

Gender politics and politics in gender in Iringa District (Tanzania)

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The paper deals with gender politics in Tanzania through a social, historical and literary perspective. This analysis is the result of a two months fieldwork based in the rural area of the Iringa region, where I collected data related to gender-based issues expressed by women and girls of several ages and generations thanks to the collaboration with two NGO's that operate in the area, namely the Tanzanian PSBF and the Italian CEFA. Through a historical analysis, this paper sheds the light on the women's active participation in the liberation movements since pre-colonial time in Tanganyika and then Tanzania, presenting the path of several women's struggles that contributed to the ideation of the gender politics of today.

Nowadays, patriarchal oppression is strictly bounded to globalization and cash-based economy. These topics are analysed in the Swahili literal repertoire and discussed by the contemporary African feminist movements that will be presented above.

Keywords: gender studies; gender politics; Swahili history; Swahili literature; Tanzania: decolonial feminist movements.

1. Introduction

Women's participation in the nationalist movements has been often neglected because the majority of the sources were male-centred. Despite that, the theoretical feminist approach that involves oral sources and the life history research highlights new gender point of view. The feminist approach denies the male-centred "ungendered point-of-viewlessness" which recognize that history can be objectively recorded, and adopts an analysis methodology that entails the knowledge of the women's social experience from their own point of view (Geiger 1987: 3-6). In the study of the history of Tanzania and social politics of the country, it is necessary to focus on the decolonial feminist movements which are part of a long movement of scientific and philosophical reappropriation that is revising the Western narrative of the world, contesting the Western-patriarchal economic ideology that turned women,

Black people, Indigenous people, and people from Asia and Africa into inferior beings (Vergès 2019: 24-25):

L'histoire des luttes féministes est pleine de trous, d'approximations, de généralités. Les féminismes de politique décoloniale et des universitaires féministes racisées ont compris la nécessité de développer leurs propres outils de transmission et de savoir: à travers des blogs, des films, des expositions, des festivals, des rencontres, des ouvrages, des pièces de théâtre, de la danse, des chants, de la musique, elles font circuler des récits, des textes, traduisent, publient, filment, font connaître des figures historiques, des mouvements (Vergès 2019: 25-26).¹

Moreover, it is important to deepen the knowledge of nowadays women's struggles and movements, in order to recognize the new identities of African women. As stated by the activists of the AFF (African Feminist Forum):

As we craft new African States in this new millennium, we also craft new identities for African women, identities as full citizens, free from patriarchal oppression, with rights of access, ownership and control over resources and our own bodies and utilizing positive aspects of our cultures in liberating and nurturing ways. We also recognize that our pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial histories and herstories require special measures to be taken in favour of particular African women in different contexts. We acknowledge the historical and significant gains that have been made by the African Women's Movement over the past forty years, and we make bold to lay claim to these gains as African feminists they happened because African Feminists led the way, from the grassroots level and up.²

The purpose of the paper is to present the path which led to the gender politics in nowadays Tanzania, analysing the experience of women and girls who live in the rural area of the Iringa region through a life history research approach. The paper will be divided in three sections: an introduction to the fieldwork, an analysis of women's participation in the politics of Tanganyika and Tanzania since the colonial imposition, and a presentation of the issues related to the experience of women and girls who live nowadays in the rural area of the Iringa region.

¹ "The history of feminist struggle is full of holes, approximations, and generalities. Decolonial feminist activists and academics have understood the need to develop their own models of transmission and knowledge; through blogs, films, exhibitions, festivals, meetings, artworks, pieces of theater and dance, song, and music, through circulating stories and texts, through translating, publishing, and filming, they have made their movements and the historic figures of those movements known". (Vergès 2021: 14)

² <http://www.africanfeministforum.com/feminist-charter-preamble/>

2. Fieldwork research, purposes and methodology

This paper is the result of a fieldwork research based in Iringa town, Tanzania during October and November 2021. The study derives from an analysis of interviews and activities proposed by two different NGO's located in Iringa town: the Tanzanian PSBF (Promotion of Social Balances Foundation); and the Italian CEFA³ (*Comitato Europeo per la Formazione Agraria* – European Committee for the Agrarian Education).

During the two months of fieldwork, I directly collaborated with PSBF, participating to all the activities proposed by the team in the Mgera and Tagamenda Primary Schools, and Tanangozi and Luhota Secondary Schools⁴. PSBF was founded in 2018 and registered in 2019 by a group of teachers, with the purpose—as stated by the NGO's president:

To help some people in the society because our society has many needs and people in need are a lot. For that reason, [these people] need someone that has the purpose to help them, to reach some of their goals in the society.⁵

Precisely, the NGO strives for equal benefit in social services provisions for girls, youth, and women to ensure equal treatment and participation in the community and equitable access to control the benefits of resources to all.⁶ *Nikomboe* (“Save me”) is the NGO active project, which aims to avoid female school dropouts acting in different areas:

- Girls' education: bridging the large gap between genders in education by pushing girls' enrolment and increasing their academic performance.
- Hygiene: improving girls' physical, oral, and overall health by providing hygiene supplies and education on how to use these items for the girls in our program to promote proper daily and menstrual hygiene.
- Community education: aiming to lower health disparities to achieve optimal health in rural villages by providing education to multiple communities.

³Cefa is an Italian NGO born in 1972 in Bologna, that aims to help the poorest communities in the world to reach food self-sufficiency and basic human rights (education, job, gender equality, child protection). Cefa has the purpose to create sustainable development models (<https://www.cefaonlus.it/cosa-facciamo/chi-e-cefa/>).

⁴<https://psbf.or.tz/index>

⁵ *Lengo kubwa ni kutaka kusaidia watu kwenye jamii kwa sababu jamii yetu ina mahitaji mengi sana na wahitaji ni wengi sana, kwa hiyo wanahitajika watu kwa ajili ya kuwasaidia watu waweze kufikia malengo yao mengine katika jamii* (Interview PSBF: Iringa, 25th November 2021). All translations are from the author of this article, except those for which the author is cited in brackets.

⁶<https://psbf.or.tz/about>

- Food: securing at least one additional meal, which is often their only meal, for the girls in the program.
- Housing: helping the girls in the program to have a safe, warm, and comfortable place to sleep.
- Clothing: providing girls with a clean school uniform so they can attend.⁷

As the topics debated were sensitive subjects for girls, I decided not to record during the activities, but to take notes and interview the president of the NGO at the end of the period of collaboration.

During the fieldwork, I also took part to some activities organized by CEFA in collaboration with JIDI⁸ (*Jamii Integrated Development Initiatives*). These activities were proposed to discuss gender inequalities in tea farming cooperatives based in the rural area of the Iringa region, as part of the CEFA's "Agricon Boresha Chai (ABC) Project"⁹ that involves thirtyfour tea cooperatives in Tanzania. According to CEFA's research, 72% of farmers who receive agrarian consultation and inputs are men. Women are often hindered in agrarian education, sharing incomes and leading, even if they are the main actors in farming activities. To deal with this topic, CEFA, JIDI and IDH (*Initiatief Duurzame Handel*)¹⁰ edited two handbooks: "Agri-Connect Integrating Gender in Cooperative Management. Handouts and Tools" (2021) and "Agri-Connect Integrating Gender in Cooperative Management. Leaders and Members' Training Guide" (2021) that were deeply analysed during the activities I attended to. The trainer used a participatory learning approach to facilitate the discussion that covered the following topics: gender definition, gender roles, gender stereotypes, gender issues, the status of women and youth in the cooperatives, and possible solutions to the main problems pointed out. I took part in the meetings as a participant observer on the 19th, 27th October, and on the 3rd of November 2021 at the MUCU (Moshi University) offices in Iringa town, where I recorded a total of 375:42 minutes of audio in agreement with the participants.

The data recorded are analysed through an interdisciplinary approach that focuses on social sciences, history and literature, as there is a large amount of Swahili literary works – poems, drama,

⁷<https://psbf.or.tz/about>

⁸ JIDI (Jamii Integrated Development Initiatives) is a Tanzania-based registered firm committed to building holistic sustainable development. JIDI has a multisectoral approach, its projects deal with health, nourishment, agriculture, education, and means of support (<https://jidi.or.tz/who-we-are/>).

⁹ <https://www.cefaonlus.it/progetto/miglioramento-del-reddito-e-della-nutrizione-dei-piccoli-coltivatori-di-te-nel-sud-della-tanzania-agriconnect/>

¹⁰ IDH – The Sustainable Trade Initiative (<https://www.idhsustainabletrade.com/about-idh/>) is a foundation that works with businesses, financiers, governments, and civil society to realize sustainable trade in global value chains.

fiction—that point out several gender social and political issues and that deepen the herstories of Tanzanian activists who became icons for the collective memory. Thanks to the study of literary works it is possible to shed the light on social movements and women’s struggles from a decolonial perspective.

3. Women’s participation in the politics of Tanganyika and Tanzania

The case of Tanzanian non-elite women in the anti-colonial struggles is particularly generative, because of the centrality of women in Tanzanian politics and in the post-independence state (Peeples 2019: 21). Women were at the heart of the struggles in the anti-colonial resistance movements (Tenga *et al.* 1996: 146) since the conflicts that occurred between 1885 and 1900 against the German colonisers (Saavedra Casco 2007: 99; Mulokozi 2014: iv). Among the Swahili literary works that narrate this period, there are two female characters presented by Mulokozi¹¹ who embody the values of the anti-colonial resistance heroines, namely: Mtage in the play of 1979 *Mkwawa wa Uhehe* (“Mkwawa in the Heheland”) and Nyawelu in the novel of 1991 *Ngome ya Mianzi* (“The Bamboo Fortress”). In *Mkwawa wa Uhehe*, Mulozi represents the anti-colonial Hehe resistance since the first battles until the death of the chief Mkwawa. Historically, it is known that the anti-colonial armies were composed of both women and men, and through his productions, Mulokozi wants to celebrate the female contribution in the anti-colonial struggles. In the play, Mtage is the icon of the female resistance, and she leads the army in several victories (Bertoncini Zúbková 2009: 212-213; Acquaviva 2019: 61-63):

Mkwawa: Commander Mtage, beloved friend. All the Hehe land welcomes and receives you with open arms, you and all the heroes, men and women who joined the war. We joyfully received the news of the victory [...] Thank you [...] (Acquaviva 2019: 61-62).¹²

Her value is recognized by the whole community and sang by the bard Mwakiyombwe:

¹¹ Mugyabuso Mulokozi was born in Bukoba in 1950. He graduated in 1975 at the University of Dar es Salaam. He collaborated for some years with the Tanzania Publishing House and then he became a member of the Institute of Kiswahili Research (Bertoncini Zúbková *et al.* 2009: 212).

¹² *Mkwawa: Jemadari Mtage, dada mpendwa. Uhehe yote inakukaribisha na kukupokea kwa mikono miwili, wewe pamoja na mashujaa wote, wanaume kwa wanawake, mliofuatana vitani. Habari za ushindi wetu tumezipokea kwa shauku na furaha kubwa [...] Ahsanteni [...]* (Mulokozi 1988: 229).

You are the woman of the future, / An example for the next generations. / You are the pride for all women, / The black mother pride. (Acquaviva 2019: 62-63)¹³

Another Mulokozi's character who is the icon of the female resistance during the German colonial imposition is Nyawelu. She is one of the main characters of the historical novel *Ngome ya Mianzi*, a young girl who is deeply described for her wisdom, bravery, determination and physical abilities, namely the heroine who will save her people.

Nyawelu is brave [...] She has the ability of a person who is able to face unexpected events.¹⁴

Mugoha: She was in front of me and I followed her. She was holding a sling. I was surprised by the way she could penetrate rapidly and silently in the acacia shrub and leaves, as a long time expert hunter.¹⁵

During the colonial period¹⁶ women were directly dominated by the colonized men (fathers, husbands, brothers) observing legal parameters decided by colonial officers and followed by local authorities. More precisely, women suffered the control of the sexual and reproductive sphere (Geiger 1987: 7-8). As direct consequence, in the years of the foundation of the TANU (Tanganyika African National Union)¹⁷ women became activists for claiming their independence. In March 1955, TANU had 2000 card-carrying members, an increase of 5000 between June and September 1955, with a female majority in TANU membership by the end of 1955. The first constitution of TANU provided for a Women's Section led by the well-known Bibi Titi, with the following objectives:

- To mobilise women as well as men to join the party.
- To try and bring them together in the liberation struggle.
- To ensure the security of the leaders of TANU.

¹³ *Wewe ndiwe mwanamke wa kesho, / Kifani cha vizazi vijavyo. / Wewe ndiwe fahari ya wanawake wote, / Fahari ya mama mweusi* (Mulozoki 1988: 22).

¹⁴ My translation of Mulokozi (2014: 26): *Nyawelu ni jasiri [...] Tabia ya kweli ya mtu utajua wakati wa dharura.*

¹⁵ My translation of Mulokozi (2014: 29): *Mugoha: Nyawelu alitangulia, mimi nikafuata. Alikuwa ameshika kombeo. Nilishangaa kuona jinsi alivyoweza kupenya katika majani na vichaka vya migunga haraka haraka bila kelele, kama mwindaji mashuhuri wa siku nyingi.*

¹⁶ After the German defeat in the First World War, Tanganyika became a Mandated Territory administrated by Britain (Århem: 1985: 19). Tanganyika got independence in 1961, and in 1964, the United Republic of Tanzania was formed adding the Zanzibar archipelago (Nyerere 1974: 3-5).

¹⁷ The first president of Tanganyika Julius Kambarage Nyerere elaborated the new political model during the colonial domination for the formation of the TAA (Tanganyika African Association) in 1954, that was at the basis of the party of the TANU (Tanganyika African National Union) that ruled Tanganyika since independence (Ruhumbika ed. 1974: 275 – 277).

- To raise funds through various activities such as dances or fashion shows (Geiger 1987: 2, Tenga *et al* 1996: 147).

Undoubtedly, for the Tanzanian collective memory, the icon of women's activism against British Colonialism is Bibi Titi Mohamed, a Muslim woman of Dar es Salaam who became one of the main TANU leaders. Thanks to Bibi Titi, women were involved in the membership of the party, and more broadly in the participation in Eastern African women's liberation movements (Geiger 1987: 2; Mbogo 2018: iii, 18-21). Her figure is deeply narrated in the Mbogo's play of 2018 "*Malkia Bibi Titi Mohammed*" ("The Queen Bibi Titi Mohammed"), which presents the essential moments of Bibi Titi's and women's liberation struggles in Tanganyika. In the play, the speech she addresses to the Dodoma's women is relevant:

Bibititi: Yes, we women, we are the pillar of the country / We gave birth to all these men / Yes, we women, we are the pillar of the world / Who are we in this world? / Yes, we are the pillar of this world. / Women, we must roll up our sleeves / Until we will kick out the British / God gave us the authority / God gave us wombs to generate life, breasts to nurse / And backs to carry children / For these reasons, do not let us be tormented / Because of our gender / Because of the habits that are passed during the time. / Let's refuse and scold all the habits / That humiliate the womanhood / God planted a seed inside us / And see: the seed have germinated / God gave us this power, / Without our collaboration we won't get independence / It is important that all of us will be united in the TANU / There is no other medicine against the strength of / The British Colonialism. / Our independence, oyee!¹⁸

The first women who joined the party were involved in small business activities, such as selling *mandazi* (a kind of salty fritters) fish, and beer. They were Muslim, illiterate, and were part of female *ngoma* groups, namely groups that performed dances and music. These were trans-tribal groups that recognised the main authority and the potentiality of the Swahili language to unify people (Geiger 1987: 13-21; Tenga 1996: 147). In the first years of the TANU mobilisation, women became aware of their political role and were involved in several activities such as selling party cards, organising activities

¹⁸ My translation of Mbogo (2018: 25-26): *Bibititi: Sisi wanawake ndiyo nguzo ya nchi / Tumewazaa wanaume wote hawa / Sisi wanawake ndiyo nguvu ya dunia / Sisi ni nani katika dunyahii? / Sisi ndiyo nguzo ya dunia hii / Wanawake sharti tujifunge vibwebwe / Hadi tumfurushe Mwingereza / Mungu ametupa wanawake mamlaka / Mungu ametupa matumbo ya kutunzauhai, vifua vya kuwanyonyesha / Na migongo ya kuwabeba wana / Hivyo tusijisikie wanyonge / Kwa sababu ya jinsia yetu / Kwa sababu ya mila zilizopitwa na wakati; / Tuzikatae, tuzikemee mila zote / Zinazomdhalilisha mwanamke / Mungu amepanda mbegu ndani mwetu / Na tazama: Mbegu imeota / Mungu ametupa uwezo huu, / Bila ushirikiano wetu, hatutaupata Uhuru / Sisi sote lazima tuwe wamoja / Ni muhimu sisi sote kujiungana TANU / Hakuna tiba mbadala dhidi ya sulubu za / Ukoloni wa Mwingereza. / Uhuruwetu, oyee!*

for fundraising, cooking for the men of the party, hosting, and performing nationalist *ngoma* (Brennan 2002: 368). After independence, in 1962 the UWT (*Umoja wa Wanawake wa Tanganyika* – Women’s Union of Tanganyika) was formed in order to unify women in one organisation that could work jointly with the ruling party as well as other women organisations in the world (Tenga *et al.* 1996: 148). The UWT organised literacy classes, projects for agrarian cooperation, training courses on public health, and nursery schools for women, to enable them to get an active role in building the country through new politics, economies, and cultural actions (Ladner 1971: 22-25). In these years the UWT started to achieve some victories as the Law Marriage Act (1971),¹⁹ the Employment Ordinance Act (1975)²⁰ and the Early University Entry (1974)²¹.

When in 1977 the ASP (Afro-Shirazi Party) merged with TANU to form the CCM (*Chama cha Mapinduzi* – Revolution Party), the female union of the ASP joined the UWT maintaining the same main objectives. However, in these years, the UWT was a wing of the party dependent on the CCM in which the national executive was dominated by men who continued to discriminate, oppress, and exploit women (Tenga *et al.* 1996: 149-159). As pointed out by Britwin (2022: 127), the post-colonial governments often enforced female stereotypes and the Tanzanian development plans were inspired by patriarchal models that derived from the Christian colonial notions of femininity. Just a minority of women – namely literate and elitist women who received Western education during the colonial period – got government positions, and the proletarian women who directly participated in the independence struggles were excluded from the new government (Geiger 1987: 25; Britwin 2022: 125-126). Since independence, Swahili literature has been involved in representing gender issues and women’s

¹⁹Two types of marriage were introduced in the country: monogamous or necessarily monogamous, and polygamous or potentially polygamous. The minimum age stipulated was 18 years for men and 15 for women (Tenga *et al.* 1996: 151-152). As pointed out by the United Nations Population Fund (2014: 1-4) when the study was presented, Tanzania had one of the highest percentages of early marriages. Indeed, according to these data 37% of girls between 20 and 24 years old were married. However, this tendency is improving because of state policies. In October 2019, the Appeals Court approved a provision to high the minimum age for marriage for girls to 18 years old, influencing the Law Marriage Act of 1971 that in the Article 13.1 states:

“No person shall marry who, being male, has not attained the apparent age of eighteen years or, being female, has not attained the apparent age of fifteen years” (<https://www.tanzanialaws.com/principal-legislation/law-of-marriage-act>).

The law of 1971 also provided grounds for divorce, recognising behaviour, conduct, and events that could constitute a total breakdown of marriage, and one of these had to be proved to the satisfaction of the court. Moreover, the Marriage Act allows women to hold and dispose of property (Tenga *et al.* 1996: 152-153).

²⁰It granted the right to paid maternity leave of 84 days every three years for all working women regardless of their marital status. (Tenga *et al.* 1996: 157).

²¹It allowed women to proceed with their further education immediately after completing the national service (Tenga *et al.* 1996: 158-159).

struggles in the country, among this production there are some literary works that denounce the oppressive politics and the status of women in the new Tanzanian state as: the Angelina Chogo Wakapabulo's play *Kortini Mtu Huyu* ("Let's Condemn this Man;" 1975), in which the author stresses female forced labour, prostitution and women's oppression under the *Operation Vijana*²²; the Penina Muhando's *Hatia* ("The Guilt;" 1972) where the weak status of women in the urbanisation process is deeply analysed, and the play *Nguzo Mama* ("The Mother Pillar;" 1982) through which Muhando stresses the women's disillusion for the *Ujamaa* policies (Acquaviva 2019: 68; 75-76; 81-88). In 1994 the University of Dar es Salaam organized a national conference to discuss the woman's position in the multiparty democracy adopted in 1992. As consequence, in May 1995 the NGO named BaWaTa (*Baraza la Wanawake Tanzania – Tanzania Women's Assembly*) was formed.²³ In 1995, BaWaTa produced a comprehensive document to educate women for the general elections, highlighting the main issues affecting women in the country as the ownership of land, the inheritance, and the lack of social services – health, water, and education (Tenga 1996: 160-162). In the same year, the Beijing Conference²⁴ signed

²² This campaign started in 1968, being part of a vaster cultural plan directed to the urban populations between 1960 and 1970. The "Operation *Vijana*" was announced by the general council of the TANU Youth League (TYL), forbidding the use of a range of items: miniskirts, wigs, skin lightening creams, tight pants or dresses, and short shorts—as indecent and antithetical to Tanzanian national culture. The ambiguity if the operation's code-name "*vijana*" ('boys'), lent it a striking economy: a male affair primarily addressed against the female offenders. This campaign acted against a specific gender and generation that was starting to dominate in the Tanzanian economy (Ivaska 2004: 104-118).

²³ BaWaTa's constitution points:

- To liberate the woman from all forms of gender exploitation, oppression, discrimination, and degradation, and to condemn the same.
- To work as an institution or a forum on behalf of all women, and through which they will be able to initiate and further their targets and interests in all aspects of social life.
- To unite all women without regard to their religion, colour, age, creed, status, level of education or authority, political parties, ideologies, or any other thing, so as to strengthen their efforts in the struggle for protecting their rights and equality.
- To mobilise all women for purposes of giving them leadership, whereby they will effectively be participating in bringing about economic and social development.
- To educate women on their basic rights and duties in the society.
- To maintain women's respect.
- To make a follow-up on law reforms, particularly in areas affecting women activities (Tenga et al. 1996: 161).

²⁴ Abzug (1996: 117-119), Larson (1996: 697, 720-722), and Roberts (1996: 237-239) state that the United Nations' World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, was the last of several meetings of the United Nations started in 1975 about the improvement of women status to reach gender equality, development, and peace. The Beijing Conference had the objective to find a comprehensive plan of action to promote social, economic, and political women's emancipation through the improvement of global politics and institutions. During the conference, the participants discussed twelve topics: poverty, education, health, gender-based violence, the effects on women of armed or other conflicts, economic structures and policies,

a turning point for gender politics in Tanzania, identifying four goals to achieve in the country: enhancement of women’s legal capacity; women’s economic empowerment and poverty eradication; women’s political empowerment and decision-making; and women’s access to education, training, and employment.²⁵ After this year, the United Republic of Tanzania’s Constitution has been amended to increase women’s representation—at least 21%—based on proportional representation.²⁶ As consequence of the Beijing’s Conference new important laws were issued as the Sexual Offences (Special Provisions) Act 1998²⁷; the Village Land Act No 4 and the Village Land Act No 5 of 1999.²⁸

In the first years of the new millennium a cross-continent feminist net, the AFF (African Feminist Forum) was formed in response to the apparent decline of women’s movements in the continent. AFF is conceptualised to be an autonomous space for African activists, with the aim to develop an independent analysis of African realities through an effort of self-determination from externally defined agendas and Western significance, reclaiming the long tradition of African women’s resistance to patriarchy in Africa (Imam 2009: 167-169). In its methodology, AFF wants to encourage creative expression as a source for change, affirming the need to document and share oral and written herstories – overall that of kinswomen and feminist “ancestors” to retain African collective memory (Horn 2008: 124). Demere Kitunga, an AFF activist from Tanzania, is promoting readership to

power and decisional process, mechanisms to promote women’s progress, human rights, media stereotypes, safeguard of the environment and the natural resources, and children rights.

²⁵ https://www.tanzania.go.tz/egov_uploads/documents/country_report_beijing_19_2_sw.pdf

²⁶ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1248349/proportion-of-seats-held-by-women-in-tanzania-national-parliament/>

²⁷This law was issued to protect the dignity and integrity of women and children. As stated by SIGI (*Social Institutions and Gender Index*) (<https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/TZ.pdf>), the Article 5 (2) Act no 8 refers to rape, which is so defined if a man commits a sexual abuse with a girl younger than 18 years old, or with a woman not consenting. Moreover, in the 16th Chapter of the Penal Code, marital rape is criminalized just if the couple is divorced. Recently, Tanzania adopted a law against sexual harassment included in the Employment Act No. 11 (2005) and in the 12th Chapter of the Sexual Offences (Special Provisions) Act No. 8 (1998), where is pointed out that the harasser must be jailed for a maximum of five years or must pay to the victim the maximum amount of 200’000 Tanzanian schillings. However, as highlighted by Jakobsen (2014: 541) Tanzania does not present law to criminalize gender-based violence which is often legitimized by the consuetudinary laws. Gender-based violence is widely spread in the country, and as reported by SIGI (<https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/TZ.pdf>) in 2019, 42% of women suffered physical or sexual abuse, and in the Iringa region, as stated by McCleary-Sills et al. (2013: 10): 42.3% of women and girls between 15 and 49 years old suffered physical violence, and 26.5% sexual abuses.

²⁸This law was issued to provide for the right of land ownership for both women and men. In 2002, Act No. 2 established Land Tribunals whose composition must include not less than 43% of women. In 2004 the Land Act No.4 of 1999 has been amended to make land economically valuable and mortgaged and to protect matrimonial property (https://www.tanzania.go.tz/egov_uploads/documents/country_report_beijing_19_2_sw.pdf).

interrogate conventional knowledge through her E&D Readership and Development Agency – *Soma*, that edits feminist books in the country and creates spaces for debate.²⁹

Women’s participation in Tanzanian politics reached its peak in 2020, when Samia Suluhu Hassan, popularly known as Mama Samia, became the first woman to be the President of Tanzania³⁰. Her efforts for women’s participation in the building of Tanzanian society is presented through the picture book *Samia Suluhu Hassan – Mwanamke wa Kwanza kuwa Rais wa Jamhuri ya Muungano wa Tanzania* (“Samia Suluhu Hassan – The First Woman to be the President of the United Republic of Tanzania”) written by Nancy Sumari and designed by Tito Fungo in 2021. Narrating her story life, the book celebrates the importance of education for girls and presents the structural lacks that avoid girls to reach their dreams, as presented in the first pages:

When Samia was a child, she was astonished because many times, several women did not have big dreams. Many of them did not go to school, and if they went there, they did not finish their studies. This condition derived from the society of the time that believed that girls could not receive the same education as boys. Samia was lucky, because of her parents who believed in education and who wanted to be sure that Samia and her sister went to school.³¹

Her story wants to be an example and an incentive to next generations:

To all girls in the world. You can be whoever you want. The choice is yours.³²

4. First results from the fieldwork research

As pointed out by USAID³³, nowadays in Tanzania women and youth are among the most marginalised citizens. TAWEA³⁴ (Tanzania Women Empowerment in Action) highlights that the main gender issues spread in the country are issues related to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), gender-based violence (GBV), gender inequality and prevalence of extreme poverty among the community

²⁹ <http://www.africanfeministforum.com/demere-kitunga/>

³⁰ <https://www.vpo.go.tz/vpos/vice-president-3>

³¹ My translation of Sumari et al. (2021: 6-7): *Samia alipokuwa mdogo aligundua kwamba, mara nyingi, wanawake wengi hawakuwa na ndoto kubwa. Wengi hawakwenda shuleni, na kama walikwenda, hawakumaliza masomo yao. Hali hii ilichangiwa na jamii kwa wakati huo kuamini kuwa, watoto wakike hawapaswi kupata elimu kama wale wa kiume. Samia alipata bahati, kwa kuwa wazazi wake, waliamini katika elimu na walihakikisha kwamba Samia na ndugu zake, wanakwenda shuleni.*

³² My translation of Sumari et al. (2021: 4): *Kwa wasichana wote, duniani. Unaweza kuwa kile unachotaka. Uamuzi ni wako.*

³³ <https://www.usaid.gov/tanzania/our-work/gender-equality-and-women%E2%80%99s-empowerment>

³⁴ <https://www.end-violence.org/members/tanzania-women-empowerment-action-tawea>

members. Moreover, according to the International Republican Institute (IRI) (2016: 3-8) women are affected by many challenges for participation in the “fabric of the community” and for obtaining leadership positions. For this reason, the Tanzanian government is turning its attention to a constitutional reform process. From 2012 to 2013, a government-led Constitutional Review Committee travelled through Tanzania to collect citizens’ views. The coalition came together to request gender equality in the draft constitution, safe motherhood, land ownership, equal employment rights, equal representation in decision-making bodies, and the increase of the gender quota in parliament from 30 to 50%. Moreover, in 2021³⁵ the government revised its position related to the Education Act (2002) which provided school expulsion for girls who got pregnant, conceiving pregnancies as moral offences. During the Magufuli’s mandate this tendency became harsher as the president firmly sustained the Expulsion Policy:

As long as I’m president, no pregnant students will be allowed to return to school... the warranty to go to school be it secondary or primary is forbidden.³⁶

However, in June 2021 Leonard Akwilapo, the Minister of Education, affirmed that girls who dropped out school because of pregnancies should resume their studies in alternative colleges:

We are offering an alternative path to education to all children who missed their education for any reason, including those girls who got pregnant while in school, through our Folk Development Colleges (FDCs).³⁷

In this panorama, several local and international NGOs are spreading projects to face gender inequalities, through different actions. Starting from the assumption that Western based ideologies which rule the statement of the majority of NGO’s assume gender equality and women’s empowerment as a way to support the functioning of free market and facilitate the economic growth (Hickel 2014: 1361), the following paragraphs will focus on the gender related issues stressed by women and girls during the fieldwork to highlight the structural and political problems that are being claimed by the latter, instead of focusing on the NGO’s aims and projects.

³⁵<https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/01/tanzania-allows-teenage-mothers-be-back-school>

³⁶<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/10/06/tanzania-pregnant-student-ban-harms-thousands>

³⁷<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/tanzania-offer-alternative-education-school-dropouts-including-pregnant-girls-2021-06-22/>

4.1 PSBF – School dropouts: facing period poverty

As stated by the World Bank,³⁸ in Tanzania every year more than 120'000 girls abandon school. For that reason the PSBF's *Nikomboe* ("Save me") project has the main purpose to tackle female school dropouts, which are more spread in the rural areas than in the urban ones.³⁹ According to the PSBF's president:

In the rural areas it's not so easy for girls. This is because, first, in the rural areas the poverty is bigger, and another problem is the distance from school: going at home from school is really far. Moreover, in villages girls have more work to do than in the cities. For this reason, they are asked to do a lot of work before going to school and even when they go back. For this reason, it is really hard for girls.⁴⁰

The questionnaires filled by the 60 girls involved in the project point out that every child carries out care work and farming activities at home every day. As reported by TYVA (2017: 4-5), in the country the main issues related to female school dropouts are related to financial barriers as most families cannot afford school uniforms, transports to get to school and school supplies. As a direct consequence of this precarious economic condition, the issues of period poverty, teen pregnancies, and early marriages are well spread in the country.

When I joined PSBF, the NGO team focused mostly on activities to prevent period poverty⁴¹ and to improve girls' hygiene. According to Cavill *et al.* (2013: 258) period poverty has a great impact on girls' education in the world. From a study led by Tamiru *et al.* in 2015 (2015: 97-99), it emerged that 48% of the Tanzanian girls interviewed do not go to school during period. This is due to structural problems as in the country 99% of school toilets are not appropriate to maintain a proper MHM (Menstrual Hygiene Management), and girls have difficulties in getting sanitary pads. Most girls use reusable pads made from old clothes, cotton rags, and sponges that are not efficient. Disposable pads, when around, are too expensive and most of the girls cannot afford them (Tamiru *et al.* 2015b: 15-16). As stated by the president of the PSBF:

³⁸ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/statement/2021/11/24/world-bank-statement-on-the-announcement-by-government-of-tanzania-on-equal-access-to-education-for-pregnant-girls-and-y>

³⁹As reported by the Tanzania Demographic and Health Survey, in 2010, in urban areas 86.7 % of girls went to primary schools, and 4.7% of girls went to secondary schools, while in rural areas, 84.5% of girls went to primary school and just 0.9% of girls went to secondary schools (TYVA 2017: 1-3).

⁴⁰ *Ila maeneo ya vijijini sio rahisi sana kwa wasichana. Kwa sababu maeneo ya vijijini kwanza umaskini ni mkubwa lakini pia hata umbali kutoka shuleni, kwenda nyumbani kutoka shuleni ni mrefu sana. Lakini pia kwa vijijini msichana ana kazi nyingi sana kuliko mjini. Kwa hiyo atatakiwa kufanya kazi nyingi sana kabla hajaenda shule na hata akifika nyumbani atakuwa kwa kazi nyingi za kufanya* (Interview PSBF: 25th November 2021).

⁴¹As stated by Michel *et al.* (2022: 1) period poverty is the lack of access to menstrual products, hygiene facilities, waste management, and education. It affects many women globally causing physical, mental and emotional challenges.

There is a lack of sanitary pads that [a girl] can wear at school to be comfortable and to study well without the fear of being in that period of the month – during menstruations, but if it cannot be like this, she won't be comfortable, she will start feeling ashamed, or going to school will become for her an obstacle. For that reason, problems of school dropout are related to the lack of sanitary pads.⁴²

Moreover, in the country, there is a lack of activities for menstrual education, and taboos and stereotypes are widely spread, causing a lack of support from the society, community and family (Tamiru *et al.* 2015: 92). In the rural area of Iringa, usually notions about femininity and period management were taught during *unyago* rituals, where maternal and paternal grandmothers had the responsibility to educate and initiate girls to the adulthood using songs–*misimu*, dances and practicing genital female modifications (GFM)⁴³ which concerned the excision of the hymene (Cavill *et al.* 2013: 11; Fisher-Brown 1935: 92-93). Because of GFMs, nowadays government and education system discourage these practices. During the fieldwork I did not get a clear idea about the real spread of these practices in the rural area of Iringa, even if some informants declared that *unyago* is still practised in a limited manner with no GFM. Despite that, the topic has to be examined in depth. When I asked to the PSBF president if the knowledge about menstruations is still transmitted through *unyago*, he asserted:

Yes, [girls] get these teachings during *unyago*, but today government does not permit the teachings of *unyago* and *jando*⁴⁴ because there are some communities that mix these teachings with genital modification practices. For this reason, for the moment, government goes against and hinders these teachings. Because of this, many girls do not have the chance to get an education from their parents and their community about the growth of their bodies.⁴⁵

In response to these menstrual issues, PSBF proposes some training activities for MHM. During these activities, the NGO trainers present some quizzes to promote group discussion about stereotypes and taboos around menstruation. These activities are useful because through group discussions, girls

⁴² Kuna kukosa taulo za kike ambazo ataweza kuvaa shuleni na akawa comfortable akasoma vizuri bila matatizo mengine bila kuhofia kwamba atakuwa kwenye muda wa mwezi, kwenye menstruation, kama hatakuwa anaweza kujisikia vizuri basi anaweza kujikuta anaingia kupata aibu au kuzulia shuleni kwa hiyo matatizo yanahusiana pia na kukosa taulo za kike kwa kuzulia shule (Interview: Iringa 25th November 2021).

⁴³ I decided to use the less-used term “modification” to replace the more common “mutilations” referring to the Fusaschi’s study (2003: 33), which analyses these operations collocating them in the wide trans-cultural category of the modifications or alterations of the body for non-therapeutic aims.

⁴⁴ Initiation rite related to male puberty (Tumbo-Masabo *et al.* 1994: 99).

⁴⁵ Ndio wanapata haya mafunzo ya unyago lakini kwa sasa serikali hairuhusu sana haya mafunzo unyago na jando kwa sababu kuna jamii zinahusianisha haya mafunzo na ukeketaji, kwa hiyo serikali inasimamia inazuia sana haya mafunzo kwa sasa. Kwa hiyo wasichana wengi hawapati nafasi ya kwenda kufundishwa na wazazi hawa na jamii kuhusu maendeleo ya mili yao (Interview 25th novembre 2021).

become aware about MHM. Moreover, to support girls to go to school during period, the NGO started to distribute reusable and washable sanitary pads made with proper materials reachable in the country (towels, *kanga*,⁴⁶ and plastic tarp), made by a local tailor. Girls enjoy the pads because they are easy to wash and usable for several hours. During the activity named “Menstrual Olympics”—a game that directly involves girls in a challenge of speed for washing the pads properly - girls learn important tips on personal menstrual hygiene. As reported by the president of the PSBF:

These training activities were really important because a girl who lives in a village has no opportunity to follow training about girls’ puberty. She will have the possibility to follow just school training activities that however are not about female personal hygiene, and do not teach her to recognise herself as a girl in the moment of her body’s changes—to see these changes as normal when they happen—and [they do not teach] how to live these changes step by step. Many girls in villages do not receive this kind of education because parents sometimes are afraid to talk about these topics with their daughters. Because they are afraid, it is fundamental that we as PSBF, give this kind of education to help the girl to reach her aims⁴⁷.

The problem of MHM is well known in the country. According to Vaughn (2013: 33-34), in Tanzania, the Ministry of Education approved the use of booklets⁴⁸ in primary schools to add MHM to the curriculum. Moreover, UNICEF and local ministry officials embraced this book in the new “Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) in Schools” national strategy throughout Tanzania in 2011. This program was realised with the collaboration of four ministries: health, education, water, and sanitation to integrate MHM interventions such as sufficient latrines, water, and disposal mechanism in addition to the book. Despite that, period poverty remains a big issue in the country that must be faced overall starting from the structural conditions that avoid school’s participation.

⁴⁶*Kanga* consists of a rectangular piece of fabric (150 cm x 110 cm), and it is very famous all over East Africa. It is brightly colorful and on it you can find different sentences that refer to important periods of life of the person, mostly a woman, who wear it (Acquaviva et al. 2019: 58).

⁴⁷ “*Training* hizo zilikuwa muhimu sana kwa sababu msichana aliyeko kijijini kwanza hana fursa ya kupata *training* zinazomuhusu yeye kama msichana. Atapata tu *training* za shule za kawaida. Lakini zile ambazo zitamuhusu msichana kuwa msafi, msichana kujitambua kwamba sasa unaingia kwenye kipindi ambacho kutakuwa kwenye mabadiliko kwenye mwili wako kwa hiyo unapooona mabadiliko haya ndio ni badiliko ya kawaida lakini pia namna ya kuishi na haya ya mabadiliko huishi nayo katika hatua moja, mbili, tatu. Wasichana wengi hawapati elimu vijijini. Kwa sababu wazazi mara nyingi wanaogopa kuongea mambo kama haya na watoto. Kwa sababu wanaogopa ni muhimu sana, sisi kama PSBF ni muhimu sana kuenda kutoa elimu kama hizi zinaweza kusaidia msichana na anaweza kufikia malengo yake” (Interview 25th November 2021).

⁴⁸ “Growth and Changes – *Vipindi vya maisha*” (2009), written by Marnie Sommers, presents the following topics: puberty, physical changes, pregnancies, menstrual pain, and premenstrual syndrome. It is a double language text, written in English and Swahili, and presents stories and quizzes to foster learning.

4.2 ABC project: women’s participation in tea cooperatives

The training activities proposed by the ABC project in Iringa town had the main purpose to discuss gender inequalities in tea cooperatives. During the meetings several topics were pointed out, and among these, I will focus on the definition of gender, gender roles, the women’s workload, and the definition of a *mwanamke aliyewezesha*,⁴⁹ that will be discussed below.

During the first meeting⁵⁰ a group formed by women and men with a total of sixty participants discussed as first topic the definition of gender. In Tanzania, at Primary and Secondary schools gender definition is usually studied during Civics lessons. In “Civics for Secondary Schools. Book Two” (Zombwe 2018) gender is defined as follows:

Gender refers to the constructed social and cultural characteristics and norms which are then attributed to the different biological sexes. So, the social-cultural relationship and interactions between males and females in the society focus on the roles and responsibilities of two different sexes. Gender changes according to the environment and the culture of the society (Zombwe 2018: 76).

The ABC project’s definition discussed is similar to Zombwe’s and amplifies some concepts:

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles and responsibilities of women and men, in a given culture or location. These roles are influenced by perceptions and expectations arising from cultural, political, environmental, economic, social, and religious factors, as well as custom, law, class, ethnicity, and individual or institutional bias. Gender attitudes and behaviours are learned and can be changed (CEFA, JIDI, IDH 2021a: 3).

The term “gender” (Sw. *jinsia*) has been presented as opposed to the term “sex” (Sw. *jinsi*). As reported in the CEFA’s handbook (CEFA, JIDI, IDH 2021a):

Sex refers to the biological differences between women and men. They are generally permanent and universal (CEFA, JIDI, IDH 2021a: 3).

Moreover, according to the trainer and the participant view, “sex” cannot be changed because decided by God:

⁴⁹ “The woman who is enabled to do.”

⁵⁰ ABC project, 19th of October 2021.

T⁵¹: Here we noticed that sex is an application that God assigned to you, isn't true? [...] now, gender is these actions that have been associated to you from society or from culture [...] right? [gender] is these actions that you acquire from your society. When you are told that a woman has been beaten by a man, right? When you are told that women do not climb trees. When you are told that a woman [must] cook and that man can go to the bush to play football. When you are told that the mum goes to carry her child to the clinic and the father stays at home. These are issues of what kind? Gender issues. We were not born with them, but we met them in our society, and they made us as we are. So, who wears trousers?

Everybody: men.⁵²

Concerning gender roles, Zombwe (2018: 77) defines them as follows:

Gender roles have been mostly based on the division of labour according to sex. To many societies, these divisions have been made in a biased form. In different societies, the roles of women for instance, can be seen in domestic activities such as cooking as men play their roles in political and other useful economic activities where women are treated as cooks, and men are assigned other important economic activities (Zombwe 2018: 77).

As reported in the CEFA's handout (CEFA, JIDI, IDH 2021a: 4) women who live in the rural area are associated with "Women's Triple Roles," namely:

- Productive, relating to the production of goods for consumption or income through work in or outside their home.
- Reproductive, relating to domestic or household tasks associated with creating and sustaining children and family.
- Community management, relating to tasks and responsibilities carried out for the benefit of the community.

Socially, these roles were consolidated during the post-independence politics. In fact, even if Nyerere wanted to stress for gender equality in the independent Tanzania, Ujamaa politics enforced gender role division. Referring to women in "Socialism and Rural Development" (1967):

⁵¹Abbreviation for trainer.

⁵²T: *Hapa tumeona jinsi ni maombile ambao mungu amekumbanana, si ndio? [...] Sasa jinsia ni yale matendo ambayo unafundishwa na jamii au tamaduni [...], sawa? Ni yale matendo ambayo unabeba kutoka kwenye jamii yako. Unapoambiwa mwanamke abishani na mwanamume, sawa? Unapoambiwa wanawake hawapandi miti, unapoambiwa mwanamke apike, mwanamume aende porini kucheza mpira. Unapoambiwa mama andoa mbebe mtoto kupeleke kliniki na mwanamume abaki nyumbani. Yale ndio mambo ya nini? Mambo ya kijinsia. Hautujazaliwa nayo lakini tumeyakuta kwenye jamii zetu yakatufanya jinsi tulivyo. Kwamba suruali ni ya nani?*

Wote: wanamume (ABC project, 19th October 2021).

By the virtue of sex they suffered from inequalities which had nothing to do with their contribution to the family welfare. Although it is wrong to suggest that they have always been an oppressed group, it is true that within traditional society ill-treatment and enforced subservience could be their lot. This is certainly inconsistent with our socialist conception of the equality of all human beings” (Nyerere 1967: 3).

As stated by Tenga et al. (1996: 143), in the Ujamaa villages women covered a central role overall in the farming activities working at times “for twelve or fourteen hours”. The Ujamaa agriculture project was highly gendered and women performed the ideal mothers and wives, occupying a subordinate position in the authority structure of the society. This tendency was accompanied by the ideal Ujamaa family configuration that projected the monogamous nuclear family based on the European and Christian model, which abhorred the traditional kinship structure (Britwun 2022: 126-127). Indeed, the nuclear family is the place for the reproduction and production of the workforce and the instrument that maintains the capitalist mode of production, based on the paradox which associates the domestic relationship of reproduction with the capitalist relationship of production. Nowadays, women are mostly defined in terms of their reproductive role, and because they usually do not earn an income for their activities, they are not recognised and valued as economically productive. In fact, even if women occupy a fundamental position in the farming activities and in the care works, they do not acquire the recognition of a productive status. Submitted to the conjugal relationships which dominate the parent-child relationships, the product of women’s workload does not enter the household if not intermediated by the man (Meillasoux 1978: 93; 173). As referred by Mascarenhas *et al.* (1983) in a case study that focuses on women’s oppression in Tanzania:

For women, the task of being wife and mother are defined as “duties,” as moral obligations, by the patriarchal ideologies which govern the sexual division of labour in domestic labour” (Mascarenhas *et al.* 1983: 20).

To focus on gender roles, during the first training with CEFA53, participants were divided into eight small groups to answer four questions:

- *Kwenye jamii yangu kwa kuwa mimi ni mwanamke ni lazima...* (“In my society as a woman it’s necessary to...”)
- *Ningekuwa mwanamume ningeweza...* (“If I were a man I could...”)

⁵³ABC project, 19th October 2021.

- *Kwenye jamii yangu kwa kuwa mimi ni mwanamume ni lazima...* (“In my society as a man it’s necessary to...”)
- *Ningekuwa mwanamke ningeweza...* (“If I were a woman I could...”)

According to the collected data, women are associated with reproductive roles (give birth and take care for the family in absence of husband’s help); productive roles (handle small business activities, farming activities and hard works; breed small livestock as chicken or pigs); and administrative roles as women are perceived as fundamental mentors for society for which they are an example and an educational figure. Below, I present a speech from a participant that highlights gender roles issues:

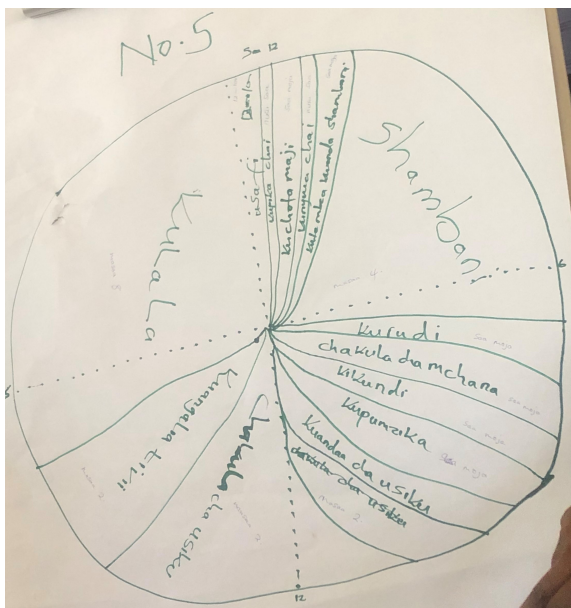
W⁵⁴: Life [that of women] has some difficulties now. Because, in the house where you live, even if the father is a worker the woman is a farmer, and both contribute to the income for the house. For example, [...] mum gets up at 5, and the father gets up at 7. From 5 am, mum gets up, eats, washes the dishes, and clothes the children to go to school. Father does not even wash his clothes. Father washes, gets dressed and goes out to work. Despite that, for the income, the father will be back, and I will be back, and we will put them together, responsibilities must be shared. For these reasons, good practices can start at home. If mum gets up, gets dressed, and cleans up, the father should clothe the children to go to school. For this reason, these would be the rules that permit gender balance between men and women⁵⁵.

As stated by Jakobsen (2014: 540) in rural areas in Tanzania, the agricultural workforce is predominantly female, and most women work their husband’s land. A woman usually works 12-16 hours a day, and the husband the half of this amount. Moreover, the man decides for and takes the income from her agricultural work. An ABC project activity that sheds the light on this topic is *Mduara wangu wa maisha* (“My circle of life”). This activity was proposed to the women’s groups⁵⁶ to highlight the huge women’s workload. Women were divided into small groups, and they had to draw a pie chart of a daily routine of a participant. The circle represents the 24 hours of the day that women had to divide according to their daily activities. The pie charts reported are the result of the work of 60

⁵⁴ Abbreviation for “woman.”

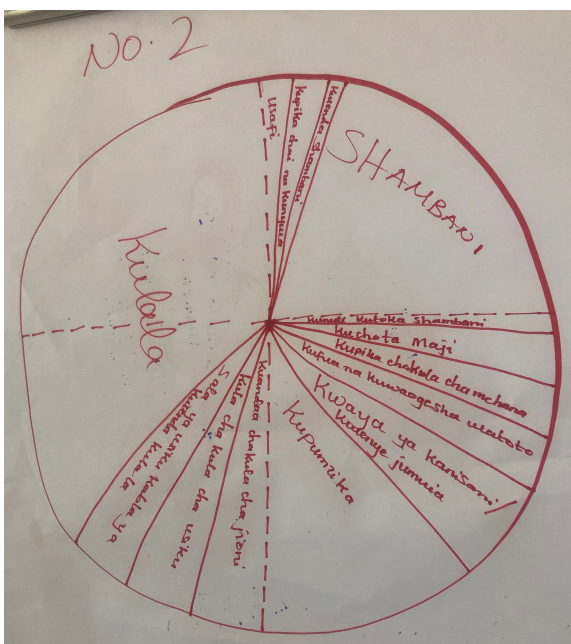
⁵⁵ *Maisha sasa yana magumu. Kwaani ndani ya nyumbani unapoishi hata kama baba atakuwa ni mfanya kazi, mama ni mkulima lakini wote wanachangia pato la nyumbani. Kwa mfano, [...] mama anaamka saa kumi na moja, baba akaamka saa moja. Lakini ndani saa kumi na moja mama ameamka, amekula, ameosha viombo, ameandaa watoto wamenda shule. Baba hata pengine anaosha nguo za baba. Baba yeye ataoga, atavaa nguo, ataenda kazini. Lakini kwenye kipato, baba atarudi, mimi nitarudi na tunachanganya, majikumuni yanaenda pamoja. Kwa hiyo sheria ndogo ndogo zingesainia ndani ya nyumba. Kama mama ameamka anaandaa, anafanya usafi, basi baba anaandaa watoto waende shule. Kwa hiyo hizi zingekuwa sheria ambazo zina usawa kati ya mwanaume na mwanamke* (ABC project, 19th October 2021).

⁵⁶ ABC project, training activities of 27th October 2021 and 3rd November 2021.



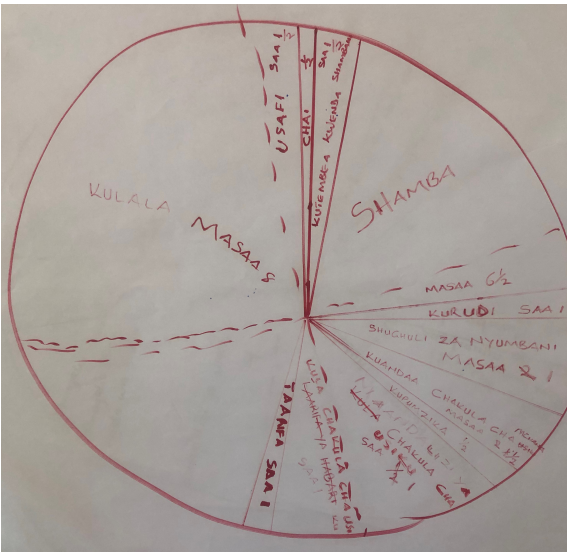
Picture #2 (ABC project, 27th October 2021).

The participant gets up at 6 am. She spends 1 hour to clean up, 1 hour to go to tap water, 30 minutes to have breakfast, 1 hour to go to the field, 4 hours to work in the field, 1 hour to go back home, 1 hour to stay in the tea company, 2 hours to make dinner, 2 hours and 30 minutes to watch tv, and 8 hours to sleep.



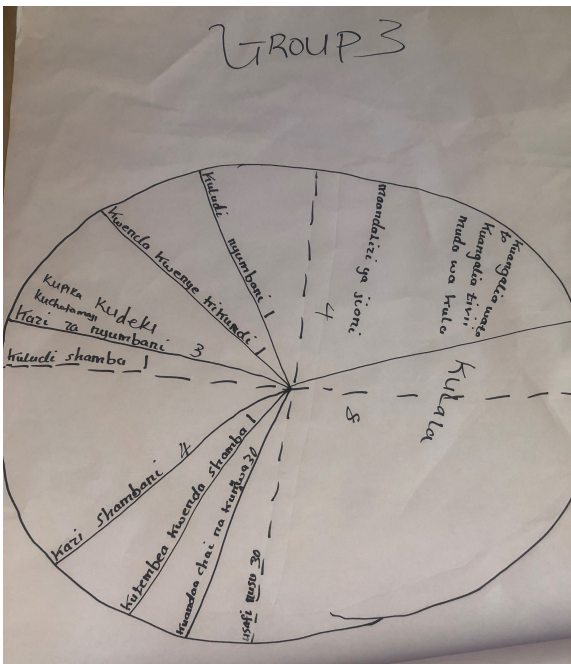
Picture #3 (ABC project, 27th October 2021).

The participant gets up at 6 am. She spends 30 minutes to clean up, 1 hour to make breakfast, 30 minutes to go to the field, 4 hours to work in the field, 30 minutes to come back from the field, 1 hour and 30 minutes to tap water, 1 hour to cook, 1 hour to clean and wash the children, 1 hour for the church choir, 1 hour to rest, 1 hour to finish to prepare dinner, 1 hour and 30 minutes to eat, 1 hour and 30 minutes to pray, and 8 hours to sleep.



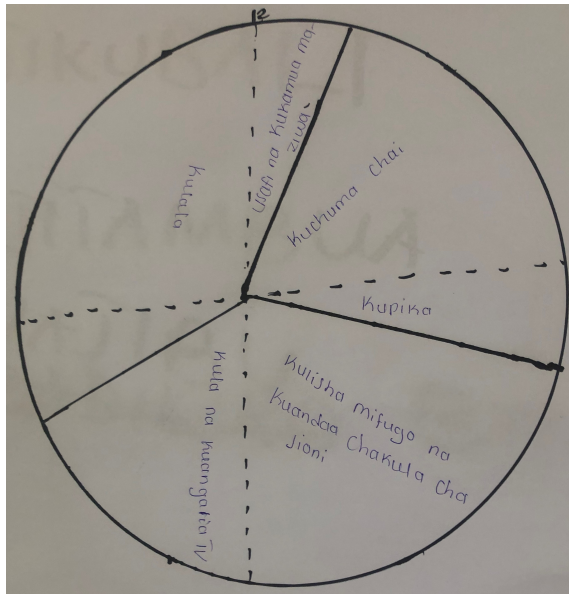
The participant gets up at 6 am. She spends 30 minutes to clean up, 30 minutes to have tea, 30 minutes to go to the field, 6 hours and 30 minutes to work in the field, 1 hour to go back home, 1 hour to do the housework, 2 hours and 30 minutes to prepare lunch, 30 minutes to rest, 1 hour to make dinner, 1 hour to have dinner, 1 hour to listen to the news, 8 hours to sleep.

Picture #4 (ABC project, 27th October 2021).



The participant gets up at 6 am. She spends 30 minutes to clean up, 30 minutes to prepare tea, one hour to walk to the field, 4 hours to work in the field, 1 hour to go back from the field, 3 hours to cook wash and do the housework, 1 hour to go to the tea company, 4 hours for the evening preparations (taking care of children, watching tv, eating), 8 hours to sleep.

Picture #5 (ABC project, 27th October 2021).



The participant gets up at 6 am. She spends 1 hour to milk, 5 hours to harvest the tea, 1 hour to cook, 5 hours to feed the animals and prepare dinner, 4 hours to eat and watch television, 8 hours to sleep.

Picture #6 (ABC project, 3rd November 2021).



The participant gets up at 6 am. She spends 1 hour to clean up, 7 hours to gather the tea leaves, 1 hour to have lunch, 4 hours to sew, two hours to have dinner, 1 hour to watch the television, 8 hours to sleep.

Picture #7 (ABC project, 3rd November 2021).

As stated by Meillassoux (1978: 100), to reach an egalitarian work redistribution, it is necessary to dissociate the productive and reproductive cycles that often are merged in the domestic way of production. This work distribution, as pointed out by Mascarenhas et al. (1983: 16-17), generates women's oppression which is necessary to maintain the dominant capitalist relations of production and reproduction and in rural areas, women's oppression is fundamental to the exploitation of peasants as well. In the peasant production system, female labour is vital in the domestic labour

process, and it is the major component of food production and export crop production. This oppression is often justified by gender stereotypes attributed to women.

According to this, women in the Iringa region suffer low social esteem. Often associated with their reproductive role, they are described as caregivers, passive beings, and sexual objects who must satisfy the male pleasure (Sanga 2020: 112). During the first ABC project's training,⁵⁷ the group was divided according to gender to identify the differences between women and men. Through this activity and the ABC's project handout (CEFA, JIDI, IDH 2021: 8), it is possible to identify the stereotypes attributed to women. Socially, women are perceived as dependent, weak, incompetent, less important, emotional, implementers, and housekeepers. As reported by a woman during the training:

Women are always hearth people, [woman] is a person who cooks [...] this is the woman's responsibility.⁵⁸

Moreover, women are seen as supporters, fragile, fickle, fearful, peacemakers, cautious, flexible, warm, passive, followers, spectators, modest, subjective, soft-spoken, secretaries, nurturing, gentle, excitable, patient, cheerful, caretakers and cooperative. These characteristics are opposed to those of men, who are identified as powerful, independent, competent, more important, logical, decision-makers, leaders, brave, active, aggressive, adventurous, competitive, objective, and as reported by Sanga (2020: 112) dynamic and creative thinkers. Despite that, what emerged from the ABC project's training activities—overall these addressed to women groups⁵⁹—is that the participants are aware of the oppression they suffer, and they have a clear idea about the ideal of an empowered woman that can be reached. In this domain, I want to refer to the term “empowerment,” trying to detach from the neoliberal Western idea of the gender mainstream feminism which focuses on achieving individual condition and self-mastery (Hickel 2014: 1356). Namely, I refer to the term according to the Italian presented by Nadotti *impoteramento* (hooks 1998) derived from Spanish *empoderamento* which are related to the capability of action and the awareness of oneself and the society, contrary to the individual power and the straight (Borghi 2020: 13; Specia *et al.* 2015: 196). In analysing this term, I will present the activity named *Sifa za mwanamke aliyewezesha* (“The characteristics of a woman who make it possible”). During the activities of the 27th September and 3rd November, the female participants divided into small groups had to draw the picture of the ideal of an empowered woman, and then to present it in front of the group. In general,

⁵⁷ABC project, 19th October 2021.

⁵⁸ *Wanawake siku zote ni mtu wa jikoni, ni mtu wa kupika. [...] ni majikumu ya mwanamke* (ABC project. 19th October 2021).

⁵⁹ABC project, 27th September 2021, 3rd November 2021.

similar features were pointed out: the *mwanamke aliyewezesha* is beautiful and happy, she has tidy hair braided or dreadlocks, and has beautiful dresses and accessories such as earrings and necklaces. She is economically independent with good revenues, she lives in a beautiful house with a bathroom, and she owns her tea field (to which some participants add a cornfield). Most of them say that this empowered woman is a farmer or a chicken breeder with just two exceptions: one group says that she is a teacher, and the other one says that she owns her business activity. Regarding her family, she has children but as reported by most of the groups, she is not married. Here below I present the pictures and some extracts of the debate that every group reported. During the meeting on the 3rd of November, we had less time for the discussion, so I report the features that I wrote directly during the meeting. These pictures are the result of the work of 60 participants.



Picture #8 (ABC project, 27th October 2021).

W: She has a beautiful house, she breeds, and she is also a farmer. [...]

T: What is she holding in her hand?

W: A purse.

T: And has she got money in the purse?

W: Yes, she has.

T: She is beautiful, she is wearing earrings.

W: Yes.

T: My friends, she has got a house, livestock, tea fields, happiness, beauty, money, she wears a beautiful dress. Is she walking?

W: Eheh [asserting].

T: Where is she going?

W: She is going to the cooperative.

T: Ah! So, does she own a cooperative?

W: Yes.

T: Fine.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ W: ana nyumba nzuri, anafuga, na pia ni mkulima. [...]

T: Ameshika nini?

W: Ameshika pochi.

T: Na ana hela kwenye pochi?



W: This is an empowered woman. It is not necessary that every empowered woman builds a home or owns a field. This is a woman who is going to her business activity. She is going by herself to do her business.

T: What about her look?

W: Her look is beautiful.

T: Is she married?

W: She is married with a husband, and she has children. She is wearing a shirt and a skirt.⁶¹

Picture #9 (ABC project, 27th October 2021).

W: Ndio.

T: Amekaa mzuri, anavaa hereni.

W: Ndio.

T: Jamani, ana nyumba, ana mifugo, ana shamba la chai, anapendenda, ana furaha, ana uzuri, ana pesa, ameavaa nguo nzuri. Anatembea?

W: Eheh.

T: Anaenda wapi?

W: Anaenda kwenye kikundi.

T: Aaah kwa hiyo ana vikundi.

W: Ndio.

T: Sawa.

⁶¹W: Huyu ni mwanamke aliyewezesha. Sio lazima kila mwanamke aliyewezesha anajenga nyumba au ana shamba. Huyu ni mwanamke ambaye anaenda kufanya biashara zake. Anaenda zake kufanya biashara zake.

T: Maonekano yake?

W: Ni maonekano mazuri.

T: ameolewa?

W: ameolewa na mume na ana watoto. Anavaa shati na sketi.



W: An empowered woman. This woman has her house, here she is wearing a dress, she owns tea, and also a cornfield.

[...]

T: What about hair, how is it?

W: It is tied, she has dreadlocks.

T: Is it a purse?

W: Yes.

T: What has she got inside?

W: Money.

T: Has she got money?

W: Eheh [asserting].

T: What is she wearing here?

W: A necklace.

T: And here?

W: Earrings.

T: For this reason, an empowered woman is beautiful, she adorns herself.

Everybody: Yes.⁶²

Picture #10 (ABC project, 27th October 2021).

⁶² W: Mwanamke aliyewezesha. Huyu mwanamke ana nyumba yake, hapa akavaa suti ana chai, bado ana milimo ya mahindi.

[...]

T: Nywele zi vipi?

W: Amechama, ana dredi.

T: Hii ni pochi?

W: Ndio.

T: Ana nini ndani?

W: Hela.

T: Ana hela?

W: eheh.

T: Anavaa nini hapa?

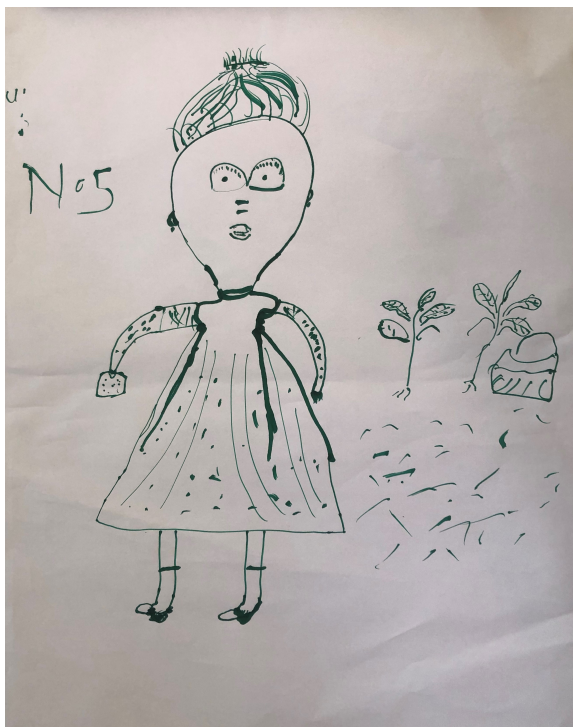
W: Vikanda.

T: Na hapa?

W: Ni hereni.

T: Kwa hiyo mwanamke aliyewezesha ana mrembo, amejiremba?

Wote: Ndio.



W: An empowered women is a tea farmer.
T: What is she carrying?
W: She is carrying food.
T: So, she went to the field and now she is carrying food.
W: Eheh, yes.
T: And why is she wearing socks?
W: She went gathering
T: Is she going to gather coffee?
W: Tea.
T: Eheh [asserting].
W: For this reason, she is wearing shoes, to go to the field.
[...]
T: Eehh. So, an empowered woman has got tea, a house, money, she can have food, then is the field hers or of her husband? Or is not married yet?
W: Eheh, she lives alone.
T: And here? Is her hair braided?
W: Eheh [asserting].⁶³

Picture #11 (ABC project. 27th October 2021).

⁶³ W: Mwanamke aliyewezesha ni mkulima wa chai.

T: Amebeba nini?

W: Anabeba chakula.

T: Kwa hiyo alienda shambani na anabeba chakula.

W: eheh ndio.

T: na kwa nini anavaa socks?

W: anaenda kuchuma (raccogliere).

T: anaenda kuchuma kahawa?

W: Chai.

T: Eheh.

W: Kwa hiyo anavaa viatu, kwa kuenda shambani.

[...]

T: Eeeh. Kwa hiyo mwanamke anayewezesha ana chai, ana nyumba, ana hela, anaweza kupata chakula, halafu shamba ni yake au ya mume wake? Au hajaolewa?

W: Eheh anaishi mwenyewe.

T: Halafu hapa amesuka?

W: Eheh.



Picture #12 (ABC project, 27th October 2021).

W: An empowered woman is going to get her bag; she is coming from her house.

T: So, she has several livestock: chicken, ducks.

W: Yes, and her tea field, that over there.

T: So, there is corn but also tea. So, an empowered woman has a field, and other products.

Everybody: Yes.

T: Does she own her house?

W: Yes.

T: Has she got a cooperative? Is she a leader of a cooperative?

W: Yes.

T: Eheh, she must be beautiful. Her hair is braided. Is she married or not yet?

W: Not yet.

T: For that reason, many empowered women do not want to be married.

W: Yes.

T: So, we saw the features of empowered women [...] which features did we see if we return [watching] all the pictures?

W: The feature that I notice is that the empowered woman has her own tea field, moreover she breeds.

T: Eheh [asserting]. What does she breed often?

W: She owns chicken.

T: Eheh [asserting]. Something else?

W: She has got a house.

W: She has got a cooperative.

T: Eheh [asserting]. Something else?

W: She always has money.

T: Something else?

W: It is necessary that an empowered woman is

beautiful.

T: Eheh [asserting], an empowered woman, we noticed that she is not yet married.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ W: Mwanamke aliyewezesha anaenda kwenye kikoba, ametoka kwenye nyumba yake.

T: Kwa hiyo mwanamke mifugo mengi ni kuku, bata.

W: Ndio na shamba lake la chai lile hapa.

T: Kwa hiyo kuna mahindi lakini chai pia. Kwa hiyo mwanamke aliyewezesha ana shamba na mazao mengine.

Wote: Ndio.

T: Ana nyumba yake?

W: Ndio.

T: Ana kikundi? Ni mwanachama wa kikundi?

W: Ndio.

T: Eheh lazima apendeze. Akasuka

suka. Huyo ameolewa au hajaolewa?

W: Hajaolewa.

T: kwa hiyo wanawake wengi waliowezesha hawapendi kuolewa olewa.

W: Ndio.

T: Kwa hiyo tuliona sifa za wanawake waliowezesha. [...] tumeona sifa gani zinarudisha picha zote?

W: Sifa ambayo nimeiona, mwanamke aliyewezesha ana shamba la chai. Pia anafuga.

T: Eheh. Anafuga mara nyingi nini?

W: Ana kuku.

T: Eheh kingine?

W: Amekuwa na nyumba.

W: Amekuwa na vikundi.

T: Eheh kingine?

W: Ana hela wakati wote.

T: Eheh nyingine?

W: Mwanamke aliyewezesha ni lazima apendeze.

T: Eheh kingine? [...] mwanamke aliyewezesha, tuliona ambayo hajaolewa [...].



Anatengeneza nywele

She puts in order her hair.

Ana mtoto.

She has a child.

Ana choo “nyumba bila choo sio nyumba”.

She has a bathroom “a house without a bathroom is not a house.

Hajaolewa.

She is not married yet.

Ana shamba lake.

She owns her field.

Anaenda sokoni.

She is going to the market.

Picture #13 (ABC project, 3rd November 2021).



Anapendeza.

She is beautiful.

Ana hela.

She has got money.

Ameolewa.

She is married.

Picture #14 (ABC project, 3rd November 2021).



Anaenda kazini.

She is going to work.

Ana kazi ya kufanya, ni mwalimu.

She has work to do, she is a teacher.

Sio mkulima.

She is not a farmer.

Picture #15 (ABC project, 3rd November 2021).

In recognizing their productive role, the women represented in these pictures are economically independent. In this domain, most of them decide to detach from the husband who is often a symbol of oppression and coercion. Despite that, the “ideal” woman here presented is not strictly related to the individualist values of Western ideology, as she is deeply bounded to the reproductive role and to her community from which she wants to be recognized for her daily efforts. According to my analysis, the willingness of the participants is not to break the social norms to be the “empowered woman who looses the constraints of kinship and cultures” (Hickel 2014: 1360), rather to create a united group able to be the pillar on which the society can stand on. This concept is well presented in a popular song of the Swahili orality repertoire that was sang several times during the activities proposed to the women groups:

<i>Wewe ni nani jamaa?</i>	You, who are you?
<i>Mimi ni mama</i>	I am a mother.
<i>Watoto?</i>	Children?
<i>Watoto wananjitegemea</i>	Children find protection in me.
<i>Mwanaume?</i>	Man?
<i>Mwanaume ananjitegemea</i>	Man trusts me.
<i>Jamii?</i>	Community?
<i>Jamii inanjitegemea</i>	Community stands on me.
<i>Mimi ni mama</i>	I am a mother
<i>Wewe ni nani jamaa?</i>	Who are you?
<i>Mimi ni mama</i>	I am a mother.
<i>Wewe ni nani jamaa?</i>	You, who are you?
<i>Mimi ni mama</i>	I am a mother.
<i>Watoto?</i>	Children?
<i>Watoto wananjitegemea</i>	Children find protection in me.
<i>Jamii?</i>	Community?
<i>Jamii inanjitegemea</i>	Community stands on me.
<i>Shirika?</i>	Society?
<i>Shirika inanjitegemea</i>	Society stands on me.
<i>Mimi ni mama</i>	I am a mother

(ABC project. 27th October and 3rd November 2021)

5. Final remarks

As pointed out from the topics presented, gender-based issues in Tanzania nowadays are related to structural conditions well rooted in the country, as patriarchal oppression is deeply related to cash based economy that directly affects social living conditions. As the case of the rural area of Iringa shows, women are desired for their reproductive force for which they also suffer big menaces by men who want to protect, control and dominate them. In these terms, it is possible to assess according to Meillassoux's theory (1978: 3-4; 90-91), that the present-day Tanzanian economy is related to the capitalist mode of production, imposed in the country since imperialism. This mode of production is based on the nuclear family which reproduces the necessary workforce of the so-called "free man" without whom this mode of production would not exist. Indeed, to assure the capitalist reproduction and development it is necessary that the workforce grows proportionally in a qualitative and a quantitative way, and in this domain, the capitalism reinforce women's subordination and oppression as this status is fundamental to the imperialist exploitation in Tanzania (Mascarenhas *et al.* 1983: 10).

For that reason, the contemporary feminist movements which converge in the AFF (African Feminist Forum), claim for gender liberation recognizing the inter-connected dependence of patriarchy and capitalism. This intersectional aspect is well presented in the following AFF statement:

Deepening existential insecurity arises from intensified capitalist relations of extraction and exploitation that have left devastation in their wake. Facing the challenges ahead requires renewed determination to craft the theoretical frameworks for deepening our understanding of our varied contexts in order to dismantle existing relations of oppression and domination. As the contributors to this special issue show, creating more liberatory possibilities for African women and societies will necessarily be work-in-progress, drawing on and amplifying the possibilities for inspiration and strength through the building of feminist solidarity and collective action (Pereira 2017: 28).

From a decolonial feminist point of view, the Tanzanian experience shows, mentioning Vergès (2019: 19-20), that is possible to “de-patriarchalize” revolutionary struggles for the “right to exist” of a part of the humanity that was often silenced, namely that of women. In fact, the historical analysis of the feminist movements and the daily life experience of peasants who live in the rural area of Iringa, shows the incessant women participation in the building of the Tanzanian society. This analysis is enriched with the brief presentation of some literary works of the Swahili repertoire because they give the possibility to compare the reality with the artistic perception which supported and still supports the narrative around gender politics in the country.

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