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RESISTANCE TO WOMEN'S ETHNIC NARRATIVES IN TANZANIA: TWO PERSPECTIVES ON IDENTITY

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Abstract

Two Tanzanian activists, Ruth Meena and Elieshi Lema, resist identification with their local ethnic groups in deference to their identity formation with nationalism and feminism. Both maintain that ethnicity is a politically charged term based on a colonial construct that favors patriarchy and describes all women's ethnicity generically without questioning their positionality. Meena as a political scientist at the University of Dar es Salaam and Lema as a writer and editor of E & D Publishing, provide evidence for their professional roles having moved beyond ethnic boundaries due to their educational opportunities and the influence of feminist thinking. In the construction of their culture, as activists, scholars, teachers, and writers, they have re-imagined how to live their lives, so that they could actively participate in the struggle for nationhood, gender equality, educational access, economic independence and community development. Meena and Lema have also demonstrated through their writing of books and articles, the possibility for women to rewrite history with a different emphasis and orientation. *Keywords:* Ethnic Identity, Indigenous Education, Tanzania Education, Tanzania Women's Narratives, Tanzania Nationalism.

Introduction

After reading the life histories of women in the "*Unsung Heroines*" the omission of female narratives in African history takes on new meaning. Then following a close look at Susan Geiger's "Tanganyikan Nationalism as 'Women's Work,'" which emphasizes "the absence of Tanzanian women's biographies and life histories in historiography" (1996, 467), the issue of too few women subjects in history can be linked to the call by other women for a stronger female presence. But, an attempt to place heroines into history is complicated. At stake are the obstacles presented by pre-given social categories that ensnare an author trying to inscribe the lives of women into history (Nagar and Gieger, 2007), the questions about the narrator's reliability, upon whom the memories and conscious selection of the story depend (Ngaiza and Koda, 1991), and the collegial relationships that allow for a multi-vocal history to evolve. However, despite these caveats, I became engrossed in bringing fresh voices into what was, in the best sense, an open-

ended dialogue about women's ethnic identity. For me, the successful communication of another's life work - be it activism, scholarship, and/or teaching - has as its reward, the personal and professional connections that have been established and the potential for inscription into the pages of history.

The act of exploring the ethnic identity of Ruth Meena, a political scientist, teacher, and activist and Elieshi Lema, a writer, editor, and publisher, both of whom live in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, is a difficult subject to unpack. The conversations with Meena and Lema, and the supporting history of Tanzania provided by Dorothy Hodgson (2004), Susan Geiger (1996) and Aili Tripp (1999), reveal many issues involved for Tanzanian women when ethnicity is paired with an attempt to narrate a story about women's identity. From Hodgson, ethnicity has been called into question as one of the "categories of control" that signifies power within the "construction, negotiation, assertion, or denial of 'identities' " (12). Moreover, as she asserts, ethnicity is part of an "interconnection of gender and ethnicity," and as a category, ethnicity like gender, is integral to "axes of difference [that] interact over time to produce, reproduce, and transform one another" (14).

In following up on these relational complexities in this article, I focus on Meena and Lema's visceral resistance to any kind of women's ethnic narrative of Tanzania, investigate the historical evidence that elaborates the particularly thorny issues surrounding ethnic identity among women in Tanzania, and consider how to proceed with honoring the issue of ethnic identity for women in Tanzania in the future. As the process of sifting through these ideas unfolds, this article is organized around their interviews with Kate Parsons who traveled to Dar es Salaam in 2012, in order to record their stance on identity issues. From Meena and Lema's discussions, scholarly works that contributed to their thinking will also include their identification with nationalism and feminism, historical movements with which they strongly connected, each for her own reasons. Throughout my analysis based largely on Parson's interviews, the emphasis will be on how Meena and Lema chose to express issues of identity.

To begin the discussion of ethnic identity, Meena's interview on May 17th, 2012 is instructive. She said:

I do not think it is right to say that I am a product of my [local]ethnic identity . . . Whatever inspires me has nothing to do with my 'Chagga' identity. Most of my feminist friends agree. One has to make a distinction, if I go home I love my family but that is different than identifying with my whole tribe and letting that define who I am. . . I don't want people to mention it. . . My commitment is to women's liberation and also a very strong nationalism.

In resisting the Chagga as a central maker of her identity, Meena made two keys points about ethnic identity. One, she argued, as have other scholars before her (Mafeje 1971, Iliffe 1979, Ranger 1983, Lentz 1995, Hodgson 2001), that the concept of tribe is constructed. She maintained:

The Chagga Tribe was a colonial construct, just like all tribes that we now know of. The Chagga were not an exception. Not only did the German colonists aid in

the formation of these tribal groups, so did the pre-colonial anthropologists who came in with pre-conceived notions and biases of the ‘uncivilized natives.’ The colonists drove different kinships and clans into certain geographical regions, creating new tribes that united. One example would be the Chagga tribe. Colonists elected chiefs who led the tribes, drawing together different ethnic groups that often times had similar language characteristics, e.g., Bantu, Kushots, Nilots. (Parsons Interview with Meena, May 17, 2012)

Two, with even stronger words, Meena rejected any attempt to link her to an ethnic identity, because she considered an association with ethnicity as too politically motivated (Iliffe 1979, Tripp 1999). She said:

I simply do not believe in ethnicity as a central marker of my identity. In this urban context [this refers to life in Dar es Salaam], ethnicity is really only used as a political tool. . . people use it for their political aims. This is what happened during the colonial period with urbanization. When people moved into urban areas, there were no social networks so people needed each other for support. They formed ethnic groupings for a supportive network. (Parsons Interview with Meena, June 17, 2012)

As Meena underscored the connection she made between ethnicity and its use as a political tool with an example from, what she considered a male ethnic narrative. She maintained that men embraced their ethnic identities in order to keep in touch with their village roots and to gain support and votes. She said, “I have never in my life considered ethnicity as key in defining who I am, what I am, and what I believe in.” (Parson Interview with Meena, June 17, 2012). Meena’s rejection of an ethnic identity, because of her association with it as a social construction and as a political tool has support in various historical records. They include Valentin Mudimbe’s 1998 *The Invention of African Gnosis*, Amina Mama’s 1991 “Shedding the Masks and Tearing the Veils,” Frances Mascia-Lees, Patricia Sharpe, and Colleen Ballerino Cohen (1989), “The Post-Modernist Turn in Anthropology,” and Frantz Fanon’s 1959 *A Dying Colonialism*, all of whom Meena cited in one of her most influential research publications (Meena, 1992). During the nationalist period those fighting for independence used ethnicity when they needed to build their power base. According to C.K. Omari, leaders as well as political parties depended on an ethnic baseline, to strengthen their support and expand their control (1995, 69-70).

Meena’s rejection of a local ethnic identity developed at a very early age. She noted that even as a child her ethnicity was not a significant factor in her identity. In the interview with Parsons (May 17, 2012), she said:

From when I entered primary school, identification by ethnicity was never on my radar. I grew up in an environment in which nationalist institutions had been constructed by the nationalist movements involving those like President Nyerere. All of these institutions were created to rid us of our ethnic or tribal associations and give us a new sense of being.

Many scholars who have written that during the Nyerere years Tanzanians were strongly discouraged from using a local ethnic marker by which to identify themselves, have corroborated Meena's memories from her childhood. For example, Julius Nyang'oro (2004) states the extent of the sanctions against ethnic identity were evident from the "lack of explicitly ethnic data in official records" (10). The last census that recorded ethnicity as a category was in 1967. Nyerere's nationalistic project succeeded so well that Nyang'oro observed, as the political culture of Tanzania has evolved, "it is incredibly 'politically incorrect' to ask new or old acquaintances what ethnic group they belong to" (10). In her May 17, 2012 interview, Meena followed up on the sanctions against tribal associations by saying more about her early life experiences. She noted that where she was born was not influential to her identity, because like her daughter, she matriculated from schools where the official emphasis was not on separate social groupings. "My geographic location growing up had little to do with my identity . . . The [missionary] boarding school that I went to pooled many children from different places during that time. They came from Zambara, Tanga, etc..." (Parsons Interview, May 17, 2012).

In stark contrast to Meena's reluctance to associate with a local ethnic marker, she articulated many strong connections to herself as a nationalist and feminist. In her words, her rise from a primary school student to a professor of Political Science at the University of Dar es Salaam, to a leader in gender equity, and then to a citizen who invested her life savings to create a secondary school for aspiring university entrants, was not so much a result an association with her ethnicity as it was the result of mentors, such as Walter Rodney, John Saul, Lionel Cliffe and President Julius Nyerere, who instilled in her the idea that education for a few also translated into a debt these few owed their nation. As she stated, "First and foremost, I consider myself a nationalist" (Parsons Interview, May 17, 2012). She preferred that her achievements be foregrounded against an era when there was a deliberate effort to deconstruct local ethnic identity and establish nationhood. In other discussions with Meena, she recounted the importance of nationalism in her personal development at various stages of her education and wanted to be remembered for her innovative high school, RAIDA, that at its core promoted the values that she believed helped build the nation of Tanzania.

The depth of Meena's understanding of Tanzania's struggle for nationhood, including its urgent need for equitable educational initiatives and the need to document women's personal sacrifices as they faced momentous obstacles because of their political activism, was well articulated by Meena in "A Conversation with Bibi Titi: A Political Veteran" for the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (2003). Meena's research defined Bibi Titi's significance for activists during the Tanzanian independence struggle by highlighting the political acumen of Bibi Titi who understood the narrow paradigm of power. Bibi Titi used dance troupes that sang political songs and satirized colonial domination. And, in so doing, she demonstrated that these individuals "were being as much political as guerrillas, which organized military action against [the] colonial state" (Meena 2003, 140). Bibi Titi's central role was that "of recruiting and mobilizing both men and women into TANU membership" (147). Meena credits Bibi Titi with valuing nationalism more than her marriage and financial security and with having the courage to withstand the ruling party allegations that she had become a traitor.

Remarkably, despite having resigned from party membership in protest to the Arusha Declaration, and then being jailed and relieved of personal property, Bibi Titi continued to

support Tanzanian nationalism. By standing for her principals, Bibi Titi expressed her sense of nationalism within the context of her highly skillful experience as a participant in a movement that was entrenched in patriarchal political culture. According to the Meena, when President Nyerere requested that Titi co-author the nation's independence struggles, Bibi Titi rebuffed him by saying that he had already "encouraged the distortion of Tanzanian history by permitting individuals to eliminate the role which women played (including her own) in Tanzania's political history" (2003, 152).

As a staunch supporter of Bibi Titi and of early feminist theorizing in Tanzania, Meena's identity was strongly influenced by a reading group started by Marjorie Mbilinyi. Meena and other women were reading feminist literature, which Meena noted was not common at the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) (Parsons Interview, May 19, 2012). Meena elaborated that the 1970s at UDSM were a dynamic time. Revolutionary thinkers, such as Walter Rodney, taught her history, and their classes were vibrant. As she stated:

We students met and read Marxist literature, which inspired out critical thinking and class analysis. But, within that context, we were not able to articulate gender-related contradictions or women specific issues. Our male colleagues dismissed such issues as a Western bourgeois agenda. We had to take time to understand the social exclusion of women, even within the political economic/class analysis context. Women's issues became apparent to us as intellectuals and as they related to Tanzania particularly. (Parsons Interview, May 19, 2012)

Meena was part of the first workshop organized in September 1979 by Marjorie Mbilinyi, along with Ophelia Mascarenhas and Debra Byrson, to discuss feminist issues that fomented from the revolutionary studies at UDSM. Meena commented further that "[t]he workshop combined students and teachers—about 60 women. It was like a working session for women scholars to identify women specific issues within the political economy discourses. That was a very powerful experience" (Parsons Interview, May 19, 2012). In a paper given by Mbilinyi on gender issues at UDSM in 2000, Mbilinyi stated that that this particular workshop was an important historical marker at a time when women came together in solidarity to confront the male bias in educational institutions and in society at large and began to agitate for a radical transformation (2000, 12).

Meena recollected another important exposure to feminism occurred when she joined the Southern African Political Economy Institute to head a Gender Unit, which had initially been founded by Patricia Macfadden, a renown feminist activist in the region. While heading the Gender Unit, Meena formed a small group of scholars who contributed to her first publication on gender: *Gender in Southern Africa: Conceptual and Theoretical Issues*, a volume she edited, as the Coordinator of the Southern Africa Political Economy Series (SAPES) Trust in 1991. In this volume, Meena and her colleagues started to interrogate western scholarship on African women, particularly the approach that tended to disengage with the colonizing experiences of African women whose oppression, including being victims of colonial power, being part of a patriarchal culture that undermined their rights as equal citizens, and being part of the 'constructed Third World' marginalized by forces of capital exploitation. The scholarly contributions in this text contributed to the then emerging feminist critique of male dominance, and the writers laid claim

'over' the knowledge production that proposed pedagogic shifts promoting collaborative learning, sharing and producing knowledge. The central issues that were raised involved questioning who is the knower and are women knowers (Meena, personal communication, Nov. 5. 2011).

Throughout Meena's interviews, her remarks on feminism were punctuated with a critique of patriarchy that tried to define the boundaries for Tanzanian women. Many of the rules that men supported had the effect of alienating women, like Meena, from particular identifications, e.g., ethnicity, because they were associated with unfair practices. For example, Meena noted, "The cultural patriarchal values were never dismantled. When my dad passed away, his land was only divided between my brother and stepbrother, even though they never worked the land. I have 12 siblings, and only two brothers were qualified to have a right to my father's land, which my mother had been working throughout her life" (Parsons Interview, May 17, 2014). Moreover, what Meena found more appalling was that the men who held such values about family property were highly educated. In her family she narrated a story about an aunt whose daughter had to fight against her father who wanted to sell the family land, without their consent. When the daughter died, the male cousins wanted to refuse her burial on the land, so that even burying her on the family land was a contentious and dishonorable affair. In these distasteful circumstances, Meena identified lawyers and doctors among family who acted so foolishly. In response to these stories, Meena stated emphatically, "identifying as 'Chagga' had no real advantages" (Parsons Interview, 17, May 2012).

When Meena revisited her own early childhood years and linked a description of herself with a kind of feminist assertiveness, she narrated the following history:

I resisted patriarchy from a very tender age. When I finished class four, it was as if I were destined to get an education. My father had said "no" to my requests to go to school. But, I was determined to go. After I finished class eight, when my brother was not financially able to support me for secondary school, because he was studying theology, I looked for alternatives. I investigated the possibility of the native council sponsoring me. I did not tell them that my father did not want me to go to school. Instead, I told them that he was old and retired. I maintained that he did not have the income to support me going to school. I convinced them that I really wanted to go to school, and my local government sponsored me. (Parsons Interview, May 17, 2012)

In this experience, as with others Meena provided, her defiance of patriarchy comes through sharply. She did not allow herself to be bound by the males in her family nor the males with whom she came in professional contact. Rather, she chose to define many of the terms by which she lived and thereby gave voice to her own needs, which often times contradicted the categories by which others sought to confine her.

In addition to Meena's emphasis on the concept of ethnicity as a colonial construct and its use for particular political aims, i.e. for a male ethnic narrative, Elieshi Lema's resistance to a local ethnic identity focused on two other key issues: the problem with how the term ethnicity has been used generically to describe all women, and the question of how women's positionality in relation to where they live affects their identity. Importantly, both Lema and Meena regarded

themselves as Tanzanians, and although interviewed separately, they also both emphasized that their identity had been compromised by the fact that African ethnic groups were a colonial construct, and they were critical of its political use. Lema added to Meena's commentary that the Kilimanjaro area was exploited by colonialists who "group[ed] people, in order to divide and conquer" (Parsons Interview, May 22, 2012). The colonialists befriended chiefs so that they would fight each other for land. She remarked that enmity was created by the wars during colonialism among the people in the Western Kilimanjaro area, and this was part of the historical record documented in folk literature (Lema, personal communication, June 21, 2012).

In Lema's interview with Parsons on May 22, 2012 in Dar es Salaam, she problematized the discussion of women's ethnic identity in Tanzania by asking, "When you say women, are you talking about women writers? Women in politics? Women generally? Because it is no longer possible to talk of women, just like that." After requesting more clarification from her interviewer, Lema continued and said, "I am interested to know how you will reference which group of women you are studying. You need to go outside of a narrow frame of reference, because there are a lot of different social groups among Tanzanian women: professional women, village women, etc." (Parsons Interview, May 22, 2012). In a follow-up email, Lema elaborated that she interpreted conversations about ethnicity as "moving towards a redefinition of women's ethnicity - as shared groups' social traits, beliefs and culture" (June 21, 2012). She made it clear that she was not speaking of women as a homogeneous group, instead she envisioned various groups being involved with similar concerns, such as defining their beliefs, shaping culture, and framing stories about themselves. If the end result of thinking about women and their ethnicity meant that women were not considered as individuals whose identity was shaped by participation in many different groups and did not allow for women to define themselves, then Lema did not have anything to add to women's ethnic narratives in Tanzania. She wanted to refocus conversation around the ability for women to shape culture, to identify with home, to speak a local language, to negotiate within a rural or urban environment, and to express the fluidity in identity.

While thinking about her options, Lema gave an example of her own understanding of women's roles in shaping culture. She provided the following text that shows ways in which women negotiate in their environment:

One day, I asked my mother who is now 95, how women related with men during her youth and young womanhood. She laughed, then said, "Women could not sit and talk with men, and when a woman passed near where men sat, she asked for their permission to pass." I realized how very narrow the path of women within patriarchy has been and continues to be. But in the same breath realize how accomplished women have become over time in negotiating their way towards self-actualization within that very system. Looking at the evolving women's social landscape, I think there are two critical areas of constant negotiation: negotiation for space (outside the kitchen, the field and the water holes) in which women need to operate and influence society and advocate for equitable partnership in human development; and, a woman always negotiates for a path, alongside men or parallel to theirs, as she shapes her life as a woman, a professional, an activist, a mother and wife. (Lema, June 21, 2012)

In the process of Lema's theorizing on women creating a space and path in society, it became evident that by becoming a creative writer and publisher, Lema provided an example of women shaping culture. A press release for the Goteborg Book Fair refers to Lema as a "well known cultural name in Tanzania" (2010). Her accomplishments include authorship of children books, *Mwendo* and *Ndotoa ya Upendo*, short stories, such as "Tryst with Peril" and novels, *Parched Earth*. Her contributions to literature also involved her successful publishing house E & D Limited that she established in 1989 with Demere Kitunga. E & D Limited, known for its English and Kiswahili titles, children's books, and primary and secondary school textbooks, is committed to educating the public. Wendy Davies in "The Future of Indigenous Publishing in Africa" states Lema's goal as a publisher has been to create a reading culture, which provides relevant books whereby people can be helped to control their own lives and development. Others have said that Lema's writing, as well as her leadership in other critical development activities, is rooted in her feminist beliefs and in her advocacy of girls' and women's rights, which she frequently is asked to elaborate (2009).

From Lema's accomplishments and conversations, an obvious conclusion is that her sense of identity has very strong ties to feminism. Its influence helped shape her ideas on positionality as a key feature of her own identity. In theorizing on the complexities inherent in the concept of positionality, Mbilinyi (1985) wrote that positionality needs to be investigated in connection to locations, positions, and identities in significant social relations, because these aspects of positionality define who people are. Mbilinyi adds that the relations among variables, i.e., location, position and identity are "historical, changeable, subject to abolition and transformation through everyday happenings" (49). As a follow up to Mbilinyi's analysis, another example of Lema's interpretation of the women's social positions and the complexities inherent in the lives of females is provided in a short excerpt from her narrative, "Doreen Seko's Growth":

She told me that the world has very little to give girls for free, that they should never, *never* let people walk on their heads and kill their spirit before they know who they are. Mother talked generally about girls, as if I was different from the rest of them. She would talk about the life of a woman as if what she said affected her only generally. Later, after I was married I came to know that the life of a woman would be realized ultimately in relation to other women. She meant that my life should be a landmark for a girl growing up, or for others needing a role model. She was telling me that my life must strive to give meaning to others needing it. As a young girl, that world, my mother's, was far removed from the angle of my naïve lenses. Now, our lives converge, only the angle changing slightly to distinguish my situation from hers.

In this text, Lema's narrator explicates the dangers for a young girl in a world circumscribed by the actions of people who may want to "kill her spirit." Then, as part of coming of age, the narrator says that she came to understand that her life was positioned in relation to other women. By finding her place in the midst of other women, she realizes that her outward view provides different readings: her relationship to women, i.e. mother and daughter, may seem distant in one and close in another. These ideas regarding the changeable location and position of the narrator

bear out the significance that positionality has for Lema in her personal life as well as in her writing and publishing.

During the remainder of Lema's interview, in addition to her resistance to generalizations that detract from the ideas associated with positionality, she questioned why the notion of adherence to an ethnic narrative was even important. In speaking of *Parched Earth*, Lema stated that the narrative in her novel was not rooted in a grand concept of ethnicity but by the local culture in which she found herself as a writer. As she noted:

This is the culture I knew. And that is the culture I can describe, criticize, and analyze. But, it was not because I was committed to the ethnic narrative. It is really because that is where my legs were standing. That was the place that I could look around and say I really recognize these landmarks. (Parsons Interview, May 22, 2012)

As Lema continued to problematize ethnicity, she made an important distinction between living and believing in an identity that is linked to ethnic groups. She elaborated:

It is not a question of being committed. It is perhaps how women are exploring their social environments. Where are they? Where are they seeing themselves in order to get by? For example, if I say I am 'Chagga', what do I mean? What does the term carry, being Chagga? What does it mean externally and internally? If you are a Chagga, because you were born there; and you are a Chagga, because you believe in Chagga culture, and you live it, that is a difference. (Parsons Interview, May 22, 2012)

Here, the identification with Chagga is also complicated by the difference Lema finds in speaking of identity and home. She continues:

You see, identification is a word that is hard to define. I tell you, if I go home, I go home as a person. It is not a neighborhood. It is the place where all of my nuclear family was born. It is like I am going there and I feel home. It is completely normal. We share tea, beer, whatever . . . When we leave those areas, and we come to the city, that is when people identify as you are so and so. And, you must come from this tribe, because of the way you speak and express yourself. But for people like Ruth [Meena] and me who left home very early, we lost things as we mixed with others. We sort of achieved a blend of characteristics. (Parsons Interview, May 22, 2012).

As Lema suggests, in using terms, such as identity, the meaning is 'thick' not only in terms of how a particular person or group is being defined but also where a person (or group) is located - her roots. Most notably, Lema's sense of home is at the center of her own writing, as Irmi Maral-Hanak (2011) provides a critical look at Lema's creative output. One of Maral-Hanak's main points is that as the first Tanzanian author to highlight street children in a literary text, Lema's young adult novel *Prosopa's Journey* (1995) questions stereotypes about children and disrupts the myth of home as "a secure place for women and children" and "represents the complex inter-

relatedness and interdependence of present-day Tanzania rural-urban lives" (44). She also directs the reader to see that Lema subverts hegemonic constraints by giving voice to females who use speech acts to express power through analytical control. According to Maral-Hanak, Lema's female character, Sara, was given communicative power, and in her direct speeches she establishes herself as dominant over the boys and adults near home (46-49).

Two other additional problematic issues exist for Lema when she deals with her identity. First, she is very aware that the language in which she communicated as a child marked a particular social group that believed that Nronga was the first ancestor in the village. Lema was born on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro and the locals in her village spoke Kimachame. When probed for more specifics about her own ethnic identity, she declared:

Really, I think I would pick Tanzanian first. Because you see, I don't live in the Kilimanjaro region anymore. I don't speak my first language until I go there. I can't conduct a conversation, like the one you and I are having. I don't know whether that is something to be proud of or not, but that is a fact of life. So how can I call myself 'Chagga?' (Parsons Interview, May 22, 2012).

For Lema, as for Meena, being associated with Chagga is a highly charged connection, if for no other reason than there is no Kichagga language.

By having been bound to some degree to what has come to be known as the Chagga tribe [or society], Lema is proud of having defied its gender-specific rules. A story she related had to do with the passing of land to her in an extremely unusual manner. She said that it had only been possible, because her mother was a very progressive woman. Lema described two taboos she challenged:

I cut down banana plants, and I cut down the coffee trees to create space to build a house. Everyone said, "What? We want to come see for ourselves who has done that." That situation was so sensitive. I could not get any member of my clan to help me. I had to go and look for laborers outside my clan to help me cut down the banana and coffee trees. People were asking, "Who is she?" "How could she?" But, I built my house. Then, after my house was finished, people walking along the road came to me and said, "You've convinced me to send my girl child to school." One of the women said to me, "I am going to do everything I can so that my girl child can go to secondary school, even if it means selling coffee or selling my cows." So, I had made an impression. (Parsons Interview, May 22, 2012).

The suggestion of owning a home or property for Lema, involved a strong reaction to being identified with the "Chagga"; because, for Chagga women owning land was not possible. As she said, owning land on which to build a house is "COMPLETELY against 'Chagga' tradition. A girl cannot own land. Land is so critical that men fight over it" (Parsons Interview, May 22, 2012).

Second, another problematic issue for Lema in attempting to discuss a construct that links identity to ethnicity is the distinction among women based on whether the locality with which

they were identified is rural or urban. According to Lema, 80% of the women in Tanzania are rural and 20% are urban and ethnicity in these spaces is referenced differently. For her, adherence to ethnicity was apparent in rural areas. She noted in the rural area, “people’s circumference of life is their ethnic position. They haven’t mingled. Mingling happens in towns. Back in the village, there is very little mingling” (Parsons Interview, May 22, 2012). Julius Nyang’oro wrote, “migration among Tanganyika’s population was widespread both before and after the establishment of the colonial rule (2004, 9). As he argued, before colonialism migrations were the result of inter-tribal conflict; after colonial rule demand for laborers necessitated migration; and both migration and assimilation among different groups was commonplace in much of the region. And though Lema suggests that “rural people haven’t mingled” much, in fact, few people in Tanzania are unaffected by the movement of groups who were forced to adjust to changing material conditions and seek safety in more stable and beneficial surroundings.

For Lema whose history, as she said, involved being born in a certain village and attending a Catholic school up to age four, going to another village in standard five, moving in secondary school to another part of “Chagga” land, and then locating in a city, challenges the possibility for a simple ethnic narrative. Lema sees her history as one in which she had to adapt to new surroundings, and in the process, her sense of identity changed. Her perspective is that her identity ought to be understood in terms of a fluid rather than a static concept of ethnicity. Lema added to the dimensions of identity by saying, “Then I marry a man from the other side of Tanzania, Bukoba. So, where is me? Where is me, really? Now, my children, where are they? They can’t possibly say they are anything other than Tanzanians” (Parsons Interview, May 22, 2012). The concept of so-called ethnic identity continually changes, and Lema sees evidence of fluidity from the days of independence to contemporary times. In her interview, she noted that President Nyerere tried to remove tensions among ethnic groups in Tanzania. She said:

Nyerere tried to remove the tension to the extent that everyone was called ‘Ndugu.’ Ndugu is an expression that suggests that everyone is a brother. . . We looked at ourselves as Tanzanians only. And, anywhere and everywhere, and we still do, but that is eroding. It eroded as soon as the free market was established. Everybody for themselves, the individual. (Parsons Interview, May 22, 2012)

As Lema discussed the change in identification among Tanzanians, she made note that her children identify as Tanzanians but that constructions are changing. As Gisela Geisler writes about present day identity issues, her research describes a vibrancy and malleability that allows women, like Lema and her children, to move beyond their nationalist identities. She writes, “Women who joined nationalist movements . . . were part of a new generation of urban African populations [that] equipped women to move beyond ethnic boundaries to a more trans-ethnic identity as Africans” (2004, 39).

Although the discussion of women’s ethnic identity in Tanzania above is an historical interpretation by two highly educated Tanzanian women who were born in the Mt. Kilimanjaro region and who resisted claims to ethnicity as a central marker of their identity, the larger, more complex historiography surrounding women’s identity issues still needs discussion and documentation. A worthwhile extension of such research into history is to ask what still needs to

be done, so that women are more fully integrated into the literature. A concrete approach to this question is to follow up on Meena's advice in her chapter on Bibi Titi (2003), where Meena asks what are the lessons for women that can be drawn from Titi's political experience. Meena's response is that women ought to document their experiences for themselves and for future generations. However, the documentation of women's experience is not a suggestion that what is needed are just more narratives about women's experiences as part of an historical record, rather the implication of Meena's response is more subtle and might well be the refrain stated by Ifi Amadiume (1997):

As African scholars, we must commit ourselves to rewrite history with a different emphasis and orientation. This is already in progress, with African scholars devising new methodologies and historiography in African Studies, such as oral account, other non-documentary evidence, and a different and more relevant yardstick of culture and civilization. (91-2)

Amadiume points directly to the constructions of culture in which Meena and Lema have engaged as they sought to make sense of their surrounding communities. Indeed, they committed themselves to re-imagining how to live their lives, so that they could fully participate in the struggles for nationhood, gender equity, educational access, economic independence, and community development. Thus, they are women who as activists, scholars, teachers, and writers played an integral part of feminism and life history, as Geiger (1996) maintains. They have become critical to historical reconstruction, as they have actively participated in the collective reconstitution of the meaning of women's social experience (Geiger, 6).

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