

**SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION AND
POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT IN THE
AGE OF GLOBALIZATION:
LOOKING BEYOND WOMEN'S
EMPOWERMENT IN TANZANIA**
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ABSTRACT

The paper reviews the efforts attempted so far to create a social movement for political empowerment of women in post-independence Tanzania. It locates the various women groups within the larger social context and analyzes the role gender plays in intra-household resource allocation and the mechanisms which maintains the prevailing structure of social relations. Firstly, the paper assesses the organizational resources which have been available to women and how these have facilitated the creation of a movement. The tutelage of women by men as fathers, uncles, brothers, and husbands is seen as a major impingement on independent resource management by women. Increased workload on women due to technological change in economic production is also highlighted. The sedentarisation of pastoralists and the resulting degradation of rangelands are shown to have changed women's property rights in livestock; to have made it possible for men to redefine women's traditional rights and consolidate control both over livestock and dairy incomes. The political opportunity structure under which women have been operating in Tanzania is, however, seen as fairly favourable to women empowerment. The paper sees women in Tanzania as the vanguards of the struggle for the second liberation, which is the agenda for this millennium.

Keywords: gender, women empowerment, social movements, social change

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INTRODUCTION

Studies in gender inequalities have established that women work more than men and lack productive assets such as land and credit; they lack access to extension

services; they lack political power and have limited control of their labour and the returns for their labour. Other studies have shown that women cope differently with short-term household economic crises according to their class position and as an outcome of historical processes of commercialization in which fragmentation of landholdings, changing labour relations and shifting patterns of investment have accentuated the unequal allocation of resources both within and between households.

It is thus that some commentators disapprove the dichotomization of the African agricultural production sphere into subsistence and commercial production and prefer to approach the issue with the analysis of commoditization of the sphere of production and the need for expanded cash crop production whereby more and more women labour is being taken out of food production and self-provisioning and into the highly exploitative cash crop production. This leads to incessant food deficits, widespread impoverishment, and sharp domestic conflicts whose understanding demand the consideration of the larger questions of democratization, liberalization of the political space and market related issues in the economy. This paper's stance, therefore, is that since most of the grievances resulting from resource misallocation between the genders are situated in class relationships the movement for political empowerment of women in Tanzania should also be logically cast from the vantage point of these relationships.

Using the Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT), this paper reviews the efforts attempted so far to create a social movement for political empowerment of women in post-independence Tanzania. Firstly, the paper assesses the organizational resources that have been available to women and how these have facilitated or hindered the creation of such a movement. Secondly, the paper evaluates the political opportunity structure under which the women have been operating and assesses how this has allowed or hindered women organizations to succeed in their endeavors. Crucial questions about the social character of the movement itself are raised. Questions such as: Are women a homogeneous social group with harmonious grievances/interests? More important, how have women circumvented all the injustices depicted by the various studies as having been inflicted upon them as a social group to make the reproduction of all of us possible? Finally, the paper considers the future of women struggles in the light of the current globalization of economic and socio-cultural life.

1. CONCEPTUALIZING THE RESOURCE MOBILIZATION THEORY

According to Spalding (1993) the RMT focuses particular attention on the organizational prerequisites of social movement formation and success. The RMT posits that social movements succeed as a result of a confluence of three important factors, namely the existence of organizational resources, the existence of a critical mass of grievances in civil society, and the existence of a

political opportunity structure which allows organizations to flourish and enjoy some success. Organizational resources in this context include networks of allies, money, time, leadership, expertise, the ability to attract media attention, and, most critically, the potential to disrupt society's functioning. Organizational resources make a sustained movement possible. Without them the aggrieved population is likely to be deprived of the capacity for collective action even when confronted with a favourable structure of political opportunities (McAdam, 1982 as quoted in Spalding (1993: 93)).

Grievances are created by a variety of different actions or situations. Grievances provide reasons for organization and protest, and can be used to mobilize the population behind a cause or group. Grievances alone do not, however, determine the success of a movement. The level and salience of grievances change over time, but collective action may not occur when they are at their most virulent. The intensity of state repression can, for example, always put such action into a caveat.

According to Tarrow (1983: 28), a political opportunity structure (POS) consists of the circumstances that determine the potential for groups to gain access to the state and to achieve some of their goals, and includes: (a) the openness or closure of formal political access; (b) the stability or instability of alignments within the political system, and (c) the availability and strategic posture of potential alliance partners. As noted by Eisenger (1973), the POS can be seriously constrained by the existing level of state repression, or adverse public opinion concerning the protesting group, or the pressure toward inclusion. Generally, however, as access to the state system opens up, the costs of mobilization and organization are reduced, allowing the groups to be more effective without requiring increased resources or effort.

2. WOMEN GRIEVANCES: GENDER OR CLASS ISSUES?

2.1 WOMEN'S "DIRE STRAIGHTS"

As already noted, various studies have established that women work more than men. For example, at its worst one study showed that the male input of labour was 19 percent, whereas that of women and children was 71 percent and 9 percent, respectively. It was further found out that women walked about 7,000 km a year in carrying out their duties (Msimbe, 1988 as quoted in Havnevik *et al.*, 1988: 178). Lack of productive assets such as land, credit and access to extension services fostered by tradition and circumscribed by customary and state laws has been shown to be the source of other major grievances, leading to reduced agricultural productivity and food shortages (Havnevik *et al.*, *ibid.*).

Other studies have shown that women lack political power and have limited control of their labour and the returns to their labour (Koda, 1985; Mbilinyi, 1994; 1988; 1980). According to one study, for example, the involvement of the

men in the dairy business had increased substantially with the acquisition of improved dairy cows kept under zero grazing. Although many of the respondents said this was associated with increased labour demands from women in terms of collecting water, feed grass and cleaning the stables, the main reason expressed by both men *and* some women was that since the new type of keeping animals involved large sums of money and needed constant contacts with veterinary and other officials the men could no longer leave the business to the women alone (Mung'ong'o, 1995).

Women in wage employment have been shown to be in similar dire straits. Havnevik *et al.* reported that women constituted only 6 percent of all urban wage and salaried employment in 1966, increasing to 12 percent in 1972 and 15.6 percent in 1980. (Havnevik *et al.* 1988: 179). More recent sources indicate that this situation has at best been vacillating through the decades. One source, for example, shows that women employment in urban centres rose from 6.5 to 8.6 percent between 1991/92 and 2000/02, respectively, the same in the rural areas (where the percentage of women engaged in employment are usually high) declined discernibly from 43.4 percent to 42.0 percent, respectively (URT, 2002: 13).

Many of the women from the poor and female-headed households not in employment in urban centres depended on the informal sector for their livelihoods. Although income from the mushrooming urban informal sector had proved to be 10–15 times the official minimum wage, women in this sector were said to bear a triple constraint of labour, requiring the involvement of children until late in the night (URT, 2000: 14; Havnevik *et al.* 1988: 181).

The picture painted by the above-mentioned studies is grim indeed. One wonders how the women as a social group have managed to remain sane and well under such oppressive conditions for all this time. Are women superhuman? Or have we missed some aspects of human agency in women which has made them makers of history in their own right rather than mere recipients of change?

2.2 CONSIDERING CLASS RELATIONSHIPS

Ngalula (1977) found that Sukuma agriculture was sharply divided between a low-productivity food producing agricultural sector dominated by women, on the one hand, and, on the other, a male-dominated cash-cropping sector well endowed with modern high-productivity inputs and implements. According to Whitehead (1990), however, the dichotomization of the African agricultural production sphere into food and cash crop cultivation obscured the impact of commoditization of this sphere of production, which shifts more and more female labour out of food production and self-provisioning and into the highly exploitative cash crop production. This results in incessant food deficits, widespread impoverishment, and sharp domestic conflicts.

Whitehead (1990) argues, therefore, that most of the grievances resulting from resource misallocation between the genders are in fact situated in class relationships. Class and gender are thus related variables in the analysis of women's empowerment. Both women and men are either capacitated or constrained by the social class they belong to. However, gender appears to have received much more attention in the field of rural agricultural research than class, probably owing to the eclipse of the marxist orientation and the entry of more women researchers into gender studies.

Studies in the Kondoa District further established that the rural society in the area is not homogeneous (Mung'ong'o, 1995). It was clear from those studies that access to productive resources is both socially and spatially differentiated. The data clearly demonstrated that a woman's social position, status and welfare were also very closely intertwined with her position, first as a daughter and then as a wife, in either of the three prevalent wealth groups. According to that study Rangi society was divisible into three wealth groups, i.e. the comparatively rich *Musungati/Nkabaku* wealth group, the intermediate *Watu-wa-Kati* wealth group, and the poor *Watu-wa-Hali-Duni* wealth group. Thus, if a woman is born in the *Musungati/Nkabaku* wealth group she stands a better chance of marrying someone from the same group and continuing the enjoyment of the privileges and status commensurate to that group: a better provided-for household, some additional labour power from bonded labour, polygyny or dependent relatives, some work-easing machinery, etc. In Rangi society, therefore, upward mobility by marriage seems to be the best—sometimes the only—way of improving a woman's social position and status.

As already noted by Kerner (1991) women cope differently with short-term economic crisis, according to their class position, owing to historical processes of commercialization in which fragmentation of landholdings, changing labour relations and shifting patterns of investment have accentuated the unequal allocation of resources both within and between households. Other studies have documented the fact that, as a result of SAP policies in smallholder agriculture which have forced women to seek work in plantations, new forms of gender relations are emerging based on negotiation and cooperation. The women's workload is not only increased due to technological change in economic production, their provisioning responsibilities are also increased as men become dependent on the cash incomes of their female partners (Holmboe, 1991; Holmboe and Wandel, 1991; Mbilinyi, 1997).

In a study in Njombe District, Mung'ong'o (2001) found, for example, that although the brewing and sale of local beer was usually a women's preoccupation, more and more of the male population had joined in the activity by 1995. A majority of these came mostly from the lower echelons of the middle wealth group and less from the poor, suggesting that the traditional income earning activities for men had been more depressed by the changing economic fortunes in the area than those of women. As a result, there had been a redefinition of social roles in the household as more and more men shifted their occupational preference towards income-earning activities formerly considered

the preserve of women. On the other hand, the situation had not only increased competition between the genders for fewer economic niches in the local resource base and markets, but it was also probable that, as a result of these developments more and more homesteads in the district were drifting into food insecurity as resources, especially food resources, were increasingly being commoditized.

2.3 ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Rural female-headed households without access to farmland and other productive resources can be really poor, particularly if they have no relatives or friends with resources. The situation in the urban centres is, however, different. Some female-headed households are extremely resourceful, economically resilient and highly exploitative. Important factors in these efforts have been economic diversification and the use of social capital. (Box 1).

Box 1: Economic Diversification: Petty Trading and Prostitution

Helen Lutwaza was 46 years of age and divorced. She lived in Biharamulo. The household consisted of her two children aged 8 and 6 years, a female relative aged 35 years who worked as a petty trader, two male relatives aged 16 and 17 years, respectively, and a house-girl who looked after the children and did the cooking. Helen had been employed as a community development worker in the town since 1965. Her total income at the time of the study was Tsh. 46,800 per month derived from the wages (32%), trading (13%), and sale of agricultural produce from a 3.5 acre shamba (55%). She was planning to start local beer brewing, which is a good income generator. She owned a five-roomed house built of durable material. As an independent woman Helen felt she was in a better position than many married women who are often obliged to surrender to their husbands any income they generate, or are totally dependent upon their spouses for resources.

Source: Baker and Mwaiselage (1993).

There are quite a number of migrant Haya female-headed households in Biharamulo. An unknown number of these female heads engage in professional prostitution, just like their kith and kin in most large East African urban centres. Many are said to have left their husbands and families in the Haya country, who encourage them to migrate to other parts of the country and engage in prostitution for varying periods of time. Money generated through such activities is sent back to Haya country for investment in highly productive coffee and banana farms and in high-quality housing. Prostitution in Biharamulo is, therefore, not an indicator of poverty. It is a highly lucrative entrepreneurial activity to generate capital to increase productivity in agriculture.

Source: Baker and Mwaiselage (1993).

Social capital has been defined as the rules, norms, obligations, reciprocity, and trust embedded in social relations, structures, and society's institutional arrangements which enable its members to achieve their individual and community objectives through beneficial collective action (World Bank, 2000; Narayan, 1996: 50). Elsewhere, social capital has been defined as that bundle of socio-cultural, political or economic portfolios/opportunities an individual household or person can access from social and kinship networks (Mung'ong'o, 2001). Many female-headed households in rural and urban areas, but especially so in the latter, tend to depend on this capital for subsistence and development than on any other form of capital. (Box 2).

Box 2: Slaves, Woman-Husbands and the Fear of Posterity

Christina Magoti was a 25 year-old grain trader. She had been married in 1983 at the age of 15. She had four children, two boys and two girls. The youngest was three. The woman Christina was married to was aged about 43 years. She was a widow with two grown-up daughters. One daughter was 27 years old and had two children. She was unemployed and lived with Christina and the mother.

Christina called her woman-husband Mother-in-Law. Christina came from a poor family whose parents required resources to improve their economic situation. Mother-in-Law paid a dowry of 24 cows to Christina's parents in the hope that Christina would bear her male children that would preserve the Mother-in-Law's family name and respect her memory. Although it is normal for such mothers-in-laws to chose the man the "spouse" would have children with, Christina was allowed to choose a man she wanted. This man was married to another woman and he had no rights whatsoever to Christina's children. The children belonged to the Mother-in-Law who gave them her family names. The father of Christina's children was, however, allowed to visit. The children knew him and they called him father.

Christina would have wished to live with a man but the traditional dowry paid to her parents prevented this. It is possible to break this kind of marriage and some have managed to divorce by paying back the dowry. If Christina got a man who would like to marry her, he would have to repay the 24 cows to the Mother-in-Law. Christina would have liked to have fewer economic responsibilities. By then she was supporting her four children, the Mother-in-Law, the unemployed daughter and her two children. Mother-in-Law helped Christina look after the children when she went trading because it was the main source of income for the household.

Source: Baker and Mwaiselage (1993).

The tutelage of women by men in their roles as fathers, uncles, and brothers is, however, a major impingement on independent resource management by women. Data from Kondoa District has demonstrated that the percentage of the sample homesteads that had women as decision makers on the allocation of productive resources and the disbursement of family income accruing from agricultural production was small and more often than not female-headed. Even

where observations in the field revealed that the parcels that the female-headed homesteads were cultivating had actually been inherited from their parents, during their years of marriage these were left in the hands of their brothers and/or uncles as caretakers. This tradition and others related to it have put women in a position where they cannot use land as collateral for credit from financial institutions (Mung'ong'o, 1995).

2.4 ENTITLEMENTS TO LIVESTOCK AMONG PASTORALISTS

The importance of livestock in pastoral societies in East Africa and women's access to them have been adequately analyzed in, for instance, Aud Talle (1990: 73–92) and Joeke and Pointing (1991). Generally, livestock are a pastoralist homestead's means of survival. Entitlements to them are, however, very complex and fluid in that the animals are both the means of subsistence as well as the basis of wealth and prestige. Women as milk managers have been associated with livestock as the means of subsistence, while men as herd managers have been associated with animals as wealth and status symbol.

The women's role as milk managers has been intimately related to their reproductive and household provisioning roles. Milk and milk products have been used for consumption within the household or for exchange. Rights to milk have, however, depended on the women having a reproductive role, as child bearing establishes a woman's claim to milk. For women past childbearing age and without cattle, access to milk was ensured by child adoption. The declining availability and dietary importance of milk under conditions of sedentarization and degradation of pastures has meant that women in poor *manyata* homesteads are less able to gain access to income and support in this way.

Pastoralist women have also gained support, dignity and some measure of authority from their role as milk managers. Using their dairy management role, women from rich homesteads have been able to build their own social and exchange networks that have ensured the flow of food into the homestead during periods of stress. Moreover, to meet homestead requirements the women have usually retained income generated by the sale of dairy produce for this purpose.

Furthermore, apart from holding entitlements to milking rights some women have also owned animals obtained at marriage or through inheritance, although in many cases such animals have been left in the care of their brothers to strengthen family obligations that can be drawn upon in times of crisis. Women have thus often been involved in discussion and decision-making related to livestock, especially if they or their children have had rights to particular animals in the homestead. Inasmuch as it is from the mother's share of homestead herds that male children have typically received and/or inherited livestock from their fathers, women have played a critical role in determining men's access to animals.

However, increasing sedentarisation and degradation of range lands that have necessitated herds to be kept at cattle posts far away from the homesteads have adversely affected women's property rights in livestock. It is reported that there has been an increasing tendency for men to appropriate women's rights without negotiation or permission. Moreover, increased commercial transactions in livestock have made it possible for men to redefine or disregard traditional rights accruing to women and children, thus not only consolidating male control over livestock, but also effectively shifting dairy income from women's control to men's control.

These developments have adversely affected the capacity of women to meet homestead provisioning needs, as well as for the wider issues relating to women's well-being. Diminishing access to livestock has curtailed the exchange and reciprocal networks that formerly facilitated the exchange of productive resources and food. Childless women and women from poor homesteads have been particularly disadvantaged as a result of the breakdown of the traditional redistributive mechanisms. For them the lack of access to milk has been much more than just a material deprivation. The shift of emphasis in livestock production from milk to meat has in fact become an intimidating and socially degrading experience. (Box 3).

Box 3: Pastoralists, Social Networks and Impoverishment

Facing unpredictable environmental conditions and the constant risk of personal misfortune, pastoralists recognise that participation in kin-based mutual assistance networks is the best survival strategy they have at their disposal. The obligation to assist an impoverished fellow clan member is also deeply rooted in their culture through customary rules of social relations, as well as resulting from the character of property rights in livestock. Sedentarization policies requiring pastoralists to settle down at one locality, livestock diseases and the adoption of consumer practices characteristic of non-pastoral communities have, however, gradually put the resources of rich domestic groups among the Maasai less accessible to the poor as the non-pastoral goods which are purchased become exclusive possessions of the one who buys them. The decline of pastoral resources and the profitability of agricultural pursuits in Maasailand are drawing more Maasai into agriculture, thus widening the wealth gap between the rich domestic groups and the poor. Poor domestic groups which migrate out of Maasailand into new environments or urban centres aim to produce their own subsistence needs through agriculture and other activities such as employment, and produce a surplus that would allow them to build new herds and return to their traditional pastoralist way of life.

Source: Potkanski (1994)

From the discussion above, it is pertinent to conclude that an individual homestead's position in the social structure of a community is an important variable in the analysis of women's problems both in urban and the rural areas. An approach that does not consider women's condition in this context and

instead dichotomizes them into simplistic spatial categories and then analyzes their problems as if women were a homogeneous social group is very misleading. Such spatial categories obscure very real socio-cultural and economic differentiation between and within women groups, so much so that they lead into specious generalizations and the formulation of ineffectual intervention programmes.

3. POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE

The relationship between the state and civil society is manifested in the structures of power and social relations. It is manifested in how these structures and relations determine access to productive resources at all levels and how much freedom of action is allowed to individuals and civil organizations to articulate their interests within society. Although the role of government policies in fostering gender inequalities has been variously documented (cf. Havnevik *et al.*, 1988; Shivji, 1985), in response to women pressures exerted by women, the state in Tanzania has been exceptionally lenient with regard to women's grievances. It has introduced several measures in an effort to redress these imbalances. These measures have included the quota system that provides special seats for women in party and government organs at all levels, the creation of a full ministry dealing with women affairs, and the allowance given to women to organise and register their activities as NGOs.

The efforts made by UWT, the currently banned BAWATA, TAMWA and TGNP's Gender Budget Initiative directed at challenging the perpetuation of gender-blind and male biased policies and procedures in allocating national resources have largely succeeded due to a favourable POS. Gender inequalities in education, division of labour, socio-cultural and political patterns have, however, limited women's full utilization of these opportunities for political empowerment. It is estimated, for example, that less than 25 percent of the women in Tanzania have benefited from these opportunities (Havnevik *et al.* 1988: 186). A majority of the beneficiaries have come from an urban-based elite group.

Despite this structural shortcoming Kabeer, (1994: 261–262) notes the reforming potential of these NGOs as being observable in four factors, i.e.:

- The extent to which they have emphasized the participation of marginalized women.
- The degree to which they have provided women with access to new kinds of resources, thereby signalling new potential and possibilities rather than merely reinforcing old roles and constraints.
- The extent to which they have treated women as real actors in the development process, rather than seeking to act on their behalf.
- The measure of emphasis they place on new forms of collective awareness and association, which enable women to challenge the belief systems that

legitimize their subordination, to analyze their own situations and problems, and to come up with their own strategies.

4. WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

The structure of the global economy in the post-Second World War period has been transformed by the growth and extended domination of global production and exchange by transnational corporations. The transformation has been linked to a loss of control over national economies by national governments in favour of transnational conglomerates, supported by international financial institutions and a narrow corps of transnational development professionals. The condition for the expansion and accumulation of capital on a world scale have been transformed by the development of technology which provides for the fragmentation of production and the worldwide sourcing of manufacturing.

The conditions for globalization of production have been similarly transformed by the development of a world market for labour. International labour migrants are always men. Women, in contrast, are favoured by industries like textiles, clothing and electronics assembly, which plead the inherent virtues of female dexterity and its consequent suitability for the intricate work they require. The major advantages for capital in employing women may be identified as lower unit costs of production because wage levels for women are almost always significantly less than for men, whilst their productivity for comparable jobs appears to be higher.

Moreover, because women are subordinated as a gender they are more manipulable and generally less organized and hence more suited to the widespread industrial requirement for standardized, repetitious and highly labour-intensive work. Women's structured susceptibility to domination makes their labour power a peculiarly appropriate commodity in world market factories that are vulnerable to changes in the conditions of accumulation.

The impact of economic globalization on the macro and sectoral policies in Tanzania is likely to worsen the situation of women, especially so for rural and poor women. In a country like Tanzania where there are systemic factors that impair the state's capacity to curb social inequalities, globalization will adversely affect the situation of marginalized social groups, including women. In a situation where the sites and structures of policy implementation are overseen by a de facto single-party political establishment driven by clientelist relations and procedures, disadvantaged groups who maintain an organic linkage between their cultural life and their mode of production lose the capacity to articulate their interests, as they themselves become socially invisible.

Halfani and Nzomo (1995) found, for example, that the country's record of respecting fundamental human rights was fairly positive. However, by maintaining a truncated notion of culture and emphasizing on economic policy management, the state had subjected marginalized communities to persistent

violations of their cultural rights in the course of planning and executing of development projects. Lack of participation in policy formulation by pastoralists, especially women pastoralists, was put forward as a case in point. Under globalization these interests are likely to be completely eclipsed.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper has reviewed the efforts attempted so far to create a social movement for political empowerment of women in post-independence Tanzania. The paper located the various women groups within the larger social context and analyzed the role that gender plays in intra-household resource allocation and the mechanisms that maintained the prevailing structure of social relations. The paper assessed the organizational resources that have been available to women and how these have facilitated the creation of such a movement.

Women saw the tutelage of women by men as fathers, uncles, brothers, and husbands as a major impingement on independent resource management. Increased workload on women due to technological change in economic production was also highlighted. The sedentarisation of pastoralists and the resulting degradation of rangelands were shown to have changed women's property rights in livestock and to have made it possible for men to redefine women's traditional rights and consolidate control both over livestock and dairy incomes.

Despite these developments in gender relations and resource mobilization and distribution it has been pointed out that the political opportunity structure under which women have been operating has been fairly favourable to women empowerment. It was argued that the efforts made by UWT, BAWATA, TAMWA and the TGNP's Gender Budget Initiative have largely succeeded due to a favourable POS. It is for this reason that it has been argued that the future of women struggles in the age of globalization would best be situated in a gendered class perspective.

All over the Third World, peasant and indigenous people's movements have sprung up to resist various injustices. Although both men and women have been part of these movements, women have provided the core of these movements, as they are the ones who have felt the burdens of modernization (Omvedt, 1993; Shiva, 1988). This paper sees women in Tanzania as in the vanguard of the struggle for the second liberation that is the agenda for the new millennium.

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