

Capitalism, gender activism and women's liberation in Tanzania: myths and realities

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Abstract

The dominant feminist approach to women's issues in Africa and other underdeveloped regions attributes their subordination, poverty, and oppression to outdated and harmful traditional practices. This contrasts with western capitalist societies, often viewed as models of "gender equality and modernity." Liberal and radical feminists advocate for eradicating traditional cultures through modernization, empowerment, and even legal enforcement. This critique argues that such explanations overlook the deeper cause: the class structure created by peripheral capitalism in imperialist-dominated regions. These structures, shaped by the unique processes of capital accumulation, are the real drivers of women's subjugation. For example, in Tanzania, the criminalization of female circumcision and land commoditization illustrate how capitalism homogenizes social life to serve metropolitan capital's accumulation needs. The article asserts that the relentless drive for capital accumulation, which subordinates all—including men and women—to its expansion, has far more devastating effects on marginalized groups than traditional customs. Feminists must shift focus to challenging the capitalist system itself, as true liberation for women cannot be achieved within the framework of capitalist globalization. Only under socialism, where equality is integral, can genuine freedom for women and other vulnerable groups be realized.

Introduction

“Although capitalism can and does make ideological and economic use of gender oppression, then, this oppression has no privileged status in the structure of capitalism. Capitalism could survive the eradication of all oppression specific to women as women – while it would not, by definition¹, survive the eradication of class exploitation. This does not mean that capitalism has made the liberation of women necessary or inevitable. But it does mean that there is no specific structural necessity for, nor even a strong systemic disposition to, gender oppression in capitalism.....The strategic implications are that struggles conceived purely in purely extra-economic terms – as purely against racism or gender oppression, for example – are not in themselves fatally dangerous to capitalism, but that, at the same time, they are probably unlikely to succeed if they remain detached from anti-capitalist struggle.”(Wood, 2007, p. 123)²

¹ They were referring to a pattern of dress very common amongst the so-called “modern females” – seductive dresses which either expose much of the intimate parts of their body thereby exposing much of their breasts, thighs, stomach, navel, chest, and the back, or else very tight trousers. They were expressing a general concern as well as a worry among the general citizenry in Tanzania who feel that the pattern of dress is un-African, immoral, and hence, artificial. This pattern, according to them, needs to be proscribed by a responsible government in power.

² This paper is a product of contemporary women's movements and human rights activism addressing women's issues. It aims to examine the logic behind these movements, as well as the realities and myths surrounding them within the neoliberal context.

Early in 2003, an interesting but unique event happened in the township of Kibaya, in Kiteto, Arusha Region, Tanzania. Despite its tumultuous and reverberating effects, the said event was never reported in any media in the country, though it sent shivers and disturbances into the corridors of power in the district administration. The sequence of events unfolded as follows.

In March 2003, approximately four years after the enactment of the Sexual Offences and Special Provisions Act of 1999 (SOSPA), which proscribes the practice of circumcision of female children, and whose penalty is 15 years of imprisonment, round about five hundred women belonging to the Maasai nationality in Kiteto District organized themselves into a group of “gender activists” and decided to trek into the township of Kibaya to demand their right to circumcise their female children. The background to this incident can be traced to a decade of agitation and sensitization programmes against female circumcision by non-government organisations (NGOs) which claim to fight for gender equality in Tanzania, and one which eventually led to the said enactment. About the same time, it was reported that a seminar organized by a similar NGOs in Tanga Region aimed to sensitise Maasai women against female genital circumcision had been boycotted by the female participants - an event which called for a high-ranking bureaucrat from the regional headquarters to come and intervene, and ultimately placate the disobedient participating members.

The Maasai women from the surrounding villages in Kiteto District had convened in the township, well equipped with the necessary provisions to last for one week. They camped in the outskirts of the town and every morning they would flock into the town demonstrating and singing, and their target was to meet the District Commissioner whom they pleaded to grant them permission to perform the circumcision to their daughters and the associated traditional rituals. One of the principal precipitating factors which pushed these women to take to the streets was the discriminatory and prejudicial nature of the law which they felt was against peasant women in particular, and one which was insensitive to their cherished traditional customs and beliefs. They argued that there is no reason why the Government should clamp on their traditions while in their midst their daughters in town and cities were allowed to dress indecently on the presumed pretext that they have the liberty and right to do so? Why is it, they claimed, liberty was only limited to these young females and was not extended to them? They further went to the extent of interrogating the viability and legitimacy of the phenomenon of prostitution, describing it as one of the most despicable and humiliating practices for women in Tanzania and whose extent and magnitude is on the increase. And yet, they argued, the Government appears to be not only lax and indifferent towards it, but that it largely tolerates it as it has not been hard on it.

District Commissioner declined to address the problems presented by the protesting women on the argument that he was not responsible for the enactment of the law which proscribes female circumcision; instead, he directed them to see their member of parliament (MP) who, by then was not in office. It is claimed that a week in advance, upon realizing that the Maasai women were planning to demonstrate against the law, the MP of the constituency had left the town for somewhere else. Being a member of the Maasai community himself, and being ambivalent on the customary practice itself, and realizing that to meet them and to openly address them in support of the provisions of the law would be tantamount to betraying his own customary

practices to which he subscribed, he opted to flee so as to avoid confrontation with. Aggrieved and deeply disappointed for not being able to submit their demands to the relevant authorities, and after almost one week of demonstrations, the Maasai women eventually left the town for their homesteads in the rural countryside.

This episode and many others of a similar nature, which happens in Tanzania and which go unreported, raise a number of important issues, particularly for NGOs and women activists who positioned to speak on behalf of, and who champion for the rights of women and children. On the one hand, there are the Maasai peasants and pastoralist women, who for centuries, have been circumcising their female children, would like to continue with their customary practice. On the other hand, insensitive to the Maasai traditions and customs, the educated women elites in alliance with the Tanzania state vehemently condemn the practices on the grounds of what they describe as severe health consequences as well as violation of human rights. In the process, they have gone to the extent of criminalising the said practices. The immediate question is: between the two contending social sides, who is right and who is wrong? Is it the elite petty-bourgeois women leaders of these NGOs who are bent to destroy other people's customs or the "primitive" Maasai peasant women who happen to resist this onslaught?

Most influential studies which have examined the various forms of gender inequality, oppression and violence in Africa in general, and in Tanzania in particular, have tended to approach the issue from a positivist stand-point only. They have explained women's oppression as a function of outdated traditional African belief systems and customs which are claimed to be extant to-date.

Generally, culture may be referred to as a collective consciousness as well as institutions of a people shared by a common history, language and psychology and culture. Therefore, culture differs from one society to another. While the dominant bourgeois culture in western countries tends to view the self as a product of the individual person. However, in the Africa culture is a product of the household, the lineage and the village community in general. In trying to understand the way in which culture determines or shapes peoples' actions through roles, norms and attitudes, we need to examine not only the economic base, but also the cultural and linguistic categories as these maps out the cultural domains. For one thing, cultural and linguistic categories vary across societies, and hence one's understanding of a particular culture depends on one's sensitivity upon these categories. For example, the concept of female circumcision does possess a completely different meaning from the concept of female genital mutilation³. It is not that the daughters of imperialism do not understand the cultural

³ In Tanzania, for example, for the Wabende nationality located in the south-western part of the country, the linguistic categories/concepts of *majo* meaning "mother" and *tata* meaning "father" and *mwana* meaning "child" are quite specific and relational concepts denoting a particular relationship: a relationship of authority, deference, respect, and responsibility between a parent and a child. A *majo/mwana* relationship is first and foremost one of authority: the mother is superior, and the son or daughter is always in a subordinate position to his/her mother and this relationship is permanent regardless of the age of the son/daughter. In this instance, therefore, the European concept of a child who after attaining the age of 1 year is regarded to be free and hence disrespectful to her/his parents or one who may not maintain social distance from his/her parents is completely alien in the Wabende nationality in Tanzania. Similarly, the concepts of individual rights: those of the child and women as a special category of people in the village community are also foreign. Rather, there are only collective rights and responsibilities! In like manner, the meaning of the concept of female circumcision in those communities which

importance and significance of female circumcision to the communities concerned, quite the contrary. They know that circumcision is a necessary step “to raise and protect a girl and to make her eligible for marriage”. They are also aware that female circumcision “operates as a social norm and is held in place by reciprocal expectations within those communities” and that failure to conform to the practice “can affect not only a girl’s marriageability, it can also lead to social exclusion, ostracism or even violence” and may also affect the standing of a girl’s family within the community. It is further recognised that “conformity meets with social approval, brings respect and admiration and maintains social standing in the community.”

And yet, despite acknowledging the obvious and grave repercussions that may befall a girl and her family who does not undergo female circumcision, one of the daughters of imperialism, the UNICEF (2010: 1), in an unstinting, arrogant and highly disrespectful manner has this to say:

FGM/C is a violation of the human rights of women and girls. Even if not intended as a violent act, the practice is de facto violent. It is a manifestation of the deep-rooted of gender inequalities and is discriminatory in nature. The practice is rooted in cultural understandings of gender, inequality, marriage and family. These understandings influence how it is viewed and tolerated in different contexts.

More importantly is the fact that it is not so much the result of the superior knowledge the anti-circumcision groups have acquired of “others”, rather it is a product of the unequal power relations imbued with racism between the two contending forces: the master and the slave. It is very much reminiscent of the encounter between the 17th century Europe and Africa – a relationship in which Europeans viewed the continent’s inhabitants as either savages or primitive and hence one in which Europe usurped the role of an “adult” and Africa as an “infant” who needs to be guided and controlled⁴. It was then the moral obligation of Europe to look after the “infant” African. In the words of T. Carlos Jaques (1993):

“With Europe’s historical superiority came an ethical obligation from which past contacts with Africa had been free, for the cognitive space occupied by the African qua primitive was also of a moral consequence. The civilised,

undertake it is different from the biological meaning associated with the concept of female genital mutilation which has been deliberately and vindictively misconceived by the “daughters of imperialism” in order to be in good favour with their Western mentors and sponsors.

⁴ During the classical colonial period in Tanganyika, one method used by the colonial state to obtain labour from the natives was by flogging; and this was legitimated in racial terms. Since the African was very low on the racial compared with Europeans and Asians, he was likened to a child who needs to be nurtured and disciplined and to this end the vocabulary used by the colonial masters reflected the racial theory. While the African child labour was referred to as “toto”- meaning “child”, an African adult labourer was referred to as a “boy”! This racial theory is still extant: the African natives must be taught how to think and act according to the norms and values of the master, namely, the European ways of life. See, Iliffe, J. (1979) *A Modern History of Tanganyika*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 150. This is exactly the role played by the imperialist agencies like UNICEF in collaboration with the African petty-bourgeois women in Africa. One important question one would ask would be: how is it possible that different Europeans and the current feminist NGOs with seemingly different cultural traditions have reacted in overwhelmingly similar ways to “primitive” cultures in Tanzania and particularly to what they categorise as “harmful cultural practices”? [“mila potofu”?] One answer is that they perceive it to be in opposition to the dominant culture which they aspire to imitate, namely, a bourgeois culture with the attendant values of individualism, individual rights, norms and values.

adult nations of Europe came to see themselves as in some sense duty bound to care for the infant savages of Africa. Abolitionism thus gained a new theoretical foundation. And colonialism was proposed as an answer to Africa's retardation."

This racist approach which takes on an essentially static and ahistorical view of the African people has tended to deform mainstream feminists' view of the underdeveloped nature of the Tanzanian social formation and the associated gender relations and inequalities which it intends to eliminate. It takes for granted the prevailing gender inequality outside its socio-historical context and similarly, it plays quite the same role which the Christian Missionaries played in Africa. And this is particularly so with works on female circumcision.

One of the most characteristic features of works that have been conducted on female circumcision has been their penchant for its medicalisation. In 1997, for example, the World Health Organisation (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Population Fund (UNPF) issued a joint statement which affirmed the harm caused to the female body by female circumcision as well as death and henceforth called for its elimination. In addition, it was confirmed that the said practice was a violation of human rights of women and of the girl child. In Tanzania, this was followed by the establishment of a plethora of NGOs which purport to speak for women rights the majority of which are donor funded from imperialist countries.

Similarly, others have followed suit. According to Stallings, et al. (2009) female circumcision is discriminatory and violates the right to equal opportunities including the right to be free from violence, torture, cruelty and injury. The researchers also found that the risk of HIV infection amongst Tanzanian women who had undergone female circumcision was roughly twice the number of women who had not. This is despite the fact that the same researchers were perplexed by such a finding as the association was confounding.

In a study conducted among women in Moshi, Kilimanjaro Region whose objective was to explore attitudes and beliefs which underlie female circumcision and the importance associated with the said practice, Chugulu, et al. (1998) found the following as principal factors:

uncircumcised woman would become wild and her sexual urge would be uncontrollable and that babies born of uncircumcised woman would die and that genital cutting reduces promiscuity apart from preserving virginity.

Massawe (1983), likewise, noted that among the Chagga, all women who were not circumcised during their childhood were required to circumcise after marriage, even if one is pregnant. In Kilema Village, Moshi District, Kilimanjaro Region, female circumcision is mandatory because it was said to prevent diseases of genitalia, diminishes sexual desire and ensures fertility as it was believed that circumcised women would give birth easily without labour complications.

Even those studies (Siberschmidt, 2003; Haram, 2003; 2004) which are not directly concerned with female circumcision, they are likewise characterised by the same approach, namely

positivism, ahistoricism and cultural relativism and are devoid of a scientific conception of capitalism and its consequences to the African social fabric.

Yet, we learn from experience that the social world in which we live is a composite of two worlds, namely, the world of *appearances* and the world of *essence*. However, this relationship between form and essence must not be viewed as two distinct, separate and ontologically different entities existing independently of each other; rather they need to be seen as two elements of reality which mutually affect each other to produce a reality. The former exhibits and expresses the phenomena which are subject to sense perception that is they are the kind of things which we can see, hear, touch, smell and feel. Most frequently, these are the types of phenomena which we encounter on a daily basis and it is on the basis of their perception and conceptualization at the empirical level that human beings are able to make sense of the nature of the world surrounding them so that in the process they are ultimately able to construct descriptive concepts and theories about it.

Conversely, the same social world possesses internal properties which are qualitatively different from their physical features which are not easily susceptible to the human senses and these are none other than social relations, processes and forces which are hidden under them. Although non-empirical, these structures have some objective features which can be discerned and studied scientifically and this is precisely the task of the science. The social structures have an independent existence which is “experienced” as external to human beings. They act on human beings by pressurizing, limiting and constraining their behavior. They are products of social relations which, in turn are themselves the product of not the ordinary individuals in a given society, but the most powerful people based on gender, class, ethnicity and age. While human beings construct social structures, the task of science is to deconstruct them and in the absence of experiments, through the power of abstraction, social scientists with the aid of analytical concepts and theories, are able to go beyond the appearances so as decipher the inner kernel of the social world. More importantly, it is these social structures which constitute the causal factors of the observable phenomena and not otherwise. Bhaskar (2009: 71) has this to say in that regard:

*“... the objects of scientific investigation are structures, not events; and that such structures exist and act independently of the conditions of their identification, and in particular in open and closed systems alike. These structures are non-empirical but empirically identified transfactually efficacious but only contingently manifest in particular outcomes and they form the real ground for causal laws.”*⁵

In like manner, the social factors that are responsible for the low status accorded to female gender in Tanzania in particular and Africa in general cannot be discerned by merely describing and eliciting the traditional African values, beliefs and customs which used to constitute the bedrock of the African social system in the past. Nor can we understand the upheavals, social penury and crises which afflict women *per se* either in the so-called “domestic domain” or in the “public domain” by invoking the hackneyed forces of “patriarchy”, “globalization” and

⁵ R. Bhaskar (2009) *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*. London: Routledge, p.71.

“modernity”. Although these could be the precipitating factors, they do not constitute the causal factors.

The above approach can be faulted on a number of counts, one being that it privileges individuality at the expense of the community. But the most telling one is that by concentrating on the empirically verifiable phenomena such as indices of “women” subjugation by “men” or “patriarchy”, the pauperization and marginalization of women with complete disregard for the larger capitalist structures which are known to be the causal factors of these indices; the meaning of these indices are divorced from the objectively shaped system of social production and the associated dominant social relations of production. And since they cannot go beyond the “objectivity” of facts, no light is ever thrown upon the causes of the social facts so observed. As a result, the indices regarding women subjugation are made to appear as “natural facts” and characteristics caused by “men” and “patriarchy”. But we are reminded that although it is true that science deals with facts, the study of facts must not be limited to the superficial description of “women” subordination. We need to heed the injunction of George Lukacs who asserts:

The historical character of the ‘facts’ which science seems to have grasped with such purity makes itself in an even more devastating manner. As the products of the historical evolution, they are involved in continuous change. But in addition, they are also precisely in their objective structure products of a definite historical epoch, namely, capitalism. When ‘science’ maintains that the manner in which data immediately present themselves is an adequate foundation of scientific conceptualization and that the actual form of these data is the appropriate starting point for the formation of scientific concepts, it therefore takes its stand simply and dogmatically on the basis of capitalist society. It uncritically accepts the nature of the object as it is given and the laws of that society as the unalterable foundation of ‘science’.

In order to progress from these ‘facts’ to facts in the true meaning of the word it is necessary to perceive their historical conditioning as such and to abandon the point of view that would see them as immediately given: they must themselves be subjected to a historical and dialectical examination.⁶

The second shortcoming is its Eurocentrism. Mainstream feminism has tended to develop general knowledge and universal concepts, which are embedded in 19th century Victorian English experience as well as in a philosophical tradition of abstract individualism, inappropriate universalism and excessive particularism. These universalistic assumptions, which are characteristic of western, thought in general and the attendant descriptive theoretical categories, have provided an ideological justification for western colonial and economic dominance.

In like manner, and it is precisely because of this, in investigating the present underdeveloped social formations, mainstream feminism takes the prevailing peripheral capitalist system and the associated social assumptions for granted and has introduced social categories and concepts

⁶ Lukacs, Georg *History and Class Consciousness*. London: Merlin Press, 1971., p.7.

which are entirely empty of social and historical content⁷. It is due to this reason that George et al. (1990: 24) have attacked Eurocentrism for the creation of “mental captivity” among the educated elites of the underdeveloped countries as well as for transposing inappropriate social categories to the “other” societies:

.... the more damaging inequality promoted by Eurocentric social science disciplines probably arises from the borrowing of categories and constructs meaningful and valued in western contexts and transposing them in other contexts where they are less meaningful and less valued.⁸

In this way, mainstream feminism has tended to treat social phenomena like marriage, household, and traditional culture not only as real entities, but also outside their historical and social contexts. These, in turn, are abstracted from society and are then taken as universal categories of social life instead of European categories relevant to a particular European society and expressing certain concrete social relations at a particular time. Even when the relations between, say, a husband and wife as expressed in the actual conjugal bond or that between father and son in different family systems are taken into consideration, these relations and the associated family systems are judged to differ from one another in unessential form⁹ only. Not infrequently, they are evaluated not in historically determined social terms, but in reference to abstract models (particularly those developed in Europe and North America) which are felt to be of prior logical importance and *prima facie* evident.

The tenor of this paper is that it is neither the traditional African customs nor the so-called patriarchy which constitute the causal factors of women domination and subordination in Tanzania; rather, the problem must be sought in the inner workings of the capitalist economic

⁷ The truth of the matter is that all theoretical concepts and categories – no matter how generalised in use - are historically rooted concepts. As C. Wright Mills once remarked, “many of the concepts most commonly used in social science have to do with historical transition from the rural community of feudal times to the urban society of the modern age: Maines’ ‘status’ and ‘contract’, Tonnies’ ‘community’ and ‘society’, Weber’s ‘status’ and ‘class’”. Thus, the use of terms such as “extended family” in describing African family structures is not only Eurocentric, but also, in my view, the expressions are totally devoid of social and historical content in so far as they neither express truthfully the structure nor the relations of the traditional African family systems.

⁸ Joseph, George Gheverghese, Vasu Reddy and Mary Searle-Chatterjee, “Eurocentrism in the Social Sciences”, in *Race and Class: Journal for Black and Third World Liberation*, vol.31, no.4, April-June, 1990, p.24.

⁹ Most anthropologists and sociologists are so much cooped up with bourgeois notions and categories dominant in their respective societies that they have always projected the same notions and values prevailing in their own cultures into other peoples’ cultures which they have studied because they have assumed them to be so self-evident. They have not critically examined the *essence*, *meanings* and *values* attached to certain relations between and amongst members of the household, clan or lineage which they studied. For example, in studying customarily approved Nyakyusa marriages, Monica Wilson speaks and discusses them in terms of “legal” marriages. Similarly, Richards defines and views marriage exchanges among the Mayombe in terms of “marriage payments” and “contract” – i.e. in typically Victorian terms! He says, “The *marriage payment* here performs different functions from those ascribed to the *lobola* of the patrilineal Bantu of East and South Africa, but it is an equally significant element of the *Contract*” (emphasis mine). See, Richards, A. I. “Some types of marriage structure among the central Bantu” in Radcliff-Brown, A. R. and Daryll Forde (eds) *African systems of Kinship and Marriage*. London: Oxford University Press, published for the International African Institute, 1950, p. 214.

Similarly, the English expression and meaning of father has been projected as the same all the time in every culture they studied. In this respect, fatherhood is the same in every culture – for it a matter of engendering. Likewise, motherhood, is the same in all cultures at all times and places because in its distinctive features, and its definition, it a matter of a child being born of, or engendered by, a woman. This perspective assumes that mother is mother the whole world over, and that mothers can be compared!

system which is the root cause of all social evils in the world today, including those associated with gender inequality, violence and sexuality. The essay postulates that to attribute gender inequality to traditional customs and values is a misnomer; it is to miss the point. For one thing, with the onslaught of Christian missionaries and the colonial state – today and yesteryear - and the attendant processes of commoditization, have rendered the African traditional societies *empty* of their *inner content*, and what we observe today are simply their *empty shell*. It will be argued that unlike the pre-colonial societies where the dominant instances where the political and the ideological, in a capitalist society today the economic instance is dominant as it controls the society directly. That at the heart of capitalism is the generation of surplus-value which constitutes its driving force; and this, in turn, explains its tendency towards homogenization of all aspects of social life through the process of commoditisation.¹⁰ The paper argues that unlike the pre-capitalist social formations, capitalism is a *totalizing* socio-economic system having a totalizing power which, while pervasive, yet the power itself has a *systemic* origin, a *unified* logic and quite identifiable *social* roots. Furthermore, while in the pre-capitalist societies, exploitation and domination were transparent as they were mediated by the extra-economic mechanisms such as the legal superstructure and the military; under capitalism exploitation and domination is *opaque*. Worse still is the fact that the way in which people experience capitalism is totally different from the manner in which the capitalist system works: the appearance forms of capitalism which people experience do disguise *new forms of power, coercion and domination* which capitalism engenders. We need, therefore, concepts which can penetrate the appearance forms of capitalism so as to decipher its underlying structures. To this end, the concepts of fetishism of commodities, reification and ideological hegemony will be employed in explaining the manner in which both men and women alike are estranged, exploited and dominated by capital.

On the one hand, the failure to understand the “inner connections” of the capitalist system and the manner in which it is related to the “external phenomenon” of life and, on the other hand, the inability to analyse the disposition of power to control the production process and appropriation of the surplus product, has always been the bane of feminist intellectuals and the associated NGOs. It will be posited that the struggle for gender equality is in no way antagonistic to the operation of the capitalist or market relations, nor does it contravene the sanctity of private property, both of which, are a necessary prerequisite for the functioning of capitalism. The paper ends up with a call for the abolition of capitalism as an essential condition for true liberation of women.

¹⁰ It may be recalled here for, the benefit of the reader, that inbuilt in the system of capitalism is to reduce everyone, including men and women alike, to a common denominator, namely a commodity. In the pre-colonial social formations, we never had such general and totalizing concepts such as women, men, students, teachers, children, rather each individual person’s identity was defined by kinship relations in accordance to his/her position and status in the social hierarchy in the lineage and village community in general. It is, therefore, a great theoretical flaw to read the capitalist principles and laws of motion of capitalism as they are exhibited in the present capitalist societies back into all history including the egalitarian societies – a feature very common among the bourgeois social sciences!

Roots of women's subordination: Some historical reflections

The subjugation of women and the corresponding phenomenon of gender inequality are not transhistorical phenomena, rather they are a product of certain social and historical conditions that were necessary for them to emerge and ultimately to develop into the form in which we now observe and experience. There are societies known in history where women were not subjugated, the 16th Montagnais communities of Labrador in Canada are such a case. According to Shokolow (2003), when the Jesuits met the Montagnais in 1492, they were surprised to find that parents had very little authority over their children as the latter could easily disobey them and no one could punish them for their misdeeds. Among other queer features which the Jesuit fathers found among the communities in general, was that the Montagnais people neither believed in hierarchy nor in obedience. According to Father Paul Le Juine:

They imagine that they ought by right of birth, to enjoy the liberty of wild ass colts, rendering no homage to anyone whatsoever, except when they like. They have reproached me a hundred times because we fear our captains, while they laugh at and make sport of theirs. All the authority of their chief is in his tongue's end; for he is powerful in so far as he is eloquent; and, even if he kills himself talking and haranguing, he will not be obeyed unless he pleases the savages." (Quoted in Shokolow, p.161.

As far as Montagnais women are concerned, these were characterized as "firebrands of Hell" due to what was stated to be:

"their haughty independence and sexual freedom. The Jesuits were shocked that Montagnais women could not conform to the subordinate role Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and God have chosen for them. The Montagnais women were the allies of Satan because they would not act meekly and obey their fathers and husbands." Shokolow, p.161.

That a number of influential studies (e.g. Gailey, 1987; Leacock, 1954, 1980; Rodney, 1972; Etienne and Leacock, 1980) have shown that the imposition of capitalism in the world in general, and Africa in particular, is directly linked to the subjugation of people generally with the specific subjugation and domination of women. They succinctly document that Christian Missionaries, state formation, and capitalism transformed the traditional structure of production by promoting commodity production and the associated capitalist relations of production as well as commodity relations. In so doing, they fundamentally altered the erstwhile kinship relations which were responsible for the prestige and high status of women.

In like manner, in Tanzania, a number of historical and anthropological studies on the pre-colonial social systems in Tanzania have succinctly shown the degree and the extent to which the onslaught of the Christian Missionaries and colonial capitalism had had profound consequences on gender relations. While in the pre-colonial society's women constituted an autonomous social entity, with the introduction of Christianity and colonialism women became subjugated and marginalized and their former traditions and prestigious status were undermined.

In her influential study on the Chagga, Hasu¹¹ has demonstrated how the African social system in the pre-colonial Chagga provided women with autonomy, especially in economic and cultural affairs and activities which were particularly internal to them. For example, she shows that the division of labour at the family level was clear-cut: there were economic and cultural practices which women had full control of and for which the male gender was not allowed to interfere. The production of milk and their utilization were under the control of the mother of the household. Likewise, initiation ceremonies for young girls were the sole preserve of women in Kilimanjaro. Above all, taboos and prohibitions were prevalent in the entire society to maintain good conduct. When the first Lutheran Missionaries arrived in Kilimanjaro in the early 1890s, they found this autonomy as outrageous, and programmes to eliminate it were initiated to match with men's supremacy which was the cultural norm in their mother country - Germany. Like their counterparts elsewhere in colonial Africa, apart from women's autonomy, the other major cultural practice which they regarded as abominable, and which they sought to circumscribe and eliminate in Kilimanjaro were initiation and ritual ceremonies related to child birth and marriage, polygamy and wife inheritance. The missionaries were all out to disorient the African people from their beliefs, taboos, prohibitions and the associated practices which maintained the traditional socio-economic system, and the end result is what we observe to date: chaos in every aspect of social life including the general subjugation not only of women but also of the entire African population. The Christian missionary activities, therefore, constitute an important phase not only in the processes of undermining and destroying the traditional African social system but also in negatively representing the African as primitive who needs to be civilized with Christian moral values and norms. But more importantly, they were an important and key precursor to classical colonialism which came to dominate the entire African Continent.

With *colonialism*, the pre-colonial societies were radically transformed: production was of commodities and even *labour-power* itself became a *commodity*. In order to obtain wage-labour a number of mechanisms were employed by the colonial state and these included, among other others, forced labour, taxation, recruitment as well as cash crop production (Shivji, 1986; Rweyemamu, 1973; Sabot, 1979; Iliffe, 1979; Honey, 1982; Mwaipopo, 1990; Oyewumi, 1997; Tamale, 2020). As men were absorbed into capitalist enterprises and public works as wage labourers and money became their new sources of income, power and prestige, women were increasingly confined to domesticity and subsistence economy. Despite the fact that women's work in the domestic sphere was essential as it subsidised the capitalists who paid the male labourers below the value of labour-power, their erstwhile roles were undervalued within the capitalist social context. Roberts (1984: 176) has offered a summary of the role of capitalism in subordinating women:

The intensification of female labour in peasant economies released male labour for the production of cash crops..... Their (women's) productive labour was intensified to ensure the subsistence basis of labour reserve areas

¹¹ P. Hasu (1999) *Desire and Death: History through Ritual Practice in Kilimanjaro*.

while their reproductive labour ensured the maintenance and reproduction of labour power at no cost to the capitalist wage.

Several processes which resulted in women's subordination were initiated. These included the intensification of commodity relations, restriction of people's rights to use subsistence resources, the transformation of goods and services into private property, and the founding of the social and political institutions to support the colonial social and economic relations. In the process, kinship rights became constrained, marriage rights restricted, and consequently, women's status and authority were undermined, and eventually yielded. Since then, there has been an intense struggle between the kinship sphere which wants to retain its traditional authority and the civil (public or the state) sphere which is continuously bent to destroy the former; the latter wants to control labour and migration towards the civil sphere. The result is that there is a continuous process of fragmentation of the kin sphere and, consequently, people's identity is shattered as a result of the polarization of the two spheres.

Since it is characteristic of capitalism to reduce everything [including human beings] to a common denominator, namely *commodity*, the market, etc., in the civil sphere people lose their identity. Thus, the kin-defined personhood was, and still is demeaned, the kin sphere became subordinated to the civil sphere. Those engaged in mental labour became more 'cultured', and lastly, people were valued according to their *utility*. In other words, it is colonial capitalism, to date and yesteryear, which is responsible for undermining, and ultimately, destroying the autonomy and esteemed status of women in Tanzania in particular and Africa in general.

It needs to be emphasized here that capitalism, in its neo-liberal phase characterized by commodification, privatization and marketisation of almost everything, is a system whose principal objective is to generate surplus-value and it will leave no stone unturned in pursuing this objective. It is no wonder, therefore, that extra-economic coercion of various kinds is being employed to pave the way for commoditization of the commons, which contribute to the livelihoods of the masses in Tanzania. These, include water, forests, fisheries, wildlife, and pasture.

In the recent past, we have witnessed a heightened assault of the violation of human rights on the masses of Tanzanians who, regardless of the sexual identities, have been subjugated to appalling and abominable social conditions as a result of militarization occasioned by the neo-liberal policies by the Tanzanian state. More recently, in 2013, three ministers: were forced to resign due to violation of human rights; land dispossession and social polarisation.

Capitalism and new forms of domination

The manner in which individuals under capitalism experience capitalism is completely different from the way capitalism works, as the experience is normally false experience. In this way, exploitation, oppression, social inequality and other forms of domination are obscured. Drawing on insights from Marx, Lukacs and Gramsci theorization, I seek to develop the thesis that capitalism as an all-embracing social system has its own type of rationality; that which creates false beliefs among the population, thereby maintaining and reproducing itself in the

process. To substantiate this, examples are drawn from Tanzania by citing the manner in which self-interest and individualism works.

In the pre-colonial class societies in Africa, like the Buganda and Buhaya Kingdoms in the present-day Tanzania, exploitation and oppression of the serfs by the landlords were transparent, and hence directly observable. Each member of the household knew the amount of labour days or rent in kind or in money one was obliged to discharge or pay to the landlord either weekly or monthly. Similarly, the legal and the military were ever present to enforce obligations due to the serfs or peasants who became recalcitrant.

One of the most fundamental issues was disclosed by Marx (1954) – and one which all along had been concealed by classical political economy, thereby making it impossible to explain the secret behind capitalist accumulation - was the social relations as well as the disposition of power that exist between the capitalists and the workers. However, under capitalism, exploitation is almost always camouflaged. Marx disclosed that what the worker sells to the capitalist is not their labour, but their labour-power and hence what they get in the form of a wage is not the equivalent for his labour, but for his labour-power. The wage may or may not express the value of his labour-power, yet what is definite is that it is not the payment of his labour.

Arising from the sale of labour power is what we get, that is the essence of capitalist relations: “the worker works under the control of the capitalist to whom his labour belongs” and hence the capitalist has the property rights of the products of what has been produced. It is this relationship which constitutes the pre-condition for the generation of surplus-value which is the driving force of the capitalist system. It is also a coercive force which compels the worker to work for the capitalist beyond the labour, which is necessary for the reproduction of the wage labourer himself. A clear understanding of this point is extremely crucial as it enables one to recognize the source of the sub-divisions of surplus value, the origin of profits, rent and interest, all of which are premised on the exploitation of the worker in the process of capitalist production.

Thus, on the surface of the bourgeois society, the form of the wage appears on the part of the capitalist as the price of labour, in other words, as a certain quantity of money which is paid for a certain quantity of labour. And from this, it appears as if inanimate things like machinery and buildings have the power of yielding profits; land is able to produce rent; and labour is able to yield the worker wages. What this amounts to, and this is crucially important, namely that a theory which proceeds from the assumption that the capitalist does pay for the labour which he receives and hence surplus value cannot be derived from the exploitation of workers on the ground that workers receive what they have contributed. In other words, that profit, rent and wages are the result of the role played by the means of production such as land, instruments of labour and labour in the production process, can only conceal the essence of the matter.

The sales of labour power and not of labour, and the reproduction of this social relationship as a dependent one on capital, therefore, constitute the core of Marx’s analysis as it is a concept which is inherently invisible on the surface. Thus, to go beyond this form of appearance becomes critical. However, this revelation has its corollary: the ability on the part of the

capitalist to maintain this exploitative relationship depends on the powers of the state which fosters the expropriation of the worker, the maintenance of private property for the capitalist, and hence absolute control over production and appropriation aided by the market relations which are inherently coercive.

Conclusion

The article prospect that the struggle for women's empowerment will continue because the systems that shape the struggle still exist. This is done by the conditions that systems create and generate to maintain this movement to be a myth rather than a real way to success. However, the article prospect also, that voice will continue on women's empowerment but success will remain in the process because the system also continues to create ideologies that demolish real emancipation.

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