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## Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis for Tanzanian Researchers

By Florence Wenzek<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This article enriches reflections on the circulation of the concept of gender in the Global South by looking at the transformations of Tanzanian research on gender in education between the 1970s and the early 1990s. A close reading of the texts shows how the concept of gender has been used in this field of study since 1990; it considers variations depending on authors and their positioning. Comparing this with the writings of the 1970s and 1980s, when no one used the concept, reveals how it contributed to epistemological change. The article also reflects on the respective role of local factors and international influences (via donor agencies and global epistemologies) in the epistemological evolutions of the field. It highlights that researchers, even in a time of growing international dependency, managed to keep intellectual autonomy.

*Keywords:* Gender, Tanzania, Women Studies, Epistemology, Education

### Introduction

In the late 1980s and 1990s, several African scholars proposed powerful critiques of the concept of gender, arguing for its inadequacy for the analysis of African societies (Amadiume, 1987; Kañji & Camara, 2000; Oyewumi, 1997). These critiques were rooted in a denunciation of the imperialist dynamics of global research and derived from the fact that gender was perceived as a northern concept. Others developed epistemological reflections to explain why and how they appropriated the concept nonetheless (Bakare-Yusuf 2004; Imam et al., 2004; Steady, 2004). These debates are at the core of works on the epistemology of gender in Africa (Arnfred et al., 2004; Sow, 2007). They obscure, however, the fact that in several African contexts, such as in Tanzania, the term “gender” was not the object of debate nor was it explicitly rejected. Such a case study invites us to shift the gaze towards another issue: how and why it has been effectively appropriated in various ways by several African scholars.

### *Women’s and Gender Studies in Tanzania*

Research on women’s studies in Tanzania dates to the 1970s, with few women approaching these topics. At the turn of the 1980s, these scholars created two research groups dedicated to this issue [Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP), 1993]. The socialist framework of thought that dominated political and intellectual life from the late 1960s to the late 1980s influenced the approach of many.<sup>2</sup> Gender inequalities were inserted into a broader analysis of relations of domination; men’s oppression of women was seen as a major tool of capitalist relations of production and reproduction (Mascarenhas and Mbilinyi, 1983).

From the late 1980s onwards, the term “gender” appeared in Tanzanian academic research at the same time as in Europe, but following a different trajectory. This was a period of profound political and economic transformation for Tanzania; following a long decade of

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<sup>2</sup> The Arusha Declaration of President Nyerere, in 1967, marks the official adoption of socialism by the United Republic of Tanzania, which was a one-party-state from 1965 onward. J. Nyerere built a theory of “African socialism” that contested the idea that African societies were divided in social classes. At the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), Marxist socialism was more prevalent than Nyerere’s African socialism.

economic crisis, the Tanzanian government agreed in 1984 to implement Structural Adjustment Plans (SAP). These neo-liberal reforms forced the government to abandon its socialist orientation. This led to a liberalization of political life, with a gradual return to a multi-party system from 1990 onward (Aminzade, 2013). In this context, women's studies and activist women's organizations developed rapidly. Whereas women's activism had hitherto been largely confined to the women's union linked to the single party, the Union of Tanzanian Women (UWT), the liberalization of political life encouraged the proliferation of associations (Brown, 2006; TGNP, 1993). Larger associations also emerged to create links and guidance for these organizations, notably the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP). Established in 1992, it combines research and activism in an effort to influence public policy (Mbilinyi, 2003).

The term "gender" was therefore introduced into women's studies at a time when women's activism was flourishing, but Tanzania was also affected by a growing dependency on international funding. Such a context is not specific to Tanzania, nor to Africa, and the weight of international donors on research orientations has already been investigated (Arnold and Nitecki, 1990). This trend impacted the field of women's and gender studies more than others since it was underfunded in public research institutions. In the 1990s, donor institutions increasingly targeted women in their policies, generating a large amount of consultancy work in gender research (Ampofo et al., 2004; Cîrstocea 2019). Two competing interpretations have dominated analyses about the effects of this context: some authors describe the field of gender research in the Global South as overly determined by the donors' agendas and Western theoretical frameworks (Steady, 2004), while others argue that researchers from the south were nonetheless able to put forward their own interests and to develop "local" epistemologies of gender, generally through their links with women's movements (Ampofo et al., 2004; Basu, 1995; Degavre, 2011). Arnfred proposes a more nuanced analysis, suggesting that depending on context and actors, the interplay between academic research, activism and consultancy work can lead to very different results (Arnfred, 2004). Drawing on these earlier studies, this analysis asks how Tanzanian researchers used the concept of gender in a context of growing dependency toward international donors combined with the growth of women's organizations in the country. To what extent were they constrained or influenced by donors? How did women's activism inspire or orient research epistemologies?

### *How to Study a Travelling Concept*

Tanzanian uses of the concept of gender are conceptualized as an issue of appropriation—a concept which takes into account the intellectual agency of actors and challenges an enduring tendency to describe researchers from the Global South as receiving theories and concepts from the Global North (Mohanty, 1984; Spivak, 2009). To study this appropriation, I look at the strategies developed by individual Tanzanian researchers who used or did not use the concept of gender beginning in the late 1980s. Sociologists have argued that intellectuals use such external concepts or references depending on how it helps them to situate themselves within the local academia (Bourdieu, 2002). Beyond the local position of individuals, the national context also must be considered since this strongly influences the social sciences despite the importance of transnational and international trends (Heilbron et al., 2008). As a result, I will explore the national specificities, including the influence of socialism, that shaped how international trends in the uses of gender impacted Tanzania in specific ways.

One global trend deserves special attention: the frequent de-politicization of gender. The historiography on gender and development often argues that actors in the field of international development deprived the concept of its critical and political dimension in the Global South as well as in Eastern Europe (Arnfred, 2004; Calvès, 2009; Cîrstocea, 2019). Such a practice, though, is not specific to institutions of international development. Researchers

have repeatedly noted similar non-critical uses of gender and distinguished between two usages of the concept (Butler et al., 2007; Scott, 1986). One, referred to as “critical”, is analytical and follows Scott’s definition: “gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power” (Scott, 1986, p. 1067). The other, referred to as “ordinary”, “non-critical”, or “neutral”, is descriptive and employs “gender” as a synonym for “women”, “sex”, or “sexual difference.” This second usage fails to acknowledge that “women” and “men”, “femininities” and “masculinities”, are historically constructed categories, nor does it highlight the relations of power between men and women. This article studies the appropriation of gender in Tanzania, keeping in mind this distinction between “ordinary” and “critical” uses, linking these usages to the social and material conditions of Tanzanian researchers and considering the interplay between international and national trends.

*Methodology: Analysis of a Corpus on Gender in Education*

Bibliographical reviews have studied the evolution of scientific production on women and gender in Tanzania, but they do not question epistemological issues raised by the appropriation of gender (Mascarenhas and Mbilinyi, 1983; Mukangara, 1995; Mukangara and Matiyas, 2007). Unlike most authors who have studied the development of gender approaches, my own scholarship is not part of the evolutions described; I bring an external view on the subject given my age (the period under study precedes my entry into nursery school) and my position working as a doctoral student in France. This exteriority to the field of research implies that I do not have the rich knowledge of an insider and led me to design my own methodology: I focus on a selected corpus of texts on gendered dynamics in education.<sup>3</sup> Zooming in on a specific branch of the field of women’s and gender studies enables me to have a broad view on the subfield as a whole and a close reading of its major texts.

Education is a fruitful avenue for exploration given its centrality in the construction of gender relations in any society, and because of the interest it generates both inside and outside the academia; it constitutes 14% of the references cited in (Mascarenhas and Mbilinyi, 1983) and 9% in (Mukangara, 1995). This choice, however, may inadvertently overemphasize the impact of international donors on the shaping of gender research in Tanzania since it became a major topic for donors in the 1990s. Nonetheless, the surge of scholarship on education in the early 1990s is undeniable and merits analysis in the hope that future studies on other subfields of women’s studies will yield comparative perspectives.

All works addressing female education or gender issues in the educational sphere are included in what I consider works on “gender in education” even when the word “gender” is not used. The corpus includes articles, papers, dissertations, and reports written by academics and non-academics from the beginning of women’s studies in the 1970s to the mid-1990s. The mid-1990s were a moment of transition, which was both conceptual (with the integration of the term “gender” in women’s research worldwide), political, and economic (as Tanzania adopted liberal economic policies and a multi-party state). The focus on this period allows me to address the changes brought about by this moment of transition, while leaving aside the extensive scholarship that emerged as the field developed and became more structured (Mukangara and Matiyas, 2007).

Two approaches govern my treatment of this corpus. Firstly, I have drawn on the works listed in the “education” section of two bibliographies (Mascarenhas and Mbilinyi, 1983; Mukangara, 1995) that give a broad overview of Tanzanian writings on women and gender since they include government publications, grey literature such as annual reports, as well as master theses, dissertations, and papers. I identified who was writing on the topic, when, in

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<sup>3</sup> This corpus was built during two research trips to Tanzania in 2018 and 2019.

what form, in relation to what institution, and whether they used the term “gender” in their titles.

Secondly, I have resorted to a more textual analysis of thirteen texts I was able to consult. I have adopted a close reading approach to identify the textual contexts in which the word “gender” and the expressions derived from it were used, the meaning given to them, and the ways in which this vocabulary was integrated into theoretical reflection. In addition to this corpus, I also benefitted from my encounters with M. Mbilinyi, one of the main authors of my corpus and the field of gender studies in Tanzania. More general studies on the development of the field of women’s and gender studies in Tanzania have guided my analysis throughout (Koda, 1989; Mbilinyi, Jan. 1984; Mbilinyi, 2011; TGNP, 1993).

The first two parts of this paper show how a field of study on gender in education progressively emerged in Tanzania, thanks to the cross-fertilization of both local and global trends. The third section explores how gender has been used by Tanzanian researchers in this field of study. It seeks to distinguish the “ordinary uses” and “critical uses” of gender in Tanzania in the early 1990s and to study how these various uses of gender transformed and enriched research approaches. Echoing Scott’s 1986 appeal to develop the “useful” dimension of gender by giving it a critical dimension, this article asks to what extent gender proved “a useful category of analysis” for Tanzanian researchers in the late twentieth century.

### **The Emergence of a Field of Research on Girls’ Education in Tanzania (1970s-1980s)**

#### *Local Initiatives Supported by Global Trends (1970s – 1980s)*

Prior to 1990, research on gender in education was rare in Tanzania, but nonetheless constituted a growing field of interest. Although in the 1970s the only works based on original and in-depth research were those by M. Mbilinyi, several references which did not deal specifically with women’s or gender issues in education gave some information on the topic.<sup>4</sup> During the 1980s, more academics began writing specifically on gender in education.<sup>5</sup> However, action-oriented reports produced by actors of the educational field dominated the literature.<sup>6</sup>

The growth in the number of studies and reports on gender in education during these years is simultaneous to the emergence of a discourse on women in the field of international development. It is the period when the “Women in Development” (WID) approach has been conceived; this orientation became concrete in the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985). This international trend had an impact on Tanzania through the action of international agencies in the country and through actions and discourses of Tanzanian officials. A “women’s section” was created in the Prime Minister’s Office and the president, the party, and the UWT referred to the International Women’s Year to push policies in favor of women (Geiger, 1982; Koda, 1989). In 1985, Tanzania sent an important delegation to the Third Conference for Women organized in Kenya (Mbilinyi, 2003).

Such international trends, however, had a relatively limited impact on the development of studies on gender in education. Firstly, the WID approach did not give high priority to education (Vavrus, 2003). Secondly, the focus within educational aid was on sectors where girls and women were under-represented (vocational and higher education). The dominant actors of international educational aid only began to shift paradigms and to pay attention to the

<sup>4</sup> References 201, 202, 206, 207, 209, 211, 223, 227, 228 in (Mascarenhas and Mbilinyi, 1983) and 303, 356, 359, 363, 370, 377, 378, 379 in (Mukangara, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> References 295, 312, 317, 326, 347, 355, 360, 361 in (Mukangara, 1995). We can also add the ten students’ dissertations that focus on gender issues in education, among the 176 research works listed in (Faculty of Education, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> References 200, 204, 208, 210, 213, 222, 226, 233 in (Mascarenhas & Mbilinyi, 1983) and 301, 318, 325, 344, 349, 351, 356, 362, 364, 366, 368, 371, 375, 376, 380 in (Mukangara, 1995).

gender gap in the late 1980s, but it was not an important move before the 1990s (Niño-Zarazúa, 2016).

Moreover, up to the mid-1980s, Tanzania maintained an independent political agenda, resisting longer than other Southern countries the liberal orientations of the SAP and other policies advocated by the IMF and World Bank (Aminzade, 2013). Thus, the international playing field only began to have an impact through the voluntary action of Tanzanian actors for whom local factors were important in directing their attention to gender issues in education.

As elsewhere, women were primarily responsible for developing women's and gender studies in Tanzania. Some, like M. Mbilinyi, were oriented towards this field by men who saw this as a "natural" field of study for women (Mbilinyi, 2011). However, testimonies collected from women who were part of the Institute of Development Studies' Women's Studies' Group (IDSWSG) of UDSM, founded in 1978, show that women's experience of patriarchal attitudes in both professional and private life was an additional incentive in devoting careers to women's and gender studies (Besha, 1998; Mbilinyi, 2011).

Beyond personal experiences, women's collective action played a major part in the development of women's and gender studies (Callaci, 2017; Swantz, 2016). The first issue of the journal *Chem-Chem* in 1975 testifies to the role of activism in the field of education. Its central dossier, entitled "Women and Education", consists of five collective articles that were discussed in a seminar of the Department of Education and that criticized public policies for being contrary to "the socialist educational transformation" and for "deliberately" organizing the under-representation of girls in schools (Duwi et al., 1975). Alongside these articles, an interview with the Minister focused on the Musoma Resolution of 1974 that UWT criticized for its discriminatory effects on women's access to university. This issue of *Chem-Chem* shows how women graduates organized collectively to defend their access to higher education, using research as one of the tools to defend their right. The same trend can be seen in the 1980 Report of the Ad-Hoc Committee on Women Representation in the University of Dar es Salaam Academic Staff Assembly through which women at UDSM battled against the pervasiveness of misogyny in academic life (Mbilinyi, 2011).

Individual researchers turned to collective action to circumvent difficulties encountered when developing research on women and gender on their own (Mbilinyi, Jan. 1984). At UDSM during the 1970s and 1980s, most academics were openly misogynist and disparaged women's studies (Bujra, 2017). The IDSWSG was a response to this misogynist climate; it was created to provide a safe space to nurture women researchers working on women's studies. As the Institute of Development Studies Directorate tries to appropriate funds they had obtained from the Ford Foundation<sup>7</sup>, the members created their own independent organization, the Women's Research and Documentation Project (WRDP) (TGNP, 1993). These events illustrate how Tanzanian women took the incentive for developing women's studies in these years, how they faced opposition from their male colleagues, and how they used the support provided by international donors to obtain more resources and independence to conduct their research.

### *Global Epistemologies in a Local Field*

Within socialist Tanzania, educational studies focused primarily on the issue of unequal access to schools, especially in terms of class, ethnic, and regional inequalities. Similarly, the first studies on gender in education focused on the under-representation of girls in schools. The phenomenon was mainly analyzed as the result of parental choices, and most authors described the opposition of some parents to the schooling of their daughters as the effect of cultural conservatism. For instance, the authors of articles published in the UWT journal in 1975 suggested that such opposition had no rational basis and explained it with pejorative terms such

<sup>7</sup>On the Ford Foundation and social sciences, see (Heilbron et al., 2008). Other articles in this issue point to the importance of the Ford Foundation in the development of gender studies in the Global South.

as “traditional beliefs” or “the negative aspects of our cultures” (Duwi et al., 1975). Other authors from the 1970s and 1980s, while using this vocabulary more cautiously, also referred to “traditional attitudes”. For P. Olekambaine, such attitudes were the main reason for the persistence of gender inequalities in education despite post-independence policies that she considered favorable to the integration of girls (BRALUP, 1979). M. Mbilinyi’s position in these years stands out: while she did mention “traditional attitudes” she also argued that many families’ preference for boys’ schooling was “the most rational investment” (Mbilinyi, 1972, p. xvii).

This focus on inequalities echoed perspectives on girls’ schooling developed in international discourses of development. In the Women in Development approach that dominated the spheres of international aid, education was seen as a means to insert women in the “modernization process” and to allow them to participate in the development of the country (Rathgeber, 1990). The Women and Development (WAD) approach developed another reading grid based on the premises of neo-Marxist feminism that criticized capitalism and patriarchy. Both approaches led to the same position on gender inequalities at school: parental attitudes of opposition to girls’ schooling were condemned either as manifestation of “traditional” prejudices or as manifestations of patriarchy (Vavrus, 2003).

WID and WAD approaches are interesting to compare with Tanzanian analyses because they were among the main theoretical references mobilized by researchers in the field of women’s studies in these years. This is partly explained by the fact that an important part of the documentation on women’s studies available in the country was to be found in the libraries of international agencies (Mukangara, 1995). Tanzanian researchers actively engaged with this literature. Koda describes how they were divided between the tenants of the WID approach and its opponents for whom it was “a capitalist ideological tool used by both national and international capital to continue exploiting women” (Koda, 1989, p. 52).

This theoretical reflection was incorporated in debates on education. In their bibliography, M. Mbilinyi and O. Mascarenhas criticized a paper on literacy for espousing uncritically the functionalist approach of the WID movement and neglecting patriarchal and capitalist relations of power that limited the effects of women literacy (Mascarenhas and Mbilinyi, 1983, p. 165–66). Such a criticism echoed the influence of neo-Marxist perspective in Tanzanian academia during the socialist period, but its denunciation of patriarchy was more unique in a university that was often overtly misogynist. The few researchers that developed such perspectives were more in line with the global WAD approach that they contributed to develop through published articles in both Tanzanian and international journals (Mbilinyi, Jan. 1984; Mbilinyi, 1984). Mbilinyi’s theoretical work circulated in both the US and in communist countries (Bonfiglioli, 2018; Rathgeber, 1990). Thus, Tanzanian researchers actively engaged with global epistemologies that they appropriated and enriched depending on their political and theoretical position.

### **Local and Global Trends in the Reshaping of Research on Gender in Education (1990-1995)**

The 1990s saw both an explosion of the number of works on girls’ education and the introduction of the concept of gender in these works. How did local and global dynamics interact to produce such transformations, and what were the effects on the analyses produced?

#### *The Pressures of International Actors and Researcher’s Strategies*

Mukangara lists 27 works dealing specifically with gender in education for the year 1990, while in other years there were never more than nine referenced works (Mukangara, 1995). Such a phenomenon has been observed in many African countries that developed research on the topic at the same time (Vavrus, 2003). Although international trends and donors

played a role in this research, an examination of these works reveals that Tanzanian researchers largely determined the orientations of their academic work.

Around 1990, international institutions shifted their main paradigm of analysis from a “productivist approach” which aimed to create the conditions for economic expansion to a “developmentalist approach,” based on ideals of social justice and human rights. In this context, they gave priority to financing education and became more interested in issues of gender equality (Niño-Zarazúa, 2016). As a result, girls’ education became a global development priority, notably at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, in March 1990 (Unterhalter, 2000).

At the same time, the transition from socialism to liberalism profoundly transformed Tanzanian research funding. Funded from its inception in 1970 thanks to Western development assistance, UDSM was largely dependent on this international aid. The SAP called into question this functioning by drastically reducing public funding for teaching and research. In the 1970s, approximately 13% of the government budget was spent on education, and this percentage decreased to 6% for the period 1985-1992 (Bagachwa, 1999). A reformulation of the priorities and modalities of international aid accompanied the SAP. Two factors had an impact on gender research. Firstly, higher education declined as a priority in international education policies as primary education attracted renewed attention (Provini, 2019). Secondly, donors allocated funds less frequently directly to the government and chose instead to finance specific projects. As a result, they could impose their priorities and interpretative framework on the research projects they supported (Barkan, 1994). The policies of the Sweden International Development Agency (SIDA), the oldest and most generous donors to the university, reflect this evolution. Until the mid-1980s, the organization had a policy of allocating funds according to the priorities and policy choices of the Tanzanian government. In 1984, SIDA aligned itself with the dominant discourse among international aid actors, criticized Tanzanian policy choices, and then stopped funding the Tanzanian national research agency in favor of direct funding to research groups (Hyden and Mukandala, 1999; Mkude et al., 2003).

This makes it tempting to argue that the international sphere imported or even imposed the topic on Tanzanian researchers who became dependent in these years on donor project funding. A closer look at how researchers defined their work gives a more complex understanding of the processes at stake. While several Tanzanian researchers did indeed begin studying gender in education at the very moment when it acquired momentum on the international stage, this appears to have emanated from an autonomous interest in these issues. The research group Women, Education, Development (WED) created within the Faculty of Education of the University of Dar es Salaam in 1989 is emblematic of such a position. The group’s research was funded by various bodies, including the Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation (NORAD), and they did consultancy work, but they insisted on giving priority to “projects defined by WED itself” (Brock-Utne and Possi, 1990, p. v). They worked in Swahili and published in English, which is symptomatic of their will to anchor their reflections in the national context while also addressing an international audience. Despite foreign funding, their group was primarily driven by a need to stimulate and federate research on women within the faculty of education, and they insisted on retaining control of their research agenda.

Similarly, researchers who were previously involved in gender research were able to work with or for international institutions, while maintaining their intellectual freedom. The report “Education in Tanzania with a Gender Perspective”, a 300-page volume co-authored by four Tanzanian women, illustrates such a trend. The product of a two-day workshop that brought together 18 people, the report was then the most important study on girls’ education in Tanzania (Mbilinyi, 1990). It was the first report commissioned by SIDA to focus specifically

on the gendered aspects of educational processes, reflecting a new commitment by the organization (Mbilinyi and Mbughuni, 1991). The Tanzanian researchers commissioned to write the report were already involved in research on gender and were granted considerable autonomy: the SIDA referent and the authors jointly drew up the research program. The Tanzanian scholars devised their methodology and insisted that higher education be included among the fields of study (TGNP, 1993).

This does not mean that Tanzanian researchers had no interest in international intellectual trends—rather, they felt free to choose trends that were not those preferred by donors. M. Mbilinyi states that Kate Young and Anne Whitehead from the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex<sup>8</sup> were key references for herself and her colleagues. Both women were important actors in the development of the Gender and Development (GAD) approach (Degavre, 2011; Rathgeber, 1990). This approach, developed in the late 1980s, integrated the concept of gender in development research and practice in an effort to include a critical reflection on relations of power between men and women within the understanding of women's issues in developing countries. Tanzanian researchers, such as the authors of the SIDA report, adopted this approach which allowed them to develop their conceptualization of gender. It did not immediately transform the discourse of international organizations, which kept for a time to the WID approach; when these organizations finally adopted it, however, they deprived it of its critical dimension (Calvès, 2009; Degavre, 2011; Rathgeber, 1990).

Despite funding by international donors, Tanzanian researchers built on their decade-long experience of organizing women's studies groups and were able to advance their own agendas when donors amassed in the 1990s. Donors offered material and financial help, which national institutions of higher education had failed to do, both because of a lack of means and a lack of interest in women's and gender studies. The question remains, however, how these scholars then deployed the concept of gender.

#### *Local Factors in the Reinterpretation of Gender Inequalities in the Educational Field*

Around 1990, a major reorientation occurred within scholarship attentive to gender inequalities in the educational sphere: increasingly, inequalities were seen to stem less from family behavior than from educational institutions themselves.

This shift in critical discourse towards government policies and the functioning of educational institutions was associated with a reconceptualization of parental attitudes: scholars and activists resorted less frequently to the weight of “tradition” when studying opposition to girls' schooling. The authors of the SIDA report describe in detail the reasons why some parents were reluctant to send their daughters to school: fear of schoolgirl pregnancy, economic constraints that pushed poor families to rely on the domestic work of girls, the financial importance of money exchanges at weddings, or men's fear of being supplanted in traditionally male technical occupations (Mbilinyi, 1990). Tackling the “black box” contained in the expression “traditional attitudes”, these authors brought to light that behavior was linked to social and economic constraints. Similarly, the authors of the report for TADREG showed that cultural attitudes to children's schooling, especially girls, varied greatly from one region to another depending on the dominant economy of each region (Malekela et al., 1990). Positions hitherto understood as cultural were therefore attributed to economic factors. Finally, in the book published by the TGNP in 1993, cultural reticence to schooling was studied through the prism of “conflicting gender roles”, that is, the contradictions between socially transmitted gender norms and those transmitted in school (TGNP, 1993).

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<sup>8</sup> M. Mbilinyi, comments on a draft paper, 17/10/2019.

This evolution is all the more interesting in that it runs counter to the discourse that prevailed at the time in development circles: the new international interest in girls' education around 1990 was accompanied by an understanding that "traditional practices" constituted the main obstacle to girls' schooling (Vavrus, 2002). What explains then that the Tanzanian field of research, despite its links with international development agencies, developed arguments that ran counter to these analyses?

Political liberalization encouraged new attention directed at the role of educational institutions in the construction of gender inequalities. It created an atmosphere of reform that facilitated or even encouraged the voicing of critical discourses, particularly against the socialist policies that the government was in the process of dismantling, while in the previous decades, open criticism could lead to the ban of research projects (Mbilinyi, 2011).

At the same time, school expansion also contributed to the evolution of research approaches. In the mid-1980s, the success of universal schooling that was launched in Tanzania ten years before brought as many girls as boys to primary school benches. As a result, studies turned from the issue of girls' access to school towards the issue of their results at school, which had previously only been studied in the field of mathematics (BRALUP, 1979; Coulson, 1974). These new studies emphasized that the school system itself discriminated against girls and shifted their center of gravity from the family to the educational system. Scholars examined gender stereotypes conveyed in school through studies on teaching materials, career guidance of pupils, or the attitudes of teachers and pupils. If evolutions in the Tanzanian political and educational contexts contributed to this reconceptualization of inequalities in the educational field, the concept of gender played a role as well.

### **The Appropriation of Gender**

Within international discourses of development, the shift from the WID and WAD approaches to the GAD approach from the late 1980s transformed discourses on female education. The GAD approach analyzed girls' schooling practices in the light of social and economic factors, which allowed for a better understanding of the plurality of women's educational experiences (Vavrus, 2003). What was the epistemology of gender change in Tanzanian approaches to gender in education?

#### *Ordinary and Critical Uses of Gender*

As elsewhere, Tanzanian researchers used the term "gender" in a variety of ways, investing the concept with a variety of meanings. At the workshop organized by the Women, Education, Development (WED) group in 1990, only four of the twelve abstracts used the term (Brock-Utne and Katunzi, 1990). Among the three papers published by the group in 1990-1991, two do not use it either (Brock-Utne and Possi, 1990; Kassimoto et al., 1991). The authors of these policy-oriented works share a commitment to case studies, used as *exempla* of shortcomings, that are the basis for recommendations to the Ministry of Education. In these texts, the absence or scarcity of the word gender is less a refusal of a foreign concept than the result of a genre of writing, which relies on examples rather than on theoretical insights.

More commonly, researchers used the term in a way that corresponds to its "ordinary" meaning. A good example of such usage is a 1991 report on parental attitudes to girls' schooling in the context of the reintroduction of school fees (Sumra and Katunzi, 1991). The authors used the term gender descriptively to refer to the differences between "girls and boys" without acknowledging the constructed and social dimension of these differences nor the relationships of power between men and women. This example, like others produced within the WED group, reveals an essentially descriptive or "ordinary" usage of "gender" among these Tanzanian researchers.

Others, however, developed more “critical uses” of gender at the same period, particularly the authors of the SIDA report, who used the notion extensively and analytically. They often specified the expression “gender relations” with the adjectives “oppressive” or “patriarchal” to underline their commitment to analyzing the unequal power relations between men and women. They also engaged with gender’s analytical dimension: for instance, they forge the expression “engendering characteristics of the school” which allows them to refer to “characteristics which are a result of oppressive gender relations or which further entrench women” (Mbilinyi and Mbughuni, 1991, p. 2). This conceptualization helps them to study how gender norms shaped schooling and how schooling contributed to the elaboration and diffusion of these norms, keeping in perspective that gender norms and gender relations vary over time.

### *Gender as a Key to the Transformation of Research Approach*

This variety of uses of the concept of gender is closely linked to the research approaches developed on education issues. On the one hand, researchers who did not appropriate the concept and those who used it in its ordinary meaning continued writing about “tradition” and “cultural opposition” as the main causes of gender inequalities in education (Brock-Utne and Possi, 1990; Katabaro in Brock-Utne and Possi, 1990; Sumra and Katunzi, 1991). On the other hand, Tanzanian scholars who appropriated the concept of gender in its critical dimension are those who reinterpreted the causes of inequalities in education more largely. For instance, with the expression “gender relations within the classroom”, authors of the SIDA report developed a new relational approach in a field that had focused primarily on girls as isolated subjects. This was part of the transformation of research approaches that turned towards the place of educational institutions in the building of inequalities.

A comparison of the SIDA report with earlier studies on female education, especially studies by two of the authors of the reports, M. Mbilinyi and P. Olekambaine, highlights the effects of such critical uses of gender. In the 1970s-1980s, they did not consider the differentiated role that parents, teachers, and administrators might have in girls’ educational pathways depending on their gender. This is particularly striking in the early work of M. Mbilinyi: in 1969, she considered fathers’ attitudes towards girls’ schooling, excluding from the outset the influence that a mother might have (Mbilinyi, 1969). On the contrary, in the SIDA report, P. Olekambaine states that fathers and mothers have different attitudes towards girls’ schooling, explaining that mothers were more likely to encourage girls to continue their schooling, even though they often had less material interest than men in doing so. As for M. Mbilinyi, she had turned her attention to the level of formal education received by each parent and its impact on girls’ schooling.

These scholars’ more systematic consideration of gender as a category of analysis seems to have had an impact on the work of colleagues less involved in women’s and gender studies, such as the authors of the TADREG report, who examined the differentiated role of the level of formal education of mothers and fathers (Malekela et al., 1990). Other scholars who were invested in women’s studies but who never wrote theoretical and epistemological texts on gender also included this variable in the study of the role of administrative staff, echoing the analyses developed in the SIDA report (C.A. Mbughuni & A.M. Chaila and Temba in Brock-Utne and Katunzi, 1990)

As a whole, the critical uses of gender also allowed for a more systematic study of all the factors influencing women’s educational trajectories. Discriminations suffered by girls and women in the family, school, and employment spheres were now considered together. Thus, patriarchy was no longer conceived as stopping at the school door: denunciations of patriarchal power relations were extended from the family sphere to school and university. This can be seen, for example, in the denunciation of the extent and frequency of sexual blackmail and sexual harassment in higher education (Eva Mosha in Brock-Utne and Katunzi, 1990; Mbilinyi,

1990). The influence of the labor market and its discriminatory practices on students' choices of orientation was already mentioned in the research of the 1970s (Duwi et al., 1975), but it was studied in greater depth in the 1990s (Mbilinyi, 1990; TGNP, 1993). Gender was thus appropriated by some Tanzanian researchers as an analytical category enabling them to highlight how every sphere of social life is dominated by symbolic and material relations of power between men and women. This new systematic study of all the constraints weighing on women's educational trajectories permitted researchers to depart from a discourse that attributed gender inequalities to "tradition".

### **Conclusion**

The word 'gender' was therefore used in both "ordinary" and "critical" ways by many Tanzanian researchers in their work on gender in education, starting in 1990. There is no clear-cut association between ordinary uses and links with international agencies or between critical uses and the influence of the women's movement; authors of studies commissioned by an international donor also developed critical uses of gender. In the process, they demonstrated their intellectual independence from discourses within the international sphere, in that they appropriated those that helped them in their research—such as the GAD approach—while distancing themselves from the neo-liberal approaches of the dominant donor agencies. Moreover, they were also among the key actors of the creation in 1992 of TGNP, a major women's organization in Tanzania that sought to link research with action in the promotion of "transformative feminism" (Mbilinyi, 2015).

The ordinary uses of gender were helpful to their authors in enabling them to access funds and recognition in an era when there was a demand for "gender experts". But for Tanzanian researchers who adopted gender as a critical concept, it indeed proved to be a "useful category of analysis", allowing them to raise new questions and develop new analyses. In response to authors who argue that gender was mainly imported in the Global South as a foreign concept that researchers adopted to fit global trends, this article highlights the intellectual agency of researchers that appears in these critical appropriations. Such appropriations are often referred to as "localized versions" of gender, an expression that points to the efforts of researchers from the Global South to adapt the uses of a global concept to their local context. This should not obscure, however, that these researchers, despite structural constraints, addressed global debates in their scholarship and enriched global epistemologies as this issue amply demonstrates.

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