

## Chapter 5 Women

I knew in the moment when the pain was the greatest,  
when it reached a crescendo,  
as when a large metal drum is struck with a corresponding metal stick,  
that there is no God known to man  
who cares about children or about women.  
And that the God of woman is autonomy.

Alice Walker  
*Possessing the Secret of Joy*

“Women” are a special focus of development programs throughout the world. From small NGOs like Concern to the largest multilateral branches of the UN and the World Bank, Women in Development (WID) concepts are central to contemporary aid planning. Programs active in Malangali have always reflected the currents in discourse about gender, whether those currents have discounted issues of gender or given them primary focus. This chapter examines the ways programs aimed at changing the social conditions of women and have interacted with Malangali residents and African aid agency staff. I examine the ways Northern feminist ideology<sup>1</sup> constructs an image of the African female, women who must be liberated from oppression and misery. I compare Northern views of African women with the perspectives of female Malangali residents about their lives and

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<sup>1</sup> In my use of the term “ideology,” I follow the lead of Jean and John Comaroff, who write: “Following Raymond Williams (1977: 109), who here seems to have *The German Ideology* [1970] in mind, we use [ideology] to describe ‘an articulated system of meanings, values, and beliefs of a kind that can be abstracted as [the] “worldview” of any social grouping. Borne in explicit manifestos and everyday practices, self-conscious texts and spontaneous images, popular styles and political platforms, this worldview may be more or less internally systematic, more or less assertively coherent in its outward forms. But, as long as it exists, it provides an organizing scheme (a master narrative?) for collective symbolic production. Obviously, to invoke Marx and Engels (1970) once again, the regnant ideology of any period or place will be that of the dominant group. And, while the nature and degree of its preeminence may vary a good deal, it is likely to be protected, even enforced, to the full extent and power of those who claim it for their own” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 24).

the aid programs available to them.<sup>2</sup> Finally, I examine what happens when Malangali women interact with programs determined to change their lives.

The chapter has two aims. First, I hope to show how the ideologies and actions surrounding WID are produced and consumed, in order to find roots to many problems experienced by development planners and the African women “targeted” by these kinds of programs. Second, through a critical examination of what I submit is the misapplication of feminist precepts, I hope to contribute to a distinctly reflexive feminist-based political anthropology of African gender relations. Here I follow, and apply to the anthropology of development, Chandra Mohanty’s powerful and provocative analysis:

I argue that assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality, on the one hand, and inadequate self-consciousness about the effect of Western scholarship on the “third world” in the context of a world system dominated by the West, on the other, characterize a sizable extent of Western feminist work on women in the third world. An analysis of “sexual difference” in the form of a cross-culturally singular, monolithic notion of patriarchy or male dominance leads to a construction of a similarly reductive and homogeneous notion of what I call a “third world difference” – that stable, ahistorical something that apparently oppresses most if not all women in these countries. And it is in the production of this “third world difference” that Western feminisms appropriate and “colonize” the constitutive complexities which characterize the lives of women in these countries. It is in this process of discursive homogenization and systematization of the oppression of women in the third world that power is exercised in much of recent Western feminist discourse, and this power needs to be defined and named (Mohanty 1991: 53-4)

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<sup>2</sup> I undertook research among women in Malangali as a white heterosexual male. This set of facts, among many others (being American, being university educated, growing up without a mother, growing up in a left-wing household, etc.), obviously influenced the perspective of this study, my relationships with the women I with whom I talked, and the ways women in Malangali were predisposed to interact with me. Anthropology often mandates that the ethnographer work among people dissimilar in many respects to him or herself. For reasons discussed in this chapter, research and theorizing about issues pertaining to women and gender (other than sexuality) have become almost exclusively the domain of female scholars, which I think is methodologically and intellectually blinkered. Without belaboring the point here, I will state: I believe that the research I have done with women in Tanzania is ethnographically valid, despite – or quite possibly enriched by – the many differences between us.

African governments, Western agencies, and academics from all over converge on the analysis that life is hard for African women such as those in Malangali (see, for example, Reynolds 1975, TGNP 1993, Bureau of Statistics and Ministry of Community Development, Women's Affairs, and Children 1995, Mukangara and Koda 1997). From this recognition have arisen hundreds of programs and literally thousands of projects throughout the continent involved in something variously called WID or GAD (Gender and Development) (Weekes-Valiani 1980). WID/GAD targets African women together as a discrete locus for development work. A whole set of circumstances are defined as "women's problems" and acted upon as gendered spheres. Further, most actions of interest to international aid agencies today are designed to include gender components. Such perspectives on women's problems in Africa arise from discernible, culturally mediated roots and in turn have particular consequences when converted to action.

Myriad portrayals of the hardships faced by African women stimulate the activities that international aid agencies end up funding.<sup>3</sup> I choose one brief description to give luster to the theoretical discussion that follows, a basic version of what Mohanty discusses as Western feminist [or in this case feminist-derived] writings on women in the third world that seek "to demonstrate the universal cross-cultural operation of male dominance and female exploitation" (1991: 66). A textbook that Concern prepared for Irish students, distributed in the "Tanzania: People and Natural Resources Pack" (Concern/

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<sup>3</sup> Mascarenhas and Mbilinyi (1983) list four hundred references discussing women's issues in Tanzania through 1981. Mukangara (1995) lists a further 956 references written between 1982 and 1994, and many more have been written since. Most, but not all, of these writings share some of the intellectual predispositions discussed below.

E.C. 1990) along with a video that is faithful to the text of “The Personal Touch” brochure discussed in Chapter 2, follows the trope of the brochure in many particulars. In its depiction of gender matters, however, the textbook also draws upon – and then teaches to European children – an additional set of understandings of the lives of African women. The book purports to chronicle a day in the life of the fictional Lutevele family. Mama Solomon awakes at 5 a.m., rekindles the fire, and cooks breakfast for the family. She then trudges to the tap to get water, her youngest baby strapped to her back. Again she prepares food, then leaves for a long day on the farm. Her husband meanwhile has already left to do some farm work, but he knocks off by 11 a.m. to go shopping in town. Her eldest daughter sweeps the house, washes the dishes, soaks the beans, gives Grandpa his medicine, and then gets herself off to school. After lunch the women go into the forest to search for fuelwood. When the children get home from school, Mama Solomon and her eldest daughter carry baskets of maize to the village milling machine while the boys go off to play soccer. Again the mother cooks and takes care of Grandpa. The father helps his children with their homework, then goes to the village to drink beer and play checkers. The mother puts the baby to sleep, then sits outside making baskets with other women and reminiscing about having had a chance to eat meat at a recent wedding (pp. 4-5). The next morning the cycle repeats itself, as this imagery of the drudgery of African womanhood repeats itself (often in shorthand) throughout the literature (Buvini?, Lycette, and McGreevey 1983, Østergaard 1992, Creighton and Omari 1995).

Considering women as a site for development activity involves a parallel but in some respects radically different process to those discussed in the last three chapters.

Farming, forestry, and water projects focus on *physical* changes, though social transformations are sometimes accidental or intentional by-products. Women's development projects are at root geared toward *social* changes, often through the medium of physical transformations. While such projects are phrased in the neutralizing language of development, they arise from the political climate of Europe and the United States from the late 60s until the present day. While most WID/GAD efforts could hardly be considered "feminist" in their substantiation, they are part of a northern discourse about women that is intensely ideological.

### **Feminisms**

Northern academic feminist discussion, far from being unified, consists of two major threads, what I call "egalitarianist" and "womanist" perspectives. The egalitarianist camp argues for essential underlying sameness between the sexes, asserting that women can and should be surgeons and politicians, and only co-equal partners in domestic endeavors. The womanist camp (what di Leonardo calls "cultural feminism") argues for the essential uniqueness of women, seeing women as nurturers, peacemakers, and the source for social good. This chapter is written from a firm personal devotion to egalitarianist precepts, though with the explicit anthropological agenda of understanding how such ideological beliefs are cultural constructs that often differ from the goals and ideas of the women of Malangali.

Di Leonardo, in her important 1991 essay, asserts that feminist anthropological knowledge has diverged from popular feminist culture (1991: 8). In popular discourse, which is especially important because women's programs are often designed by people who

do not have a thorough grounding in the theoretical literature, the two threads of egalitarianism and womanism are interwoven: women are unique *and* discriminated against. Many feminist anthropologists have moved beyond such simplifications. Di Leonardo demonstrates that such early formulations as Ortner's 1974 female: nature, male: culture dichotomy have given way in anthropology to studies that examine complex interplays of politics, history, gender, and belief. Di Leonardo asserts for the contributors to her edited volume, and for we feminist anthropologists who follow, the duty to share knowledge about issues of gender and the difficulties that often particularly affect women, while recognizing our ideologies – a call to which this chapter attempts to respond. Yet she also points out the legacy of early theorizing:

The proposition that women are, across time and space, a single oppressed and virtuous class, and its entailed refusal to recognize the transhistorical and cross-class existence of wealthy, powerful, and evil women, has remained popular among many western feminists. The dichotomizing, essentializing threads in 1970s feminist evolutionary models today weigh, to paraphrase Marx, like a nightmare on the brains of living feminists (1991: 26).

Western WID/GAD programs arise from this complex mixture of perceptions about women (Escobar 1995: 177-82), and must design their efforts to appeal to funding sources with similar mixed roots. In most cases WID/GAD programs are designed by people who genuinely care about the problems of women in Africa, and who see their programs as a way to help. The programs have the commendable goal of making life better for women who experience many hardships in their lives. They go about their work, though, in ways that more closely speak to the concerns of the funders than directly to the concerns of those women who might stand to benefit from their help.

**Weakness** Women and children have long been perceived in Western thought as weak groups warranting protection from such necessities of the male world as war and capitalism. The Aid to Families with Dependent Children welfare program in the United States, for example, has long targeted these groups for special assistance. While able-bodied men have great difficulty receiving state support in the US, many mothers of young children have until the 1990s been eligible for monthly checks while they cared for their offspring. (The 1990s' emphasis on "free trade" and the power of the market has brought "welfare reform" designed to cast these women into the lowest echelons of the workforce, a branch of the dominant philosophy that forced so many African countries to adopt Structural Adjustment Programs.) Private international emergency relief programs in Europe after the Second World War provided aid "directly to low-income women, who, in their gendered roles as wives and mothers, were seen as those primarily concerned with their family's welfare" (Moser 1993: 59). These programs were the direct precursors of those active in Africa today. Documentaries of starving Africans in refugee camps, such as those during the 1984 Ethiopian crisis, continue to focus on the emaciated women unable to nurse their starving children, and the images of this perversion<sup>4</sup> cause people to donate to aid organizations. I suggest that a further consequence of such images is that African women, particularly uneducated rural African women, are seen by many feminist-inspired scholars and development practitioners as too weak to speak in the struggle to overcome their own conditions of oppression. The practice of writing such women into the

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<sup>4</sup> Susan Moeller (1999: 96) reproduces one such photograph from a December 14, 1992 *Time* story "Landscape of Death" on the famine in Somalia. The picture's caption neatly encapsulates its ghastly contents: "Beyond Hope, Beyond Life: A child, its eyes covered with flies, tries to take milk from its mother's shriveled breast."

women's movement, whether as candidates for aid or practitioners of hidden "local feminism" is now well established.<sup>5</sup>

**Sisterhood**            The 1970s brought to the women's movement in the U.S. and Europe a much discussed feeling of shared female identity, "sisterhood." Judith Butler shows what this notion of empathetic interconnectedness meant for the women's movement:

[W]e refer not only to women as a social category but also as a felt sense of self, a culturally conditioned or constructed subjective identity. The descriptions of women's oppression, their historical situation or cultural perspective has seemed, to some, to require that women themselves will not only recognize the rightness of the feminist claims made in their behalf, but that, together, they will discover a common identity, whether in relational attitudes, in their embodied resistance to abstract and objectifying modes of thought and experience, their felt sense of their bodies, their capacity for maternal identification or maternal thinking, the nonlinear directionality of their pleasures or the elliptical and plurivocal possibilities of their writing (Butler 1990: 324).

Political empowerment was one result, including the creation of Emily's List through which women nationally donated to female candidates around the United States. Emily's List faced dilemmas when it was revealed that femaleness did not inherently engender among candidates the liberal tendencies of the group's core donors. Nevertheless, the concept of an underlying bond between women entered the popular culture, vocalized in, for example, Chaka Khan's 1979 pop hit "I'm Every Woman."<sup>6</sup> (Houston's version of

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<sup>5</sup> A visit to the Library of Congress call numbers HQ1240 and HQ1870 in the stacks of any well-funded library will show such writings to be a growth industry. See, for example, Maguire 1984 and Basu 1995, but see also Narayan 1997 and the contributors to Alexander and Mohanty 1997 for nuanced discussions of the potentials for both colonized and colonizing feminist discourse.

<sup>6</sup> The song was even more successful when re-released in 1994 as a Whitney Houston cover. While the notion of a pop star glamour queen claiming empathetic interconnection with the downtrodden billions may strike some as absurd, the song reached number four on both the American and British pop charts and The Bodyguard album on which it was the second single sold over 33 million copies (Manish's Whitney Houston



“I’m Every Woman” is currently a standard on bootleg cassettes heard daily throughout Tanzania.) Though pop-feminist pop-anthems did not have the same crystalizing effect on popular consciousness about gender as “We Are the World” and “Feed the World” had regarding starvation in Africa, they did give voice to a distinctive translation of how the women’s movement came to be understood by many Northern women outside the academy. This philosophy of sisterhood has driven many women to vote for women and pro-woman candidates, who in turn believe in and bring forth policies and programs aimed at benefitting women at home and abroad.

**Genitalia**            The female bond was claimed by Alice Walker in her 1992 book *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. The book purports to tell the story of a young African woman facing ritual genital cutting<sup>7</sup>. Though genital cutting does not appear to be common in Malangali, it is central to the discussions women in the North have held about African women in the past decade, which have formed a development narrative that gives guidance to international aid programs. Walker’s novel binds the narrative in the popular press. Walker’s authority to write the novel comes not from time spent in Africa, nor from

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Page, [http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/Exhale\\_Tonight/singles.htm](http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/Exhale_Tonight/singles.htm)). The lead single, “I Will Always Love You,” the biggest selling commercial single of all time, is responsible for the album’s phenomenal sales, but “I’m Every Woman” was Houston’s highest-ever new entry to the British charts, at number five.

<sup>7</sup> Different forms of female cutting, ranging from the removal of the tip of the clitoris to radical surgery, are practiced by many African ethnic groups. Some women experience extreme and enduring pain while others disavow such feelings. The terms that commentators use, including female circumcision, clitorodectomy, infibulation, or female genital mutilation (“FGM”), are all politically fraught, “with circumcision signaling relativistic tolerance and mutilation implying moral outrage” (Walley 1997: 407-8). “Genital cutting” or “genital surgery” seem to be the terms that best cover the varying initiation practices. As far as I can tell, no such practices exist among the dominant ethnic groups in Malangali. My male informants on sexual matters knew nothing about it, and women denied to me that such practices occurred; the extent of my intimate knowledge of these matters comes through conversation. “Yes, I was cut at my initiation,” one woman told me. “Yes, it hurt, but I did not cry.” But we were miscommunicating – she was talking about facial scarring and scarrification of her torso, not her genitals.

conversations with refugees of the ordeal. Rather, she claims to write the book about her “sister” with an authoritative voice because she is a woman and of African descent; having invented Africanesque words “now tossed up by my unconscious..., so I claim the continent” (Walker 1992: 285). Walker’s novel is central to an international campaign against genital cutting that has moved with slow momentum through Europe and the US in the 1990s. Stories, and recently pictures, of this often excruciating and sometimes fatal procedure garner shock and outrage. In 1993 there were unsuccessful calls for the United States to halt aid funding for countries in which genital cutting is practiced, including Tanzania. Although the movement faltered in the realization that the problem is too intractable to be solved through mere governmental pressure, the visceral condemnation of women and countries that do not cease the practice continues to this day. As Nahid Toubia has pointed out (in a 1997 panel discussion on female genital cutting at the Yale Law School), the New York Times has run dozens of articles about genital cutting in Africa or among African expatriates in the nineties, but barely mentioned the many other serious health issues (other than HIV) facing women on the continent every day. She goes on to stress that this focus on women’s genitals strips them of their humanity. Western perceptions of the custom reify notions of African barbarism and invoke an urgent necessity to induce cultural change for the benefit of women too subjugated to recognize their own victimization. In the case of genital cutting, she argues convincingly that African women are seen in the North as bodies, not cultured individuals.

The furor over genital cutting is only the most dramatic of the many ways donors, governments, and academics essentialize the African woman. In her we have a quiet,

passive workhorse who carries water long distances, searches ceaselessly for scarce firewood, bears and nurtures countless children, and tends the domestic needs of often drunk and abusive husbands. The recognition that women are often responsible for much of the family farming has added to the standard litany of woes.<sup>8</sup> Undereducated and unempowered, the African woman is understood to exist at the margins of repressive patriarchal societies. The consequence of such perceptions is that aid programs are designed to rescue women from primordial conditions they are presumed not to understand, and against which they are powerless to act. The fact that genital cutting is done to women by women shows the ensnaring grip of culture;<sup>9</sup> more dramatically than the reproduction of any of the other symptoms of subjugation, genital cutting highlights the radical cultural dislocations that proponents find may be necessary to rescue the African woman.

Christine Walley, in her article 1997 “Searching for Voices: Feminism, Anthropology, and the Global Debate over Female Genital Operations,” presents both an ethnographic account of a genital cutting ceremony in rural Kenya and a comprehensive analysis of the international controversy surrounding such practices. She underscores the issues of importance to aid in Africa in a discussion that is worth quoting at length.

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<sup>8</sup> Guyer (1991: 257-9) credits Boserup (1970) for awakening the awareness of women’s work on the African farm among intellectuals in more urban institutions. She writes, “The fact of African female farming... threw light on a range of other feminist concerns: the historical bases of ‘patriarchy,’ women’s work and social status, the effects of state policies, and the implications for women of the dynamics of ‘the world system.’” Guyer demonstrates that in ensuing discourse, a “misleading focus” fixed particular notions of female farming, outside of “empirical veracity,... within a framework of evolutionary directionalities.”

<sup>9</sup> Walley (1997: 421) quotes ABC News anchor Forrest Sawyer, for example, saying, “This is a brutal, disabling ritual so tied to culture and tradition that for thousands of years women have been powerless to stop it.”

Walker's and NOW's presentation of female genital operations have fed into powerful and value-laden understandings of differences between Africans and Euro-Americans... Such understandings presume a radical difference, a binary opposition between First and Third Worlds that itself is built upon the historical belief in a chasm between "modern" Euro-Americans and "native" colonized others. Reading through much of the Western-based literature opposing female genital operations, the degree to which many of the arguments work to reproduce such beliefs is striking. One common trope... has been the tendency to characterize African women as thoroughly oppressed victims of patriarchy, ignorance, or both, not as social actors in their own right. Sub-Saharan and North African women are alternately seen as not being allowed to express their voices, or as having defective or confused understandings if they speak in favor of genital operations... "[T]raditions" are simultaneously depicted as the meaningless hangovers of a premodern era and as the defining characteristic of the Third World. In this scenario, "traditions" in the Third World are hardened essences that can only be shed by modernization, while in the West, "backward" cultural traditions are conceived of as being steadily replaced by "rational" ways of life... "Development," assumed to be the intrinsic property of Europe and the United States, rather than a cultural construct in its own right, emerges in this discourse as the antithesis of cultural traditions. (Walley 1997: 419-20)

In the third section, I show what transpires when these culturally constructed notions of development and feminisms are paired in the real context of Malangali. In the next section, though, I discuss the views of gender roles and womanhood that were presented to me by Malangali women. Before the ethnographic examination of these topics, however, it is worth considering how it is that "women" have come to be viewed as a distinct category for knowledge and aid.

**Compartmentalization** This is a subsection that could by rights fit in any chapter of this dissertation. Why, for example, are farming and forestry compartmentalized by aid programs when they are part of an ecological and economic continuum for Malangali residents? I suggest the topic is most pressing when it comes to women's issues because, by placing women as a discrete category for analysis, holistic

thought about the objectives of social action becomes impossible. Women are to be acted upon as subjugated subjects, rather than engaged in ways that may make less burdensome their conditions of existence.

Two of the biggest health issues, malaria and AIDS, exemplify compartmentalization. These two diseases have been consistently overlooked by both of the aid organizations active in Malangali. This significant oversight shows how aid agencies perceive of issues in different ways than rural residents. To a mother there is little difference if her child dies of malnutrition or dies of malaria, but neither UNICEF nor Concern addresses malaria prevention education in the area. Both agencies also locally avoid engaging the issue of AIDS in any but the most peripheral ways. Malaria is perhaps the leading cause of child death (though without any testing facilities, anything that shows any symptoms of malaria is diagnosed and treated as such), and the slow devastation of AIDS has been tearing through Malangali families for much more than a decade.

These two diseases are seen as health issues by the agencies, but outside of their provenance. It is of course not fair to blame a voluntary organization like Concern for not doing *everything*, but without blaming them we can ask why.<sup>10</sup> For Concern, part of the explanation for avoiding dealing with AIDS seems to stem from its Irish Catholic origins; I was told by some staff that dealing with non-marital sex and prophylactics made the higher-ups intensely uncomfortable. But there is a wider issue, which is the

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<sup>10</sup> The question is especially fair because Concern publicity touts working on AIDS-related programs in Uganda since at least 1990 (Concern 1995b: 4). On what basis did the organization choose to undertake AIDS work in Uganda, but not in Tanzania? Their newsletter distributed in Europe and the US does not mention the difference in programs between the two countries, though the AIDS literature and Concern publicity about their work in Tanzania are distributed through exactly the same channels.

compartmentalization of knowledge. In this, development has followed the academy. As academics became increasingly specialized during the past century, we have carved the world into non-overlapping niches: biochemical crystallography, economic anthropology, Africanist historiography. University-trained specialists then entered various development fields that allowed them to apply their expertise. Arndt (1987) shows this process at work in the creation of the field of development economics and the organizations that promoted it. Similar processes occurred in such areas as agriculture and health. Overlaps in people's behavior, such as the use of piped water to grow vegetable gardens that might improve nutrition, involved different experts and often separate agencies. Even within a small organization such as Concern we see a conflict between water engineers planning a finite flow through their pipes and the horticulture specialists enthusiastically promoting vegetable gardens. Our way of seeing the world as divisible into "sectors" (or departments in a university or corporation) allows us to limit that with which we do and do not involve ourselves. In Malangali, Concern understood that UNICEF was dealing with the health sector, and therefore remained mostly detached. UNICEF in turn made a set of determinations delimiting what aspects of health it could engage. With no overarching strategy and pathetic funding, health care in Malangali fell to a patchwork of emergency services, special vaccination campaigns, and radio exhortations regarding people's individual behavior.

The process that compartmentalizes health, water, and social sciences into separate spheres of knowledge also sets "women" into a curiously discrete category. Again, the academy sets the precedent, with "women's studies" departments and courses arising

in the post-Freidan epoch. While such departments arose to include women in academic knowledge systems from which they had been previously overlooked, the result on many campuses has been to segregate issues of wider human importance into structurally marginal courses and discourses.<sup>11</sup> Women with a predisposition to engage in “women’s studies” tend to talk among themselves, with their ideas seldom achieving prominence in other fields – except as tokens of a feminist sensibility among sympathetic members of the academy.

In development fields, “women’s issues” often are similarly pushed to the side as their own special – and limited – programs. This segregation can be seen first in the literature, the overlap between academics and development. Recent edited volumes tell the story: *Feminist Visions of Development*, (Jackson and Pearson 1998) has sixteen contributors, fifteen of whom are women, and the lone male is second author on a paper co-written with his wife; *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge* (di Leonardo 1991) has one male writer among fifteen contributors; *Feminism/ Postmodernism* (Nicholson 1990) one man and thirteen women; *African Feminism* (Mikell 1997) does not include any men among its thirteen contributors. The other works cited in this chapter are also almost exclusively written by women and, I venture, read by women. Within aid organizations, women are often assigned to write on women’s issues and run women’s programs. In Concern, all expatriates responsible for women’s programs were female, reducing the women staff available for work on agriculture, forestry, and other programs; all engineering

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<sup>11</sup> Women’s studies courses are predominantly taught and attended by women. In one such history course I took in 1986 as an undergraduate at Columbia, there was only one other male in a woman-taught class with over forty students. An introductory Women’s Studies course at Yale had a similar ratio in 1998.

staff (expatriate and Tanzanian) were male, as were a majority of those responsible for other project areas. Senior staff, from small organizations like Concern to behemoths like UNICEF, a significant majority of whom are men, accept the importance of directing programs toward women for reasons discussed throughout this chapter, and assign research and implementation responsibility to the women who show an interest.<sup>12</sup>

While women are consumers of health, education, agricultural, forestry, water, and many other services, WID/GAD activities often stand apart from these other sectors. In Malangali, Concern's women's program largely emphasized "women's groups," collectives that were supposed to farm, plant trees, sew, or grind maize together.<sup>13</sup> In the late years of the program, as detailed in Chapters 3 and 4, attempts were made to figure out within the context of the forestry and water projects how women could be involved. The staff of the other projects also had a mandate to keep special track of how their efforts affected women. In a small organization where the senior staff see each other on a daily basis (when the projects were run by expatriates, the decision-makers were all living in the same house), it is easy for the concerns of one staffer to infiltrate the perspectives of the others. On a policy level, however, women remained the domain of the Community

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<sup>12</sup> Baden and Goetz identify an ironic process in the "mainstreaming" of gender issues, the movement "from subordination to disaggregation." They write, "Bureaucratic requirements for information tend to strip away the political content of information on women's interests and reduce it to a set of needs or gaps, amenable to administrative decisions about the allocation of resources. This distillation of information about women's experiences is unable to accommodate or validate issues of gender and power." As an example, they cite the creation by the UNDP of the "Gender and Empowerment Measure," or "GEM," in which "the rhetoric of grassroots, collective, bottom-up development ('empowerment') is invoked to name a top-down and universalizing statistic" (1998:22-23).

<sup>13</sup> This chapter does not specifically discuss Concern-sponsored women's groups because none remained active in the research villages by the time I arrived.



Development project in Malangali. Other agencies active in Tanzania remove women's concerns to entirely separate departments – or even designate women as the agency's exclusive focus.<sup>14</sup> The compartmentalization of knowledge about women serves as preface to the specific ways that people acting on such knowledge set about to change women in Malangali.

### **Womanhood**

Women in Malangali articulate perspectives on gender that rarely overlap with those of Western feminists or development planners. Throughout my field research I asked women provocative questions, questions informed by years of engagement with feminist discussions in the United States. I found that women in Malangali are explicit about the special burdens they face as women, while they embrace notions of womanhood of which such burdens form a part. Aspects of their lives that cause them hardship, such as bearing many children, are often integrally connected to the ways women assign value to their lives. Women in Malangali embrace the values surrounding many gendered expectations, such as one Katherine Fritz presents from her research in Uganda that women will fetch water for the family (Fritz 1998: 109-10) – for example, one woman who let her husband use wheeled transport to fetch water, rather than carrying it home herself on her head, was subject to criticism by other women for failing to perform her womanly duties. What Fritz calls “the cultural construction of personhood” is a process “in which meanings surrounding gender roles and the logic of gender relations become

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<sup>14</sup> A year 2000 funding proposal for an anti-anemia project I helped plan, for example, eliminated most references to men as program co-beneficiaries in a version submitted to one funding agency that was quite explicit that its focus is exclusively on women.

extremely compelling to those involved” (1998: 127).

**Fertility** I begin this section with scenes that are, peculiarly, a seeming digression from discussions of women’s development issues in rural Africa. First I present a short scene in which several women voiced their feelings about children and fertility. I then relate the story of the personal reproductive problems of one relatively well-off woman, Lila Jordana. I choose to tell her story, rather than render similarly sympathetic portraits of the hard lives of many other woman in Malangali division, because experiences such as hers have been largely silenced by a narrative about African women for which Jordana’s tale may present cognitive dissonance. (I do not wish, however, to obscure other women’s stories that highlight hardships that, unlike Jordana’s, sometimes *do* feature in the rhetoric of aid to women in Africa, and that also add to an understanding of what being female means to a person living her life in Malangali, such as these snapshots that I do not present in detail: One young woman in Mwilavila who died of AIDS, the last of three wives and one husband to fall to the disease, was buried in a sheet because she had no family to pay for a coffin. A grandmother in Isimikinyi pulled my hand to her shriveled chest and told me she bore twelve children, only two of whom have lived to adulthood. Katerina in Tambalang’ombe talked often of the difficulties of tending the farm and raising an ever-growing number of children on her own while her husband was earning money away from their home for ten months of the year. Mama Kisu in Ipilimo nearly died in childbirth, after which her husband agreed that she should receive a free hysterectomy at Ilebula hospital – and then they suddenly lost their youngest toddler in an unexplained tragedy.) I elect to detail in this chapter the stories of a few

women whose experiences may or may not be typical of Malangali residents – in part because the history of each woman I have met contains both unique elements and some that are common to many. Profiles of these women, as with the stories of dozens of Malangali women, raise issues that look very different from the abstractions of much development writing.

After harvest in Ipilimo village, several women were sitting outside a house while the homeowner went about her annual task of replastering her walls with fresh mud. The women were sharing some of the year's last bamboo wine. They began discussing how many children they have. Mama Bertram, a young mother with only two children could not compete in this demonstration of her womanhood, but that did not stop her from dreaming. She said with a determined smile, "I'm going to have ten *plus*."

Another young woman echoed her. "So will I. God willing."

I asked, "Why do you want so many children? Isn't it very hard to care for so many?"

Mama Bertram replied, "No, the older ones take care of the younger ones." I thought about all the 5-year-olds who could be seen babysitting their neighbors or siblings, and nodded.

An older woman, Mama Amina, contributed, "Children bring good cheer to a house."

Said another, "Children make a house complete."

"How many children do you want?" Mama Bertram asked me.

"I'd like two children," I answered. "Maybe three if it happens."

Mama Bertram was surprised. “Why do you want so few?”

Mama Amina answered for me: “White people don’t like children.”

What became obvious in this discussion are the differences between how most Malangali women view motherhood and the expectations of the foreigners who design aid programs. Cases in which Tanzanian women seek birth control or abortions certainly exist, but usually because women want to space births or do not want to give birth out of wedlock, not because they wish not to have children at all.<sup>15</sup> As Fritz demonstrates, in an anthropological contextualization of motherhood along the lines called for by Warren and Borque (1991: 287), a great deal of social identity relates to bearing children within the context of marriage. The women in this scene demonstrate, moreover, that having children is more than just a matter of securing their social status; many women with whom I have spent time derive a great deal of happiness from being surrounded by a brood of offspring.

Lila Jordana, by contrast, was infertile.<sup>16</sup> She was pregnant once in the early 1990s, but miscarried early. She subsequently married Akmed, a trader from a prominent Iringa-based family. She converted to Islam before the wedding, which was a great disappointment to her devout Catholic mother. Akmed was a good provider, a bear of a man who regularly left Malangali on the bus at 4:30 in the morning and got back from his perambulations at around sunset. Sometimes he stayed with his other woman in Mafinga

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<sup>15</sup> Aspects of this discussion are supported by unrelated field research among almost 300 pregnant women in Mpwapwa District, Dodoma Region, in 1999.

<sup>16</sup> Certain details of this story have been changed by agreement to protect the identity of the people involved.

town. He had recently fathered another child by this city wife,<sup>17</sup> so the fertility problem clearly lay with Jordana. Akmed was very fond of Jordana, who was beautiful, personable, and an industrious entrepreneur, but he had not promised to wait forever for her to conceive. Jordana broke into tears when she discussed the possibility that Akmed might leave her.

She went to every doctor in the area. The clinic at Mwilavila was useless to her. Women's health is attended to by a new maternity ward donated by the family of a Concern volunteer who died of malaria. The facilities are sanitary but spartan – metal framed beds with simple foam mattresses in two rooms with six beds each. Families bring their own bedding and food, and must bring their own kerosene lantern if they need emergency care at night. Available medicines are mostly Panadol and penicillin, which are donated by a European organization every six weeks in a box of rudimentary supplies, but that are used up in half that time. The clinic is geared toward emergency care, and even for that it is horribly inadequate.

So Jordana went to Makambako, and to Iringa. She consulted with physicians who gave her advice on timing her cycle, but the facilities could not handle an examination that might reveal anything about her medical condition. Nor did they have laboratory equipment to test Akmed's motility, though he expressed willingness to undergo any tests that might be needed. The medical route was a dead end.

When Jordana was unsuccessful at the hospitals she took a trip to visit a famous witchdoctor far away. (Most Malangali residents believe that some illnesses are brought by

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<sup>17</sup> In Swahili the term *mke*, translated wife, is often an ambiguous referent for marriage or cohabitation.

God and can therefore be cured by modern medicines, while other illnesses are caused by human agents and so must be cured through spiritual mediums. Medical issues are discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.) The *mganga* determined that he could not cure her infertility with herbs or charms. The problem was an angry person, he said. Somebody did not want her to have a child with Akmed. Who was angered by her marriage to the Muslim businessman? The answer revealed itself: Jordana's mother was the witch.

Jordana's family disintegrated. Her father had recently died, and some tensions were evident at the memorial ceremony where his possessions were divided up. Her trip to the *mganga* severed the family along the fault lines that showed at the memorial. Her older sister Mama Ronald sided with her, while her younger sister remained loyal to the old woman. The old woman fell ill and neither Jordana nor Mama Ronald went to visit her at the clinic. Various other people associated with the family went to one side or the other – though more people supported the aggrieved daughter than the old woman who was likely a bitter old witch.

Finally Jordana's elder brother appeared from Arusha. Although his inheritance of most of their father's land was a sore point for Jordana, his decade living away from Malangali made him more or less neutral in the family conflict. He attended to their ailing mother, then convened a council with the sisters. He persuaded them that the witchdoctor was wrong. His argument that the *mganga's* methods – the cauldron and chants and spitting – were faulty did not sway the sisters, but he was persuasive in reminding them how eager the old woman was for more grandsons in addition to young

Ronald in secondary school. The weeks during which rays of hatred beamed from Jordana's eyes every time she saw her mother soon faded to a bad memory, with the old woman apparently redeeming herself beyond suspicion.<sup>18</sup>

At this point Jordana came to me for assistance. My involvement before this was slight, supporting the brother's efforts by saying that even if the infertility was indeed caused by a human, I could not see how the mother could possibly be the witch. Now I was called in because of comments I'd made about the case to another woman, a friend of Jordana's. I had talked about the fertility treatments women undergo in the United States. Then that week the BBC reported a story of an English woman who took fertility drugs and was then carrying octuplets. What doctor could Jordana go to for help having babies?

I had to renew my residence permit in Dar es Salaam the next week. While there I stayed with an American friend working for UMATI, a USAID-funded family planning program. I also visited a Tanzanian friend, Dr. Betty Hiza, who is one of what she reckons to be about 70 obstetrician-gynecologists in Tanzania. UMATI funds educational programs and women's health clinics throughout the country, including the one at Ilembula, near Makambako, that Jordana had visited. The inquiries I put in with these two women on Jordana's behalf were passed through the highest levels of the women's health service corps in a couple of days. The answer I brought back to Jordana, while sad, hardly surprised me. "I'm sorry," I told her, "the doctors here can only help women who want to *stop* having children [see Population Planning Unit of the Planning Commission

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<sup>18</sup> When, much later, the mother lay dying of cancer, Jordana attended her bedside day and night with no hint of lingering doubts.

1995 for a brief discussion of the “cost-benefit analysis of an effective family planning programme” as government policy]. The closest place you can find a university-trained doctor who is a specialist in helping women become pregnant is probably in South Africa. Maybe there is somebody in Nairobi, but nobody could say for sure. Even the South African fertility specialists probably only usually help white women. The treatment is very expensive, too expensive for most Africans. UMATI said that many other Tanzanian women have problems becoming pregnant, but there are no services for women like you, and none are planned.”

**Roles** Along with bearing children, Jordana and her neighbors shared many other expectations about what her life as a woman would entail. I found the highly regimented gender roles extremely difficult to get used to. At first I could sit politely while the women attended to me, because my American male socialization allows guests to be served with only a pro forma offer to help. But after my status in many houses transformed from special guest to just one of the guys, I still transgressed if I so much as dipped my own drinking water from the clay pot in the corner. Celebrations were particularly confining because we menfolk were always made to sit in our groups drinking while the women busied themselves with cooking, gossiping, singing, and cleaning.<sup>19</sup> I felt most trapped by gendered expectations when Mama Musa, an older woman with whom I was particularly close, fell gravely ill with a bleeding ulcer. When I went to be with her at the hospital,

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<sup>19</sup> Public gatherings were not suitable occasions for me to do ethnographic research among women, because the fact of gender mandated public performances of gendered roles. Qualitative research with women usually occurred in more private spheres, such as talking together in the kitchen while women cooked, enacting gendered roles that gave context to our conversations.



Jordana made it clear I should stand outside with the other men while women with whom Mama Musa had little connection spent the night nursing her by her bedside. On that evening I was angry at the constraints I had to live with as a male in Malangali, though on other occasions it was convenient to play the role. Eventually I came to accept that, though women often complain about the laziness of their menfolk, they derive an important identity from their domestic roles. The things that men do *not* do, such as cooking or fetching water, are often considered things men are *incapable* of doing (or at least doing well). If it were not for women accomplishing these essential tasks, integrally related to their biological reproductive role, society could not function. Consequently these are tasks that women refuse to give up, even while they complain. When Gustafi Vader continued fetching water from the tap even after his wife recovered from an illness, as Fritz witnessed in Uganda, women's negative comments suggested he was not much of a man or had swallowed his wife's powerful medicine. At a building project women sometimes stood and watched as we men hauled bricks or dug trenches for the foundation. When I went to bring some bundles of roofing thatch to the construction site, though, the women scurried to collect the extremely heavy headloads ahead of me. However onerous women's tasks are, women jealously guard what they see as distinctive markers of their femaleness. These markers correspond in many cases with what Westerners see as symbols of femininity – and often of subordination.

I do not mean to suggest that women are thrilled by the domestic burdens they associate with womanhood, nor that all are content to keep quiet about issues of concern to them. I suspect that the notion of the quiet, apolitical, pliant African woman is a

recent narrative based on surface appearances rather than lived experiences. I have met many women who are quite powerful figures within their families and villages. Often these are grandmothers, wizened and unprepossessing old women wrapped in faded cloth, seated unobtrusively on the ground. Though researchers or administrators may not notice them, their utterances, muttered or proclaimed, can have a similar effect on local decisions as pronouncements by the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board can have on world markets. Women often achieve respect in association with their successful bringing of children into their husbands' families and into the world, as detailed in Chapter 3. Other ethnographers, notably Wikan (1982), Mernissi (1987), and Boddy (1989), have written extensively about the complexities of women's relations to social and political power, concluding that even women in apparently repressive North African societies have essential roles within the social order because of attributes accorded to their femaleness. There is no reason to suspect that women's power as women is a recent phenomenon; it may even be that women have become silenced in recent years through the expansion of state machineries in which their political influence has been supplanted.

### **Change and Continuity**

One result of the international discourse about women's subjugation has been efforts by the Tanzanian government to promote women into structural positions of power. Expectations now exist that women will serve on all boards, from local tree committees to the Prime Minister's cabinet. In Malangali, many villages try to meet national requirements for women to have 25% representation within government by ensuring that one subvillage chair is female. (As far as I know, no woman has yet run for or been appointed to chair an entire village within the division. One

single mother active on village committees waved off suggestions by her neighbors that she stand for chair of her village with the simple question, “Who would take care of my house and farm while I’m doing village business?”) Women who take positions of authority may talk about the power barriers they are breaking, but they do not see themselves as agents of *cultural* change. They still embrace a world in which men herd the cattle and women cook the *ugali*, men clear the fields and women collect the firewood, women carry the grass and water needed for construction but men “build” the house and roof.

Martha Chaula, an Isimikinyi resident who is my “older sister,” told me proudly about building her own washroom/ latrine outbuilding. She said that nobody thought the structure would stand, that it was impossible for a woman to build. She proved everybody wrong, but she was not eager to go into the construction trade. Instead, she shamed the men around her – her brother, the family of her children’s father – for their failure to complete the tasks men should undertake for women. If Malangali has an indigenous female voice for changing cultural norms about gender, Martha is she. Although she only had the opportunity to complete seven years of school, she writes well and does difficult mathematics in her head. She is chairwoman of her subvillage and an important voice in village and division political affairs. Yet Martha will likely live her life holding to an ideal of a society in which men and women each uphold their ends of a social compact into which, as far as she discerns, all were born.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> In 1999, long after I wrote this paragraph, I was able to have Martha hired as my research assistant for the pregnancy study in Mpwapwa. The eleven of us on the research team split into two houses, with Martha and I in different houses, and she being the only woman in a house with six Tanzanian men. After a couple of weeks she happily told me that she was habitually waking up before the men emerged from their rooms and cooking them all tea. She also stayed up late on the night before I had to leave, shelling and roasting the peanuts I had been given by some of the women we were working with, so I would have nourishment for my long trip back to

I close this section with the story of another woman who overtly challenges some social norms while remaining deeply committed to others. Selma Pekee was an agriculture extension officer responsible for Ihowanza Ward in Malangali.<sup>21</sup> She is Haya by birth and ethnicity. After graduating Form 4 in Kigoma, she was placed in a training college for agriculture workers in Tabora. Her three year program taught her how to reach and teach peasants in remote rural areas.

Of all the women I met in Malangali, Selma was the most politicized. She was acutely aware of injustices in the societal options available to women. Her experiences as a single mother gave her a personal perspective on these issues. I watched her little girl Gloria grow from a shy less-than-two to a precocious three-year-old. Throughout that time, Gloria's father Umimi, a Concern security guard also from Kigoma, periodically intruded himself into Selma's life. He often threatened to take the baby, which under Tanzanian law he is entitled to do at any point before she turns seven. One evening at dinnertime Umimi showed up with three other men. He was angered by a decision Selma had made without consulting him, and demanded that she postpone her vacation trip home to Kigoma in a few days. Gloria sat in the next room and cried until Umimi's spokesman made a final pronouncement and the men stalked out the door. When Gloria stopped crying, Selma began a staccato soliloquy that I paraphrase from notes written a few days later:

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the United States. Cooking tea and preparing peanuts are both women's tasks through the performance of which she received validation for her female identity.

<sup>21</sup> Certain details of this story have been changed by agreement to protect the identity of the people involved.

“How can he come here and make demands like that? How come he thinks he can make me delay my vacation? Maybe he’s Gloria’s father, but he is not my husband. He says he will take her. He does not even know her! When does he ever give her any help? He even stopped her allowance at his store. If he refuses to help, how can he come here later and say he’s got rights as her father? This is a very bad law, women do all the work raising the child and then the father comes and takes her when she’s seven. Work for nothing! If he wants his daughter, he should help take care of her now. This new woman of his won’t take care of her, she hates Gloria. Maybe I will leave her with her grandmother in Kigoma. Then Umimi will leave me alone, I can find another man without that jerk bothering me anymore.”

Selma left on her vacation as scheduled, in defiance of her ex. While in Kigoma she went to Umimi’s parents’ house and tried to leave the little girl. When Gloria did not stop crying after several nights, Selma “agreed” to take her back. I could not believe she ever intended to leave Gloria. When I said as much, Selma smiled and averted her eyes. The ruse worked to the extent that Umimi’s father wrote him a letter telling him to stop pursuing the girl until she is older. When Umimi lost his job due to staff reductions, he moved to Njombe town without even saying goodbye to his bright little daughter.

Selma worked with women’s groups, including seminars Concern organized training village residents and leaders about women’s legal rights. She often expressed outrage over particular things men did. For example, she talked bitterly of the days when Umimi would come home at odd hours and demand that his food be ready instantaneously. Yet her model of gender relations remained firmly Tanzanian. She

wanted more consideration for women when they did the things women do, but she had no vision of changing what the things women do should be.

Women carry out the domestic tasks that make households run. The idea of men cooking, washing clothes, or even sweeping the floor made Selma laugh. Since she was a neighbor and a close friend, we saw each other every day. I often ate at her house, but when I cooked for myself she would never try my food. When my domestic assistant left for a funeral, Selma sent her woefully underpaid “housegirl” to collect my dirty laundry because it was unimaginable to her that I could manage on my own. Despite her problems with Umimi she still envisioned a marriage to a man who would be less a constant companion than a friendly provider: of children, of support, and, in her hopes, of respect. Selma’s version of egalitarianism, though barely recognizable as such, is closer to Northern feminist ideals than anything expressed to me by any other woman in Malangali.

### **Encounters**

The story of how women’s issues took on the importance they did within Concern Tanzania is important for what it tells about the transcultural migration of ideology. Concern did not come to its version of a focus on women out of the blue, or even because it was keeping track of current trends in European development thought. In fact, much of the emphasis on women occurred *despite* the beliefs of important people in the Dublin office, or differently than these men pictured the activities. Several European women and a few expatriate men in the field staff were instrumental in designing projects and policies that they recognized were sometimes specifically at odds with the head office. As well as attempting to induce cultural changes to the Tanzanians in the field areas, they also

consciously engaged in subversive political manipulation designed to foment ideological shifts in the management of Concern Worldwide. It is likely that their efforts will have more effect in changing their organizational culture than in seriously affecting the status of women in Tanzania.

Two Concern expatriates were especially concerned with gender issues during my field research period. Pauline Underwood is an Irish woman who was based in Ismani (200 kilometers northeast of Malangali), and David Storey is an Englishman who was the last Concern expatriate to live in Malangali. David and I had many interesting conversations about gender and development issues, some of which were off the record. When we spoke on the record, with notetaking in the Malangali Concern office, he talked at length about distinctions between “practical gender needs” and “strategic gender needs.” As he described it, a practical needs approach focuses on making the lives of women better through attention to such things as water, firewood, and health care that affect women on a daily basis. Strategic needs involve longer-term efforts to eliminate the inequalities that oppress women on a societal basis.

Pauline had taken the initiative in instigating new gender policies within Concern Tanzania. Her efforts involved extensive research, planning, and politicking within the organization. She put great effort into writing a document called “Gender Relations in Tanzania.” This internal paper aimed to stimulate action by placing women’s experiences in Ismani within a wider Tanzanian context. She begins, “In order to get a better picture of gender inequalities in Ismani so as to plan strategies to increase their input, or enable them to increase their participation, it is necessary to be aware of gender roles in the area.”

She goes on to provide some details of women's status in the nation, including statistical notes from the Tanzania Gender Networking Program (TGNP).

Women in Tanzania, as in most countries to varying degrees, have three roles to fulfill:

- 1) Reproduction and maintenance of human resources.
- 2) Production
- 3) Community management

She details these roles in short paragraphs, each two sentences, that make such general observations as "Tanzanian women are solely responsible for bearing children and caring for the whole family." She goes on to illustrate that, "[d]espite the fact that equality was one of the stated objectives of *Ujamaa* and villagization," female representation in a variety of political, statutory, and educational areas remains nominal.

The text lends itself to micro-analysis, but dissecting the accuracy of the specific words would place too much emphasis on the document. More important are the document's contexts: how it came about and what the people whose viewpoints it represents sought to achieve. Pauline's paper directly distills Caroline Moser's 1993 *Gender, Planning, and Development*, and applies its concepts to Tanzania.<sup>22</sup> The three roles she outlines for women are those discussed by Moser, as is the observation that the Structural Adjustment Program is premised on women compensating for the hardships of reduced services and male labor focusing on cash crops.<sup>23</sup> Although Pauline's paper does not mention strategic and practical gender needs, this concept that she and David raised

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<sup>22</sup> Tanzania is not among the 37 non-wealthy nations referenced in Moser's subject index.

<sup>23</sup> Moser 1993: 71-2, discusses, as Pauline puts it, the extent to which SAPS "assumed that [women's] productive and reproductive labor is elastic."



in our interviews is one that Moser discusses extensively. The book was floating around the shelves of the several Concern sites, and, if memory serves, Pauline specifically recommended I read it. Because the book is a building block for Concern and many other WID/GAD planners in the 1990s, it is worth examining it in detail.

A closer look at the text of Moser's book will show how a set of ideas flowed from the Western academy – in this case academic feminism – toward the African social landscape and Malangali policy planning. Although the book is written from the perspective of a World Bank planner, the author has an explicitly political agenda: “the emancipation of women from their subordination” (p. 1) “to ensure that [they], through empowering themselves, achieve equality and equity with men in developing societies” (back cover). Though Moser states and restates her objectives in overt language, her political/ ideological premises are never put to the question. When she says her “concern is with the gender-blindness of current policy formulation and planning procedures” (p. 8), she never asks *who* might advocate or oppose more gender-aware policies. Nor does she ever question whether “gender awareness” might in fact be a particular kind of blindness. For Moser, “the debate concerns the extent to which constraints [to gender planning] are technical in nature, relating to inappropriate planning procedures, or whether there are wider political constraints which impede successful implementation” (p. 9). She goes so far as to ask, “Are the planning constraints encountered when challenging inequalities in society more often political rather than technical in nature?” (p.7). To Moser these political obstacles are the forces of inequality, forces that must be made to yield to the desirable goals she lays out. But while she recognizes that planning is

not a neutral activity, she does not think to put the goals of gender planning up for serious discussion. In the chapter she devotes to “the political agenda of women’s organizations,” she states that “gender planning is simply the engine to operationalize this specific political concern so that it becomes accepted as institutionalized practice, in what is an emancipation approach” (p. 191). Gender planning, like development itself, is in this account a social good that must overcome whatever technical or political constraints impede equity and equality.

Moser’s first and second chapters discuss how “the predominantly feminist debates... on gender relations... provide the knowledge base for the new tradition [sic] of gender planning” (p. 28). She situates herself firmly within this “tradition,” setting as the practical task of her book the dissemination of an “adequate gender planning methodology” (p. 4, 212-248) with which to “operationalize” (pp. 139-172) these egalitarian goals. The audience of pure feminist academic research, she points out, still remains essentially other academics. Her task is “to identify how the complexities of gender relations and divisions of labor in specific socio-economic contexts might be simplified into methodological tools which enable practitioners to translate gender awareness into practice” (p. 5). Although she states that “the development of gender planning comes out of the powerful social and political movements that women themselves now generate,” (p. 191) she then demonstrates that even the most “grass-roots” organizations are often “explicitly feminist in orientation... with an overwhelmingly middle-class, urban membership” (p. 202).

I personally agree with many of the premises and goals Moser outlines, and I

suspect most people reading this will agree as well. It is therefore all the more crucial for us to recognize that the argument is based on an ideology to which we may adhere, in order for us to understand the political and social tensions at work in WID/GAD activities such as those ongoing in Malangali. The *only* places where feminist precepts have become so naturalized as to be accepted without question are in certain circles of academic and educated social liberals. While they may be American, Irish, Bengali, or Tanzanian, they share an experience of education in similar institutions (often in the wealthy world) reading similar overlapping sets of texts. Even in the year 2000, the United States remains in conflict about such issues as women in the military, gender-based affirmative action, and abortion. Yet it is precisely the educated, socially liberal women (and occasional men) who are motivated by political gender-equity issues who commit themselves to work in organizations devoted to the causes Moser discusses. The effect of this ideological predisposition can be seen in the transition from Moser to Malangali.

Late one afternoon Pauline and I sat outdoors in Malangali, drinking tea and talking. Our conversation, recorded in synchronic notes, showed she was well aware of her politicization. I asked what her ideal was for gender relations in Ireland. Without pausing, Pauline responded, "Absolute equality. In the workplace, in childcare, in who does the vacuuming."

"For Tanzania?" I asked.

"For Tanzania, ideally it would be the same."

I continued, "Why should we try to bring 50% gender balance to Tanzania?"

"Well," Pauline answered, "why should we do anything? Why should we try to

help poor farmers here, instead of forgiving debts and paying a fair price for coffee, which would really help? All agencies promote their beliefs. This is certainly *my* belief... The problem is there is an inequality between men and women. Rather than WID, there should be programs in which women can compete on an equal basis if given equal opportunity. In natural resources, in everything.” Pauline recognizes that gender equality, unlike crop management or tree planting, is something for which she must fight, though she is not explicit in stating what she must fight *against*.

Ideological struggle is inherently a conflict between world views. Missionaries recognize their task as a battle to convert the very souls of their African brethren by mental reconfiguration of their belief systems. In the missionary project the delineation between good and evil is clear, marked by the acceptance or rejection of particular interpretations of gospel. In WID/GAD, the target is much more ambiguous; the target is culture. The feminist-inspired development narrative runs into dilemmas, first because many practitioners/ activists are aware of how potentially patronizing and didactic their efforts can be. Second, many people who have a concern with women’s subordination are also motivated by a sense of the injustices that have silenced and impoverished Third World social systems. Practitioners thus insist publicly that gender-centered organizations actually speak on behalf of their silenced sisters and with their at least tacit consent. Listening to Jordana or the other women in Malangali who seek their social validity through their domestic roles as wives, daughters, and mothers is inconvenient to those who wish to alter such perceived structures of oppression. Their solution has been a feminist-inspired missionary project that claims to know what is best for women while

simultaneously trying to win converts to the cause. The missionary parallel continues: while missionaries come to Africa motivated to save souls, they are also compelled by their creed to do good work on behalf of the unconverted. Many Anglican missionaries never engage in proselytization, and even the more evangelical Seventh Day Adventists place as much emphasis on their health program as they do on church building.

In the WID/GAD endeavor, Moser makes clear this dual-track approach:

If the strategic gender interest... is for a more equal society, than a strategic gender need... can be identified as the abolition of the gender division of labor. On the other hand, if the practical gender interest is for human survival, then a practical gender need could be the provision of water. (Moser 1993: 38)

While she recognizes that efforts at inducing cultural change are potentially patronizing or neo-colonial, the conclusion Pauline expresses is that doing nothing is at least equally damaging to women, while being no less political.

**Determinations** Because of her deep concern for issues of gender equity, Pauline was motivated to initiate greater gender awareness within Concern. She approached the country director, who gave approval for her to study the problem and make proposals. While he and I did not talk specifically about gender issues, our several conversations on other topics enable a few speculations. Paul Murphy is a man who prides himself on an open-minded, “participatory” approach toward management and development, and his work is motivated by his moral quest for social justice. He sees himself as an activist in a fairly staid organization, so wants to try approaches in Tanzania that might be transmitted to other sites in Concern Worldwide. When Pauline brought to him her observations (bolstered by other expatriates, including Helen O’Connell, who

had left by my main field research period) about the several ways Concern was not living up to its pro-woman rhetoric, he could agree with her position and see an avenue for change. Pauline therefore was given time to research her “Gender Relations” paper. When she finished it, she discussed with others the policy options she could pursue. She was constrained by the limits of activities in which Concern engaged and by the looming end of a contract she did not wish to renew.

She determined that the best way to make a difference in the time available to her was to effect change within the organization itself. Beyond the practical considerations of her limited time for a potentially massive task, she also thought it better to get the organization’s own house in order before taking on cultural change within the villages. She therefore brought about a meeting about Concern’s internal gender policies that included staff from all three field sites and the Iringa and Dar-es-Salaam offices. Thirteen people were in attendance: two African women, five African men, three European women, and three of us European and American men. We sat at a long conference table, with Pauline in a position where she could stand up to write on a big tablet by the head of the table. Most of the conversation was in English, as are the almost-verbatim notes from which I reconstruct the dialogue.

Pauline began the discussion. She asked, “Why have we come to this meeting? I myself am here because I’m interested in issues of gender inequality.”

The responses of the African attendees included, “Gender issues are important;” “To listen and learn;” “To hear what is being said in relation to women because I’m among the women;” “We’ve been talking about this a long time, now we need an action

plan;” “To improve my abilities to help;” “I got a letter saying I should come to this meeting in Iringa.”

Europeans replied that they thought gender issues were important for Concern to address. Pauline explained that the purpose of the meeting was to start coming up with policies for Concern and its programs. She pointed out that only a quarter of Concern employees were female, saying, “Most management are men. So it makes sense to start with an employment policy before trying to enact the 50% woman target for the beneficiaries of the programs in the villages.”

A male extension worker interjected, “It is difficult recruiting women for forestry programs.” Shirima, the program coordinator for Malangali, agreed, saying, “Women might not want to work in rural areas, since they can’t have access to towns, things like hair relaxers, etcetera.”

Pauline masked her grimace and asked whether it might be true that women actually have more energy than men, and perhaps should therefore be hired as drivers. An African man suggested that women would not want such physical work. When David pointed out that plenty of women were in physically demanding positions like Community Development, Shirima replied that women’s own conceptions may lead them to avoid being drivers, or science-intensive jobs like forestry. Pauline countered, “I think it comes down to women fighting for their rights.... [T]here’s an inequality here, and we should think of changing it.”

Shirima pursued, “Do we move women into positions of authority because of their training, or because they’re female?”

Pauline suggested giving women training to qualify for higher positions, and the African women agreed that they had little opportunity to get such training, and little encouragement. After a little more discussion, she said, “I think we should be encouraging people to move up the ranks, even if it means preferential training opportunities – but that is a controversial position, and if I were a man, I’d object. Are we all agreed we should have a policy?” There were general mumbles of assent. “Then the steps would be to start thinking about what should be in a policy,” she continued. The discussion then focused on what such a policy should look like, with the Europeans doing most of the talking.

At one point a male extension worker suggested, “Many of these things are matters of *desturi*,” meaning tradition or custom. Replied Pauline, “These are all *desturi*. We need to decide what we’re going to keep as *desturi* within the organization.”

Shirima was still not convinced by the basic premise, objecting toward the end, “There need to be safeguards that people must reach standards, not be promoted simply for gender.” But when Concern’s European regional director suggested using their gender policy to try to influence a wider debate, Shirima suggested contacting government people to let them know of these aims. The regional director picked up Shirima’s thread, mentioning village governments and local committees, while Pauline was writing on the tablet: “Influence Outsiders. Links with Dublin.” “Absolutely Dublin should be aware that we are doing this and should be thinking about doing it as well.” With that comment, the meeting drew to a close.

Pauline clearly had several goals for this meeting. She wanted to change policy within Concern Tanzania. She wanted to change attitudes among her Tanzanian



colleagues. She wanted to promote a “participatory” model of consensus building, while at the same time guiding the consensus toward her views. She wanted to produce a model that might lead to changes in Concern Worldwide. And she hoped that the new policy would be an incremental step toward more egalitarian gender attitudes in this part of Africa.

The reactions of the other meeting participants exhibited the obstacles facing her. The transcript shows a clear divide in the room about approaches toward gender issues: a divide not between men and women, not between management and staff, but between African and European. The comments of the other Europeans showed them to be on the same wavelength as David and Pauline – speaking of changing attitudes in Europe and influencing wider debates in Tanzania. Meanwhile, the Africans present, male and female, talked about innate differences between the sexes: women want things like hair relaxers, do not want to do forestry, may not want to work in remote areas, and have a greater concern for their families. In the end a consensus was reached by effectively silencing the African voices in the room. Further meetings were planned for a committee with 50/50 gender and racial composition. The committee was delegated to produce a gender policy for the organization.

In the end they produced such a policy, and the policy looked quite a lot like what Pauline had in mind. While for many structural reasons (especially staff reductions related to reorganization) it will be a long time before Concern has a female driver or other equal-opportunity employment practices, the commitment on paper is a significant step within the organization. Although Dublin would not likely have instituted such a policy shift on

its own accord, both the participatory way the policy seemed to come about and the principles of basic fairness with which it seeks to be consistent should win it respect at the head office. It is quite possible that the new policies will be promoted as a model of enlightenment within the organization, and a necessary step in living up to Concern's rhetoric about women. As in many development debates, however, this is an example of Europeans speaking to other Europeans through the intermediary of field experience.

Also of importance in this encounter is Europeans speaking to Africans. In this meeting the directive nature of the ideas is seen more clearly than in any other interaction I observed. At later gender policy meetings the African participants were already acclimated to the feminist-based perspective, and some could be expected to become effective advocates for a certain egalitarianist gender consciousness. Other European concerns have been similarly introduced as distinctly activist social agendas, but become Africanized as converts have become indigenous advocates. Rarely do we have the opportunity to see the initial arrival of the idea like Sahlins' depiction of Captain Cook meeting the Hawaiians (Sahlins 1981). The Comaroffs (1991) document with uncommon detail the incursion of Christian ideology among southern Africans in the late pre-colonial era. Following a line through Shepperson and Price's *Independent African* (1987), the contemporary spread of Christianity in Tanzania relies largely on the work of African believers. (Today's white missionaries are often involved in winning converts from one brand of Christianity to another.) Concern hired many people who were converts to a belief in the messages they spread. Mtindo, whom we met in Chapter 3, undertook an evangelical role in the dissemination of anti-burning, anti-cutting, pro-

planting forestry ideology. Sambena, already a committed horticulturist as a result of her pre-Concern work experiences, became a firm advocate of organic agriculture as a result of the training seminars she was sent on during her employment. Feminist-based consciousness was not introduced to completely unexposed individuals, so the Iringa meeting is not a pure conjuncture of Sahlinsian first contact. That long-term Concern employees, women and men, should voice at the meeting such non-feminist views after a decade of a program with stated objectives toward helping women shows deeply rooted and intensely different cultural perspectives toward gender.

**Controls** Within the rubric of programs aimed at women, family planning joins the pantheon of messages that rural Tanzanians hear regarding every aspect of their lives. The same radio that tells them to plant certain crops or care for trees or boil their drinking water may also bring instructions about the most personal of choices. The AIDS people tell them to wear thick Salama condoms (popularly called “socks,” and said to be about as sensitive) when having extramarital sex, while the birth control people tell them to somehow resist pregnancy even in the context of wedlock. As will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8, Tanzanians are subject to literally hundreds of messages that tell them how to live better. The parallel messages of condom use and family planning illustrate how even the most intrusive messages are received by their consumers. The efforts to spread such messages highlight the discord between planners and Malangali residents on matters of sex and gender.

The North Atlantic women responsible for initiating international family planning programs have greatly reduced the number of children they carry to term and delayed the

age at which they give birth. In the US, birth control, safe available abortions, and women's entry into the workforce as career professionals have combined with a cultural devaluation (at least among the educated elite) of the concept of fulfillment through mothering. Whether or not the birth rate is declining, it is seen by planners as a major problem prohibiting Tanzania's successful development. During my fieldwork period, the Tanzanian papers were filled with discussion of the Third UN Conference on Population in Cairo. Tanzanian groups and aid agencies from around the world met to discuss the perceived impending Malthusian crisis and ways to counter it in the non-wealthy world. As with genital cutting, the female body is the battleground for a vision of society symbolized by lower birth rates. As one Tanzanian scholar writes:

[W]e have to use all available ways to sensitize various groups in our society to the negative effects of high fertility rates on the development of women. If we want women to develop personally and to be full participants in society, then high fertility is one of the constraints which must be overcome. The reproductive role that women play, important though it is, has had a negative effect on their own development and must be countered in their interests and those of society as a whole (Omari 1995: 265).

Many Malangali women, as we saw earlier, have a different outlook. Though most Malangali women with whom I have talked express a desire for families that are large by contemporary Northern standards, however, many appear to be bearing fewer children than their mothers.<sup>24</sup> The prevailing wisdom of demographic theory, which holds that

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<sup>24</sup> No firm numbers exist that could support or refute this admittedly impressionistic assertion. Even were reliable data about number of births and number of surviving children available for recent years in the area, no corresponding information with which to make a comparison would be available for any time in the past. I spent several days during the field research period (at village offices, clinics, divisional offices, district headquarters in Mafinga, and regional headquarters in the city of Iringa) trying to track down the source material for those statistics that are referred to in Concern and UNICEF documents about Malangali, especially about birth rates and infant mortality, only to find that such numbers as do exist appear to be hypothetical.

“[t]he desire for a higher standard of living is the chief single consideration which has induced people to restrict the size of their families” (Wrong 1956: 60), may well be in evidence among area residents. As people become more sure of the survival of their children and of their security in their old age, the theory holds, they begin to have fewer children. The agrarian poor need many children to help with farm work and increase income opportunities – as Maddox puts it (1996: 60), “[t]he more labor within a household, the better off it was.” Conversely, the theory goes, better-off families are financially drained by too many children who need support through school and do not return income to the household until they are much older.

Such a process is difficult to distinguish in rural Tanzania and in other rural African contexts, though it may be occurring (see Mafeje and Radwan 1995, Adepoju 1997). Some younger parents try to limit family size to four or five children, sometimes referring to the expense of primary school fees and clothing. Koponen’s more recent evaluation of demographic trends in Tanzania adds needed complexity to the demographic debate; he shows that fertility actually increased in many parts of the country during the colonial era, likely in response to colonial demands for laborers (1996: 37). Koponen argues that population trends change when social and cultural conditions change, but that fertility choices cannot be manipulated at the will of policy makers. The historical evidence argues against automatic assumptions about future patterns without knowledge of the reasons that families make the choices they do given the conditions they face. Nevertheless, whether because there is less call for Malangali youth as surplus laborers in Tanzania’s agro-industry, or because there is less profit to be made from extra

labor on the farm, or for other reasons entirely, families in the area do appear to be getting smaller.

The battle over fertility is peculiar because it so rarely involves direct conflict – or even direct interaction between the sides. Though UMATI and its affiliates are active in the provision of certain anti-fertility services at centers throughout the country, advocates of family planning usually wait for women to seek them rather than proselytizing in the villages (Maro 1999). Family planning literature is widely distributed, and most people are familiar with the term “*upangaji wa uzazi*” (planning of births) because of radio broadcasts. A few professional families sport UMATI posters on their walls and space their births by four years. On the other hand, we met Mtindo, a man born in 1968 who already had six children by 1996. Non-professional Tanzanian women rarely speak in positive tones about “family planning,” even those who do in fact bear half as many children as their mothers’ eight or ten. Even women who want contraception such as IUDs often face opposition from their husbands, though during recent research on pregnancy in Mpwapwa several women discussed ways by which those who wish to space their births are able to do so discretely. That many women take so much personal pleasure in their identity as mothers means that, whether or not they are having fewer children these days, it is rarely because they have listened to and agree wholeheartedly with the family planning message.

Condom use, meanwhile, is by no means as common as it should be, but it has become increasingly accepted in the past several years. The changed attitudes toward latex have much to do with a massive “social marketing” campaign largely funded by USAID. Posters, radio advertisements, billboards, T-shirts, and colorful store displays have

united in a successful effort to take much of the shame out of thinking about and using condoms. People rarely talk about condoms in mixed company, but groups of men often discuss AIDS and socks in the context of normal conversations about sex and women. Women also sometimes raised the topic in our discussions about family planning issues, with the questions usually directed toward me as a presumed outside “expert.” Not only do people talk about condoms, but when it comes to casual sex they often use them. Baba Shangaa was both a key informant about male sexual issues and, during the late stages of his wife’s pregnancy, a regular customer for my stock of superior American varieties.<sup>25</sup> Other young men would sometimes knock on my door early in the evening with 200/= (33 cents) for a comfortable Durex, eight times the price of the Salama condoms available at Abdalla’s little pharmacy in the market square. The head physician at the clinic provided corroborating information. Until the early 1990s, various sexually transmitted diseases were one of the most frequent complaints of adult patients. In recent years, she said, new incidences of these diseases have tapered off dramatically. Although the clinic has no means to test for AIDS, it is likely that this reduction in STDs is a harbinger of a significant slowdown in the virus’ transmittal. Out-of-wedlock births are still common, but the mother can almost always identify the one man with whom she was involved when she became pregnant. Condom use in the casual sex that still occurs is now apparently quite high.

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<sup>25</sup> My caring aunt in New York sent me a gift box filled with condoms for my first Christmas in Tanzania. She wrote “Condoms” on the customs declaration on the package, so by the time the box was delivered to me half of Malangali knew I had an apparently inexhaustible supply. I usually sold them instead of giving them away because it seemed the easiest way to ration a scarce commodity. It proved to be an effective *entre* to intimate discussions. The stock was also much appreciated as parting gifts by several close friends when the fieldwork period came to an end.

People are terrified of AIDS. Though some have a fatalistic attitude that there is little they can do at this point to prevent it, many others have seized on using condoms as something they can do to protect themselves. In her 1995 research in rural Uganda, where condoms are much less widely available, Katherine Fritz (personal communication) found many women would prefer their partners use condoms but cannot insist. Among men in Malangali, and at least in the desires of women, condoms are an important consideration in extramarital sex. The advertising facilitates the choice to use condoms, making them easier to acquire and easier to introduce at the appropriate moment. The public health campaign does not introduce the desire to use condoms, however. Given a choice between condoms and *au natural*, most people would prefer without. Given a choice between condoms and potential pregnancy, many men and women would still opt for without.<sup>26</sup> It is only the choice between health and a gruesome death that impels men to don the socks.

People are quite cogent in their explanations about why they do or do not use condoms. They are equally cogent in explaining why they seldom prefer family planning. Yet the family planning agencies act from the assumption that they must *teach* women to use family planning – that if women understand their options they will want to do the

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<sup>26</sup> During my research period in Malangali, I usually stopped short of asking women questions directly about their sexual practices, and so only discussed such detailed intimacies with the women who brought up the subject themselves, a total of about ten women. I lost my shyness about the topic during my 1999 research in Mpwapwa. Martha Chaula, in her role as my research assistant, was at first astounded by the things women discussed in our conversations. “I cannot believe she told all those secrets of women!” she exclaimed as we walked away from one interview. Condom use was high among the topics we discussed. Some women do not find condoms to interfere with their sexual pleasure, but other women passionately despise sex with a condom. These findings are not significantly different from the mixed reactions of women in the United States with whom I have discussed this topic.



right thing and limit their families. Women who do not choose family planning are thought to be ignorant. In some cases, the planners assert that once women are aware of the possibility of birth control, they will flock to methods that will liberate them from multiple childbirths. Women in Malangali are well aware of their options, though perhaps not in great detail. The choice many make to continue bearing families of four to ten children represents an ongoing conflict with the ideological bases of women's health programs.

Many Malangali women do not agree that reducing the birth rate is a desirable end of social policy. Unlike a woman in a high rise on New York's Upper East Side with whom I had a typical U.S. conversation about my research who imagined, ironically, overpopulation in fertile villages with fewer than 1000 residents in areas the size of Manhattan island, Malangali residents see a relatively stable population. The division is said to have had a statistical pre-AIDS growth rate of 1.1% per year,<sup>27</sup> or a population doubling in an extraordinarily slow 60 or 70 years (with "surplus population" presumably migrating to plantations or urban areas). Mama Regina told me in 1998 of a village meeting at which the objections of residents to rising primary school fees were raised. People argued that, with fees at 2000/= (\$3) per pupil, many parents would be unable to educate all their children through the seventh year. Responding to these concerns, a representative of the division government schooled in development policy had a ready reply. "If you can't afford these fees," Mama Regina reported he said, "then you should have fewer children. People have too many children, then they complain that they

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<sup>27</sup> Concern 1989, though such census calculations are often of questionable accuracy.

cannot educate them, cannot send them to secondary school. Plan your births, then you won't have problems raising your children." The way she told the story, this pronouncement provoked bemusement among the women in the audience. Women may have fewer children today, she said, but they did not feel the matter was appropriate for government to dictate to them. The voices of the women concerned, though, are consistently silenced or ignored in international fora. Women's groups from non-wealthy countries are able to find funding for participation in such conferences as the Cairo meeting if they provide "indigenous" voices for the concerns of the funders. The woman who says "I want ten *plus*" is unable to have her sentiments thought valid on a national or world stage.<sup>28</sup>

The ultimate irony, though, is this: were serious money put into complete women's health services, including fertility and maternal health, and were adequate post-natal care facilities available for infants and children, a significant number of women would likely make the decision to bear fewer children. To this end, UNICEF and Concern have both

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<sup>28</sup> Writes Chen (1996: 148), "By the time they reached Cairo, the Women's Voices '94 Alliance and the [International Women's Health] Coalition... had reached remarkable consensus on key values (gender equality, reproductive rights and male responsibility) across the divides of ideology, culture and relative wealth and power." Chen argues that the platform put forward by this group of 215 women from 79 countries, which held what it called a "feminist PrepCom" that claimed to "identify common ground and universalities in women's perspectives on reproductive health and justice," was instrumental in shaping the 20-year "Programme of Action" that governments agreed to in Cairo. The women who participated in this preliminary conference, all of whom required the resources to get themselves to Rio de Janeiro for 5 days, would surely have been preselected on the basis of their educations and job titles as those who had a substantial background in the perspective on women's issues that prevails in development and NGO circles. In their discussion of the 1995 Fourth UN Conference on Women in Beijing, Baden and Goetz agree that "the information provided by Western feminists has tended to get a better hearing than the perspectives of Southern women" (1998:22). Thus, for example, many North Atlantic women in Beijing were concerned with making abortion services universally available, while women from elsewhere wanted freedom from forced abortions and contraception. They conclude that, "at the very least, we need to maintain an open dialogue with feminist researchers and activists in the South" (p. 35). I argue that such a dialogue, if it were to come into existence, would in all likelihood continue to exclude women in places like Malangali whose politics are neither feminist nor activist.

taken modest steps in Malangali. Every child under 5 is weighed and measured monthly by UNICEF-organized village health workers. Mothers of underweight children are given advice about nutrition. More importantly, UNICEF funds have provided vaccinations that are mandatory for all children for many diseases.

In August 1996 I was in Isimikinyi village for Tanzania's first day of the global polio eradication campaign, funded by UNICEF and the World Health Organization. Mama Limo, a nurse from the Mwilavila clinic, had a list with all 138 children under five in the village. Throughout the morning women gathered up their children and walked over to the office. By six p.m., 127 children had received their vaccine. The next day the health officer returned to her post. She had a tedious day with little company, but when her duty ended she had vaccinated a total of 143 children, with the discrepancy accounted for by a family who happened to be visiting from elsewhere. Six weeks later the exercise was repeated, and again the compliance was more than 100%. Some women brought their children not because of immediate concern for their health but because of the threatened fines they would receive for non-compliance. Nonetheless, I heard no serious grumbles about the exercise from local women.

In the WIS research adults consistently ranked health above most other important issues in their lives. In daily conversation women emphasize health concerns more than anything other than a general lack of money. Concern was inspired to undertake their work in large part because of their perception of high infant mortality (IMR) due to malnutrition. All of the program's horticulture and agricultural efforts have been premised upon improving nutritional availability to reduce IMR. The combination of a more

rounded diet resulting from new vegetable gardens, with the probably more significant event of the UNICEF vaccinations, seems to have made a substantial contribution to addressing some of the primary health concerns of Malangali residents. This example shows that it is far from impossible to sponsor aid programs that meet the desires of area women. Such programs remain, however, distinctly overshadowed by ideological efforts to reconfigure their social system.

**Madonnas**            The stereotype of the lounging, drunken man contrasted to the sober, overworked woman appears ad nauseam in WID/GAD literature and the conversations of development personnel with whom I have spoken around the world.<sup>29</sup> This trope, present in the E.C./ Concern textbook cited at the beginning of this chapter, is prevalent in Tanzanian representations of the necessity for women's programs. In this section I examine a performance that enacted the "women's" message through the eyes of some Tanzanian officials. I suggest that Tanzanian policy planners, male and female alike, hold to an imagery of overburdened rural women that arises when they read feminist-inspired development narratives in the context of their memories of their own mothers and aunts. The programs they advocate are far from the feminist ideal envisioned by Pauline, but they do represent an official consensus that some action be taken to alleviate women's misery. Female and male policy makers draw on their remembered experiences when they engage the international WID/GAD discussions, and are often eager to

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<sup>29</sup> Owomoyela (1994) argues effectively that such notions contribute to pathologization of Africanity, whereby presumed African misogyny and an anti-empirical presupposition of an exploitative patriarchy combine to condemn both African men and the cultures of which they are a part. Glazer (1997) provides an empirical counterpoint, demonstrating ways in which both men and women engage in the social and economic aspects of drinking, including drunkenness, without condemning individuals for the activities in which their economic needs and personal desires lead them to engage.

embrace efforts that will lessen this burden. Thus the womanist policies they espouse bear many resemblances to those envisioned by egalitarianist feminist theorists. They are not nuanced academic edifices, nor do they correspond completely with the experiences lived by women and men in rural Tanzania.

A play put on in Malangali by the Iringa Ministry of Culture represents one conceptualization among many of the lives of women in Tanzanian villages. The play featured a woman who began by complaining about her life. Her husband came home, ordered her around. He went off to drink. She complained to her woman friends. He returned, drunk and even more abusive. Neighbors and extended family tried to intervene. A brother promised the woman he would talk to her husband, then took him away to talk over more alcohol. The wife cried to her friends as she discussed her many burdens. She is responsible for the children, much of the farming, and then she has to cook for this unreasonable lout, she wailed. She cried more. Finally, the man was made to see the effects of his behavior on his wife. He vowed to pull his own weight in the household, stop drinking so much, and show his wife the respect she deserves.

Public theater is not common in Southern Tanzania. This play by the Ministry of Culture was the only instance of dramatic performance of which I was aware during the time I lived in Malangali. It happened to be fairly ineffective because the presumed target audience of married men and women were not much in attendance. Even so, the performance serves as the diagnostic climax to this chapter. The performance was not created by or for Concern. The aid organization merely sponsored the event, driving the troupe down from Iringa, preparing a few posters as advertisement, lodging them, and

paying their small daily “overnight” bonuses. Instead, the performance was part of the Ministry’s standard repertoire of cultural development activities.

The regional culture minister is a friendly older man. We talked the next morning. He asked many thoughtful questions about my research and extracted a promise for a copy of an upcoming publication. He lives with his wife in Iringa, where she sees to household management. How he came to sponsor this particular play remains a question, but I am sure arose from a combination of the literature current within the national Ministry, policy directives from Dar-es-Salaam, and reminiscence of village life through the lens of the new enlightenment. His version of feminist-inspired consciousness does not match Pauline’s “fifty-fifty” ideal. Instead, he focuses on women’s special role as mothers and caretakers. In recognition of the hardships women face, he urges men to adjust their behavior, to make life easier on their wives and mothers. His agenda is not to transform domestic life so that housework and childcare is divided equally, but to modify the way men act so that women get what he sees as their due. In his ideal, men would drink less, provide for their families, and show their wives respect. The women would get to reduce their workload somewhat, but continue to cook the *ugali*.

Women, of course, drink, lie, and cheat as well as toil, sweat, and pray – they are humans, not merely actors following scripted roles. To round out this chapter, I must present one final scene. Early one morning I walked through the market square in Tambalang'ombe, which was quiet in anticipation of its monthly day of activity the next week. As I entered the road that leads away to the north, I met several women sitting in the shade cast by a dried-mud wall. Mama Juma called out, “Martin, how are you? How is

the morning?”

“Good, good, I’m fine. How are you? Is your husband well?”

“Good, his health is improving, he is gaining weight a little,” she told me. “He is not here, he has gone with the cattle. Will you have some *ulanzi*?” She extended a two-liter jug of bamboo wine that the women were sharing. “Welcome to *ulanzi*. Welcome to sit.”

“Thank you, thank you.” I drank from the jug, wiped my mouth, and handed the jug back to Mama Juma. “Thank you, I cannot stay. I must climb the mountain before the sun becomes fierce. Will you be here this afternoon when I pass by again?”

“We’ll be here. You are welcome this afternoon.”

The women in this village square do not lead easy lives, but the lives they lead cannot easily be painted on a canvas of abject oppression. They are the women of Malangali, good and unscrupulous, wizened and stunning, lazy and harried, barren and fertile. We cannot begin to design aid programs that address their needs if we reduce them to saintly cartoon characters of misery. Life for women in rural Tanzania is more complex than portrayed in either the Ministry play or Concern documents or books such as Moser’s. Women face many hardships, some of which resemble those depicted in these various media. Yet they are also active agents in the production and reproduction of the cultures in which they experience their lives. It is easy enough to talk about women’s “subordination,” or to elevate them to the status of modern-day Madonnas, when exposed to culturally produced ideologies that enable such ways of understanding. It is also easy to agree with planners and with Malangali women about the hardships that make women’s

lives burdensome. What is difficult is to step back from culture-coded predispositions, to examine how the efforts we advocate are less inevitable than they are ideological.

As with the environmental programs discussed in the last chapter, I do not propose that we abandon programs aimed at improving the conditions in which women live their lives – but I suggest that it is possible to remain a committed feminist, or a committed environmentalist, while yet calling critical attention to gaps in theory or practice, gaps that may in fact derail the political project. As Malangali women are quick to say, many resources from outside could be made available to them that would make a tremendous difference in their ability to live long and prosper. I do, however, suggest that we abandon the pretense that women in places like Malangali are, unbeknownst to themselves, waiting for aid programs to come liberate them. Only when we understand the contexts in which aid programs reside can we work toward making available resources to improve women's lives without imposing the precondition that they also change their cultural values.