

EMPOWERMENT POWER: NGOS AND FEMINISMS IN DAR ES SALAAM

by

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Abstract

In this thesis, I examine circulating discourses of “women’s empowerment” in Dar es Salaam, one of Africa’s urban epicentres of NGOization. Through the ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted in Dar es Salaam’s NGO sphere from May to August of 2016, I illustrate why development critique and intersectional feminisms must emphasize agency and variation, and avoid falling into binaries and Eurocentrism. Based on participant observation in “local” and “expat” circles, and formal interviews with Tanzanian NGO workers, I address the following questions: how does development discourse in Tanzania use tropes of women’s empowerment? Whom do these discourses serve? In what ways do participants’ comments on development speak to their geopolitical locations, race, class and gendered positionalities?

I argue that “empowerment” language is easily co-opted to obscure structural inequalities among international and local agents, as well as the state and its citizenry. I caution against simplistic and prescriptive applications of critiques of “Western” development activities and white liberal feminism in an analysis of how empowerment discourse too often produces narrow images of power, recognizing that empowerment discourses are strategically activated within differing contexts and must be examined in their particularities.

Lay Summary

This thesis engages with critiques of Western development and White liberal feminism in the context of the NGO scene in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. It deconstructs the goal of “empowering women,” asking what this term really means and how power dynamics operate within this discourse between the “international” and the “local,” as well as between local hierarchies in this context. I draw upon the fieldwork that I conducted in Dar es Salaam from May to August of 2016 in order to identify the struggles of local NGOs and NGO workers, and to explore what these difficulties can tell us about how structural and interpersonal dynamics are affected by geopolitical location, class, race, gender, and other intersections.

Preface

This thesis is an original intellectual product of the author, Emily Allan. The fieldwork that underwrites it was approved by the UBC Behavioral Research Ethics Board, under Certificate Number H15-03446, and by the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH), under permit number 2016-270-NA-2016-90. All names of participants have been changed to protect anonymity.

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Dedication

For papa.

Introduction

If you have never been to a major African city and your image of Tanzania comes from popular media, your Facebook feed, travel blogs, or classic ethnography, you might be expecting me to set the scene for this thesis with a dramatic narrative of my arrival into village life or a romantic description of a desert landscape, as written from the front seat of a safari jeep. If so, I am sorry to disappoint you. I could tell you the story of my exhausted arrival at Julius Nyerere International Airport, or of how I sweat through two hours of traffic fumes while trying to locate my apartment in Tanzania's largest city with scant directions from an Airbnb listing, and eventually had to borrow my taxi driver's cellphone to call for help. Instead, I will begin by explaining that Dar es Salaam, where I conducted my fieldwork from May to August of 2016, is one of the largest cities on the African continent, with a rapidly growing population of over 5 million and several booming industries. Perched on the middle of the Swahili Coast, Dar, as it is popularly known, is a vibrant economic, political, and cultural port-hub of East Africa, and it has long been at the centre of the NGOscape of development and gender movements in Tanzania.

Much of my participant observation as a fledgling ethnographer involved sitting in traffic and chatting with *Bajaji*¹ or Uber drivers (who were thrilled to hear that we lack this service at home in Vancouver); bartering for groceries at local markets or shopping at the heavily air-conditioned Food Lovers;² hanging out with friends at upscale bars and restaurants in Masaki or at *shisha* bars,³ watching music videos projected onto big screens; and either eating *mihogo* and

¹ Three-wheeled motorized rickshaws imported from India.

² An upscale grocery store – essentially a South African-based Whole Foods.

³ *Shisha* bars were shut down during my fieldwork by the new government headed by president John Magufuli, who was elected in October of 2015.

*mishkaki*⁴ from my favourite vendor at Coco Beach, or the best *chips mayai* in the city.⁵ In the early evenings, I would often jimmy the lock to the roof of my dusty pink National Housing Corporation (NHC)⁶ building to take in the sunset. This ritual was accompanied by a symphony of rush hour honks (which lasted much longer than an hour), the roar of *boda-boda*⁷ engines below and airplanes above, the chain-reaction barking of neighbourhood dogs, the muffled call to prayer from a nearby mosque, the clinking of dishes in surrounding kitchens, and the low rumble of regulars' voices above the sizzling grill at the outdoor restaurant next door. This city is nicknamed “Bongo” (“brain” in Kiswahili) because it is said you need a good one to survive in it, but “Dar es Salaam” translates roughly to “home of peace.” I felt this peace most deeply while I stood atop my roof as the bustle slowed, the cityscape dimmed through its nightly gradient to a deep indigo, and the air cooled with the breeze rustling through palms from the Indian Ocean. I could hear waves from here only at this time of day, once the sky had silenced some of the sounds of the city. My neighbour Esther, a cousin of friends in Dar, teased me when I invited her to partake in this sunset ritual with me, saying, “That is the Whitest thing I’ve ever heard.”

My life in Dar was spent largely with middle or upper-middle class urbanite Tanzanians and with other “expats.”⁸ The latter circle was made up of my roommates and their friends, some new to Dar and some who had been there for years. Our neighbourhood, Seaview, sat just north of the affluent and largely South-Asian neighbourhood of Upanga, a short *dala dala* ride to

⁴ Cassava and beef skewers, respectively.

⁵ Chips Edo in Namanga, for the record. *Chips mayai* is essentially a French fry omelette.

⁶ The National Housing Corporation (NHC) is state-owned housing, much of which was sold off in a flurry at the end of the Ujamaa socialist period to wealthy Tanzanians investing in real estate.

⁷ Motorcycle taxis – a cheap and popular way to get around the city besides taking the *dala dala* (van buses).

⁸ A term I am wary of for its selective application.

Posta, the downtown business core.⁹ This location was helpful for traveling to NGO offices, which were often based in more affluent areas of the city. While most *wazungu*¹⁰ live in the wealthy neighbourhoods of Masaki and Oyster Bay on the city's peninsula, my Seaview apartment was home to a rotating roster: Canadian development workers, American archaeologists, a German volunteer at a local hospital, and an Indonesian who was working in marketing for a food company. Because some of my roommates and their friends worked for international NGOs, I was uniquely and precariously positioned for my research. I could write an entire ethnography on "the expat experience" in Dar, discussing the separation of social circles within the city and the commonly-held stereotypes and attitudes about "local" life, but this will have to wait. My location among "expats," however, shaped my understanding of the dynamics between foreign and local, and how these play out at the individual level. Living an "expat" life was simply my reality.¹¹ It would have been pretentious on my part to try and do otherwise, particularly in a stratified urban context where my Whiteness was a visible marker of wealth.

Though my distinctly privileged experience of Dar might mislead you to think otherwise, poverty levels in Tanzania are high and widespread. It is one of the most "aid"-dependent countries in the world, receiving over two billion dollars in foreign aid every year.¹² Most Tanzanians live outside of cities and rely on agricultural production, facing much higher levels

⁹ Named for the main post office.

¹⁰ *Wazungu* (plural of *mzungu*) generally means White people; although, as I will discuss, it sometimes gets applied to non-White foreigners as well, as it was to a couple of my roommates.

¹¹ See Passaro 1997 for a discussion of "village epistemologies" and persistent anthropologist-as-adventurer tropes.

¹² I use "aid" in scare quotes to refute the benevolence this word connotes. As one of my Tanzanian friends once put it, "it's not aid if you expect something in return."

of poverty with less access to resources.¹³ However, with high unemployment rates and other challenges common to economically exploited contexts, life in Dar is far from easy for anyone, even the middle and upper-middle class urbanites who made up my research demographic. My interview participants were either employed as development workers at local and international NGOs, or else they worked in NGO governing bodies. Currently, on the global stage in development discourse and in Tanzania, the NGOscape is focused on one particular solution to poverty: empowering women. Many local and international NGOs provide programming aimed at empowering women economically, legally, politically, or “culturally.” Every NGO my research participants worked for was focused on providing this programming in some form. In this thesis, I ask the following questions: how does development discourse in Dar es Salaam use tropes of women’s empowerment, and whom do these tropes serve? What does empowerment mean beyond this rhetoric? What power relationships in terms of geopolitical position, race, class, and gender are present in the NGOscape and how do they manifest in the embodied experiences of NGO workers? I address these questions in several ways: first, by establishing the theoretical background; then, by describing the ethnographic context; and finally, by discussing how “empowerment” operates in relation to these spheres.

The project of empowering women has gained centrality in development discourse over recent decades, marking a new paradigm that has drawn critiques rooted in intersectional feminism and post-development theory. The beginnings of this shift can be traced to the mid-1970s when the United Nations declared its Decade for Women, prompting institutions and organizations worldwide to seek access to funding and international recognition by focusing their

¹³ According to the World Bank (2015), in 2012 almost 44 percent of mainland Tanzanians were living below the US\$1.25 international poverty line (slightly lower than the average for Sub-Saharan Africa), with the vast majority of the population clustered around the poverty line. It also showed urban-rural inequality to be increasing.

efforts on women and girls. As Kalpana Wilson explains, the Women in Development (WID) approach was based on both neo-classical economics and liberal feminism. The former assumes that “economic growth comes from the exercise of individual choice supported by the institutions of private property and the free market”; and the latter “emphasizes women’s capacity for rational thought and action and seeks equality with men in the public sphere” (Wilson 2015, 805). The focus on women’s empowerment gained prominence in the 1990s, around the same time that Third Wave feminism emerged in America and elsewhere, and it developed alongside the grand-scale neoliberalization of many economies in Africa, including Tanzania, during post-independence periods of deregulation, privatization, and free trade. Girls’ education, the integration of women into the labour force and public sphere, and women’s microfinance programs have all become central to this project (Wilson 2015; Karim 2011). In the Tanzania Development Vision 2025 of 1999, President Mkapa’s government announced its goal to end gender inequality within the next two and a half decades, a statement that inspired a variety of gender-based initiatives that continue today.

Also in the 1990s, feminist critiques that challenged the hegemony of Whiteness and heterosexuality within Western feminist movements began to gain prominence (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981; hooks 1981; Lorde 1984). Theorists in the 1980s had criticized scholarship that creates and victimizes an archetypal “third world woman,” discursively colonizing and homogenizing women in the Global South (Mohanty 1984). While these critiques have long been debated within anthropology, discourses of “women’s empowerment” in the development sphere continue to perpetuate the same problematic tropes. I decided to apply these critical frameworks in the context of the NGOscape in Dar es Salaam, working within the gap between feminist theory and development practice. Some NGO representatives I spoke with ran girls’ education

programs which aimed to address the relatively low rates of female education compared to their male peers, particularly in higher levels of education. Other NGOs engaged in microlending or financial and skills training for women. Some focused on women's rights advocacy and legal aid, addressing issues such as land inheritance laws, which were amended relatively recently to allow women to own property. Yet others were focused on ending gender-based violence,¹⁴ child marriage,¹⁵ and female genital cutting (FGC). It is rare for "expats" to work at local NGOs, although many are employed at international NGOs, where they are particularly overrepresented in leadership positions. It is common, however, for Tanzanians to work at either international or local NGOs. My interview participants were middle or upper-middle class, university-educated, English-speaking, Black Tanzanians. This positionality, which is representative of the local NGOscape demographic, is somewhat unique within the development literature, as it is often erased in overly-simplistic conceptions of the 'local.'

"Development" is a broad and loaded term. It often eludes definition, as it is used in the literature to refer to a range of ideologies and activities. Though they are deeply related, there is a distinction to be made between the ideology of development-as-progress and the sets of development policies and activities that focus on the alleviation of poverty and betterment of living conditions. While development ideology can be traced to European Enlightenment notions of progress and modernity, most development critique specifically refers to the theories and practices that have crystallized to mean "development" in the post-World War II era (Sachs 1992; Ferguson 1994; Escobar 1995; Rahnema and Bawtree 1997). And while there is a

¹⁴ A report from the National Bureau of Statistics (2011) found 40 percent of women had experienced gender-based violence as an adult, and 10 percent reported that their first sexual experience was against their will.

¹⁵ The HIV/AIDS and Malaria Indicator Survey (2008) found 40 percent of women (age 20-49) had been married before the age of 18. It was legal until 2016 in Tanzania for girls to be married at the age of 14, with parental consent. While Constitutional Court ruled marriage under the age of 18 to be illegal, an appeal has since been filed.

difference between ‘aid’ (bilateral funds ‘given’ from states or inter-state organizations), NGOs (which can be foreign or locally based), and grassroots movements (often explicitly political in nature), these are frequently conflated within discourse around ‘development’ as an umbrella-concept, as well as being practically connected through funding structures and operation.

I use the categories of “West,” “Global North/Global South,” and “Africa” in this thesis reluctantly. I am caught between my desire for specificity and the fact that “West” and “Africa” were ubiquitous in my conversations in Dar, as were White and Black, and these terms were often invoked as binary oppositions and mapped onto each other. These spaces are constructed. They do not have rigid or static boundaries, but they have taken on specific meaning in people’s lives and understandings of the world. Although these categories are general and reductive, their usage reflects how complex and fluid concepts are often *experienced* in generalized ways and articulated in common conceptions on the ground.

In framing this discussion, I also want to note that my research was undertaken at a somewhat dramatic political juncture in Tanzania. A new government, led by President John Magufuli of the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), came into office in October 2015, six months before I arrived in Dar. Since his election, President Magufuli has been trying to administer his own impunity, and civil society has been shrinking as a result. After decades of relatively democratic rule, this is quite a change for Tanzania. During my fieldwork, Tanzanians were very skeptical of Magufuli’s decisions, particularly since his economic policies have caused drastic economic hardship for many, but were wary of expressing criticisms publicly. “Right now you really have to be careful what you say,” one participant told me, “or it might be used against you.” There were rumours about phones being tapped and people being punished for speaking out. Whether these stories were true or not, they produced real and palpable fear. None of my

participants used Magufuli's name, instead saying things like "you know...the guy," or "the new government." This felt particularly eerie when I interviewed government workers in offices with large portraits of Magufuli watching over us. Though I also heard many irreverent and humorous comments about the new president, I learned early on in Dar that he was not a good topic for small talk with strangers; my chatter with an Uber driver one night fell awkwardly silent when I made the kind of flippant political joke people made in private or among friends. Although some people were much more forthright about their political opinions than others, this silence rung throughout my fieldwork. This political tension affected what could and could not be spoken about, particularly when discussing the political goals of the state in terms of its relationships with donor countries and institutions. Some participants also saw the shrinking civil society space as a huge potential challenge to NGOs. Many in the civil society sphere were particularly apprehensive about how the government could affect organizations that dealt with human rights defense, or advocacy groups that challenged laws or oppressive systems.

While Magufuli's election cast a shadow over my fieldwork, the political situation at home was also frightening. I started writing my thesis during the election of an openly racist, Islamophobic, misogynistic, homophobic, and transphobic American president, who came into power a few months after I returned from Tanzania. In the past year, the President has emboldened bigotry not just in America, but in Canada as well. In particular, White supremacy and White nationalism is showing itself openly in ways it has not for decades.¹⁶ Conversations about race, Whiteness, and feminism have taken on a distinct urgency in recent months. In this increasingly polarized political moment, early post-colonial and feminist interventions are being

¹⁶ As evidenced, for example, by recent White supremacist and KKK rallies throughout North America, notably in Charlottesville, Virginia, in July of 2017.

embraced by many in the mainstream, especially through online feminist activism.

Intersectionality is being discussed in new contexts, and this is exciting and important. However, as with anything that becomes popularized, intersectionality is now subject to misinterpretation, co-optation, and dismissal based on misunderstanding. For me, there is a tension between the importance of accessible knowledge and widespread understanding, and the danger of essentializing an anti-essentialist concept, to which feminist ethnographers have worked for decades to give more depth, nuance, and contextual specificity.

With this positioning and these distinctions in mind, I hope that the information I gathered on the NGOscape in Dar will be useful to my participants and their circles, that it will help those in positions of power within development institutions understand the effects of their decisions, and that my reflections on empowerment discourse will be useful to those who engage in development in any capacity. I root this research in critical development theory, in which I both use and separate myself from a post-development stance; intersectional feminist theory; and critical race theory, particularly as it relates to my experience as a *mzungu* in Dar.

I often see, both in mainstream discourse and in anthropology, rejections of intersectional feminist interventions or poststructuralist critiques on the grounds that they are totalizing, “divisive,” or not informed by ethnographic data. I challenge these rejections, remaining engaged both with post-development’s critique of modernizing trajectories, and with critiques of White or liberal feminism. I argue that in the context of women’s NGOs in Dar es Salaam, “empowerment” operates in several ways. First, while critiques of “empowerment” discourse (in both Western and Tanzanian academia) rightfully point out that Western feminism and development often operate on notions of “empowerment” which are limited to liberal notions of power and autonomy, I caution against a prescriptive application of this critique. Indeed, my

participants articulated their understandings of “empowerment” to me in familiar terms of economic freedom and individual autonomy, which of course manifest differently according to context. Second, “empowerment” programs face several structural restraints not only for their intended recipients, but for the NGOs themselves, particularly if they are locally-based. While the same language of “empowerment” is used to describe the putative relationship between international and local organizations, similar power dynamics and paternalistic attitudes are present in the donor-to-international organization relationship. Finally, just as it can obscure global dynamics of power and donor interests, the language of “empowerment” between international and local NGOs elides the reality of local NGOs’ limited capacity and access to funding, and by extension their ability to act in ways informed by grassroots understanding.

Notes on Methodology

My methodological framework draws on Dorothy Smith’s conception of Institutional Ethnography, that is, locating larger translocal structures of power in people’s everyday embodied experiences (2005). Clearly, development and feminism do not simply operate as imperialist impositions along a Colonizer/Colonized binary. But how does “empowerment” fit within this understanding of power? Drawing on Dorothy Smith, Chandra Mohanty posits that centring *relationship* “emphasizes the process or form of ruling, not the frozen embodiment of it” (2003, 56) and stresses the interconnectedness of histories and their importance to solidarity across power asymmetries. I would suggest, as Mohanty does, that “we understand race, class, gender, nation, sexuality, and colonialism not just in terms of static, embodied categories but in terms of histories and experiences that tie us together – that are fundamentally interwoven into our lives” (2003, 191). Anthropologists like Lila Abu-Lughod have stressed the importance of being aware of this interconnectedness when we think about our contextual positionalities as

ethnographers (1990). As a White Canadian of European descent,¹⁷ I am situated as a beneficiary of an ongoing history of colonialism and global inequality. Canada has a long legacy of imperialism in Tanzania (and across Africa), in addition to being a settler-colonial state. Political scientist Yves Engler (2015) traces this history from the British colonial period that Canada supported politically, economically, and militarily; to the post-independence period in which Canada's "aid" money was used for Canadian military training of Tanzanian forces; to Canada's support of Structural Adjustment Policies in the 1980s-1990s; and finally to current violence and displacement at the hands of Canadian extractive industries and free trade agreements.

Power asymmetries between Global North and African countries are often elided by what Nigerian-American writer Teju Cole has coined the "White saviour industrial complex" (2012), within which "aid" and development can mask the realities of political and economic exploitation with a banner of benevolence. Ideologies of White saviourhood manifest explicitly and insidiously, and I have noticed them and their benefit to me having now worked in Tanzania twice. I first came to Tanzania in 2013, when I spent two months doing a university group research program near Arusha. That trip inspired the idea for this research, and introduced me to friends who live in Dar es Salaam. Though I have been a student and a researcher rather than a development worker, I have still encountered the attitude from countless people at home that my mere presence in an African country, regardless of what I am doing, is *de facto* generous.

The ethics of conducting research in East Africa is something with which I continuously grapple. I do not view my participants as victims of an inherently exploitative academic enterprise (see Smith 1999), but as agents who chose their roles in this research. However, I am

¹⁷ During a previous trip to Tanzania, when discussing colonialism with a friend from Arusha, I realized with a jolt that I have both German and British ancestry. These were Tanzania's two colonizers.

well aware that anthropology in Africa emerged in tandem with the colonial project and was used by Europeans to fabricate a racist justification of imperialism (Asad 1973), and that the social science that developed in the United States has played a role in securing contemporary American hegemony (Khalili 2011, 67). My own position as a researcher is embedded in these historic relations of power, privilege, and situated knowledge (see Haraway 1988). As Anthropologist Laleh Khalili writes,

we – as persons and researchers – are always situated in a complex web of relations whose evenness, density, and depth are shaped by and reproduce asymmetries in access to intellectual, social, political, and economic resources (2011, 66).

These webs are neither static nor bound, and they are mediated by relationships. My situatedness within them is relevant to my later discussions of intersectionality and Whiteness, and how these concepts function within feminism, development, and anthropology.¹⁸

My positionality frames this thesis in a certain light and within several limitations; the most glaring of these pertains to language. Though I had a basic grasp of Kiswahili and received two weeks of intensive language lessons upon my arrival, and though my interviews were conducted in English, language remains a barrier to my understanding of the context at hand, and of Tanzanian development and feminist scholarship. Although much has been published in English, there are relevant works in Kiswahili that I cannot access. On another level, ideas do not always translate with all their nuance. Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has written at length about this issue of translation and its relation to the politics of Anglo-hegemony in his influential *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986). I draw on African scholarship from outside of Tanzania partially because of these limitations and partially for ontological reasons. While I am cognizant of

¹⁸ There are many more intersections beyond race, class, nationality, and education, that I (a cishetero, able-bodied, Anglophone, settler-Canadian) cannot adequately address in this thesis, though they are certainly relevant.

implying homogeneity across such a vastly diverse continent, I also think it is problematic to position Tanzania as ideologically bound by borders, particularly since the Tanzanian scholars I reference here situate and inform their work within larger cross-continental conversations.

To obtain a research permit in Tanzania, researchers must prove to the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH) that our research will benefit Tanzania in some way. Of course, COSTECH is a state bureaucracy: the potential for exploitative research is always there, and beneficiaries of research vary. We also must prove that we have local support or collaborators. My supervisor, Dr. Vinay Kamat, who has worked in Tanzania for well over a decade, connected me to Dr. Rosemarie Mwaipopo, his colleague at the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM). Dr. Mwaipopo is a highly respected cultural anthropologist who focuses on gender. She helped shape my project and was the catalyst for my word-of-mouth recruitment. In total, I formally interviewed nine participants. The majority of my interviews took place at NGO offices, two in hotel restaurants, and one at my dining room table.

Situating the Research: Development, Feminisms, and Race

Deconstructions of “empowerment” discourse have their roots in critical development theory, intersectional feminism, and critical race theory. Though these are all vast and complex bodies of literature on their own, I think it necessary to discuss them in relationship to one another. Not only are gender and the goal of empowering women central to development discourse and practice, both globally and within the context of my research, but feminist scholarship has also heavily informed development critique. Furthermore, both development critique (Goudge 2003; Baaz 2005; Heron 2007) and intersectional feminist scholarship

(Mohanty 1984, 2003; Crenshaw 1989; Brah and Phoenix 2004) have discussed the ways racism functions in feminist and development spheres.

In recent years, development critique has hit mainstream discourse. Development workers themselves, such as my roommates in Dar, are often aware of some post-structuralist critiques from the past several decades (Baaz 2005). Drawing on post-structuralism and Foucauldian conceptions of power, as well as post-colonialisms like Said's *Orientalism*, post-development theory crystallized in the 1990s as a critique of discourses that emerged in the postwar period (see Escobar 1995, Sachs 1992, and Rahnema and Bawtree 1997). This new paradigm broke significantly from the previous several decades of modernization and dependency theories. Rather than proposing a new version of development – as if refining the concept would right development's wrongs – post-development questioned the ways in which certain parts of the world came to be understood as “underdeveloped” (Escobar 2007). I include post-development both to draw on its contributions and to separate my theoretical framework from its oversights. Critics had three main objections to post-development: first, that it ignores material reality in its focus on discourse; second, that it over-generalizes and homogenizes development, which takes a variety of forms on the ground; and third, that it romanticizes locality, invoking static ideas of “untouched” authenticity and the trope of the “noble savage” (Escobar 2007). Indeed, Sachs (1992), writing from Berlin, paints a totalizing picture that is rife with imperialist nostalgia, stating that development has caused all “non-Western” cultures and a vague exoticized Other to die out. Perhaps his statements were intentionally hyperbolic, but this does not make them less problematic. This West/Rest binary that much post-development literature invokes also tends to ignore the “fourth world” (Manuel and Posluns 1974) and the realities of settler-colonialism within the Global North.

My main contention with post-development is that it assumes localized solutions will necessarily be radical “alternatives to development.” In responding to critics, Escobar reiterates the importance of opposing development discourse’s “exclusion of the knowledges, voices and concerns of those whom, paradoxically, development was supposed to serve: the poor of Asia, Africa and Latin America” (2007, 20). This is valid; however, it is arrogant to assume that all of those voices will reject the development paradigm and its underlying ideologies, and it is dangerous to ignore hierarchies of “local” voices. Elites in many contexts benefit from development as exploitation (Sande Lie 2007), and many people living in poverty rightfully desire the kind of material wealth that “development” has, at least seemingly, brought so many in the Global North (Matthews 2017). As Sally Matthews notes, Sachs himself admitted in 2010 that while development may have been “an invention of the West,” it was not just “an imposition on the rest:” indeed, the Global South had emerged as “the staunchest defender of development” (as quoted in Matthews 2017, 2). This understanding of post-development frames my discussion.

A common issue within current development practice is the tokenization of the “local.” Like superficial applications of terms such as “participation” (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Green 2014) and “partnership” (Baaz 2005), the appeal to a vaguely defined “local perspective” both homogenizes populations and perpetuates localized hierarchies of power. While resources and knowledge are often useless if applied without an understanding of context, things become more complicated beyond a cursory conception of “local” solutions. My participants often articulated that knowledge in itself is not necessarily enough to solve locally-identified issues without resources, capital, technology, support, and skills, to which rural and/or low-income communities often do not have access. Some were also adamant that knowledge and perspectives from elsewhere (including “the West”) were crucial for broadening their own understandings.

Indeed, many African development theorists warn against a false dichotomy that positions “Indigenous” or “local” knowledge as diametrically opposed to “Western” knowledge (Asabere-Ameyaw et al 2014, 6). This might explain why there has been so little engagement with post-development in Tanzanian and African scholarship (Matthews 2004; 2017). While there are plenty of critiques of Eurocentrism (Mudimbe 1988; Mbembe 2001) and of how development has played out through Structural Adjustment Policies (Mkandawire & Soludo 1999) and NGOization (Shivji 2007), as well as calls for indigenist African development (Chambua 1994; Asabere-Ameyaw et al 2014), engagements with post-development are scarce. Most arguments hinge on the need for Africa to overcome whatever “underdevelopment” is (Chambua 1994, 48), rather than focusing on its constructed meaning as an imposed signifier.

It is also crucial here to question what “Western” knowledge means. In *African Perspectives on Development*, Tanzanian sociologist C.S.L. Chachage quotes Senegalese theorist Cheikh Anta Diop, who wrote in 1974 that “universal knowledge runs from the Nile Valley towards the rest of the world [...]. As a result, no thought, no ideology is foreign to Africa which was the land of their birth. Consequently, Africans must draw from the common intellectual heritage of humanity, guided by notions of what is most useful and effective” (1994, 53-54). Perhaps then, according to Diop, “Western” *ideologies* are not inherently imperialistic, because they do not come from the “West” at all. Considering the extent to which the industrial revolution in Europe was funded by the exploitation of African labour and resources, and how many African inventions and discoveries have been misattributed to Europe (Diop 1987), the “West’s” supposed ownership over “modernity” is false. Indeed, while Escobar and other post-development theorists argued that “Western” conceptions of development should be thrown out, the editors of *African Perspectives on Development* wrote that “Western thought and practice

should certainly be critically scrutinized [...], but as a result of such scrutiny we may find it less necessary to neglect or reject Western thought in some cases than to supplement it”

(Himmelstrand, Kinyanjui, & Mburugu 1994, 10). This perspective surfaced many times throughout my fieldwork; I was surprised at how often knowledge articulated as “Western” was not seen as something to resist, but rather to contextualize and utilize.

When I embarked on my fieldwork, I was somewhat enamoured with post-development theory. However, I quickly found that my interactions with people in Dar challenged my theoretical foundations, just as Tanzanian and African scholarship has challenged post-development theory more broadly. When I asked my participants about their feelings on the prevalence of “Western” development and development workers, I often got answers such as this one from Neema, who works for the government enforcing Tanzania’s NGO legislation:

So long as the instructions are being followed, we are just welcoming. We are in need of your technical know-how, we are in need of your financial support, we are in need of your everything so long as it will assist us to do well in our country. Remember we are still a developing country, so we are in need of a lot of support.

Though Neema’s perspective is likely influenced by her position as a government employee, her sentiment was ubiquitous throughout my fieldwork. It challenged my simplistic understanding of White saviourism, which saw “help” as more often imposed than requested. Matthews (2017) notes similar attitudes encountered through her research in Senegal, which she based on Emmanuel N’Dione’s co-authored chapter in the *Post-Development Reader*. After Rahnema and Bawtree (1997) hailed N’Dione’s NGO in Dakar as exemplifying “alternatives to development,” Matthews conducted research with the NGO. She notes that the NGO’s staff “discard[ed] some of the ideas they had learnt while studying at university to be more attentive to the preferences of the communities with which they work,” (8) which meant providing programs

that looked a lot like mainstream development. Perhaps most tellingly, Matthews recounts that N’Dione “responded to [her] first mention of post-development theory with a mixture of amusement and dismissiveness” (2017, 3). Though Dakar and Dar are on opposite continental coasts, this interaction resonates deeply with my experiences in the gap between theory and practice, reflecting on post-development in discussion with local NGO workers.

Post-development theory has certainly been crucial in re-shaping understandings of Western-based development and how it can involve imperialistic complexes of superiority and White saviourhood. However, to paint the desire for development and “modernity” as the mental colonization of the dispossessed requires a kind of privilege (not only possessed by Western scholars) that can slide into a hypocritical imperialist nostalgia. Studies focusing on development-worker subjectivity (Baaz 2005; Heron 2007; Malkki 2015) are valuable, and must avoid this trap. Emma Kowal’s (2015) ethnography on White health workers in Indigenous Australia adds nuance to this body of work, as she takes self-critical and anti-racist subjectivities as a starting point, rather than an end goal. My experience of “expats” in Dar, however, resonates much more with Heron’s descriptions of colonial continuities in development worker attitudes in various African contexts. This is not only based on my own encounters: some of my participants stressed the need for Euro-Americans to be educated about histories of colonialism and our creation of what is now deemed “underdevelopment.” As Glory, a young volunteer at a grassroots collective NGO, put it, “You see, you have to educate; Europeans have to be educated. The problem is not with Africa.” And yet, the problems are being disproportionately lived by Africans. Understanding the construction of “underdevelopment” will not, in itself, change the realities of poverty. Those of us who do not face the material realities of poverty in our day-to-day lives need to remember that when theorizing about its alleviation.

A component that is often underemphasized in discussions on post-development is its usage of feminist theory; Escobar drew heavily on theorists like Donna Haraway, Dorothy Smith, and Chandra Mohanty. With this in mind, I turn to discuss intersectional feminism as it relates to “women’s empowerment” in the Tanzanian context. Though the term “intersectionality” was coined by Black feminists in the late 1980s¹⁹ who contested the exclusion of Black women’s distinct experiences from feminism and antiracist policy discourse (Crenshaw 1989), it has recently become a buzzword in mainstream feminist activism. It has also expanded to recognize that class, sexuality, ability, age, body type, education, religion, nationality, language, and numerous other factors all affect how people experience the world. Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix emphasize that these “axes of differentiation [...] intersect in historically specific contexts” and “cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands” (2004, 76).

A facet that sometimes eludes this discussion in Western feminism, however, is the intersection of global positionality. Brah and Phoenix (2004) touch on the critique, prevalent in the 1980s and 90s within postcolonial feminist thought, of the “global sisterhood” that Western feminism rooted itself in. As previously mentioned, Chandra Mohanty’s 1984 essay, “Under Western Eyes” was crucial to this intervention. While Mohanty recognized that “Western” feminism is not a monolith, she argued that it often “discursively colonize[s] the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/representing a composite, singular ‘Third World Woman’” (1984, 334). When women are imagined as a coherent group, she argued, “sexual difference becomes coterminous with female subordination, and power is automatically defined in binary terms” (Mohanty 1984, 344).

¹⁹ Intersectionality refers to ideas that have been articulated for centuries: Crenshaw and others often reference Sojourner Truth’s famous “Ain’t I A Woman?” speech from the 1851 Ohio Women’s convention to demonstrate this.

This tendency is not only reductive, but also “ineffectual in designing strategies to combat oppressions” (Mohanty 1984, 344). Indeed, binary thinking and victimization breed both tokenization and erasure. Revisiting her essay in 2003, Mohanty clarifies that her intention was never to imply that non-colonizing cross-cultural scholarship was impossible, though her earlier piece was often taken up and operationalized that way (224). Her goal was always a vision of transnational feminist solidarity, and her early work pointed to the importance of attending to power differentials within feminist communities (2003, 223-224).

To understand intersectionality better in context, I now turn to African feminist scholarship. Critical to this conversation is the fact that many African feminists see Western feminism as placing gender as the primary facet of identity, arguing that such centrality is a colonial imposition (Oyewumi 1997; Swai 2010). According to Nigerian feminist Oyeronke Oyewumi, other facets like ethnicity, seniority, race, and generation are more salient than gender (2003). However, feminist theorists across Africa have also contested the claim that gender as a central identity category is entirely imposed (Apusigah 2006). Moreover, I would add, much “Western” intersectional feminism refutes the centring of one facet of identity over others. Again, a complication of what constitutes “Western” feminism is needed here. Specifically, many African feminists have articulated feeling spoken over not only by mainstream or “White” feminism, but also “Western” Black feminism. Botswanan theorist Pinkie Mekgwe writes:

Africa emerges as both a geo-historical reference point and term for a pan-Africanist connection of people of black ascendancy. This sets up the dichotomy of a struggling Africa against an ‘enslaving’ Western phenomenon. *Because and in spite of this*, Black Feminist as well as Womanist thought, though largely celebrated by African women, exhibits culturally imperialistic tendencies that configure the African woman as a recipient of knowledge from her more enlightened American sister (192, 2010).

Power asymmetries in access to global centres of knowledge production are important to consider here. This is a complex conversation and not one in which I see my opinion as particularly important. I merely want to warn against the conflation of African feminisms with Black feminisms coming out of the Global North when discussing the hegemony of “Western” feminism, and to note the importance of this distinction for an intersectional framework.

Throughout my research, I was challenged to complicate my understanding of intersectionality, which was informed largely by the critiques of the 1980s and 1990s and their usage by contemporary feminist activists in my world. The language used by my participants, even those with explicitly critical feminist standpoints, unexpectedly stressed unity and commonalities rather than power differentials. The dance between a desire for recognition of contextual difference and a desire for unity was clear in my interview with Grace, a long-time feminist activist and researcher working at a large local NGO. In her view:

The challenges that women in Africa are facing are different from those that women in Western countries are facing. Definitely there is a difference, but also, we all know that we are united in one cause: just making sure that women are liberated, empowered, and really live to their full potential. [...] Western feminists who want to support African feminists should first understand the African context. And, um, they should understand how it interplays with the structures of our country, with our economic situation and liberation. And then, try to live in our shoes, ok? ... For once. And, um, visualize what that really means. [...] But we need to understand, what are the kind of things that bring us together? [...] We need a shared vision of what we want women to be. [...] So we can also try to look at ourselves as women, not as African and Western women, but just as women. What brings us together?

Clearly, a deep understanding of context is fundamental for solidarity. But while contextual differences should not be underplayed, they also should not be seen as insurmountable.

Perhaps because the concept came out of Black feminism, one of the main facets through which conversations of intersectionality are often framed is race. Relatedly, many facets of my positionality in Dar es Salaam (class, education, geopolitical location, sexuality) were so deeply

coded in and understood through constructions of race that it would be irresponsible not to address it. I think this is partially due to the type of Whiteness most people in Dar es Salaam have interacted with: one that is inextricably linked to wealth.²⁰ Additionally, there is a deep need within development, feminism, and anthropology for Whiteness to be deconstructed and decentred. As critical race theorist Sara Ahmed (2006) explains, Whiteness involves certain lines of “orientation” that require “disorientation.” In other words, privilege blinds and White supremacy, based in colonial histories, must be unlearned. Drawing on Franz Fanon’s work, Ahmed discusses how histories “surface as impressions on the skin” (2006, 2). The long histories of Whiteness in Dar es Salaam are categories that I stepped into as a researcher,²¹ and my experience of White privilege changed from one of constructed neutrality (at home) to one of hyper-visibility. Whiteness of course has no inherent meaning; it is a construct that has shaped a set of structures to which people have varying degrees of access.²² As Ahmed reminds us, “whiteness is not reducible to white skin or even to ‘something’ we can have or be” (2006, 135). Indeed, who is considered a *mzungu* in Tanzania differs from who is considered White in Canada. With significant, longstanding Arab and South Asian diasporic populations and a growing East Asian population, racial dynamics in Dar are far from just Black-and-White, but “Whiteness” is often attributed to everyone except for Black Africans.

I recognize that there is an irony in my arguing for the decentring of Whiteness, and then including such a lengthy discussion of it. As Heron notes in her critique of Whiteness in

²⁰ This is partially because of the limitations of who can afford to travel to Tanzania, and how much more Canadian dollars (and other currencies) are worth than the Tanzanian shilling. Several people did not believe me when I told them that there were poor and homeless people back home in Canada.

²¹ These are, amongst other intersections, deeply gendered. For a history of colonial constructions and violence associated with White femininity in Africa, see Heron 2007.

²² This is why “White feminism” is not only perpetuated by people who identify or present as White.

development, “This is the danger of deconstructing dominance: at the moment it is challenged, it reclaims centre stage and makes its issues the ones that count” (2007, 20). Ahmed similarly warns that in deconstructing Whiteness, we might “reify the very category we wish to critique” (2006, 135). Gayatri Spivak’s argument about decentring hegemonic subjectivities, from her long-debated 1988 essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” remains insightful here, and for discussions of privilege more broadly. Spivak stresses that we must stop “reintrodu[cing] the individual subject through totalizing concepts of power and desire” (1988, 279). My choice to be in Dar was an obvious testament to my intersecting privileges of mobility,²³ class, and race. However, in order to decentre hegemonic subjectivities, we must understand that privilege is not the only form of power, and that it does not operate monolithically across all contexts and spaces.

I want to stress that “local” applications of “Western” development or feminisms, as well as understandings of race and Whiteness, must also be understood as more than just internalized oppression. As a Gramscian conception of “contradictory consciousness” (as applied to development in Yeh 2013) posits, people can hold paradoxical motivations and ideologies. Now, in trying to decentre Whiteness, I will not give it too much further space. However, this thesis should be read with the understanding that Whiteness and its associated meanings shaped my experiences and research in more ways than I can unpack, comprehend, or see. It granted me access to certain spaces and opportunities. It was also something people regularly joked about, utilized, distrusted, or dismissed. Reflecting on privilege, post-development, and critiques of White feminism in this context, I cannot help but hear my friend Esther’s voice echoing in my head. She would tease me whenever I spouted off critical theory, just as she did when I invited

²³ I had many conversations about passport privilege and of how easy it is for me to travel to Tanzania as a Canadian, compared to the costly bureaucratic nightmare that Tanzanians must undergo to obtain a Canadian visitor’s visa.

her to come watch the sunset. With an incredulous look, a shake of her head, or a laugh, she would invariably chide, “You’re so White.”

NGOization in Dar es Salaam: Past and Present

To further explain the context of this research, I now turn to the history of NGOization in Tanzania, specifically as it pertains to gender-based movements. The trend of women’s organizing in many places across Africa in the late 1980s and early 1990s occurred in the context of the proliferation of NGOs more broadly. Tripp, Casimiro, Kewsga, and Mungwa note that women’s organizations emerged quickly and effectively, attributing this success to women’s “longstanding experiences creating and maintaining grassroots and community-level organizations,” which allowed them to more easily “take advantage of new political spaces afforded by liberalizing regimes” (2009, 82). In Tanzania, Dar es Salaam has long been at the centre of women’s organizing (Geiger 1997), and remains so to this day (Mbilyini 2015).

According to Rasel Madaha, the “first wave” of Tanzanian feminism began in the mid-1950s with the fight against colonial rule. Women such as Bibi Titi Mohammed – who went on to head *Umoja wa Wanawake Tanganyika* (UWT), the women’s branch of first president Julius Nyerere’s national party – played a driving role in the independence movement (Geiger 1997). However, once independence was achieved in 1961, and Tanganyika and Zanzibar united to form the United Republic of Tanzania in 1964, women’s organizing was co-opted into the ruling agenda under the guise that men and women were equal and would be treated as such under the constitution (Madaha 2014, 19). Although women were central to the nationalist movement and even held leadership positions within TANU, their gender-specific concerns were ignored (Tripp et al 2009, 37). The UWT “frequently expanded by unilaterally absorbing organizations and

particularly mission groups into the national organization” (Lal 2010, 7). Women, then, were “treated as a homogenous group for the interest of national building” (Madaha 2014, 21).

The quality of life under Nyerere’s Ujamaa socialism, as compared to the colonial period, is contested. While some (Mbilinyi & Shechambo 2015) point to greater equality and access to social services, others (Green 2014) point to a lack of economic growth. Priya Lal (2010) argues that gender disparity, built on colonial patriarchal systems, grew as Tanzanians were policed as gendered subjects of the state. Women were expected to have “inherent capacities for nurturing and self-sacrifice” and act as “good” Tanzanian women for the sake of the newly independent nation (Lal 2010, 9). Operation Vijiji (villagization), and Ujamaa more generally, operated on what Lal calls a “nationalist trope in underscoring that Tanzanian women literally embodied national culture and thus could protect the integrity of the national family by adhering to ‘tradition’ in dress and comportment” (2010, 8). I noticed this persistent trope in my interviews with those working in the state department for gender and development. It is important to note here that several “traditional” attitudes and customs regarding gender (and sexuality) came about in the colonial era, beginning in the late 1800s with German missionaries and then transferring to the British after World War I. As Tanzanian feminist scholar Marjory Mbilinyi writes,

The unholy alliance of, mostly, male African colonial chiefs and European colonial officers created a macho vision of ‘native’ custom and tradition which was embodied in colonial law, and used to ‘create’ and sustain patriarchal systems of marriage, divorce, inheritance and property ownership (2016, 118).

This complicates the notion of “tradition” as a barrier to “empowerment,” and further emphasizes why attitudes of White saviourhood are particularly frustrating within this discourse.

The democratization that followed Nyerere’s presidency in the mid-1980s allowed the rapid expansion of civil society that saw a “second wave” of feminist organizing. This “second

wave” was aimed both at targeting colonial patriarchal structures which crystallized during Ujamaa, as well as those introduced in the 1990s. Madaha has described the progression of the Tanzanian women’s movements as follows: “although the first women’s movement was about uprooting colonial elites, the second movement is about challenging the power of the current African ruling elites” (2014, 19). However, this period of democratization was accompanied by neoliberalization under the World Bank and IMF Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs). As is well documented, SAPs across Africa (and elsewhere) resulted in a drastic increase in income inequality and poverty (Mkandawire and Soludo 1999). Mbilinyi cites “worsening health care, falling employment and incomes, migration, urbanisation and the expansion of sex work, [...] growing food insecurity and high rates of malnutrition,” as well as the HIV pandemic, as factors which resulted from this period (2016, 121). All of this increased the need for civil society organizing and action, as the welfare state shrank and overall living conditions worsened.

Informal women’s organizations grew in the mid-1980s, and by the latter part of the decade, several formal groups had emerged, including the Tanzania Women’s Media Association, the Tanzania Association of Women Lawyers, the Medical Women Association of Tanzania, and the Association of Women Artists in Tanzania. By the early 1990s, enough groups had formed that the Tanzania Gender Networking Program (TGNP) was created as an umbrella network and coordinating body (Tripp et al 2009, 57). Mbilinyi (2015) notes that feminist organizing at UDSM began in the 1970s, with groups and programs such as the Women’s Research and Documentation Project and the IDS Women Study Group. These groups, she notes, “supported participants in their efforts to advance feminist theory that was relevant to the local situation, and later to carry out meaningful policy-oriented research” (Mbilinyi 2015, 3).

This explosion of women’s NGOs does not mean that post-Ujamaa governments have

embraced feminism. During Kikwete's presidency (1995-2005), Madaha writes that "the feminist movement is often times dismissed, by the ruling elites, as a political and foreign agenda" (2014, 26). Some of my participants echoed this observation, noting that this trend has worsened under the new government. Magufuli has refused to cooperate on initiatives for gender equality, and has made several egregiously misogynistic statements to the public, most recently criticizing teenage mothers who want to return to school (*BBC* 2017). When I asked Tulanana, a lawyer who often works with government leaders through her position at a local NGO, about national gender policies, she told me, "With the former government, at least they tried. But now, it's like now we have gone back I don't know how many steps." She also sees Magufuli's appointment of Samia Suluhu, the country's first female vice president, to be tokenistic: "Sure, she is a woman, but at the same time, she has no say."

Though "feminism" is a contentious term in many places, in Tanzania it can carry notions of imperialism. Marjorie Mbilinyi and Gloria Shechambo explain that feminists in the 1980s and 90s used the term "gender" instead, due to the "knee-jerk reaction which many Tanzanians had against the concept of feminism," seeing it as a Western ideology that "sought to overthrow male domination and place women in command, without paying any attention to the differences among women, and among men, and the power of other social relationships, especially those rooted in class and imperialism" (2015, 104). In other words, many Tanzanians felt that feminism ignored important intersections. My participants attested that this view remains prevalent today. Grace told me, "I think the word is increasingly being used, but we're not there yet. It still brings that connotation of, you know, radicalism, extremism, and stuff." I raised the topic again in my group interview with Anna and Glory, two undergraduate students studying

sociology and archaeology, respectively, and volunteering at a small grassroots NGO. I asked whether “feminism” had any negative connotations in their experience, and Anna told me,

Many people, when you say feminism, all they have in their mind is that idea that women will have that superiority, that they’ll want to compare themselves with men. That’s why many people don’t like the word feminism or the idea of feminism.

Many of my participants also noted that while gender movements in Tanzania have had considerable success in enshrining women’s rights in the constitution and legal frameworks, a wide gap remains between official discourse and reality.²⁴ As Tulanana expressed, “Tanzania has progressive laws, and progressive legal frameworks that protect women. But implementation is quite different. [...] I think because the government wants to be seen that they’re...because of the commitments that we make through the international conventions and instruments.” Indeed, Maia Green notes that Tanzania’s relatively liberal political frameworks are what make it such a favoured candidate for international aid (2015, 18). When discussing the differences between Tanzanian feminism and what she saw as Western feminism, Glory said to me, “You know, the rights of women in Tanzania are the same as all other countries, but they’ve been undermined.”

The question is: undermined by what? In much mainstream development discourse, the argument is that women’s rights are being undermined by “culture” or “tradition.” Feminist anthropologists and scholars like Lila Abu-Lughod (1990) and Uma Narayan (1997) presented early critiques of this framing. In the first major critiques on “culture” as a master concept, Abu-Lughod argued that “culture” had come to function similarly to long-dispelled notions of race by freezing differences and overemphasizing coherence to make “cultures” appear timeless and homogenous (1990, 146). Abu-Lughod and Narayan argued that framing gendered oppression as

²⁴ This does not mean Tanzania does not have oppressive laws. Most notably, “homosexual activity” between men (though not between women) is punishable by imprisonment (a law that was established during British rule).

“cultural” obscures factors like geopolitical context, colonial history, and political and economic structures by placing the blame on isolated and constructed notions of the “traditional.” These critiques are relevant for contemporary “empowerment” discourse as I encountered it in Dar. Framing “culture” as a barrier to “empowerment,” as many of my participants did, can obscure and erase the ways in which poverty is continuously created, and how it is gendered.

However, it would be a mistake to deny that things which people experience as “cultural” or “traditional” can be oppressive. As Joyce Greene writes, in a Canadian Indigenous context, “tradition is neither a monolith, nor is it axiomatically good [...]. Feminism has provided tools to critique oppressive traditions – and to claim and practice meaningful non-oppressive traditions” (2007, 26-27). The “culture” of patriarchy and gendered violence cannot be isolated to any one context; it exists most everywhere. The issue with seeing oppression as the result of “culture” or “tradition” lies in who and what gets framed this way, and who has the power to do so. Almost all my participants framed gender empowerment as needing to change “culture,” often referring specifically to practices like FGM and child marriage. But, similarly to how many in Canada isolate gender oppression to spaces imagined as having more “culture” and “tradition,” such as Africa, my urban participants largely isolated the issues facing women to rural areas.

Interestingly, a “civilizing” narrative emerged in many of my interviews. Government worker John described the goals of NGOs in Tanzania as encouraging people in rural areas

to do away with those cultural practices which, at the end of the day, discriminate against women and children. So, we think slowly but gradually again we will get them there. [...] You find that some [rural people] are very receptive and they cooperate. But some need more enlightenment, you know, you need to raise their consciousness.

In my conversation with Anna and Glory about their experiences of misogyny, both told me about many forms of discrimination, sexualization, and violence that women face in the urban context, but still asserted that the problem is much worse elsewhere. As Anna stated,

I think the problem is because in the rural areas they are still in that old era. They are not exposed to the outside world to see what's really going on. [...] But humans change, society develops, and those cultures are not fit for the current society. So some of them need to be eliminated, but some of them need to be preserved.

Consciousness-raising is a common feminist goal (one that should differ contextually), but this statement also contains hints of the social Darwinist-type thinking that often plagues urbanite conceptions of “rural” people in many contexts, conceptions that are also highly classed.

There is also a generational component to consider here. When I asked Anna and Glory about “culture” in the context of gender, Glory told me, “for our generation, like, our mothers told us, ‘you have to respect men.’ And like, you’re inferior, if you want to change, you want to co-opt the European style, so ‘don’t do that, we’ve got culture.’” The elusiveness of what constitutes “culture” is palpable here. For Glory, people of the older generation use “culture” in a way that is limiting and frustrating, but at the same time both she and Anna stressed the value of Tanzanian culture throughout our conversation. As Kamat (2008) describes, feelings of “loss of culture” have been articulated in the neoliberal era as the loss of community and respect for elders since the post-Ujamaa period. “Culture,” then, operates discursively in paradoxical ways: people can simultaneously desire to protect it, and see it as a barrier to “empowerment.”

I turn now to describe Tanzania’s NGOscape as it relates to gender movements. NGOs take a multitude of forms, operating within spheres of service provision, civil society, and human rights advocacy. As Bernal and Grewal (2014) illustrate, NGOization is a complex process of relations between states, economies, and feminisms. I want to heed their warning against an

over-deterministic view of neoliberal processes and a glorification of pre-neoliberal movements (2014), particularly considering the above discussion of the Ujamaa era. However, my interviews attest that both international and local NGOs are hindered by the power dynamics that neoliberalism has created and exacerbated in Tanzania. Certainly, as Brenal and Grewal argue, “NGOs are not simply vehicles for serving women or empowering them (however well or inadequately) but rather are themselves fields of gendered struggles over power, resources, and status” (2014, 301). Indeed, as Grace told me, “People have a sense that once you’re in [a] women’s movement, you’re sort of moving in a uniform state of motion. But within there, there are a lot of power issues.” This brings me to my discussion of local hierarchies in the NGOscape.

As many of my participants pointed out, development funding has been declining over the past several years, and local and international NGOs often compete for the same grants. International NGOs have a significant advantage in their access to funds and political influence, and with continuous funding cuts, competition is tough and local organizations are especially pitted against each other. My participants who had worked for both international and local NGOs noted a huge difference between the two in terms of available funding. Grace previously worked with a large international organization before moving to a local one. At the international NGO, she said, they were better able “to negotiate on what comes in and what doesn’t, what they can accept and what they cannot accept [...]. You know when they say ‘when you’re a beggar you’re not a chooser.’” Similarly, Daima, who had moved from a local organization to an international one, told me, “The same [donors] we would apply to when I was at the local organizations, *they* sometimes approach *us*. [...] You’d really not be able to compete with someone who has been approached, [if] you’re just applying from nowhere.” She noted that local NGOs, particularly those in rural areas, are also less equipped to follow the complex stipulations and procedures that

donors set, and often lack the technology or information needed to apply. This disparity in funding was evident even in the setting of our interview: Daima's bright, air conditioned office, where I sipped bottled water that the receptionist had offered me in the waiting room. Grace had told me that there was a difference between the international and the local "way of doing things," and this was very clear to me as I walked back out through the colourfully-branded lobby, past frosted glass windows where the NGO's slogan danced alongside larger-than-life photographs of smiling children. This was a stark contrast from my interviews with local NGOs.

Tanzania's NGO legislation, specifically the NGO Act of 2002, is aimed at legislating standards for "sustainable" development. According to the Act, international NGOs must partner with local ones, "empowering" them (in Neema's words) with resources and capacity building, and trusting them to do the work at the grassroots. This, however, is often not the reality on the ground. As Neema told me, "Some of them, they are still keeping on going to the grassroots, doing each and every thing on their own, which is not allowed." Some participants also pointed to the corruption within some large organizations. Victor, the young head of a local grassroots organization funded entirely by its members to avoid being controlled by donor interests, was particularly disenchanted with large international organizations. "They're not doing what they're supposed to be doing," he told me, "That's the big problem. They have funding, they have donors, they have everything. But they are not doing anything." Along the same lines, Anna said, "The big organizations, they don't look at the context of our society, they deal with HIV, they deal with malaria, they deal with family planning, but there are some minor things [...] they don't see. They only go for the big." To this, Glory added, "Do you know why they do that? It's because most of the organizations aim at profit. They do not aim at helping people, so they go for that stuff which exists, that's easy [...] they're undermining; they don't want to give chances for

local institutions to grow.” Victor even noted that larger organizations’ reporting is sometimes skewed to meet targets. This especially disadvantages rural areas, as most NGOs are based in urban centres like Dar and, according to my participants, do not often reach the areas most in need of their services. Victor had seen local staff working for international NGOs lie about which regions their programs cover, and Glory told me that big NGOs do not want to go to the poorest areas because they will be less likely to see improvement. David Mosse (2005) notes this trend in the insider-ethnography he wrote while working for a British NGO in rural India. Mosse revealed that the “success” or “failure” of projects was based more on validating the organization’s pre-existing policies than evaluating the effects of their initiatives (2005).

However, not everyone had negative things to say about international NGOs. Tulanana works at one of the earliest-established local NGOs, and when I asked her about their relationship with international NGOs, she told me, “We work with so many [international] organizations and they’ve been very beneficial because we’ve tapped their best practices, we’ve tapped their technical guidance, and also they help us a lot [...]. Sometimes we get volunteers of staff from international organizations who volunteer to work with us.” It is important to note here, too, that there is a vast range within the category of local NGOs. Perspectives like Tulanana’s often came from participants working in larger, older local NGOs that had more access to political power and capital, while newer, smaller local NGOs, like Victor’s, were more frustrated with their lack of access to “partnership” with international NGOs.

The issue of donor dependency was also repeatedly mentioned throughout my interviews. Most donors have switched from basket to project-based funding over the past decade, which has proven difficult for sustainability. Daima told me that she has seen many NGOs fold after project funding runs out. Similarly, donor interests were a big topic of conversation. Because donors

define, often very specifically, what money is to be used for, many NGOs stretch or shift their operations to fit the conditions of project funding. My sense is that these specifications and shifts to project instead of basket funding have responded to calls in donor countries for a better ability to “know where your money is going” (a phrase I have often heard in Canadian charity circles), particularly in reaction to the political corruption and the pocketing of “aid” money that was alluded to by some of my participants. At the local level these specifications end up limiting sustainability, particularly because dependence on donor funds is high and difficult to avoid.

Emmanuel, who worked for a large local NGO umbrella network, noted that this was particularly challenging for local NGOs with a specific focus. “The bridges are quite a bit longer for local NGOs,” he stated, “particularly for interest-based NGOs like [those aimed at] women; you must be aligned to someone’s priority.” And, as Neema told me, NGOs often “end up implementing donor’s interests instead of taking care of the community or beneficiary’s priorities. That’s why they can’t meet their objectives.” She noted examples of donors pushing products or drugs because of their corporate sponsors. According to her, this disconnect happens for a few reasons: “Some of them do not know exactly what is needed, but some of them – remember, this money is being offered [by] politicians. You know, in politics ... I can’t go further [laughs] [...] most of them they just hide their interest.” Victor, too, was skeptical of large international organizations’ “hidden agendas” for operating in Tanzania.

These structural power dynamics play out in people’s embodied experiences. As Neema told me, “Someone can just bring an expired material, expired treatment ... they just treat us like a – like a dustbin to deposit their stuff.” This dynamic manifests at the interpersonal level in encounters and relationships that are embedded in differences of class, race, nationality, gender, and other intersections. It is often demonstrated when foreigners are hired as “expert” employees

or consultants. This rarely happens within local NGOs, for a few reasons. One is financial: “expats” often get paid higher salaries than their local counterparts. Another is practical: it can be difficult to sort out the logistics, visas, and papers required to bring an “expat” on board. As Grace explained, there must be a very good reason to hire foreign staff: “What is it that this international, or person from Canada[, is] coming to do in a local organization that this local person cannot do?” For international NGOs, however, hiring foreign “experts” is commonplace, and senior management positions are often filled by “expats.” Grace told me that when she worked for a large international NGO, she was hired as the first “local” to fill the position of gender advisor. Previously, the role had belonged to a Scandinavian woman who spoke little Kiswahili and often needed a translator. The organization decided that position should be filled by a Tanzanian who could “go with the flow.” However, Grace told me that when she was hired, “the position was lowered. [...] In terms of pay, even on the organogram [a chart showing rank] it was lowered.” Even when locality is sought after, it can still be undervalued.

Daima told me that in her experience at international NGOs, donor country offices often assume there is no in-country capacity for senior management positions.

That is a big challenge; you really have to negotiate and to show them [that there is local capacity for these positions], but that mentality also affects implementation. [...] Sometimes people are coming in the name of experts [...] to do something to support, and you wonder why would someone come all the way to do this work, while internally we could have done that maybe even better.

However, the assumption of the superiority of foreign knowledge and is not only held by donors or “expats.” Daima explained,

Also it has to do with confidence as well, for us, like, some people are really raised [with this mentality], I mean, [it] comes from maybe history. But people tend to think, like, someone from the West is more intelligent than us, for instance. [...] I sometimes sit in the meetings and I say, ok, so this is someone who is supposed to be more, like, exposed

and supposed to advocate for others, but the way they behave, it's like everything that is said by someone from outside the country is ... like, final. You get what I'm saying?

I told Daima that I did, that people in Dar often assumed I had knowledge expertise that I did not.²⁵ Participants even told me I should come back and volunteer with them. As Daima noted, there is a complex history here, and while it manifests at the personal level, she was hesitant to blame it on individuals, whether foreign or local. "I think even us, like the government, the system also needs to advocate for their people," she said, "Even the organizations internally need to advocate for their people." Although my participants were working to "empower" women, they also desired the empowerment of their own skills and knowledge in the NGOscape.

Re-examining Empowerment

There is an important point to be made at this juncture. Echoing a Mohantian critique, Wilson notes that the "disempowered woman" in development discourse is "crucially always understood in relation and in contrast to her already empowered Northern counterpart" (2015, 820). Thus, while development has adopted (or co-opted) the goal of "women's empowerment" from feminist movements worldwide, much development discourse around gender rests on the misguided and deeply un-intersectional implication (which I have encountered both in Dar and at home) that feminism is no longer needed in the Global North. "Empowerment" is a buzzword that is easily co-optable. It is elusive of definition. Like the notion of "development," empowerment is both a process and an outcome. It has also become a safe alternative for those who see the term "development" as problematic or outdated. Indeed, it has become a way to obscure the power relations in which it is embedded and to "underplay or ignore the impact of

²⁵ Although I was also assumed, often correctly, to be ignorant about various things.

global and national forces on prospects for poor people's (especially women's) empowerment" (Parpart et al. 2002, 3). Green, writing on development in Tanzania, cautions that empowerment is not something that is achievable by the cursory "participation" of "local communities" alone; it cannot be divorced from greater political action (42, 2014). The term "empowerment," long associated with anti-capitalist radical feminism, has been co-opted by development institutions like the World Bank, IMF, and USAID, and by large multinational companies undertaking "Corporate Social Responsibility" projects. While their funding and programming may be beneficial, these institutions uphold or actively support structures that systemically disadvantage women, and they ignore "the most substantive drivers of poverty and hunger: structural adjustment, debt, tax evasion, labour exploitation, financial crisis and corruption in the global governance system" (Hickel 2014, 1356). As James Ferguson argues in his ethnography in Lesotho (1994), there are several dangers inherent in the de-politicization of development.

The centrality of "women" as objects (and subjects) of development has likely arisen because of the support and funding that now exists for "women's empowerment" projects globally, as well as the generation of a discourse that posits women as the "key" to development (Hickel 2014). This is particularly salient in Tanzania, where development is so deeply rooted in national identity (Green 2014). The Tanzania Development Vision 2025's goal of gender equality, and similar initiatives, make clear that the government sees women's "empowerment" as a key to national success, a theme that runs throughout the nation's history. Women's bodies have long been the sites of nation-building projects, both during colonial rule and since independence. In my conversation with John, a middle-aged man working in the state department for development and gender, he told me that for his department,

Gender is a priority, and I think that's why 'til now we've continued to receive substantial support. [...] We think day after day as we keep on talking about the importance of gender and ensuring gender equality in our society, more and more people will be convinced that this is the only ingredient of bringing about increased development.

While there is certainly value in John's sentiment, there is also a risk of placing the responsibility for "development" solely on the shoulders of women, particularly low-income women in rural areas, at whom development programs are largely aimed.

Not only have women been positioned politically as the objects of nation-building, but the national economy was built on, and is sustained by, the exploitation of women's knowledge and labour (Swai 2010; Mbilinyi 2015). Mbilinyi has written extensively about how capitalist accumulation in Tanzania, as elsewhere in Africa, has "been based on the extraction of surplus from women peasants working in both paid and unpaid work" (2015, 6). She traces how this has manifested in the post-Ujamaa period, particularly with regard to the global economic crisis of the late 1970s, and the SAPs of the following two decades. Mbilinyi explains that "as men lost jobs and incomes, women took up the slack [...]. They were later encouraged in their efforts to replace male labor with their own by a multitude of donor policies and funding of credit and training that specifically targeted women, and these programs continue" (2015, 6). Low-income and rural women, she reminds us, are most vulnerable to the current state of land-grabbing and resource extraction in Tanzania. She cites pastoralist women's resistance movements in Loliondo and other areas, and sees the "growing interest among donors and even some large-scale corporations in funding 'women's empowerment' projects" as a direct response to these movements, employed "to divide women and co-opt feminist activism" (Mbilinyi 2015, 6).

It is not only foreign development institutions and corporations, however, who stand to benefit from funding "women's empowerment" programs, but also states, institutions, and elites

across the African continent. Elinami Swai's work demonstrates how "women's empowerment" has been co-opted by the Tanzanian state in development and education policies that she argues are ultimately disempowering. Swai, an urban Tanzanian and American-educated woman of Chagga heritage, conducted ethnographic research with Chagga women in rural Kilimanjaro. She uses women's stories to demonstrate how empowerment discourse, particularly through formal education, has long been used to disempower women in Tanzania and to dislocate them from their systems of communication and knowledge. Relevantly, Swai argues:

The construction of African women as good and empowered or bad and illiterate and in need of transformation, and therefore to be targeted for special emancipatory education or even more belligerent forms of 'liberation' reinstates a worldview based on colonial lines of demarcation (2010, 10).

She reframes how "empowerment" is constructed and how it has been co-opted to serve the interests of those in positions of political power in Tanzania.

Certainly, "empowerment" is often narrowly conceptualized. As Jason Hickel argues, "empowerment interventions rely on assumptions about 'freedom' that are particular to the Western liberal tradition, which focuses on achieving individual authenticity and self-mastery" (2014, 1365). Hickel cites post-colonial feminists such as Chandra Mohanty, Lila Abu-Lughod, Gayatri Spivak, and Sara Ahmed to critique the empowerment paradigm, stating that "the ethnographic record demonstrates that not all women *want* to be liberated in the manner that Western feminists imagine" (2014, 1368). Lamia Karim's (2011) ethnography on microfinance programs in rural Bangladesh illustrates this point. Karim found microfinance NGOs to be ignorant and disruptive of local gender relations and social contexts, and asserts that what these organizations presented as "empowerment" could be more accurately characterized as an expectation that local women should bootstrap themselves out of poverty. In the Tanzanian

context, Swai argues that “local conceptions of what it means to ‘be empowered’ have traditionally been at odds with the Western conceptions of empowerment” (2010, 163). I would challenge, however, what Swai means by “local.” Of course, not all women within a given place want to be “empowered” in the same way. However, most women I spoke to articulated their desires for empowerment in ways often understood as “liberal” or “Western.” Economic empowerment and autonomy was a widely-held goal amongst participants and entrepreneurship skills, capital, and education were all stressed as crucial roads to empowerment. This perspective could, of course, be heavily influenced by the fact that I was hanging out with, and interviewing, urban middle-class Tanzanians. Perhaps I would have gotten different answers had I been talking to women of different socioeconomic or religious backgrounds.²⁶

Moreover, although economic empowerment was central to my participants’ concerns, it was not the only thing they considered important. As Anna told me,

Women’s empowerment, it doesn’t only start with giving women business, giving women education, giving women political rights. It starts with the belief, with the society around her, the way people treat her, the way people see her. If people see that she’s capable, then she’ll have that feeling ‘yes I am capable,’ and if society believes in her and treats her right, then I think that women will be much more empowered [...]. There are things like culturally or just feelings that are being imposed on women, the way women are being portrayed in society, all of those, although there are some strategies to empower women, those things undermine women indirectly.

Here, Anna gets at the importance of not obscuring “empowerment” from larger societal forces.

Though she does not articulate them here in terms of structural factors of inequality, she did mention these at other points in our conversation, particularly in regards to colonialism. She even brought up the sexualization and portrayal of African women in media as rooted in the colonial

²⁶ Although Dar es Salaam has a large Muslim population, my participants were predominantly Christian. For excellent feminist work in Muslim contexts in North Africa (which are quite different from that of the Swahili Coast, but relevant to this discussion) see Abu-Lughod 2013.

period, using Sara Baartman as an example. That said, she and Glory also articulated how they feel women are disrespected and sexualized within Tanzania, and we discussed many parallels in attitudes between Tanzania and Canada, which manifest contextually in different ways.

Interestingly, almost all of my participants articulated that they thought feminism in Tanzania was vastly different than in Canada or other Western countries.²⁷ Grace's description of "empowerment" is insightful in this regard:

I think women's liberation means, um, that a woman can have opportunities and exploit them and explore them to their full potential just like men do, without fearing. [...] I want to see a day when a woman stands, and takes opportunities, and expresses herself firmly without having to be labelled in any way. To me that is [...] liberation. But also [...] unlike the Western context, you might find that a woman is practicing a lot of feminism and gender awareness, but when they're back at home, [...] there's a lot of oppression. Yeah, but when they stand out in public, you know, or it's the other way around [...] So I want to see that the public and the private speak to each other. I think that will also lead or explain what liberation should look like.

However, as Grace demonstrates, this difference between feminisms was mostly articulated as a difference of *context* rather than the identification of the need for a movement which advocates for inherently different types of power.

Thus, while a strictly financial or individually-focused understanding of "empowerment" is deeply limiting, it is also arrogant to deny people who are integrated in global capitalist economics the desire to seek economic "empowerment" accordingly.²⁸ Again, I want to emphasize the relevance of contradictory consciousness in relation to these ideas. People are not passive, brainwashed victims of imposed liberal notions of empowerment, but actors who are well aware of what does or does not make sense within their own contexts and worlds, and are

²⁷ Imaginations of what life is like in "the West" more broadly deserve more elaboration than I can give them in this thesis.

²⁸ Capitalism and liberal notions of power are not necessarily coterminous, but there are many linkages between them and how they operate.

capable of employing different strategies to achieve their goals while understanding and holding paradoxical ideologies. While we must not assume that “all women” want to be empowered in the same ways (not just between but *within* different contexts), we also must not deny people whom we imagine to be “non-Western” their desires for certain empowerment strategies. The question, I believe, is how we can work toward frameworks, programs, and movements that allow for the complexity of multiple conceptions of “empowerment.”

Discussion and Conclusions

I started this research with the goal of deconstructing the ways in which “empowerment” discourse uses archetypes of “oppressed African women” in development and popular imagination. Certainly, a false binary of “Western women” as empowered and “African Women” as disempowered is reductive and victimizing. In Dar, however, I was quickly and constantly reminded that I needed to be mindful of my positionality and how I was perceived when countering victim narratives, or my challenging them would be perceived as a denial of my privilege. Whenever I objected to the assumption that I and other White Western women are the “empowered” counterparts to Tanzanian women, I was met with the rebuttal that all Tanzanian women face oppressions that I do not. Conversely, however, when I tried to recognize my privilege, it could easily come across as playing to a highly racialized Western superiority complex. There tends to be just as much arrogance in assuming power as there is in denying it.

In outlining the history of NGOization and women’s movements in Dar es Salaam, I have demonstrated that the power dynamics involved in the NGOscape are far more complex than simply existing between Tanzania and former colonizers (or their settler-states). Indeed, the Tanzanian state and local elites have long factored heavily into how relations of power manifest

in the NGOscape and gender discourses. The project of “empowering women” has been used in post-colonial nation building, and plays into national identities surrounding development and progress. However, as my participants attested, the reality for women who are allegedly being “empowered” is quite different than the ideal that is enshrined in legislation, and there are many challenges facing any NGO undertaking this project to eliminate gender inequality.

Most of the frustration for local and international NGOs regarding power dynamics was aimed at donor institutions. However, local NGO workers in less-established organizations with fewer connections to political and economic power also expressed frustration with international NGOs who beat them out for funding grants and then do not fulfill their responsibility of “empowering” local NGOs to facilitate “empowerment” at the grassroots level. These imbalances have made the NGOscape a competitive and political arena. As a result, even though it is governed by legislation and coordinated by several umbrella networks, the work of “empowerment” remains extremely difficult. These challenges have been compounded by the election of a new president who has been shrinking civil society space, creating fear and new obstacles for both international and local NGOs. The current political situation thus presents a barrier to the “empowerment” of NGOs in their ability to advocate for women’s rights, and this could have drastic implications for the realities of “empowerment” in Tanzania.

Throughout this discussion, I have stressed the theoretical relevance of post-development, intersectional feminism, and critical race theory. Further to the critique of “empowerment” as co-optable for nation building and corporate gain, I have also drawn in critical theories around liberal conceptions of “empowerment” as universalized both through ideology and economic strategies. Indeed, “Western” development and “White” feminism often hold narrow views of what “empowerment” means, based solely on liberal notions of freedom and individual

autonomy. I have complicated this critique, warning against a conception of liberal vs. non-liberal empowerment that maps onto binaries of West/Rest and Oppressor/Oppressed.

It is important to keep in mind that, while they are deeply entwined, the *structures* of neocolonialism – for example, those which co-opt “empowerment” discourse for capitalist gain – should not be conflated with the *ideologies* that are often critiqued as being neocolonial. Pinkie Mekgwe argues that we must understand “‘Africa’ as *actor*, partaking in the fashioning of her own history and having *participated* in colonization” (2010, 193). She proposes that “rather than apologize for those aspects of Africa’s cultural plurality that are more difficult to accommodate or deem them an eschewal of ‘tradition’, the recognition that culture necessarily evolves requires that theorists on postcolonial Africa re-evaluate the prevailing notion of Africa as a negative construct to the West” (2010, 193). So, while we must be careful not to obscure ideologies of “empowerment” from larger structures of power, we also must avoid sliding into an imperialist nostalgia or denial of agency.

In critiquing empowerment discourse, this means that, rather than seeing people as victims of “Western” ideologies, we ought to be focusing on dismantling structures which disempower in concrete ways. In order to do so, further research should focus on large donor agencies like the IMF, World Bank, and USAID. Researchers should ask what these organizations’ interests are in specific contexts, and why project funding is so specifically stipulated before it can get to the local level. To reiterate one of my participant’s sentiments, what is the point of local NGOs if they are so structurally restrained that they cannot address the actual needs of their communities? Further research into the Corporate Social Responsibility campaigns of, for instance, mining companies, would also be helpful in revealing how the idea of “women’s empowerment” is being used to obfuscate exploitative ventures in Tanzania that

disempower women in distinct ways (Porter et al 2008; Manzanera-Ruiz et al 2016). While women of various identities and classes in Tanzania are taking advantage of programming and funding to empower themselves within this structural landscape, the co-optation of “empowerment” ultimately creates more barriers. Studying the specific ways in which this co-optation happens is important in creating room for multiple conceptions of empowerment within development and transnational feminisms.

When I close my eyes and picture myself back on my rooftop in Dar, I remember trying to orientate myself – to hear the ocean and feel where I was on the coastline, to visualize the massive city mapped out around me, and to try to understand my place within it. Up on my roof, I often felt the gaze of one of my neighbours, who would smoke out of her window and eye me with bemusement: a lone *mzungu* wandering from edge to edge, ducking under clotheslines, and finally standing still to stare at the setting sun. This gaze was familiar and powerful; it was ever-present as I moved around the city. An uncertain self-consciousness accompanied the experience of sticking out in a space that was not *for* me, and knowing that people perceived me in ways I could not control. Of course, this feeling, like any discomfort or challenge I faced in Dar, was born of privilege rather than oppression. I chose it, and I do not mean to suggest otherwise. At the same time, it is dangerous to underplay or forget that forms of “dominance” can be mocked, utilized, or outright dismissed in reclamations of power. Decentring, or disorientating Whiteness and other forms of privilege within spheres of development, feminism, and anthropology therefore requires more than deconstruction. It requires understanding that different forms of power, and of “empowerment,” are not to be underestimated.

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