Individual and Contextual Dimensions of Religion and Women's Autonomy in Mozambique

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Abstract

Women's autonomy is an important indicator of well-being, and it has frequently been linked with women's opportunities and investments, such as education, employment, and reproductive control. The association between women's autonomy and religion, however, has received less research attention, and the nature of this relationship is still debated. Our contribution in this paper is to examine religion at both the individual and contextual level and to explore the implications for the autonomy of women. The setting for our research is southern Mozambique, a largely Christian area which is characterized by considerable denominational diversity. By taking advantage of a unique data collection that enumerated all congregations in the study area, we operationalize the contextual influence of religion as the congregational density of churches in women's communities. We find that both individual and contextual dimensions of religion have stronger influences in rural areas than urban areas.

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Background and Hypotheses

Organized religion plays an enormous role in everyday life in sub-Saharan Africa. However, the importance and implications of religious involvement may differ across different segments of society. In particularly, religious participation and its causes and consequence are highly gendered. It has been long established that on average religion is subjectively more important for women than for men (e.g., Benson 1991). It has been argued that religion is a source of empowerment for women (Ozorak 1996: Rodriguez 1994).

Studies have shown profound and diverse implications of religious membership and involvement for women's lives. However, the impact of religion on women's autonomy is still debated. Thus Jejeebhoy and Sathar (2001) did not find differences in autonomy levels between Hindu and Muslim women in India and Pakistan. Other studies in Asia did not detect any significant differences in women's autonomy between Muslims and non-Muslims (Ghuman 2003 and Morgan et al., 2002). In contrast, Chattopadhyay and Goswami (2007) found considerable Muslim-non-Muslim autonomy gap in West Bengal, although the religious differences were much more muted in Bangladesh. Whereas the Muslim vs non-Muslim differences in women's status and autonomy and their implications have received some attention, no research in developing countries has examined religious differences within a single religious tradition such as Christianity. Our study is an attempt to help fill this gap using data from a predominantly Christian area in southern Mozambique.

Another important limitation of the current research on religion and autonomy that our study seeks to overcome pertains to the level of analysis. Typically, religion and women's status are examined at the individual level—individual membership, involvement, and religiosity. However, a considerable body of literature has shown the important of community religious context for individual outcomes

ranging from delinquency (Chadwick and Top 1993), to cancer incidence (Dwyer, Clarke, and Miller 1990), to adolescent childbearing (Ovadia and Moore 2010), to contraceptive use (Agadjanian, Yabiku, and Fawcett, 2009). Drawing from that literature, we extend the analysis of the relationship between religion and women's autonomy by looking at this relationship at both individual and contextual levels.

Accordingly, we formulate hypotheses for the individual and contextual effects of religion. Yet both the individual and contextual-level hypotheses are premised on our conceptualization of religious teachings and practices in social and family matters and the enforcement of these teaching in various types of religious denominations. Based on prior research (Agadjanian 2001; Agadjanian 2005), we distinguish mainline denominations (e.g., Catholics, Mission Protestant), which are typically more liberal, or at least more flexible, in family and other social matters, and the generally more conservative Pentecostal and similar types of churches. We therefore hypothesize that at the individual level, membership in the more doctrinally flexible churches is associated with greater autonomy. Also at the individual level, we expect that experience of religious switching should be associated with greater autonomy: regardless of origin and destination of switching and of its causes, religious switching is a marker of individual cognitive and social flexibility.

Our main hypothesis regarding the effect of religious milieu parallels the individual-level hypothesis: we expect that greater presence of more flexible types of denominations to be associated with greater autonomy while greater presence of more conservative denominations. At this stage, we are not exploring pathways through which more liberal/flexible environment may increase autonomy (or more conservative/rigid environment may decrease it. The pathways will be explored at a later stage, when the paper is prepared for the PAA presentation (see also Next Steps).

The setting

Our data come from Chibuto district in southern Mozambique. With an area of 5,650km^2 and a

population of some 200,000 residents Chibuto is a typical mainly rural district of Mozambique's Gaza province. The lineage system is patrilineal, with marriages typically contracted through transfer of bridwealth from the groom's family to the bride's family. Most marriages are virilocal and polygyny levels are relatively high. The mainstay of the district's economy is subsistence agriculture; proximity to South Africa has made male labour out-migration a major source of livelihood for local families (De Vletter, 2007).

As much of southern Mozambique, the district is overwhelmingly Christian with a very high level of formal religious membership and considerable denominational diversity. According to our estimates, there is one religious congregation for about every 150-200 district residents. Before Mozambique gained independence from Portugal in 1975, Roman Catholicism was the colony's quasi-official religion and the dominant denomination in Chibuto and elsewhere. At the same time, the colonial era also saw a strong growth of mission-initiated (or "mainline" in our usage) Protestant churches, such as the Presbyterian, Anglican, and Methodist churches. Besides these churches, the district has a substantial presence of other denominations. Thus a sizeable share of the population belongs to the so-called "Apostolic" churches (particularly the Church of Old Apostles), a variety of African-initiated churches that were first established in South Africa and then spread through the southern African region. These churches are distinguished by strong organizational identity and hierarchy and introvert corporate culture. The area, like much of the rest of the country, has seen a proliferation of foreign-origin, even if considerably "Africanized," Pentecostal churches, such as the Assemblies of God and the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, a Brazilian import. Most remarkable, however, has been the explosive growth of the Zionist variety of Pentecostalism. Some of the Zionist churches were imported from South Africa, but many are home-grown in southern Mozambique. They are distinguished by a strong emphasis on miracle healing that is often aided by herbs and similar medicines borrowed straight from traditional healers' healing kits, despite Zionists' fervent rejection of the very institution of traditional

medicine.

Whereas most, if not all, church leaders in the area nominally subscribe to the same set of social teachings that extoll women's subordinate role in the family and in society as a whole, our field observations suggest that Apostolic and Pentecostal leaders generally promote this role more assertively than do leaders of Catholic and mainline Protestant congregations.

Data

We use data from a representative population-based cluster survey of 2019 women aged 18-50 conducted 2008. It was carried out in 82 randomly selected communities (clusters), both in neighbourhoods of the district's administrative capital and in villages of its rural areas. Within each sampled household, one randomly selected woman of the target age range was interviewed. In addition to standard socioeconomic and cultural information, the survey collected information on women's complete religious affiliation and switching histories since birth and characteristics of current religious involvement. A separate module consisting of ten questions measured respondents' decision-making autonomy. In addition to the women's survey, a complete census of all religious congregations in district was carried out and geographic coordinates of these churches were recorded.

This analysis is restricted to women in marital union. Marital union is broadly defined to include both formal marriage (bridewealth, civil registration) marriage and non-formalized (consensual) unions. In total, 1476 valid observations are used in the analysis: 1129 in rural areas and 347 in urban areas.

Method

Dependent variable: Women's autonomy. Our operationalizion of women's autonomy builds upon our earlier work in Mozambique (Yabiku, Agadjanian, and Sevoyan 2011). Women's autonomy is measured with a series of questions asking whether the woman would have to ask her husband's or

husband's family's permission to do 10 different activities, such as visiting friends, visiting relatives, going to market, going to church, spending money, getting a job, or doing family planning. Women were coded 1 on each item if they did not need to ask permission, and they were coded 0 if they had to ask permission or replied "don't know." Thus the autonomy scale varied from a low of 0 to a high of 10, with higher values representing more autonomy.

Primary independent variables: 1. Individual Religious affiliation (measured at the time of the survey) Individual religious affiliation is coded with dummies that represent the same types of congregations in the area, as well as an additional category for no church affiliation. 2. *Switching* is coded categorically as none, one, or two or more. *3. Congregational density*. We predicted that the number of congregations of specific types will be associated with different levels of women's autonomy. We created measures that summed the number of congregations within 1 km of each of the main types of congregations found in this area: Catholic, Protestant, Apostolic, Pentecostal, and Zionist.

Control variables. We control for several basic demographic characteristics of respondent that are likely to be associated with autonomy. These controls include age and age-squared, whether the marriage is monogamous or polygamous, the number of live births the women ever had, education, and work status. Education is coded using dummy categories of no education, 1-4 years, and 5 or more years. Work status is dichotomously coded 1 if the woman is working outside the home, and 0 otherwise.

Modeling Approach. We treat our 10-level autonomy scale as a continuous outcome. Because women were sampled via neighborhoods, the data are clustered and there is non-independence between women in the same neighborhood. We account for this non-independence by using multilevel regression models, specifically random effects models with a random intercept. This approach helps guard against Type I errors and biased hypothesis tests. Because we predicted that the importance of

religious congregations will vary by urban and rural areas, we estimate models separately for women in rural areas and women in urban areas.

Results

The descriptive results are shown in Table 1. The level of autonomy in this sample is moderate at an average of 5.9 on the 10 point scale. The distribution of congregations within 1 kilometers averaged 8.7, but there was large variation by the congregation's affiliation. Zionist congregations were more common, and Catholic congregations were the least common. This is not surprising given the distribution of churches in our study area and the types of congregations these churches typically form. The remaining variables in Table 1 are mainly controls and we do not discuss them in detail.

(Table 1)

Table 2 shows the results of the multivariate models. We estimate models separately by rural and urban settings. In addition, for each setting we first examine the association between autonomy and the combined number of congregations within 1 kilometer. We then break down this total number of congregations by specific affiliation type. Model 1 shows the association between the total number of congregations within 1 kilometer and the autonomy score among rural, married women. The results show a significant, positive association between the number of nearby congregations and autonomy. Each increase in the number of congregations within 1 kilometer was associated with a .12 increase on the autonomy scale. Controls that were significant and shared positive associations with autonomy include currently working, Protestant affiliation, and two or more religious switching events.

(Table 2)

In Model 2, we test if the relationship between nearby congregations and autonomy varies by congregation type. We find that it does. The significant association in Model 1 appears to be driven by two specific churches: Pentecostal and Zionist churches have significant, positive associations with

autonomy, with Pentecostal churches having the stronger association. Apostolic churches also have a positive association, but this does not approach significance (p=.14).

At the individual level, only membership in a mainline Protestant congregation has a marginally significant positive effect on autonomy, relative to membership in a Zionist church. Also, having switched church two or more times is positively associated with more autonomy.

In Models 3 and 4, we repeat the prior analyses but with urban, married women. Recall that we predicted the impact of congregations on the autonomy of women would be blunted due to the large array of competing social institutions that dilute religious organizations' influence in urban areas. The results generally confirm these expectations. In Model 3, the combined number of nearby congregations has no association with women's autonomy. After disaggregating this by congregation type in Model 4, there are no specific congregation densities that show positive associations with women's autonomy. In contrast, the only significant finding ($p<.10$) is that the number of Zionist congregations has a negative association with women's autonomy.

Discussion and Future Steps

At this preliminary stage of analysis, we have not found any net differences across individual religious affiliation categories (except for a marginally significant difference between Zionists and Protestants in rural areas). At the same time, at least in rural areas, the experience of frequent church switching has shown the hypothesized relationship with autonomy.

Our preliminary results for the contextual effects further underscore the importance of rural-urban differences. Contrary to our hypothesis, in rural areas, the number of nearby Zionist and other Pentecostal congregations is positively associated with the autonomy score. In urban areas, the marginally significant negative effect of the number of nearby Zionist congregations offers partial support to our hypothesis. These results point to the complex nature and meaning of religious

environment in rural and urban settings. In particular, they suggest that in rural areas, where opportunities for women's social advancement and status improvement are severely constrained, the presence of ostensibly conservative Zionist and other Pentecostal churches may somehow galvanize these opportunities.

For the PAA presentations we plan to further refine and expand our models. At the contextual models, we plan to take full advantage of the congregation survey data to create more sensitive indicators of liberal vs. conservative congregations that goes beyond a simple denomination-based classification. Also, at the contextual level, we will use other community-level information available in our data to try to understand the nature of these detected associations and perhaps identify some of the mechanisms through which the religious milieu may affect women's autonomy. We also plan to add community religious makeup and diversity by aggregating individual religious affiliations and levels of religious involvement. At the individual level, we will add measures of individual religious trajectories as our data contain full individual religious history. We also plan to incorporate household level religious characteristic such as marital partner's religious affiliation and religious affiliation of other household members. Finally, we also plan to examine alternative operationalizations of women's autonomy.

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Autonomy Score	5.94	2.49	0	10
Congregations within 1 km	8.69	11.03	0	58
Catholic congregations within 1 km	0.39	0.75	0	3
Protestant congregations within 1 km	1.17	1.36	0	5
Apostolic congregations within 1 km	0.82	1.24	0	7
Pentecostal congregations within 1 km	1.00	1.18	0	6
Zionist congregations within 1 km	5.25	8.22	0	45
Women's religious affiliation				
Catholic	0.13	0.33	0	1
No Church	0.12	0.32	0	1
Protestant	0.10	0.29	0	1
Apostolic	0.12	0.33	0	1
Pentecostal	0.11	0.31	0	1
Zionist	0.42	0.49	0	1
Religious Switching				
None	0.50	0.50	0	1
One switching event	0.41	0.49	0	1
Two or more switching events	0.08	0.28	0	1
Age	30.67	8.65	17	50
Monogamous marriage	0.74	0.44	0	1
Number of live births	3.51	2.45	0	13
Education				
0 Years	0.33	0.47	0	1
1-4 Years Education	0.38	0.49	0	1
5+ Years Education	0.28	0.45	0	1
Works now	0.28	0.45	0	1
Urban residence	0.24	0.42	0	1

N=1476 women

Table 2: Multilevel Regression Predicting Autonomy with Individual and Contextual Religious Measures

	Married Rural Women		Married Urban Women	
	1	2	3	4
Congregations within 1 km	0.117***		-0.004	
	(5.548)		(-0.263)	
Catholic congregations within 1 km		-0.099		0.239
		(-0.586)		(1.475)
Protestant congregations within 1 km		-0.071		0.072
		(-0.818)		(0.388)
Apostolic congregations within 1 km		0.199		0.144
		(1.479)		(0.890)
Pentecostal congregations within 1 km		0.492***		0.308
		(4.243)		(1.360)
Zionist congregations within 1 km		0.093*		-0.034+
		(2.327)		(-1.712)
Women's affiliation (ref=Zionist)				
Catholic	0.085	0.055	0.871	0.774
	(0.398)	(0.258)	(1.607)	(1.431)
No Church	0.146	0.117	-0.269	-0.242
	(0.642)	(0.516)	(-0.509)	(-0.460)
Protestant	0.415+	0.416+	0.412	0.418
	(1.677)	(1.688)	(0.824)	(0.839)
Apostolic	0.129	0.116	-0.050	0.023
	(0.588)	(0.527)	(-0.111)	(0.052)
Pentecostal	0.253	0.169	-0.220	-0.279
	(1.103)	(0.735)	(-0.483)	(-0.610)
Religious Switching (ref=none)				
One switching event	0.063	0.037	0.209	0.223
	(0.423)	(0.249)	(0.672)	(0.716)
Two or more switching events	0.474+	0.482*	-1.030	-0.984
	(1.928)	(1.967)	(-1.634)	(-1.568)
Age	-0.039	-0.029	0.132	0.107
	(-0.656)	(-0.497)	(1.024)	(0.821)
Age-squared	0.001	0.001	-0.002	-0.001
	(1.255)	(1.086)	(-0.853)	(-0.702)
Monogamous marriage	0.108	0.114	0.093	0.132
	(0.705)	(0.754)	(0.255)	(0.366)
Number of live births	-0.033	-0.031	0.019	0.030
	(-0.928)	(-0.869)	(0.217)	(0.346)
Education (ref=0 years)				
1-4 Years Education	0.006	0.030	0.528	0.577
	(0.036)	(0.190)	(1.351)	(1.482)
5+ Years Education	-0.120	-0.095	0.644	0.511
	(-0.626)	(-0.499)	(1.442)	(1.145)
Works now	0.390*	0.439**	0.197	0.263
	(2.574)	(2.896)	(0.628)	(0.834)
Intercept	5.266***	5.143***	2.904	2.333
	(5.481)	(5.377)	(1.389)	(1.109)
N	1129	1129	347	347