- to market-oriented production, but so too is it changing, at least in part, in geographical locale from rural to urban. For Mma Dikoko this has meant new opportunities for self-empowerment as an enterprise

*The title was adapted from Alexander McCall Smith's *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* (1998, Edinburgh, Polygon), which captures the essence of Botswana culture and people. The central character, Mma Ramotswa, is clever and resourceful; traits reflected in many of the women who participated in my study.

Correspondence: Alice Hovorka, Department of Geography, University of Guelph, Hutt Building, Guelph, ON N1G 2W1, Canada. E-mail: ahovorka@uoguelph.ca

owner: 'I am free to follow my interests in chickens, I have a good plot of land that I control myself, and I feel proud'.

In the last decade there has been a notable redirection of agricultural policy and planning by the government, which in years past focused on boosting productivity levels of largely subsistence-oriented agriculture in rural areas. There has been mounting concern about the stagnant arable agricultural sector and recognition that government efforts have failed to bring about significant positive changes to address growing dependence on foreign food supplies. This has prompted an emphasis on commercial production and agri-business in order to promote agricultural diversification into new subsectors, including poultry, dairy and horticulture. Paired with grant schemes such as the Financial Assistance Policy, and more recently loan schemes through the Citizen Entrepreneurial Development Agency, this government agenda is taking shape at the local level. Specifically, the commercialisation of agriculture in Botswana is becoming more visible and tangible across the agricultural landscape.

Along with this agrarian restructuring, Botswana continues to experience what has been an incredibly rapid urbanisation since the nation's independence in 1966. Indeed, significant changes in settlement patterns and population distribution have made this nation register one of the highest rates of urbanisation in the world. Today there are 26 urban settlements and some 50% of the population (of almost 1.7 million) resides in urban areas (CSO website, May 14, 2002). The growth rate of Gaborone City decreased to 3.37% between 1991 and 2001, but rates continue to increase in the surrounding peri-urban areas. The population of Gaborone in 2000 was 213,017 (CSO website, May 14, 2002), and is projected to reach 490,030 by 2021 (MLGLH, 1998, p. 288). Rural-urban transformation means that Botswana's able-bodied agricultural labour force is found increasingly in urban areas, yet they continue to identify with an agrarian-based lifestyle. Moreover, the majority of funds available for local business development have been allocated to urban enterprises (Molebatsi, 1996, p. 128), and this together with government promotion of commercial agriculture subsectors has facilitated the emergence of agricultural enterprises in and around the capital (Figure 1).³

This article engages a feminist political ecology perspective in order to situate local experiences with urban agriculture within a larger context of agrarian restructuring and rural-urban transformation in Botswana. The significance of the article is that it builds on existing research conducted by feminist political ecologists on gender and agrarian restructuring in Africa, and also contributes a new case study in the urban context. To this end, the research answers a call by Rocheleau *et al.* (1996, p. xv) for future work on gendered urban environments of Africa, Asia and Latin America, and complements Freidberg's (2001) challenge to the rural bias of political ecology. The research seeks to address the fact that the pace of urbanisation and its implications and consequences for changes on social relations and ecological relations remains under-explored. More specifically, the topic of urban agriculture has escaped the gaze of political ecologists to date, and it presents an opportunity to investigate the continuity and change of gender relations in the context of Africa's rural-urban transformation. At the same time, the research adds theoretical rigour and new empirical insights to urban agriculture research in Africa, where there exists a paucity of gender analysis and feminist perspectives, with a few notable exceptions (e.g. Maxwell, 1994; Mianda, 1996). This is particularly the case for exploring in-depth the gendered positionality of men and women in urban agriculture at the micro-scale or in

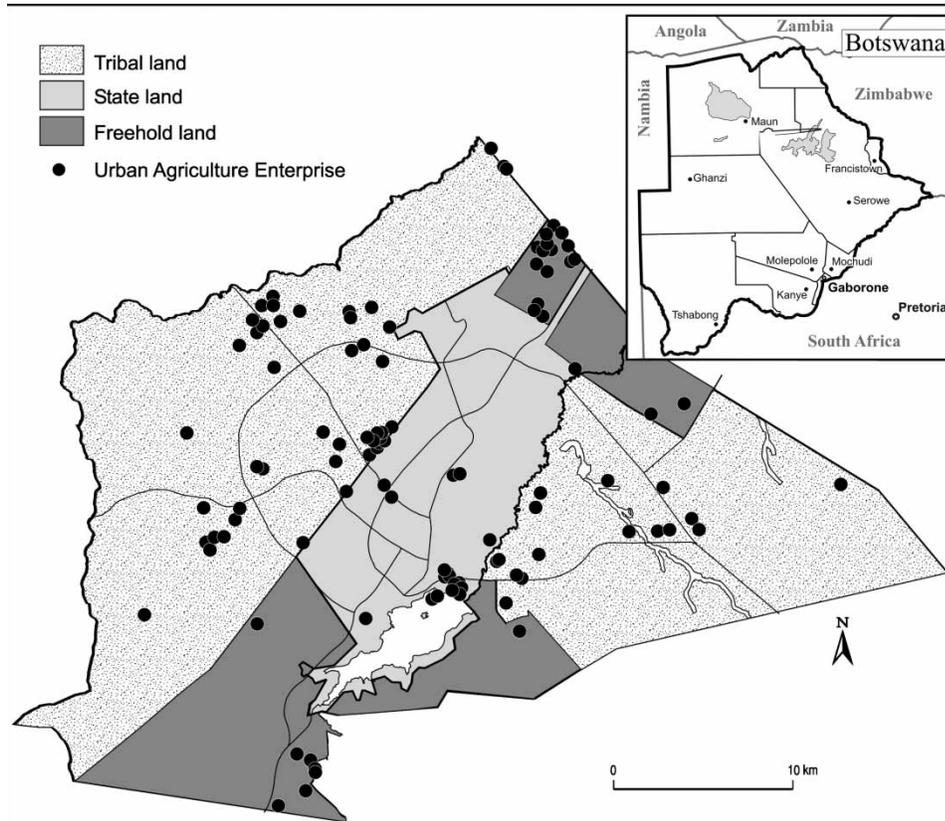


Figure 1. Location of agricultural enterprises in Greater Gaborone.

everyday life. Ultimately, it is important to recognise and demonstrate that gender is an integral part of and a key element to understanding agrarian change and rural–urban transformation.

Gendered Agrarian Restructuring

The issue of agrarian restructuring has been at the forefront of feminist political ecology. This critical approach to understanding human–environment interactions was pioneered by Rocheleau *et al.* (1996), drawing on insights from political ecology, cultural ecology and feminist geography to explore structures and processes of social change. Feminist political ecology aims at analysing gendered experiences of and responses to environmental and political–economic change that brings with it changing livelihoods, landscapes, property regimes and social relations. Central to this perspective is an emphasis on uneven access to, distribution and control of resources by gender, as well as class and ethnicity. Gender is conceptualised as a ‘meaning system’ that is produced through economic relations, social/cultural institutions and ecologically based struggles that occur at the intersection of multiple scales, be they global, national, regional or local (Rocheleau *et al.*, 1996). At the same time, feminist political ecology considers macro-level forces without allowing them to over determine the micro-level picture, and thus points out the specificity and complexity of men’s and

women's relationships to their environments in different contexts (Goebel, 2004, p. 80). Empirical studies draw attention to local agency and creativity, demonstrating the ways in which women are (re)defining their situations, often in light of or in relation to significant constraints (Rocheleau *et al.*, 1996, p. 289).

The vast array of studies on gender and agricultural production in Africa demonstrate that women farmers do not participate equally with men in opportunities for quality of life enhancement afforded by increased agricultural commercialisation (Wooten, 2003, p. 166). Past studies engaging a feminist political ecology perspective reveal the local tensions that emerge from the convergence of formal tenure regimes and customary practices within the context of agrarian restructuring in Africa. Feminist political ecology illuminates the nuanced and complex (re)negotiation of gender roles, responsibilities, spaces and human–environment interactions that take place at the local level given larger-scale restructuring and transformation. Studies highlight the ways in which men and women are defining and redefining their constraints and seeking out alternative opportunities for empowerment and action.

For example, work on gender relations in The Gambia demonstrates how land tenure reforms and an irrigation project specifically intended to benefit women resulted in a redefinition of traditional land rights and labour roles. The seasonal and spatial complementarity of male and female cropping systems broke down, resulting in serious conflicts at the household and community levels over both land and labour resources (Carney, 1988; Watts, 1988). The restructuring of family labour required to engage in irrigated agriculture had varying degrees of impact on men's and women's claims to resources. In particular, women's traditional floodplain fields were destroyed, and the process of wetland conversion has meant women's reduced control over lowland resources (Carney, 1993). Schroeder (1997) reveals that international development projects in The Gambia, on one hand, created a pattern of gender-sensitive investments and a subsequent boom in women's market gardening. On the other hand, male landholders fought and regained what they felt were eroding land rights by working with extension agents to establish (male) orchards directly on top of women's successful garden plots.

In a similar vein, Mackenzie (1998) found that the introduction and adoption of new high-yielding maize and beans caused the intensification of women's labour power during the colonial period in Murang'a District, Kenya. This opened up a political space in which men could exert a far higher degree of control over the agricultural production and distribution process, and over women's labour, than had previously been the case. Indeed, increased cash-crop production relied on the intensification of women's labour. Despite their workload women resisted male control, in part, through continued production of traditional millet and *njahi*. Guyer's (1987) work on Cameroon presents a similar analysis of how the introduction of cocoa in the 1930s transformed Beti farming systems such that women became primary producers of household foodstuffs. Leach (1994, pp. 215–16) also found an increase in women's workloads through swamp development, promoted as an agricultural development strategy in Sierra Leone. Here husbands claimed women's labour for the increased rice transplantation involved in swamp cultivation at the same time that women lost access to intercrop-planting sites. Moore and Vaughn (1987) also found that commercialisation and technological improvements to boost agricultural productivity in Zambia meant more work for women, and thus decreased

productivity in those households previously capable of sustaining their families through slash-and-burn cultivation.

Focusing on the peri-urban zone in Burkina Faso, Freidberg (2001) argues that the redefinition of men's and women's productive roles associated with market gardening must be understood in the context of changing economic conditions, power relations and social norms that have come about in part on account of rural-urban transformation. Drawing on an empirical case study of two market gardening villages outside Bobo-Dioulasso, she challenges the dominant narratives of political ecology, which have purported the 'natural' environment as one that is necessarily rural. Moving beyond this rural bias, Freidberg provides a critical analysis of the 'emerging narratives and policies concerning the African urban environment and concrete ways in which people experience environmental change in urban areas' (2001, p. 349). In particular, her investigation reveals the complex interaction of both opportunities and difficulties facing men and women within the rural-urban interface. On one hand, the city offers some, especially women, a means toward greater economic autonomy, yet at the same time weakens the potential for community-based development and conservation initiatives, ultimately threatening the natural resource base surrounding close-settled zones (2001, p. 365).

The remainder of the article illustrates how women experience and negotiate their positionality through the commercial urban agriculture sector in Gaborone, by on one hand embracing a continuity of gender inequalities and on the other hand finding new spaces to change such dynamics given agrarian restructuring and rural-urban transformation. It begins with background context to men's and women's positionality in Botswana.

Gender and Rural Agriculture

Past studies of gender and rural agriculture in Botswana provide a clear account of the imbalance between men and women, with gendered experiences stemming from differential roles and responsibilities and access to productive resources. These differences may be traced to cultural norms and values that have been institutionalised through legal frameworks, embodying the specific (male) interests of those who dominate decision-making and political power in society (Molutsi, 1992, p. 5). Botswana culture is patrilineal and powerful conventions restrict women's domain to the household and women's autonomy under male guardianship (Selolwane, 1998, p. 401). Men are perceived as the sole legitimate heirs to traditional leadership positions, female chiefs or priests are strongly opposed and public participation through the traditional court or meeting place, the *kgotla*, is male-dominated (Ntseane, 1999, p. 28). Despite acquisition of voting rights at Independence in 1966, women largely remain barred from political power on account of shortcomings in education and economic empowerment relevant for effective participation.

Political parties rarely identify gender issues as important and participation of women does not extend to the upper echelons of party hierarchies; there have never been more than two female parliamentarians at one time (of 35) (Mogwe, 1992, p. 22). Beyond political decision-making, the subordinate status ascribed to women means that they constantly require male 'protection' in relation to the management and control of property. In denying women autonomous access and rights to inheritance of assets such as land and cattle, cultural practices also deny

them the right to independent livelihoods and tie them to dependent relationships with men as fathers, husbands, uncles and sons (DWA, 1995, p. 6). Women are provided legal user rights to collective tribal land and property, but these rights are associated with cultivating land solely for reproduction of the household (Kidd *et al.*, 1997, pp. 82–4).

These cultural and material gender imbalances extend directly into the agricultural sector. The gendered division of agricultural roles and responsibilities begins at an early age when young boys are socialised into cattle-rearing while girls are relegated to subsistence arable, smallstock and some vegetable production, and are taught food production and preparation (DAPS, 1997, p. 11). One study also notes subsistence piggery and poultry activities as women's responsibility (Brown, 1983, p. 378). Ownership and responsibility for cattle as symbols of social and economic status in Botswana fall to men as a birthright. Women do not often acquire relevant skills or knowledge for cattle rearing, which in turn affects their ability to access and control the few they own. Sixty-two per cent of women do not own cattle as opposed to 32% of men (Kidd *et al.*, 1997, pp. 54–6).

In addition to gender-specific roles in agriculture, men tend to have more access to productive resources than do women.⁴ Men's control over cattle means that they also have greater access to ploughing via draught power, which is considered a major impetus for arable production. Without such draught power, women are unable to be timely with ploughing and planting plus there are more costs involved with hiring tractors or labourers (Fortmann, 1980, p. 6; Wikan, 1984, p. 131; Mazonde, 1990, p. 15; Mogwe, 1992, p. 7; Kidd *et al.*, 1997, p. 57). Women often have to borrow animals at the end of the ploughing season when (male) owners are finished using them, again risking low productivity levels. The lack of cattle as draught power also means that women do not have the opportunity to sell cattle in times of hardship (Mogwe, 1992, p. 7). Aside from cattle, women have considerably less equipment and implements than men, and the investment in and value of equipment is greater in male-headed households, although this is also the case in some female-headed households where men are present (Kerven, 1979, pp. 40–1). Women are more active in smallstock production in part because goats and sheep are cheaper to buy and maintain (Kidd *et al.*, 1997, p. 71). Women often do not have access to labour other than their own, meaning that there are gender differentials in labour time whereby, all other things being equal, the opportunity cost of women's time is higher than men's on account of their reproductive functions and household responsibilities (DAPS, 1997, p. 20). Women's limited access to resources, along with their position in the largely unproductive subsistence agricultural sector, has been reinforced further by the mechanisation of agriculture. Gender-biased government programmes have provided tractors to assist men's roles of preparing the soil for cultivation, while women's activities of weeding, hoeing and transplanting have not received a similar technological boost and continue to be performed by hand (Seitshiro, 1995, p. 33). In another instance, planting, once a female-designated role, has been mechanised through plough row planters, thus reducing control over this part of production because it is men who are traditionally allocated to use machinery (Kidd *et al.*, 1997, p. 69; World Bank, 1999).

Perhaps the most significant limitation for women is the fact that they have less access to land, both in terms of arable and grazing land, than their male counterparts (Fortmann, 1980, p. 6; Brown, 1983, p. 377; Mazonde, 1990, p. 15;

DAPS, 1997, p. 1). Both traditional and contemporary access to land is difficult for most women.⁵ In tribal areas land is relegated through a male relative, usually a father or husband, through customary rights. Under common-statutory law, land is now relegated through male-dominated Land Boards established in 1968. Although considered gender neutral, the Land Boards have not changed internal rules of traditional land tenure system and women continue to face numerous aspects of discrimination compared to men. For example, male members often overlook and delay women's applications (Ditshwanelo *et al.*, 1998, p. 27), reject female applicants under 20 years of age and demand husband's consent or name on land requests (Kidd *et al.*, 1997, pp. 48–9).

Finally, more often than not government extension services tend to target men's agricultural efforts as opposed to women's. In the past, predominantly male extension staff have been hesitant to approach women, citing a variety of cultural inhibitions and women's general lack of resources as key reasons for their behavior (Brown, 1983, p. 381). Although there are more female extension officers today, gender bias continues. For example, information on technological innovations is still disseminated through *kgotla* meetings, which are attended primarily by men who then pass on details to their wives. Furthermore, training programmes are often based on male stereotypes so they are difficult for women to relate to (Kidd *et al.*, 1997, p. 69). Rural Training Centers have at times replaced women's requests for agricultural courses with baking or dressmaking courses deemed more suitable and relevant for female participants (Seitshiro, 1995, pp. 34–7). In sum, past studies on gender and rural agriculture in Botswana demonstrate the differential, and primarily unequal, positionality of men and women that delineates access to productive resources and influences agricultural production.

Gender and Urban Life

Urbanisation trends and increased employment opportunities in the waged economy mean that in contemporary, and increasingly urban, Botswana women are presented with greater options than in the past. Yet macro- and meso-scale statistics and studies reveal that women's access to social status and productive resources remains limited compared to men's, and is reproduced through education and employment opportunities in the urban labour market.

The educational system perpetuates culturally driven gender inequalities through the socialisation of boys and girls during their formative years. While there is equal enrolment at junior and secondary levels (CSO, 1998, p. 14), boys and girls are funnelled into gendered subjects. Specifically, 'male' subjects include physical and agricultural science, mathematics, accounting and mechanical drawing while 'female' subjects include social science, food and nutrition and home management. These gender discrepancies become more pronounced at senior, university and technical levels (Alexander, 1992, p. 10). At the University of Botswana, men and women are equally enrolled; however, men dominate the sciences while women dominate education and the humanities (Republic of Botswana *et al.*, 1998, p. 12). The Teachers Training College has only 14.5% male students compared to the Vocational and Technical College, that has 66.6% male enrolment (CSO, 1998, p. 14) focused on motor mechanics, construction, bricklaying and carpentry (Mogwe, 1992, p. 11). Attitudes concerning appropriate courses for boys and girls shape options for social and

economic advancement. Women generally have lower levels of education in Botswana, despite an early start and large number of participants, and access to education continues to be constrained by traditional values, customs and division of labour. 'Female' subjects tend to have minimal vocational value that limits girls' entry into and within the urban labour market (Alexander, 1992, p. 9; World Bank, 1999).

Women are marginalised economically relative to men in Botswana, for they are secondary to male labour, earn lower wages, have irregular, part-time or self-employment and have higher unemployment rates (Datta, 1996, p. 115). Women tend to be confined to a narrow range of occupations that are less rewarding in terms of remuneration, decision-making power and upward mobility than those dominated by men. They predominate in administration, retail trade, health care, education and domestic services and the informal sector, while men dominate higher, decision-making levels in the formal sector, in particular civil service, mining, agriculture and construction (Alexander, 1992, p. 10; Mogwe, 1992, p. 7; Kariya, 1995; DWA, 1995, p. 15; Datta, 1996; CSO, 1999, p. 6). Gender segregation in the labour market has created an earnings discrepancy between men and women. Official statistics document that, on average, men earn P884⁶ while women earn P702 in private and public sectors combined (CSO, 1999, p. 13). Others claim that men's salaries are twice those of women's (Kalabamu, 1998, p. 57). Given their subordinate position in the labour market, it is not surprising that women are found increasingly in self-employment and/or in the informal employment sector. The 1991 Census shows an equal number of men and women as self-employed (Kariya, 1995), with 50% of urban women operating as small business owners (Alexander, 1992, p. 10); yet women entrepreneurs are still marginalised in their efforts. They tend to be poorer than their male counterparts, are involved in 'women's activities' with little earning potential, must juggle domestic and income-generating roles and require male consent to begin operations (especially to access credit or financing) (Somolekae, 1989, p. 61). Within the informal sector, women occupy positions that are the least stable and with the highest turnover, such as clothes, handicrafts and construction, while men participate in retail, transport, repair and manufacturing (Mazonde, 1990, p. 16). Finally, unemployment rates reveal that three-quarters of urban women versus one-quarter of urban men are unemployed (Datta, 1996, p. 115).

Legal and institutionally entrenched gender bias means that women's access to productive resources and participation in the urban labour market is stifled further. For example, gender-defined roles and marriage laws raise problems for women trying to access financial assistance and run enterprises successfully (SIAPAC, 1991, p. 112). Married women often must obtain their husband's consent and/or be registered as a business and be successfully self-employed, meaning that fewer women than men even apply for credit given their lack of collateral (Kalabamu, 1998, p. 57). Access to land is also hindered for women married 'in community of property', whereby the husband becomes the sole administrator of joint property (Kalabamu, 1998, p. 67). Single women, however, can own and register property and thus wield total control in terms of decision-making and control over the land (Larsson, 1990, p. 289; Musyoki, 1998, p. 267), but access to freehold and state land is determined largely by access to capital, again rendering women at a disadvantage given their status in the labour market.

Methodology

The research focused on the central question: how and why does gender affect the quantity and type of foodstuffs produced via commercial urban agriculture systems in and around Gaborone? To this end, the article turns its attention to the agricultural enterprises present in Greater Gaborone, which contributed P100 million or US\$20 million worth of foodstuffs to the urban market in 2000.⁷ employed over 1200 people and occupied 625 hectares of land. In 2000/2001, the author compiled and verified a comprehensive listing of enterprises through numerous sources, including the Ministry of Agriculture, Registrar of Companies, Tribal Land Board and Department of Lands' allocation records, key informants, agricultural suppliers/distributors, veterinarians, farmers' organisations and word of mouth. This led to the identification of 114 commercial urban agricultural enterprises, of which 109 participated in this study.⁸ Participants describe themselves as operating their agricultural production exclusively or primarily for commerce and income-generating purposes. The author conducted semi-structured interviews at each of these 109 enterprises. The interviews focused on productivity levels, as well as a number of socio-economic, location and environmental variables. Sessions ran for approximately 60–90 minutes and were conducted primarily in English, with a translator employed in cases where participants felt more comfortable using Setswana. Beyond formal interviews, the author spoke at length with participants during unstructured 'farm tours' at the agricultural sites. Those individuals highlighted in this article (identified by pseudonyms) were selected to illustrate most effectively the themes and trends that emerged from the data analysis. Selected individuals are not outliers; rather, they represent numerous other entrepreneurs with similar attributes and experiences relating to agrarian restructuring and rural–urban transformation in Botswana.

Continuity and Change through Urban Agriculture

The initial round of data analysis revealed a clear gender hierarchy of participation in the commercial urban agriculture sector in Greater Gaborone (Hovorka, 2005). A glaring pattern emerges across the urban landscape, reflecting a highly differentiated gendered positionality as expressed in the location of men and women's enterprises. In short, men tend to have access to larger, more expensive plots of agricultural land located in freehold areas of outright land-ownership while women are concentrated on smaller, less expensive plots of land in tribal areas, often associated with their residence. This spatial marginalisation of women is wrapped around their socio-economic status relative to men whereby women have less access to capital, given their lower educational status, labour market segregation and often single-headed-household status, which means that they often have less access to capital to acquire prime agricultural land. In turn, this has major implications for the quantity of produce, scale of operation, degree of intensification and type of agriculture subsector associated with men and women's production systems. Generally speaking, women engage in small-scale, intensive broiler production that is often constrained by access to small plots of land in tribal areas, while men have options for larger-scale, extensive and diversified systems on account of their access to larger agricultural plots in a number of land tenure categories.

While useful in illuminating gender inequality within the commercial urban agriculture sector in Greater Gaborone, this scale of analysis does not draw sufficient attention to local agency, initiative and creativity within the context of agrarian restructuring and rural–urban transformation in Botswana. Indeed, it masks the ways in which women may be (re)defining their circumstances, albeit under formidable constraints, and seeking out opportunities for empowerment and action. That men and women participate in this urban economic sector in equal numbers suggests already that the sector offers them new and accessible avenues for economic and social advancement, given the fact that many women are shut out of commercial production in other African contexts. What does an in-depth look at individual experiences tell us about the gender dimensions⁹ of agrarian and urban change in Botswana? To what extent does the commercial urban agriculture sector in Botswana represent a site of (re)negotiation of gender roles and positionality for women? Such analysis reveals that continuity is paired with changing gender dynamics whereby women are finding new spaces of empowerment despite existing constraints. As such, agrarian restructuring and rural–urban transformation in Botswana is prompting a (re)negotiation of women’s positionality through the commercial urban agriculture sector.

Motivations for Production

In-depth analysis reveals that people’s motivations for entering into commercial urban agriculture production reflect changing gendered opportunities in the urban context. The complexity of individuals’ circumstances detailed below demonstrates that both men and women perceive of this sector as offering them new and accessible avenues for economic and social advancement in a variety of ways. These findings run somewhat contrary to other research on urban agriculture in Africa, which documents that women enter into production to address survival-based needs within subsistence realms, and are often excluded from commercial production. In Botswana, not only do men and women participate in this urban economic sector in equal numbers, but also women’s motivations do not necessarily revolve around a lack of opportunities in other realms. Moreover, these findings suggest changes in gendered opportunities in the urban realm given women’s previous exclusion from commercial agriculture in the rural context. By drawing on individual men and women from the sample population, I demonstrate how motivations for entering into agricultural production in Greater Gaborone revolve around a combination of economic and socio-cultural strategies, often influenced by a range of interpersonal relationships.

Economic empowerment in itself is diverse as illustrated through the motivations of Mr Narayan, Mr Seth, Rra Pedi and Mma Tala.¹⁰ Mr Narayan and Mr Seth are profit-motivated entrepreneurs who co-own a medium-sized broiler (poultry meat) operation in Gaborone North, as part of a larger holding company through which they operate a number of businesses. Their enterprise is guided by clear goals, including high profit margins, which they have maximised through the addition of processing facilities and the distribution of produce through self-owned grocery stores. Rra Pedi started his layer (egg production) enterprise in 1997 for the purpose of supplementing his civil servant income. ‘As one grows old you need security’, he says, noting that he is happy about the extra money that comes in to support his family. Mma Tala’s motivation for initiating

poultry production on her residential plot in Mogoditshane is based on basic survival. The homemade equipment and crude poultry house reflect her impoverished status. As a single mother of four, Mma Tala considers her existence to be one of struggle, and draws on the earnings from 100 birds per month to sustain her children's welfare.

As in many other cases, the economic motivations of these individuals did not emerge in isolation but rather were prompted through their personal observations of and interactions with those around them. Mr Narayan and Mr Seth, for example, explain their move to poultry production as follows: '[We had a] friend who started with fifty chickens and established a small-scale farm single-handedly. [We] used to admire this friend and his fantastic effort. . . it was a dream of ours to do the same'. As a government official, Rra Pedi easily accessed information about the Financial Assistance Policy (FAP) and ideas of what kind of enterprise to establish. An FAP grant was a catalyst for his entry into urban agriculture. Mma Tala's neighbour works at a private poultry supplier and suggested small-scale production as a means of making some cash income. The poultry supplier provided equipment and day-old chicks on credit, which Mma Tala repaid over a 3-month period.

Furthermore, profit-, supplementary- or survival-oriented economic motivations are not always as clear-cut as they appear through the experiences of these particular individuals. Mma Kwebu, for example, occupies a higher economic class than Mma Tala, yet entered broiler production after her clothing boutique closed down and she divorced from her husband. Commercial urban agriculture was a necessary means of survival for Mma Kwebu, but she also describes her motivation in terms of striving for a lucrative, profitable business that she could build and expand. Mma Bonamune, one of Mma Tala's neighbours, also stands in contrast despite her similar socio-economic circumstances. Mma Bonamune states her motivation as profit-seeking and her poultry production is simply another enterprise that she juggles to achieve upward economic mobility.

Individual motivations for entering into commercial urban agricultural production in Greater Gaborone also revolve around socio-cultural strategies. Cultural norms, values and heritage, as well as personal and national empowerment, are evident in people's reasons for participating in this urban economic sector. Batswana culture attaches significant social status to ownership of cattle specifically, and social value to agriculture more generally, which is tied to ownership, control and use of large expanses of land. Rra Tharo states directly that his motivation for operating a small feedlot for cattle and goats in Mogoditshane is 'for status'. His high political status and economic security has allowed him to acquire a prime plot and run the enterprise without worry of poor profit levels. It is a similar story with Mma Pinki, a full-time manager at a prominent financial institution. This lucrative job has afforded her a luxurious home, expensive car and an expansive piece of freehold land, registered in her name as a divorcee, in Gaborone North. It also affords her a smallstock and horticultural enterprise, which has been consistently losing money since its establishment in 1991. While she does not attribute her involvement in agricultural production to achieving social status or making a profit, Mma Pinki notes 'I just love agriculture. When I'm tired after work it takes stress off me. And Batswana people—it's their culture. It is part of our lives.' This sentiment reflects the fact that socio-cultural motivation is paired with one's connection to society at large, which encourages an agrarian lifestyle.

A variation on the socio-cultural theme is relevant to those who link their motivations for entering into urban production to their technical training in agricultural fields. This is the case for Ms Brown, a Canadian who operates an intensive horticultural enterprise south of the city proper, relying on the knowledge she gained through an agricultural degree. Ms Brown also had impetus for starting an urban agricultural enterprise through her relationship with Canadian growers and suppliers, as well as with local horticultural producers in Botswana who encouraged her to start. Mma Perese reflects yet another motivating socio-cultural strategy, that of self-empowerment, through her statement 'The first time I did poultry production I was doing it to see if I could do something for myself'. In other instances, individuals noted their motivation to make a personal contribution to empower the Batswana people or the nation. For example, as Rra Nne states, 'I was interested in running a poultry farm to supply my country [with food] and contribute to the economy'. Mma Hibidu expresses a similar sentiment regarding her motivations as an urban agriculture entrepreneur, combining it with a cultural heritage theme: 'I have always wanted to make agriculture a part of my life... to do traditional things. Plus Botswana was importing food and I was challenged by this. I couldn't see why I couldn't contribute.'

Entrepreneurs motivated by social status, cultural heritage or empowerment often do not occur in isolation from people's linkages with various social networks, as illustrated above with Ms Brown, Mma Pinki and Rra Tharo. A handful of individuals noted that their motivations to start urban agricultural production came solely from family, friends or from those operating around them. Dr Smith, for example, states that the impetus for her piggery enterprise came from an 'innocent' conversation with an extended family member in a pub. 'Don't you want to buy my pigs?' the family member asked because of his frustration with their upkeep. Dr Smith ultimately agreed, and collected her first 14 pigs. Rra Thataro started his small broiler enterprise simply 'because I've seen so many people getting into that business' and wanted to see what the fuss was about. Finally, some individuals are motivated by almost all the above-noted factors at once. For example, Mr Desai is at first glance the quintessential profit-motivated entrepreneur, running a number of large-scale, vertically integrated broiler production facilities in conjunction with numerous non-agriculture businesses. Yet he speaks simultaneously about his socio-cultural motivation to involve local people in the production through 'empowerment deals' and contributing foodstuffs to the nation as a whole. It is through his business networks that people requiring financial assistance have turned to him to purchase their enterprises.

In summary, men and women enter into the commercial urban agriculture sector on account of economic opportunities, agrarian tradition and interpersonal relationships. The diversity and complexity of motivations reveals that both men and women view this sector as offering possibilities for economic and/or social advancement. Moreover, the equal participation of women in this commercial production sector suggests positive changes in cultural and political economic circumstances that have relegated women to subsistence-oriented agricultural roles in the past.

Claiming Land and Poultry

Upon entry into the commercial urban agriculture sector, gendered opportunities and constraints become more evident as women find themselves relatively

disadvantaged, reflecting a continuity of gendered positionality despite agrarian restructuring and rural–urban transformation. At the same time, however, an in-depth look at individual experiences reveals the ways in which women are redefining their circumstances and seeking out opportunities for empowerment within this context of continuity. In other words, agrarian and urban change in Botswana offers women specific albeit subtle ways in which they can negotiate their marginalised positionality through claims on land and poultry, and commercial production more broadly. As individuals, then, women involved in commercial urban agriculture realise greater economic and social empowerment than may be deduced from analysis of the sector as a whole.

Women's claims on land are significant given that this resource remains a powerful expression of social status and a material expression of economic empowerment in urban Botswana. For those participating in the commercial urban agriculture sector, acquisition of land in any tenure system is viewed as a high priority and the more extensive the plot area the better. The government has facilitated middle-income women's ability to access land without outright dependence on male relatives through financial grants promoting and supporting local entrepreneurship. This has provided women with the capital resources to successfully negotiate applications for tribal land through Land Boards. Indeed, 19 women in the commercial urban agriculture sector have capitalised on special provisions for female applicants to the FAP in order to secure access to desirable land in urban and peri-urban areas of Gaborone. These provisions include easier eligibility terms, smaller matching financial contributions and a larger allocation of grant money (Kidd *et al.*, 1997, p. 74; World Bank 1999).

Despite difficulties in sustaining daily running costs and expanding production systems given that grants focus on fixed asset investments (Hovorka, forthcoming 2006), many women expressed a sense of pride and contentment associated with being landholders. Mma Kwebu's thoughts reflect many of the sentiments expressed: 'I am happy that the government has given us [women] this opportunity... having this security of land means I can be independent and successful in my business. I do not depend on anyone but myself.' Other women, such as Mma Ropi, noted that gaining access to land as a married woman gave them more clout within the household: 'The success I am having with my land is good. My husband knows this too. We both see that this is a good step for us as a family.'

For those women falling within the low-income bracket and outside of government financial assistance given requirements of initial investment capital for matching funds, claims to land are asserted through negotiation of seemingly marginal spaces in peri-urban areas. Shut out of formal land acquisition for urban agricultural production, 18 women have established informal enterprises on their residential village plots in Greater Gaborone. While such circumstances may be interpreted as a lack of options for female producers, the women use these spaces of disadvantage to their advantage in a number of ways. First, residential plots offer direct water connections for homesteads, unlike agricultural plots that lack such services, leaving producers to transport water to production sites. Water is a key resource given Botswana's semi-arid climate, and low-income women realise that they are at an advantage compared to other producers. This advantage remains despite the exorbitant costs for water (in 2000 consumers paid approximately P0.65 or US\$0.13 per cubic metre) because production systems on these residential plots are relatively small-scale given spatial constraints.

Hence small plot size, paired with residential access to water, allow these women to capitalise on their marginalisation to some extent.

Secondly, low-income women use to their advantage the fact that operating agricultural enterprises from their residential plot allows them to juggle multiple roles of income-generation, household tasks and facilitating community linkages more easily than if they had agricultural land in designated areas some distance from the homestead. The women also noted the tremendous encouragement, support and information they draw from family, friends and neighbours in their residential areas. An extended interpersonal network of small-scale broiler producers has emerged through word of mouth in the peri-urban villages of Mogoditshane, Metsemotlhabe and Gabane. Mma Mariga, Mma Dikgakologo, Mma Selemo and approximately eight other low-income women are connected to each other as family members, neighbours, friends or friends-of-friends. Their discussions about the pros and cons of poultry production, and urgings of those already involved, have facilitated a hub of urban agriculture just west of Gaborone City. The women help each other with production and rely on a trial-and-error experimentation method to gain insights on issues. They also get inputs and advice from a local poultry supplier who provides on-site visits and technical support. As summed up by Mma Selemo, 'my fellow poultry producers, they have trained me. Now I feel confident with my skills'.

Thirdly, low-income women establish effective marketing channels given the residential location combined with small-scale production. Specifically, the majority of these women are poultry producers who sell produce directly from their doorstep, avoiding costly storage or refrigeration facilities, as well as processing or slaughtering costs. Although some voiced concerns regarding their inability to access formal contracts with retail outlets, the women recognise the effectiveness of informal marketing channels immediately within residential areas.

So while low-income women find themselves on marginal land in residential peri-urban areas of Greater Gaborone, they have translated numerous advantages on these plots into highly successful enterprises, contributing to their efforts towards personal economic and social empowerment. Low-income women have significantly higher monthly gross earnings per area under agricultural production (i.e. hectare) than those with more capital and suitable agricultural land. Gross earnings of low-income producers per hectare (when size of plot is controlled) are on average an astounding P745,284 per hectare with a median of P499,200. This is significantly higher (seven and 25 times, respectively) than both the average and median levels of producers in the middle-income category (Hovorka, 2005). These findings suggest that, despite marginalised positionality within the commercial urban agriculture sector as a whole, there is room for women to negotiate their disadvantaged circumstances. In terms of claims to land, women are finding new spaces of empowerment and transforming marginalised spaces into productive advantage.

Beyond land claims, both low- and middle-income women are turning 'women's work' into profit through participation in the poultry subsector, ultimately making new claims over commercial agricultural production from which they have been largely excluded in Botswana. The research reveals that almost 70% of women entrepreneurs are involved in broiler meat production. Women are appealing directly to the continuity of gender roles and responsibilities because they have been traditionally associated with poultry.

The idea that poultry is 'women's work' remains a strong theme amongst entrepreneurs: 'Women have an advantage with poultry: they know how to nurse and look after babies. That chicken is like a baby, you have to raise it', says Mma Sedimo. According to Rra Tlano, 'It is a disgrace for a woman to have no chickens.' Interestingly, the shift from rural subsistence to urban commercial-oriented production has facilitated the emergence of a strong poultry subsector given its adaptability to the urban context and its financially lucrative nature. Women have been at the forefront of this subsector, actively changing its form and function from household foodstuff to profit-making enterprise. As Rra Babitseng notes, 'poultry does not have the same status as cattle but poultry has quick turnover so there is economic status'.

Poultry production is conducive to constrained spatial locations in the city, given that 10–13 broilers can be raised in an area of 1 m², and the 6-week growing cycle means that this subsector offers high and quick earnings than horticulture, piggery or small stock production. Fixed-asset investment and operating costs can be much lower than other sectors, particularly if enterprises are small-scale. This means that Mma Ngwaga, for example, can generate seven cycles of 100 birds per year in a 25 m² poultry house, using homemade feeders and drinkers, and accessing water from her residential tap. The fixed infrastructure requires P500 of Mma Ngwaga's savings, and she reinvests profits into operational costs. There is an added advantage in that it allows her to overcome poor environmental conditions, which are particularly relevant given that Botswana's harsh climate is not overly conducive to traditional ploughing methods, let alone specialised commercial subsectors such as horticulture. Mma Ngwaga has constructed an artificial environment, the poultry house, in order to compensate for poor soils, a harsh climate, pests and inconsistent topography (that leads to drainage problems).

Women's claims on urban poultry production have been facilitated also by the vertically integrated nature of the subsector. Large-scale (primarily male) producers in Greater Gaborone have expanded their enterprises in part through small-scale contract growers in the area who are provided inputs at cost and guaranteed a consistent market for their produce. The contract has been an important link for Mma Letlhafula, who operates at Gaborone Dam. She started her poultry farm in the early 1990s and claims that she did not have success on her own because 'Batswana do not know about chickens' and much of her stock was plagued with disease. A large-scale producer approached her in 1998, and has been a contract grower ever since. This contract has included intensive training and support that has allowed Mma Letlhafula to improve the environmental conditions of her farm, as well as her productivity levels.

Conclusion

The research findings demonstrate that agrarian restructuring and rural–urban transformation in Botswana offers women opportunities to renegotiate their marginalised positionality within the commercial urban agricultural sector in Greater Gaborone. Men and women participate in equal numbers, and both perceive of this sector as offering them new and accessible avenues for economic and social advancement. Although there is continuity of women's social and economic disadvantage relative to men from rural to urban contexts, women are actively making claims on land and capitalising on their traditional roles and

responsibilities associated with poultry production. This negotiation of continuity and change in gendered positionality reflects and indeed suggests positive changes for women in urban Botswana, pointing specifically to the transformatory potential of urban agriculture, despite existing constraints at the sectoral level. The research highlights the ways in which women, like Mma Dikoko, are defining and redefining their constraints, and seeking out alternative opportunities for empowerment and action. To this end, gender remains an integral part of and key element to understanding agrarian restructuring and rural–urban transformation in Botswana.

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Notes

1. A literal translation from Setswana to English is ‘Mrs Chicken’. One of the participants in the study had acquired this nickname by a police officer who would come into regular contact with her as she sped along the Tlokweng Road to reach her poultry farm in time for regular feeding, cleaning and slaughtering at the site. She thus became known amongst her customers, her community, her friends and family and, of course, the police officer, as Mma Dikoko.
2. ‘Bukkie’ is an Afrikaans word for pick-up truck.
3. For an in-depth discussion of the emergence of commercial urban agriculture in Greater Gaborone see Hovorka (2004).
4. Gendered access to draft power and male labour has received the greatest attention by researchers exploring constraints to successful crop production by Tswana households in the 1970s and early 1980s. For a detailed review of this debate see Peters (1983, pp. 147–9).
5. Surprisingly few empirical studies quantify men and women’s differential access to land in Botswana. The 1980 National Migration Study, for example, recorded one-third of women owning land in tribal areas, with women in remote areas such as Ghanzi and Kgalagadi being the worst off in terms of landholdings (Ditshwanelo *et al.*, 1998, p. 27). A study of Kweneng District revealed that only twenty percent have access to land (Mayende, 1990).
6. The monetary currency is the Botswana Pula and P5.00 = US\$1.00 during fieldwork in 2000.
7. This figure was calculated in terms of total gross earnings in 2000 of each commercial urban agriculture enterprise surveyed. Gross earning was a central measure and signifies the total value of foodstuffs sold on the urban market in the given period. Many respondents were unable to provide clear and/or official records documenting running costs, making measures of profit difficult to come by.
8. Of these enterprises, 48 were owned by men, 51 by women and 10 enterprises were male/female co-owned (by husband and wife).
9. For the purposes of this article, I have chosen to highlight specifically *women’s* experiences within the commercial urban agriculture sector. I have done so to demonstrate that gender inequality at the sectoral scale does not preclude individual women’s ability to negotiate their marginal positionality and create opportunities to achieve socio-economic empowerment.

10. *Rra* and *Mma* are used as standard titles for men and women, respectively. The literal translation from Setswana is 'Father' and 'Mother'. Other titles, for example Mr or Dr, are used in instances where the person is of European or Indian decent.

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ABSTRACT TRANSLATION

El No. 1 Granja de Aves de Damas: Una Ecología Política Feminista de Agricultura Urbana en Botswana.

RESUMEN Esta investigación usa una perspectiva de ecología política feminista para demostrar que la reestructuración agraria y la transformación rural-urbano en Botswana ofrecen mujeres oportunidades para renegociar sus posiciones marginales adentro del sector de agricultura comercial en la ciudad de Gabarone. Los hombres y las mujeres participan en cifras iguales, y los dos perciben que este sector les ofrece avenidas nuevas y accesibles para avanzar económicamente y socialmente. Aunque hay continuidad de la desventaja económica y social de mujeres relativa a hombres desde el contexto rural a urbano, mujeres están activamente haciendo derechos de terreno y capitalizando en sus roles y responsabilidades tradicionales asociados con la producción de aves. Esta negociación de continuidad y cambio en sus posiciones de género reflejan y por supuesto sugieren cambios positivos para las mujeres en Botswana, específicamente indicando la potencial de transformación de agricultura urbana a pesar de las limitaciones existente en el sector. Esta investigación subraya las maneras en que mujeres están redefiniendo sus limitaciones y buscan oportunidades alternativos para apoderadamente y acción. En esta vía, género se queda un elemento significado y un parte integral de entender la reestructuración agraria y la transformación rural-urbano en Botswana.