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PATTERNS OF CHANGE: PROMOTING FEMINISM IN RURAL TANZANIA

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Abstract:

Tanzanian legislation for women's rights is a product of decades of indigenous women's struggles and considered amongst the most progressive in Africa. However, implementation has been problematic and some elements in the current discourse appear to push back against gender equality with an essentialist framing of women and men as naturally different. This study on the women rural communities in different regions of Tanzania, to build an understanding of how they perceive gender equality, and how their perceptions relate to decision-making, women earning incomes, women as homemakers, and control over assets.

Understanding feminist as a performance contextualise analysis through a historical overview of women's struggles to secure rights since colonial times to the present day. that local discourse appears to embrace the idea of gender; practice remains quite different with the threat of sanctions restricting the scope for re-negotiation of gender. The paper demonstrates how the continuous performance, reproduction and renegotiation of feminist takes place as part of patterns of change.

Key words: Patterns of Change, Promoting Feminism.

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Introduction

In 2006, the Global Gender Gap Report ranked Tanzania number 1 of 115 countries, with respect to the women's economic participation sub-index (and 24th for its combined ranking across a range of indicators) (World Economic Forum, 2006). Ellis, Blackden, Cutura, MacCulloch, and Seebens (2007) praised the Government and civil society for developing numerous policies and strategies in support of gender equality and women's empowerment. In the 2018 Global Gender Gap Report, though, the women's economic participation sub-index ranking for Tanzania had fallen to number 72 (and 71 for its combined ranking across a range of indicators) (World Economic Forum, 2019).

The discrepancies between rankings only 12 years apart speak perhaps to a naive optimism that creating progressive policies would translate rapidly into women's economic and other forms of empowerment. In fact, almost the opposite has happened. The Human Rights Watch Global Report (Human Rights Watch, 2019) the pregnant girls in schools, (LGBTQI) people face harassment and prevent to studies.

Government overturned four decades of policy when it banned pregnant girls and young mothers from attending school. Many schoolgirls routinely face forced pregnancy testing. In 2018, the Government suspended USAID-supported messaging on birth control. Consensual adult same-sex conduct is punishable with up to life in prison, (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

In agriculture, the gender productivity gap (the difference between the average value of agricultural output per hectare/acre on women-managed and on men-managed plots) remains large. The World Bank (2015) estimates that the gender productivity gap in Tanzania amounts to USD 105 million (0.46% of GDP), and that closing the gender productivity gap could lift 80,000 Tanzanians out of poverty each year and eliminate malnourishment in the same number. However, TGNP Mtandao (2018), a transformative feminist umbrella organisation, notes that the Government's Vision 2025 includes no measures to address the agricultural gender productivity gap. How are we to make sense of what is happening? Why is there a tendency for gender to take on an essentialist aspect, creating women and men as having clearly binary identities with different responsibilities, roles, and rights?

These insights from the conceptual model are used to help analyze the qualitative data produced by a study (Badstue et al., 2018; Petesch et al., 2018) on gender norms and agency in four farming communities in different parts of Tanzania. The study posits that although women are constantly re-represented and reproduced, spaces emerge for women and men to renegotiate gender. We investigate the nature of these spaces, and we also investigate the degree to which injunctive sanctions, which arise from the local normative understanding of what it means to be a man or a woman in these societies, impose restrictions on renegotiation.

We open by presenting some of ideas. then provide a short historical overview of how the identities of Tanzanian women have been contested and shaped during the colonial era and following Independence. This allows us to gain an appreciation of gender as a process in Tanzania. Women have long sought a variety of identities, and likewise have had identities imposed upon them Next, describe research methodology and study sites, then turn to findings. In the discussion, and models to interpretations. and analysis of power to help explain how normative sanctions continue to structure gender behaviors and restrict the scope for change.

1. Gender in national narratives

Women were important players in the struggle for Independence. However, analyses by Kinunda (2017), Mbilinyi (2016), Geiger (1996) and Brain (1978) suggest that the role of women has been largely suppressed in the way the past has been recalled in national narratives. Mbilinyi (2016) explores history as process: it is continually being negotiated between women farmers; powerful local classes; pre-colonial, colonial, post-colonial political and economic institutions; and actors – including men – at community level. Kaunda's (2017) study shows that during (and indeed after) the colonial period women negotiated their Labour power in cash cropping and protested actively against detrimental events in relation to land and agriculture. Geiger (1996) argues that women, during the 1950s, did not only respond to how the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) defined an emerging national consciousness.

Many thousands of women, acting across tribal lines, were key players in constructing 'what nationalism came to signify for many Tanzanian women and men' (Geiger, 1996, p. 465). Brain (1978) concurs largely with these analyses. He emphasizes that the colonial – followed by the post-colonial – authorities in Tanzania exacerbated gender inequalities. In pre-colonial society women and men held different roles, with women often holding high office and enjoying high status as food producers. However, Europeans introduced concepts around Victorian ideals of 'gentility' for women at the same time – for example that women are homemakers – alongside introducing cash crops which greatly increased demands upon women's Labour. These colonial conceptualizations of women's roles remain powerful today (Brain, 1978).

2 . Ujamaa policy;

Modern Tanzania was formed in 1964, when mainland Tanganyika merged with Zanzibar. Tanganyika won Independence in 1961 and Zanzibar in 1963. Ujamaa (literally 'family hood', 1964–1975) aimed to transform Tanzanian society through returning it to pre-colonial values. The process included villagisation, collective farming, nationalization of industry and banks, increased self-reliance at a personal and national level, and the development of a strong national culture (Lange, 1995; Mbilinyi, 1972). Ujamaa, according to Mbilinyi, 'through the reconstitution of agrarian relations, offered poor rural women a chance to become aware of

'the contradictions of their own lives and [...] to realised their own true abilities and potentialities' (1972, p. 72). Fortmann (1982) acknowledges that the transformative potential of Ujamaa for women was realised at times. However, although women could acquire land under Ujamaa, they did not always benefit. This is because 'structures for equality [...] tended to be overwhelmed by male-dominated tradition' at the village level (Fortmann, 1982, p. 167). Women often did not get good land, or sufficient land, nor did they have much control over their produce (Fortmann, 1982). Women's work in the field was often unrecognized (Scroll, 1981). Lal (2010) argues that the Tanzanian state's understandings of the rural family and the Ujamaa project 'were deeply riddled with internal tensions.' Distinctive gender roles for women and men were normalized, and a generic ideal of the nuclear family was celebrated (Lal, 2010). Women were promoted primarily as homemakers; it was never suggested that men could engage in house and care work (Scroll, 1981). In reality, Tanzanian women have always moved in and out of motherhood, working in the field and off-farm (Lal, 2010).

Women's multiple roles were recognized at the time by some observers: 'The African woman thinks of herself as more than a wife and mother. She is a cultivator, a weaver, a trader, and her occupational role is part of her self-image' (Mbilinyi, 1972, p. 60). Despite this, strengthening women's equality was never explicit in Ujamaa official policy (Fortmann, 1982). During the 1980s, Ujamaa was largely reversed. Men increasingly migrated to urban areas and rural women took on many tasks previously considered men's (Mbilinyi, 2016). Land became commercialised and increased rapidly in value during the 1990s and into the 2000s.

3. Women and the demand for change

The conflicting and complex ways in which men and women, and the national State, sought to perform gender during the struggle for Independence and during Ujamaa, is reflected in contestation around normative conceptions of 'who owns land'. Although under Ujamaa women had had the right to own land, the issue of ownership of land between husband and wife was excluded from legislation in the National Land Policy of 1995. Women's organizations then mobilised for equal treatment under the law. Their struggles resulted in the Land Act and the Village Land Act, 1999, and the Courts (Land Disputes Settlements) Act of 2002.

These are considered amongst the most progressive legislation in Africa (Pedersen & Haule, 2013). Legally, women may hold, own and dispose of property, and women have the same land rights as men. Laws provide for strong protections of women landowners, recognise a wife's right to household land upon widowhood or divorce, prevent village land councils from discriminating against women, and allocate to women a certain number of seats on the councils, which administer occupancy rights and adjudicate land disputes in rural areas (Pedersen & Haule, 2013). However, these rights are rarely realised. Customary land tenure

continues to vest control of property in men across Tanzania: in such systems women's rights to land are generally dependent on maintaining their roles as wives or daughters (Ewans School of Public Affairs, [2011](#)). Women and men generally have little knowledge of national law, local institutions have low technical and financial capacity to implement national legislation, and women's participation in community level decision-making bodies is weak (Sutz et al., [2019](#)). Daley's ([2005a](#), [2005b](#)) study of the relationship between land and social change in Tanzania from colonial times to the present illustrates how gendered differences in wealth and education, as well as marital status and kinship, influenced and continues to influence women's ability to formalise their rights to land and other assets. Thus, women across Tanzania are highly vulnerable to dispossession of land upon the death of their husband or separation (Dancer, [2015](#); see also Schlindwein et al., [2020](#)).

The negative impact of norms has been sharpened by the commercialization of land from the 1990s to the present day. Between 2000 and 2015, foreign and/or national investors acquired 1,321,731 ha of land with, in many cases, few benefits to the local population (Dancer & Sulle, [2015](#)). Such investments have sharply increased the value of land and thus the potential for contestation (Kinunda, [2017](#); Mbilinyi, [2016](#)). Furthermore, families headed by women tend to be poorer than those headed by men, and 'only those [women] both "without men" and with independent means [are] able to make most use of the land market' (Daley, [2005b](#), p. 558).

Women have continued the struggle for gender equality in land. Over the past few years, for instance, the Tanzania Women Lawyers Association (TAWLA) has been working with the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and other national and international organizations to support villages to adopt 'gender-sensitive' bylaws. This ongoing project has been successful in around 130 villages across six districts, including all villages in the first district (Sutz et al., [2019](#)).

4. Gender in National Policies

The overview so far shows that 'how to do gender right' in rural Tanzania has been contested for decades and is still being contested. As a consequence, different understandings of what it means to be a woman, or a man, permeate national legislation. Performance is not cohesive. The Constitution of 1997 prohibits discrimination against women. Tanzania has signed all major international and regional gender equality protocols and instruments. It has ratified the 2030 SDG Agenda and the long term 2063 Agenda (both of which include commitment to gender equality). The country has made some efforts to align implementation of the SDGs with national planning frameworks.

However, the current National Development Plan does not fully capture gender equality issues and women's empowerment. In fact, only half a page from 124 pages is dedicated to discussion of gender equality – with a few gendered indicators on other pages (Ministry of

Finance and Planning, [2016](#)). By way of contrast, the Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children ([2016](#)) in its 'Country Gender Profile'(139 pages) notes considerable weaknesses with respect to legislation in employment, property ownership and credit, and weak mainstreaming of gender in planning and budgeting at sector level. Inadequate gender-disaggregated data in key economic sectors prevents a good grasp of the situation of women and gender relations and hampers monitoring (Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children, [2016](#)). Outside observers note the overall lack of alignment between policies to advance gender equality and sector-specific policies of government ministries – as noted above with respect to land legislation (Acosta, Ampaire, Okolo, Twyman, & Jassogne, [2016](#); USAID, [2018](#)).

TGNP Mtandao asserts: 'gender mainstreaming continues to remain a lip service, whereby the Government creates national gender instruments, but commits insufficient funds to attain them' ([2018](#)). Taken together, these observations point to a tension at the heart of government. This tension arguably arises from the long-standing contestations around what a man, and a woman, should be and should do, that have characterised Tanzania over the past century and more. We now turn to our study to explore these issues further. We present the methodology and study communities before moving to the findings and discussion.

The findings are presented as follows. First, we explore concepts of gender equality and how these are expressed in intra-household decision-making. This section helps to contextualise those, which follow. Second, we provide an account of men and women's responsibilities for income generation. Third, we examine the concept of women as homemakers, and fourth, we assess the reality that men are primary asset holders and managers.

5. The suffering of women with income

Although off-farm income-generation opportunities are opening up in all communities, women involved in paid Labour were widely described as suffering and struggling. Low-income men in Mgorowi explained 'the community has no problem with a woman struggling to make her life.' Low-income men in Kenosha argued that 'People sympathize with her, because she is working hard for her family needs', and 'They admire her for working far away to sustain the family.' Women respondents in Mgorowi and Kenosha explained, 'Women selling vegetables in the market is a common practice here. No one worries about it' and 'This is normal practice. Actually, this is what women do.'

One reason why women are considered to struggle when they take on paid work, or market products, is their general lack of control over expenditure decisions – particularly when married – as noted above by low-income respondents. Discussions with middle-income men and women centering on a hypothetical vignette-based exercise whereby a man previously

sold vegetables the wife had grown – because he expected his wife to focus on household work – to a new situation where the wife herself joins a women’s marketing group, revealed strong fears among men that they will lose access to money. ‘The husband will take this decision as a way to stop him from getting the income he has been earning’, according to men. Women added, ‘He will use all reasons to prevent his wife from going to sell vegetables on her own. He will tell her to remain doing domestic activities.’ In all four communities’ respondents agreed with these assessments.

Another hypothetical vignette focused on a couple, where the wife has become successful in her market enterprise. Women and men agreed that the husband, who broadly agreed with his wife’s entrepreneurial spirit, would appreciate his wife’s financial success. However, it was widely agreed that such a man would be concerned. Men respondents said, ‘He will accept what has happened, but he will worry about the future. Because of her wealth his wife can turn against him any time’ (Med) and ‘He will fear that in future he will have no say when it comes to making decisions over the accumulated resources’ (Kenosha). The concern that a wife may ‘turn against’ the husband was linked to a widely held belief that an economically successful wife may marry another man, or court other men to obtain money.

6. Women as homemakers

A second reason why women, who work outside the home, are considered to suffer and struggle is that women are strongly associated with household, parenting and care roles in all communities. This has considerable implications for the ability of women to balance their time. Yet, normatively, the thought of a husband conducting domestic tasks and care work was viewed ambivalently.

Women and men in low and middle-income categories agreed, that working women must never neglect their childcare responsibilities. At the same time, low-income women in particular argued that gender equality *should* translate into stronger participation by men in household and care work. ‘Gender equality means giving freedom to the wife to work in business, as well as assisting each other in the responsibility of taking care of the children’ (Tanya). ‘Gender equality means, that if the woman has gone for harvesting in the farm, the man can help in caring for the children’ (Mogorowi). In some cases, men are contributing more. Women in Mogorowi said, ‘Women and men are able to work together now, different from the past where women seemed to work alone in most of the domestic activities’, and that ‘Gender equality is good, because today men are encouraged to take children to the clinic’ (Med). However, men did not make any statements relating to their willingness to participate in household work.

A third hypothetical vignette-based exercise, whereby the wife is a successful market vendor and her husband manages housework and childcare, led respondents to expect both parties losing respect. Regarding the wife, women respondents explained, that ‘The community will

consider her a woman with no concern for her family' (Mogorowi). She will be judged for making him do activities that are 'not worthy to be done by a man' (Med), and for making him look like a 'house girl' (Tanya). Accusations of witchcraft would be made, and men in the village would shout at the wife, that 'what she does is no good.' According to men respondents, the husband would be despised, because 'he does the opposite of what men are supposed to do' (Med). 'It is abnormal, and it would look like the wife paid bride-wealth for the man' (Mogorowi). Both women and men agreed that the husband would not have time to engage in social occasions with other men, because he would be too busy working on his chores. Despite the strong condemnation, it is not clear whether women would in fact welcome such a husband. Rather, the comments make it clear that men who openly engage in tasks associated with women are marginalized and scorned.

7. men's possession

Although low-income men in Med argued that gender equality meant 'women can share family assets, not as in the past whereby assets were only reserved for men', in general women were recognized to have very low command over assets. Women were considered entitled to use assets during their marriage, and in so doing, contribute to the family's livelihoods and further asset creation. However, when the marriage ends, whether due to death of the spouse or separation, most women have to leave their households empty-handed, and have no call upon the land. A middle-income woman in Tanya said, 'I separated from my husband, and I had to leave all the crops in the farm. My husband told me, that I can only take my clothes'. Poor women in Kenosha explained 'Women fall into poverty after they separate. They leave every belonging and asset with their husband.' Because of their loss of assets upon separation, it is very difficult for most single women to start over and develop a sufficient asset base to provide adequately for themselves and their families. Respondents remarked, 'Some women are household heads and have no men. You find that their husbands died, or they separated. They work hard to earn a living for their households, but they cannot do much to move their households ahead' (Tanya, low-income men). 'There are women, who are poor, because their husbands or children, who used to provide for them, have died' (Med, low-income men).

8. rural social traditions

The findings show that the reality on the ground in our case study communities lies at a substantial distance to national legislation. Considering the data, it is hard to imagine that 'legally, women may hold, own and dispose of property, and women have the same land rights as men. Laws provide for strong protections of women landowners, recognise a wife's right to household land upon widowhood or divorce' (Pedersen & Haule, 2013, p. 2). In the study communities, the majority of women – together with their children – become destitute, if their marriages fail or if their husbands die. In such a situation, women are left with little option

but to construct themselves as feminine, submissive and docile. Thus, whilst married women may seek equality in decision-making, their generally very low control over – and ownership of – assets, means that they perform acts of submission in ostensible support of men's decision-making. Maintaining their access to assets trumps attempts at decision-making autonomy. However, single women are freed from such a performance, and women respondents, who are financially secure, expressed a preference to be single in order to experience decision-making autonomy. These findings suggest performances of gender are differentiated by household typology.

Local norms indicate that men are supposed to provide for their families, even though the reality is that in all locations women are engaged in on- and off-farm income generation. However, when women earn money locally, important performances of masculinities (man as breadwinner) and femininities (woman as housewife) are inevitably questioned. In this light, it seems very important to men, particularly, to create an image of women who work as 'struggling'. Such language serves to relativize and diminish women's contributions in relation to those of men. Couching women's contributions as purely economic – and as under the control of men – allows men to retain dominance as decision-maker. In men's remarks, there is no hint that women may actually want to earn money or to see themselves as breadwinners.

Brain (1978) comments that women became homemakers during the colonial period. The literature review and our findings show, that the merging of women's identity with homemaker is pervasive and thoroughly naturalised. It is here, that Butler's concept of gender being performative has particular heft. At the same time, there are tantalizing hints that men may be engaged in housework and childcare by simple virtue of women expressing this as a possibility. Admitting in public, though, that men carry out any form of housework is taboo. The fervent denials of this prospect, particularly by men – 'It is abnormal', '(It is) the opposite of what men are supposed to do' suggest that associating men with the domestic sphere threatens their masculinity in a very deep way. Feinstein, Feinstein, and Sab row (2010) make very similar observations. They found that Tanzanian men express traditional expectations regarding gender roles, whilst women have more progressive expectations. Men generally felt that women should be responsible for children and do more work than men overall. Interestingly, their respondents suggested that disparities between women and men are natural, and they minimized the scale of any disparities (Feinstein et al., 2010)

Our findings show that understandings of gender are far from hegemonic. Women and men do engage, constantly, in gendered performances, and there is evidence that this behavior is – at least to an extent – deliberative rather than a mere reflection of cultural norms. Women and men act to secure their personal well-being in the context of a limited range of cultural and economic options. Women in particular demonstrate 'a differential consciousness, a new subject position that permits functioning within, yet beyond, the demands of dominant ideology' (Sandoval, as cited in Grebe et al., 2014).

The fieldwork findings are redolent with remarks by women – and men – that speak to a much wider understanding of gender equality than is currently expressed in their daily lives. Butler (1988) allows for agency in her model, simply because gender is an artifice – it is not real. Our study shows that women, and men, face very real limits to their personal agency. These limits are structural and as such pervasive. Even so, we came across tantalizing evidence that, behind the scenes, a few married women and men may be acting gender in more gender equal ways. However, this cannot (yet) be expressed at community level. Maintaining a ‘gender norms façade’ appears critical (Goalie & Farnworth, 2019). Women and men must be seen as conforming to gender norms in public, but in private they may be doing something else altogether.

Already noted the feminist transformative movement in Tanzania is developing indigenous analyses and strategies for promoting understandings of women as equal to men in all ways. A limitation of this study, which could be addressed in further research, is that we have not discussed the construction of masculinities, nor indigenous men’s movements for women’s equality. These include Men Engage Tanzania, which brings together 29 civil society organizations for women’s equality and positive masculinities (Men Engage Tanzania, n.d.). Since gender is obviously relational, achieving a deeper understanding of how men perform gender in rural communities (beyond sexuality, which is well-researched) would be valuable. Baroque and Doue (2013), for instance, cite various studies to show that African men’s identities have undergone as much transformation as women’s have over the past century or so. They argue the history of masculinities is ‘directly marked by the colonial conquests, which altered their forms.’ This was achieved, they consider, through destabilizing existing power systems, weakening the power of elders, and through subordinating black men to white men. Beyond this, they highlight the importance of working towards plural definitions of masculinity. ‘Men are not a single, uniform category, with inherently superior power. According to their properties and the geographical, ethnic, class, age, or other groups to which they belong, men’s relationships to gender norms and their positions in relation to women vary widely’ (Baroque & Doue, 2013, p. 9). A large British study (Sweeting, Bhakra, Benzema, Parham, & Hunt, 2013) using longitudinal data, examined associations between gender role attitudes (GRAs), actual gender roles (marital status, household chore division, couple employment) and psychological distress in working-age men and women.

They found that women, young people, and participants in less traditional relationships were less likely to express gender traditional attitudes. However, psychological distress (measured on a 12-point scale including items like feeling unable to perform normal activities and losing confidence in oneself) was higher among people – particularly men – with traditional GRAs. These findings have some clear parallels with the study. It would be interesting to carry out a more detailed study bringing together the concept of performing gender with the psychological

effects of attempting to maintain specific types of femininity and masculinity in similar rural settings in Tanzania.

9. Conclusion

Tanzania, women make up more than half of the workforce in the agriculture sector. Majority of these women work on family farms and small plots of land without receiving any payment. Although women farmers in my country work very hard, many remain poor due to multiple barriers, including lack of access to land. Within their capabilities, women hold the power of true change within our communities. This study is a contribution to descriptive on the present condition of women in Tanzania, also offers critical insights into the effects of women's empowerment on their households. Women's empowerment is a multidimensional construct which varies by context. These variations make it challenging to have a concrete definition that can be measured quantitatively. Having a standard composite measure of empowerment at the individual and country level would help to assess how countries are progressing in efforts to achieve gender equality (SDG 5).

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