To cook, or not to cook

– An exploratory study of persistent gender roles

By: Oscar Krooni
Supervisor: Lise-Lotte Hallman
Abstract

Despite significant progress in increasing female participation in national politics, Tanzanian households are still predominately run by men. Gender norms which define women as houseworkers and men as providers continue to pervade widespread notions that put a heavy burden on the backs of women and hinder an equal division of household labor, regardless of women’s employment situation. Although often disfavored in this patriarchal structure, research has found that women sometimes desire men to adapt to a role that further establishes these norms.

This study examined how women and men in Babati town construct masculinities and the male role in romantic relationships, and how officially contested gender roles persist. Primary data was collected through qualitative interviews and focus groups with primarily highly educated married women and men in Babati town. The data was analyzed using a theoretical framework based on masculinities in gender relations and African notions of feminism. Moreover, explanations and rationalizations of gender inequality were deconstructed and categorized in a content-oriented analysis to explicate the resilience of dominant ideologies.

The study found that men are expected to have a job and to make sure that the basic needs of the family are met. Most men did not construct ideal masculinity as mutually exclusive to cooking and cleaning, and neither did any woman. However, men often exempted themselves from household labor by arguing that African culture does not allow men to cook and clean unless the wife is sick or otherwise incapacitated.

Keywords: hegemonic masculinity, gender equality, patriarchy, African feminism, Babati
# Table of contents

1. Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1
   1.1 Problem statement ................................................................................................. 3
   1.2 Purpose of the study .............................................................................................. 4

2. Theoretical framework .................................................................................................. 5
   2.1 Theorizing masculinities ......................................................................................... 5
      2.1.1 Recognizing the gendering of men ................................................................. 6
      2.1.2 Studying gender relations .............................................................................. 6
      2.1.3 Defining masculinity ...................................................................................... 7
      2.1.4 Introducing “hegemonic masculinity” .......................................................... 8
      2.1.5 Tweaking the concept ................................................................................. 9
   2.2 Liberating African women (and men) ..................................................................... 12

3. Research design ............................................................................................................. 18
   3.1 Methodological discussion .................................................................................... 18
   3.2 Data collection method ......................................................................................... 18
   3.3 Analysis of data ..................................................................................................... 23
   3.4 Criticism of the sources ....................................................................................... 26

4. Findings .......................................................................................................................... 27

5. Analysis .......................................................................................................................... 33

6. Closing discussion ......................................................................................................... 43

7. Conclusions .................................................................................................................... 46

8. References ...................................................................................................................... 48

Appendix 1: List of respondents ....................................................................................... 54
1. Introduction

“We have long talked about the emancipation of women, of the problem of woman’s role in society. But in order that women shall be emancipated from their antiquated role the men must also be emancipated” (Palme 1972, p.237).

From its inclusion in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, via the feminist and Gay Liberation movements in the following decades, issues about gender equality have until recently primarily revolved around women while the active role of men and boys in achieving gender equality has mostly been overlooked (UNDAW, 2004).

Gender equality is today a central issue on the international development agenda, as evidenced by its inclusion in the Millennium Development Goals. In fact, it has been argued that MDG31 is the most important goal of all since empowerment of women through education would not only increase the productivity of families and communities at large and thereby contribute to economic development, but also lead to improved health for everyone (UNFPA, 2012). Hence the famous quote by then South African Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka: “Educate a woman, you educate a nation”2 (CODE, 2010).

Consequently, gender inequality is a principal barrier to socio-economic development that in Tanzania (and elsewhere) “hamper[s] the participation of at least half of the country’s population” (MCDGC 2005, p.iv). The Government of Tanzania has accordingly implemented several national measures and strategies to address gender concerns in addition to international documents such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SD). Among the most central national initiatives can be mentioned: a Women and Gender Development Policy in accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action; a National Strategy for Gender Development to oversee and strengthen the implementation of aforementioned policy; and amendments in the Constitution to increase female participation in parliament (MCDGC, 2005). The latter initiative has improved gender equality in national politics by guaranteeing women at least 30 percent of the seats in parliament. Further

---

1 Promote gender equality and empower women

2 This quote was inspired by Ghanaian scholar Dr. Aggrey who argued that “The surest way to keep a people down is to educate men and neglect the women. If you educate a man you simply educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a family” (cited in Jacobs 1996, p.47).
evidence of improvement was seen in the 2010 election in which half of all nominated MPs were women.

Despite this extensive commitment to fight gender inequality there is still much to be done and many obstacles to overcome before full equality can be achieved. On a global level, the latest MDG report depicts a bleak image of the situation by noting that women have largely missed out on progress made in other areas of development, such as poverty alleviation (United Nations, 2011). While the report indicated some progress in school enrolment at primary and secondary level (albeit with regional differences), girls in especially sub-Saharan Africa are strongly underrepresented in tertiary education, hence making them less eligible for qualified jobs. This is strongly reflected in Tanzania where women are estimated to make up a mere 30 percent of paid employees (Government of Tanzania, 2011). In fact, only four percent of women are involved in remunerative work, compared to nearly one of every ten men (Ellis, et al., 2007).

Moreover, it is a well-established fact both globally (Antonopoulos, 2009) and in Tanzania (Government of Tanzania, 2011) that women spend more time on unpaid work than men and that this creates a situation in which men are able to occupy a hegemonic position in the household based on their role as income earner (Kizilirmak and Memis, 2009). Research shows that in addition to resulting in an unequal division of household labor, unbalanced power relations in households also further entrench patriarchal structures and consolidate traditional practices that are discriminatory to women (Fawole, 2008). Amartya Sen (1999) argues that this arduous burden and deprived freedom to work outside the home is a fundamental impediment for women to access resources inside as well as outside the household. As such, unbalanced gender relations is a form of economic violence that has direct negative consequences on the development by leading to widespread illiteracy, poverty, and an inferior status of women in society (Fawole, 2008). One example of this can be seen in how resource allocation in households often disfavors girls and women (Cagatay, 1998). It is therefore not surprising that despite constituting just over half of the world’s population, women make up the majority of the world’s poor and hungry (UNDP, 1995; ECOSOC, 2007).

While the aforementioned Constitutional amendments in Tanzania paved the way for more women to reach decision-making positions in political life, these macro-initiatives have not
been successful in changing gender roles at household level. The Tanzanian National Strategy for Gender Development attributes the persistence of these gender roles to patriarchal structures and discriminatory customs and traditions (MCDGC, 2005). As such, favorable gender relations are assumed to emerge from tearing down these structures and renouncing destructive traditions that disfavor women.

This inference rests on the assumption that, as rational actors who are disadvantaged in the current status quo, women wish to uproot patriarchal structures and achieve gender relations that are more equitable and accommodates their wants and interests. Research has shown that it is more complicated than this however, because both women and men tend to downplay the supposed problematic of gender inequality at household level and rationalize the gendered division of household labor as part and parcel of “Tanzanian culture” or “African tradition” (Feinsten, Feinstein and Sabrow 2010, p.106). What is more, a South African study on women’s construction of masculinity in different contexts showed that women prefer a “traditional” man over a so-called “nice guy” (Talbot and Quayle, 2010). The women of the study expected and were attracted to men who could protect and provide for the family and who were not too engrossed in domestic tasks like cooking and cleaning. Additionally, a recent study from Babati showed that while men refrained from identifying with “traditional norms and values, and even less, perceived the man as a sole breadwinner or decision-maker,” empowerment of women was only reflected upon positively as long as it did not interrupt the natural division of household labor in which men cannot undertake traditional women’s duties without undermining “all aspects that defined a man” (Rörström 2011, pp.14,16).

These findings indicate that the problems of gender inequality cannot be fully grasped without elucidating the pressures on men to act and behave in a certain manner to be desirable (or acceptable) men. However, it would be equally erroneous to ignore the latent ideological underpinnings that may be so instilled in women (and men) that they are not even aware of the unequal and oppressive nature of current gender norms, thus resembling what Marxists have called false consciousness (Eyerman, 1981).

1.1 Problem statement
Defined as “a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby 1989, p.214), patriarchy inevitably posits men and women as two distinct groups where one oppresses and the other one is oppressed. However, “Since
masculinities are social constructions, it is highly unlikely that any form of masculinity can be constructed and/or maintained by men alone” (Talbot and Quayle 2010, p.256). Thus, it is imperative to get to the bottom of how women and men construct a desired masculinity in order to understand on the one hand how men are able to sustain a leading role in the household, and on the other what internal and external pressures there are on men. In other words, how are women and men as gendered beings expected to act and what responsibilities do they have in the household? And, how are the assignments of these roles explained?

Furthermore, the official strategies to achieve an equitable division of labor and resources are to “Sensitize and encourage men to participate fully in household chores” and “Campaign against customs and traditions that limit equal division of labour and resources between women and men at all levels” (MCDGC 2005, p.15). These strategies fail to acknowledge the different needs and wants of families in Tanzania, which lead to varied opinions about how the various responsibilities should be divided. Not only is it more difficult, but it would also be rather meaningless to promote gender relations that are not supported by the involved women. There is therefore a need to understand how women and men in Tanzania want gender relations to be and what gender equality means to them.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is accordingly to explicate the social construction of masculinities and the male role in heterosexual romantic relationships. More specifically, the intention is to examine how officially contested gender roles persist. This study will also expound on how women and men in Babati town want gender relations to be.

The following questions will be answered at the end of the study:

- How is ideal masculinity in romantic relationships constructed by women and men?
  - Do women and men construct masculinity differently?

- How do women and men explain the gendered division of household labor?
  - What do they want to change?
2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Theorizing masculinities

The science of masculinity underwent three main paradigmatic phases in the course of the last century (Connell, 2005). The first was based on Freudian theory; the second on social psychology and sex roles; and the third on anthropology, history and sociology. Since this thesis is written within the social sciences it will only discuss the two latter phases.³

The central argument put forth by sex role theorists is that men and women are socialized into different and reciprocal roles according to their sex. These roles will differ depending on the cultural context, but the general idea is that like actors in a play, gender relations are governed by a script that women and men are smoothly internalized into. This script is dictated by cultural norms and expectations which can change at any given time if families, schools, mass media, or any other group of social actors transmit new expectations.

Sex role theory has come under attack from multiple directions. Feminists have criticized it for its neglect of the inherent power structure in gender relations where women are expected to accept a subordinate position to men, a process which sex role theorists argue leads to social stability. Not in the sense that the subordination of women equals social stability, but rather that women and men alike should know their place and role in social relations, for instance in the division of suitable work tasks. Since these roles are admittedly liable to change if there is an interest in it, social stability emerges if women and men allow this supposedly unbiased process run its course and are smoothly internalized into their expected roles. Another challenge has come from researchers and minorities who criticize this theory for exaggerating and putting too much focus on the alleged differences between women and men at the expense of categories like ethnicity, class, and sexuality (Connell, 2005).

Historical studies on masculinities have further contested sex role theory by showing that supposedly given masculine traits, such as the role of breadwinners in Western industrialized countries, were actually constructed quite recently (Seccombe, 1986). Criticism towards this positivist understanding of masculinity has also come from anthropologists who have repeatedly proven sex role theory’s notion of male and female roles as binary opposites inept outside the so-called Western world (Connell, 2005). Ethnographical accounts of the diversity

³ For an introduction to Freud's writings, see Connell (2005, pp.8-21).
of masculinities on a global scale are complemented by sociological research which has showed a socio-contextual variation of masculinities and the making of gender through interaction.

2.1.1 Recognizing the gendering of men

Yet to recognize that there are different masculinities is not enough.

“We must also recognize the relations between the different kinds of masculinity: relations of alliance, dominance and subordination. These relationships are constructed through practices that exclude and include, that intimidate, exploit, and so on. There is a gender politics within masculinity” (Connell 2005, p.37).

What Connell says is that gender politics is not limited to relations between men and women. Instead of just identifying men as a cohesive category that “dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby 1989, p.214) in a patriarchal structure, the study of gender must also include an analysis of the power relations among men and masculinities. Because just as women are oppressed and subordinated in patriarchal structures, so are homosexual men often oppressed and discriminated against by heterosexual men. The latter marginalize the former by feminizing them and by arguing that they are not “real men.” Patriarchy as a term will therefore not suffice if the aim is to fully comprehend gender relations and discern why some men have more power than others. Before undertaking this onerous task, however, it is necessary to clarify how the terms gender and masculinity are applied in this thesis.

2.1.2 Studying gender relations

“Gender is a way in which social practice is ordered” (Connell 2005, p.71), including both power relations, referring to the abovementioned concept of patriarchy, and relations in production and economics. The latter concerns the gendered division of labor, which is evident both at household level and in corporations. For instance, men and women are often assigned different tasks according to their gender at household level and large corporations are seldom owned or run by women.

Gender also intersects with other social categories, such as class, ethnicity, and sexuality. These intragroup differences have gained recognition in the last few decades and have

---

4 This example might be more applicable to some societies and contexts and less applicable to others and should therefore only be regarded as an illustration of the power relations among men and masculinities in general.
resulted in a new approach to study gender – *intersectionality*.\(^5\) By including the ethnicity of African-American women, for instance, research has shown how they are targets of both racism and sexism (Beale, 1970). Just as Beale (1970) brought to light the double oppression black women faced in the Civil-Rights era, so have postcolonial feminists such as Spivak (1988) and Mohanty (1988; 2003) drawn attention to the heterogeneity of women on a global scale by questioning the inherent postcolonial discourse in the supposed universal (read Western) feminist movement’s struggle against oppressive men. `Third World women`\(^6\) have become devalued and characterized as backward and oppressed by their male compatriots and therefore in need of rescue by the `enlightened´ women in the so-called Western world.\(^7\)

While intersectionality evidently provides a more extensive understanding of the different realities among women, this approach has not been widely used to understand how men construct their masculinity both in relation to other men and to different women. For instance, urban men construct their masculinity both in relation to other urban men and women, and to rural men and women. Urban or rural residence is therefore only one aspect which men (and women) use to navigate their place in gender relations.

### 2.1.3 Defining masculinity

Having identified the gender relations among men, it is time to clarify what masculinity is. The first step, however, is to review where previous endeavors to define the concept have gone wrong and thereby unraveling the confusions and discordances that seem to be attached to it.

Connell (2005) has reviewed the four main strategies that have been used to define masculinity. The *essentialist* definitions have been used to separate the active man from the passive woman, to take but one example. Similar to essentialist definitions, theorists who subscribe to a *positivist* definition build their argument on what men actually are. That is, masculinity is what men do. This is quite the opposite of *normative* definitions, which derive from what men “ought to be” (Connell 2005, p.70) and are often brought forth by mass media.

---

\(^5\) For a more elaborate discussion on intersectionality as a research approach, see for example Weldon (2006) and Crenshaw (1991).

\(^6\) The term `Third World´ is today obsolete in the field of development studies and is only used here to conform with postcolonial theorists such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, whose usage of the term implies a critical approach to a postcolonial discourse in which the `Third world´ is the negative `Other´ to the so-called Western world.

\(^7\) Section 2.2 offers a more comprehensive discussion on this issue.
in the form of sports personalities or movie stars. The fourth strategy (the *semiotic* approach) has primarily been used by poststructuralist theorists involved in the study of language and define masculinity as that which is not feminine. In other words, “masculinity is the unmarked term, the place of symbolic authority” (Connell 2005, p.70).

As Connell notes, all these strategies have major flaws and shortcomings. The essentialist for bringing forth arbitrary definitions which different essentialists rarely agree on between themselves; the positivist for ruling out the existence of masculine women or feminine men; the normative for settling on a definition that few (if any) men can actually live up to; and the semiotic for overestimating the applicability of discourse in the study of social relations.

Instead, masculinity should be perceived as something else than a certain character type or behavioral norm. Masculinity only exists in relation to femininity and when we speak of masculinity “we are `doing gender´ in a culturally specific way” (Connell 2005, p.68). In other words, there is no historically fixed and universal definition of masculinity. The masculine is always constructed, contested and reinvented, and always in relation to the feminine. “`Masculinity´ […] is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture” (Connell 2005, p.71).

While acknowledging that masculinity often holds a hegemonic place in gender relations (discussed shortly), it is imperative to recognize that this does not apply to all masculinities “for it is of course hegemonic masculinity, not any subordinated or marginalised form, that occupies the masculine pole of difference in patriarchal culture” (Connell 2005, p.232).

### 2.1.4 Introducing “hegemonic masculinity”

Borrowed from Gramsci’s analysis of class relations, “`hegemony´ refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life” (Connell 2005, p.77). While violence is often used as a tool to sustain this position, “It is the successful claim to authority, more than direct violence, that is the mark of hegemony” (Connell 2005, p.77). Thus, while men in general hold a leading position in social life through a successful application of a patriarchal ideology, hegemonic masculinity refers to “the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations” (Connell 2005, p.76).
Moreover, hegemonic masculinity is culturally, contextually, and historically contingent. The masculinity that currently holds a leading position in social life can always be contested by women (and men). However, in order to succeed, antagonists of hegemonic masculinity need to overcome the four practices that act as bulwarks to any change in the hierarchy of masculinities, among which hegemony is arguably the most central (Connell, 2005). Whether it is the quarterback of the high school football team or the four-star general in the U.S. Army, there is (almost) always one man or group of men that is culturally accepted as the most powerful person(s) in that particular context. The ability of this group to claim their authority without having to use direct violence is the marker of their hegemony.

The few men who actually fully embody the hegemonic pattern are also supported as top-dogs through complicity from men who might not belong to the upper-most tier of men but nonetheless stand to gain from the patriarchal dividend.

They also shield themselves by a divide-and-rule strategy whereby different groups of marginalized men are able to rise in the ranks and different groups of subordinated men are oppressed through feminization. Wealthy and successful black athletes in the U.S. are an example of the former and homosexual men (in most parts of the world) are an example of the latter (Connell, 2005).

Together, these practices are by and large not visible as a gendered project. Instead, hegemonic masculinity is defended in terms of corporate profit, economic efficiency, or family values (Connell, 2005), thus disguising the gendered nature of everyday politics.

2.1.5 Tweaking the concept

Acknowledging that there is a culturally exalted form of masculinity is only the first step in this thesis. It has to be supplemented with a model that outlines how this normative masculinity is constructed and how it can be negotiated and distinguished from other forms of masculinity. The analysis in this study has therefore incorporated Talbot and Quayle’s (2010) term ideal masculinity, defined as the set of qualities which men ought to possess in order to be desirable or acceptable to women. In addition to these ‘must-haves,’ there are also a set of
appendages as well as acceptable- and unacceptable violations which decide how men are perceived and valued by women.\textsuperscript{8}

Talbot and Quayle (2010) found that in order to be desirable to women, a man had to work hard and be able to protect and provide for the family. Women construed these as \textit{natural} male responsibilities and a failure to live up to them would not only wreak havoc on the `male ego´ but also be frowned upon by women.

However, the interviewed women did explain some situations in which exceptions or violations to these core principles were acceptable. It was acceptable for a man to be responsible for household chores if the particular situation called for it. For instance, it would not make him less of a man if his wife is on a business trip and earns more money than he does, thus making it necessary for him to care for the family and the household while she is away. In fact, recognizing the family’s needs and putting those needs in front of his own almost makes him more masculine according to the interviewed women of the study. This was also exemplified by one woman who said that it would be acceptable for her husband to stay at home (rather than working outside the home) if this enabled her to pursue a career for herself.

In addition to these core principles, the study also found how women described some characteristics as appendages. These were desired but not essential qualities. For example, women welcomed a helping hand from men when doing household labor. Nevertheless, it was not an essential quality and it was only desirable if it did not interfere with the core principles. In other words, women wanted men to help out with domestic chores if there was an evident need for it, but only if it did not compromise their primary responsibilities.

In sum, the study found that it was only acceptable to violate the core principles of masculinity if the situation demanded it and there was no other alternative; if doing household chores (for example) did not come naturally; or if it corresponded to the desires of the female partner.

\textsuperscript{8} The qualities women look for in men can of course vary from individual to individual; between different contexts, for example a work and personal contexts; and between different socio-cultural contexts. However, Talbot and Quayle’s (2010) study provide a method of analysis to identify common themes that were used in this thesis.
Talbot and Quayle (2010) were furthermore able to show that the interviewed South African women had a firm opinion on what role men and women have in the household. Whereas men had the role of protecting and providing for the family, women should be provided for and protected. Women were thus active constructors of masculinity and constructed ideal masculinity as a space in gender relations that enabled their idea of femininity (Talbot and Quayle, 2010). If men began to sniff on the outskirts of these constructed boundaries, women would respond by deeming it unacceptable masculine behavior.
2.2 Liberating African women (and men)

As the previous sections indicated, gender inequality can interplay with other forms of discrimination. Ignoring the heterogeneity of women would hence not only make it impossible to grasp the diverse realities women in different social and cultural contexts face, but it would also undermine every effort to design strategies to improve their lives. To postcolonial feminists such as Spivak and Mohanty, Western feminism fails to understand that women cannot be defined as a homogenous social category and that the `Western woman´ is not a normative point of reference who women from all over the world aspire to emulate.

In order to understand where Western feminists have gone wrong, Mohanty (1988) makes a distinction between Woman and women, where the former denotes the position the latter have in gender relations – a position that is neither historically nor cross-culturally fixed. By failing to acknowledge this distinction, Western feminism has come under attack for carrying on the colonial project of rendering `Third World´ women in paternalistic terms through which they are not only oppressed as women by men, but also in their capacity as implicitly underdeveloped citizens of the `Third World.´ Consequently, Western feminists see a need of “saving brown women from brown men” (Spivak 1988, p.296). In other words, Western feminism reproduces a hierarchical balance of power in which `Western women,´ and the societies they live in, represent progressive ideals whereas `Third World women´ need to join hands with their `sisters´ in the West to become liberated from their own backwardness, which begets oppressive gender relations. The goal is for women all over the world to become liberated and empowered, just like the `Western woman.´

With this in mind, the term feminism is loaded with negative connotations for both men and women in Africa (and other postcolonial regions). The former have denounced feminism for at least two reasons (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994). Firstly, they argue that feminism is yet another way to divert attention from the most important issue for Africans – the continuing Western hegemony. Secondly, the liberation of women is perceived of as a way to feminize men by turning them into `housekeepers.´ This implies a degradation of status because physical labor is regarded as subordinated to mental labor. Household labor is therefore menial in comparison to doing no chores at all or simply directing them to someone else. Women, on their hand, have expressed skepticism towards feminism for being a `home-wrecker´ imposed on Africa by external powers (Kolawole, 2002).
In an attempt to achieve a local understanding of feminism and to liberate African feminism from the bleak history of its Western counterpart, Aniekwu (2006) has argued that whereas the latter is characterized by the propagation of individual female autonomy, the former works within a communal framework in which institutionalized and largely accepted ways of female subordination are challenged and reinterpreted. Granted, this may not ease the minds of men who subscribe to the abovementioned arguments. It does however have the potential of overcoming the skepticism some African women have expressed in their perception of feminism as a foreign concept to their context by deconstructing two related myths, that African culture is antithetical to equality and that Westerners carry the `torch of enlightenment´ to gender equality.

Aniekwu (2006) problematizes and deconstructs both these myths. By showing how African women often played a complementary and prominent role in pre-colonial corporate base societies, she refutes these essentialist claims – tied to suppositions of African gender roles as fixed in age-old traditions – and the supposedly liberatory role of Westerners. In fact, colonization disrupted these social structures through centralization and strong support of patriarchal and individualist structures which, among other things, separated previously commingled African societies into divided spheres in which the colonizers favored men in political and economic spheres whereas women were largely relegated to private spheres (Aniekwu, 2006). Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) argues that this Western intrusion and the inherent imposition of capitalism has had severe consequences for women because it defined women’s labor in the household as inferior and replaced the social structure of communal reciprocity with individualism and selfishness.

However, just as the `civilizing´ mission of the colonizers denigrated the role African women played in society, so has the process of decolonization and the oft-conjoined paradigmatic shift to authenticization of a true `African´ (or national) culture backfired on women’s liberation. For example, the response of nationalists in Algeria to the French suppression of everything `Algerian´ was to chauvinistically promote what was deemed to be authentically Algerian (Knauss, 1987). Patriarchal structures became an essential part of this `liberatory´ project which proved to be everything but just that for Algerian women.

According to Aniekwu (2006), the hierarchical set-up introduced and institutionalized by the colonial powers continues to predominate in many African societies. Nationalists in Algeria
(and elsewhere in Africa) represent yet another reason for why structural gender inequality cannot be explained in cultural terms, at least not if culture is regarded as static and unchanging. Rather, culture and gender relations are shaped and reshaped throughout history.

In Tanzania, the economic crisis in the 1970s and 1980s brought about new challenges to urban households which had previously relied on a sole source of income. Whereas urban women had been largely excluded from income-generating activities and therefore depended on men to provide financially for them in the past, the economic crisis redefined the roles and responsibilities of women and men (Tripp, 1989). With dramatic declines in living standards, women had to step up and play a complementary role as provider for the family, and often did so quite successfully. Not only did women earn greater financial independence and leverage in deciding how to spend family finances, but many men readily accepted this changing dynamic within the household (Tripp, 1989). Poor and wealthier women alike prioritized the family’s needs and spent their earnings on everything from clothes and school fees for the children, to financing a new house. However, whereas some men welcomed the economic contributions from women and their subsequently more active involvement in decision-making, other men kept their wives on a ‘tight leash’ either because they feared that she would leave him or because they did not want her to draw attention from other men.

These findings show that by committing to a Western feminism that claims universal allegiance to a unitary cause and project, local women’s strength and transformative potential to mobilize and change the status quo is overlooked (Aniekwu, 2006). The structural adjustment programs implemented by Tanzania in the 1980s opened up economic life and proved women’s strength and capability to play an integral role as contributory members within families without enforcing ideas about what role and responsibilities women and men are supposed to have in gender relations.\(^9\) Men also proved willing to adapt to new gender relations for the sake of their families, thus contradicting widespread notions of African gender roles as fixed in history and immune to change. That being said, women were often involved in low-paid enterprises in the informal economy, such as food-vending and sewing (Tripp, 1989), and the change in gender roles was thus far from dramatic in the sense that women did not replace men’s status as primary breadwinners.

\(^9\) While the World Bank’s and IMF’s demand for Tanzania to radically privatize the market in order to reschedule its huge debt can be seen as a coercive measure, it was not a direct enforcement of an ethnocentric idea about gender relations. Thus, the changing gender roles principally came about through local initiatives, albeit ‘facilitated’ by external (Western) actors.
In an attempt to overcome the shortcoming that derives from Western feminism’s futile attempt to construct a global sisterhood of women and its Eurocentricity, as well as every other attempt to construct a feminist ideology that takes women’s position in gender relations for granted, Mohanty (2003) argues for a feminism based on solidarity across different and interplaying forms of oppression. Relatedly, Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) writes about feminisms in plural as opposed to a singular feminism that is unable to encompass women of different ethnicity, class, caste, nationality, age status, and sexual orientation.

As the brief historical review of feminism in Africa reveals, African women face difficulties from multiple directions. The external oppression during colonization uprooted their previously advanced role in society, and decolonization did not end the gender inequality that was established during the colonial era. Research on gender relations shows that the gender roles promoted by the colonial powers still linger in the minds of many men in Tanzania. For example, although women desire an equal division of household labor, men have been able to use their role as sole income earners and decision-makers to suppress these aspirations by promoting values and norms which assert their superior role as part and parcel of Tanzanian culture or as a natural occurrence (Feinstein, Feinstein and Sabrow, 2010). Opposing and alternative norms and values are thereby constructed as either foreign to the indigenous culture and tradition, or as unnatural. Moreover, some women buy into this cultural rationalization or wave off gender inequality as irrelevant by ascribing it to age status (Feinstein, Feinstein and Sabrow, 2010).

Consequently, there are multiple obstacles to the altering of gender relations in Africa. In fact, Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) has identified six “mountains”\(^\text{10}\) that stand in the way of furthering women’s equal rights in gender relations. These are: oppression from outside; traditional structures; women’s backwardness; men; women’s color/race;\(^\text{11}\) and themselves. The influence of colonialism on the minds and societal structures has already been thoroughly explained and there is therefore no need to further discuss this “mountain” here. Moreover, the role of traditional structures seems to differ greatly. For instance, while Aniekwu (2006) highlights the prominent role women played in pre-colonial African societies, Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) argues that women were mostly inferior to men and that attitudes on the inferior

---

\(^{10}\) A metaphor for obstacles. See Ogundipe-Leslie (1994, pp.27-36)

\(^{11}\) Although repeatedly used by Ogundipe-Leslie, the term “race” is considered obsolete in the area of development studies and is often replaced by ethnicity.
status of women can largely be attributed to this historical past. However, since neither explanation can be applied to all socio-cultural contexts, every effort to rationalize current gender relations to a bygone era needs to be critically questioned. “Race” is part of a global structure in which the white North has hegemony over the black South in political and economic relations. However, due to its close connection to Western feminism and (post)colonialism, this obstacle will not be discussed in more detail, nor applied as a separate category, in this thesis.

By women’s backwardness, Ogundipe-Leslie means the effects colonization and neocolonialism has had on women’s lack of education and economic vulnerability. Men are obstacles because “Not even the most politically progressive men are completely free from patriarchal attitudes and feelings of male superiority” (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994, p.36). It is therefore up to women themselves to fight for their rights and not expect men to help or support them. The most important “mountain,” however, are women themselves. Ogundipe-Leslie argues that patriarchal ideologies and women’s subordination are so indoctrinated in the minds of women that they are blind to the oppression they live under. This further entrenches gender inequality and women’s dependency and submissiveness. Women therefore need to be educated about their rights and identify the current inequalities.

In writing about these many obstacles, Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) employs a wider perspective than to merely remedy the ills African women are faced with. She asserts that gender relations and persisting gender norms in Africa prevents the full realization of men’s and women’s capabilities and consequently hold back the socioeconomic development of African societies. Dominant perceptions which keep wives away from remunerative work not only hinder the economic well-being of the whole family and the likelihood that children are properly nourished and attend school, but can also damage women’s self-esteem. Subsequently, to break free from the “mountain” of external oppression is not enough if it results in cultural chauvinism that only wreaks havoc on African societies.

Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) argues that Africa is in need of a comprehensive transformational process that assists the development of whole societies, a process which cannot be accomplished without a re-creation of gender relations. It is therefore imperative to involve women and men alike, as both need liberation from the shackles of destructive gender norms which impede them from carrying out certain tasks because they do not think it is their
responsibility. Nevertheless, it is important not to equate equality with empowerment. For example, while empowerment can mean women’s freedom to work outside the home, equality necessitates that women who earn an income also have a responsibility to contribute financially to the family and not spend the money as she pleases. Liberation and responsibility therefore go hand in hand and it is this reciprocation that will develop and transform African societies for the better.

Instead of redefining feminism, Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) has developed a new ideology called STIWANISM – Social Transformation Including Women in Africa. STIWANISM is about the creation of a just society in which both women and men are liberated from “the tyranny of gender roles” (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994, p.209) and ultimately allows women to choose their own role, no matter what that entails. Meaning, there is no template to which every woman in Africa should be squeezed into. Rather, it allows every woman and man the freedom to reach their fullest potential by releasing them from gender norms that obstruct them from being autonomous and responsible members of society.
3. Research design

3.1 Methodological discussion

This study was primarily conducted using qualitative interviews. Primary data were collected through individual interviews, focus group sessions, and visual observations during a three-week field study in Babati District. Whereas the latter gives a picture of how gender relations are, the former methods help explain why. These findings are presented in an intermingled fashion in chapter 4. Even though the analysis was reserved for chapter 5, it is nonetheless worth pointing out that the observations and interview data presented were not completely unaffected from the author’s own perspective, for example as a male and a foreigner. This was taken into consideration in order to ensure that the findings were not tainted by my own opinions, an issue which is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Since the aim was to understand and explore women’s and men’s subjective perceptions rather than to quantitatively compare different arguments and perspectives, a qualitative approach was applied. Impersonal approaches such as questionnaires or short and structured interviews that scratch the surface would have been useful if the aim had been to achieve a representative illustration of the culturally exalted masculinity in Babati town. However, the qualitative nature chosen was of greater benefit with respect to the exploratory aim because it enabled me to probe into how my respondents think and argue regarding a personal topic in a way the former approaches would not have allowed. This approach was not entirely without weaknesses however. For instance, a three-week field study only allows for just so many deep interviews, making it hard to generalize and apply the findings to other cases, or even to Babati town in general.

3.2 Data collection method

Ten interviews with a total of 13 respondents were conducted between February and March, 2012. Of these ten interviews, eight were individual and two were focus groups, one with solely men and one with exclusively women. In the two instances where both the wife and the husband were interviewed, they were interviewed individually to avoid a situation in which one partner affects the answers of the other.

---

12 A full list of respondents with background information is provided in Appendix 1.
Respondents were selected based on the following criteria: they had to have been married for at least one year; they had to currently live with their spouse; they had to reside in Babati town; and, they had to be at least 18 years old. These criteria had to be overlooked for the female focus group, which consisted of unmarried women in a rural area just outside Babati town, and for one individual interview. The reason for this was because of difficulties in reaching respondents that met these criteria.

In order to understand the gendering of men within the outlined theoretical framework of masculinities, and to avoid “re-excluding women” (Hearn, 2004), this study included both men and women so as to be able to compare how they constructed and perceived masculinities and gender relations in Tanzania. The target group was married women and men because they were the most likely to have experience in dividing household labor between each other. Including prospective spouses might have provided a different perspective but it would also have compromised the ability to draw conclusions based on the perspectives of married couples. Moreover, since the aim was to explore women’s and men’s perspectives, rather than to explain them, there was no need to provide a representative sample of Babati. This would have furthermore been practically impossible because of the short time period in which this study was conducted.

Due to the lack of previous research, particularly on Tanzanian women’s perceptions of favorable gender relations and conceptions of gender roles, it was important to leave questions open-ended and not approach the interviews with preconceived notions of how I think gender relations should be. That being said, every individual interview commenced with a set of questions to provide some background information which might help explain varied attitudes and perceptions between different respondents, and to break the ice. These introductory questions consisted of the respondent’s name, age, place of birth, education, years married, number of children, if the respondent has a maid/help, occupation, partner’s occupation (when I did not interview both partners), and religion. It should be mentioned that even though I asked about the respondent’s name, I also informed them that they would remain anonymous unless they explicitly stated otherwise. As such, no names are mentioned in this thesis.

---

13 The focus groups are described below.
Every individual interview covered a few discussion topics from which I asked follow-up questions and clarified key terms when necessary. These topics were: the current division of household labor at their house; the division of responsibilities between the partners; the division of household labor when the respondent grew up; the perceived reasons for this division of household labor; if the respondent would be willing to switch responsibilities with his/her partner; if there is anything he/she would like to see different in the current division of household labor (in his/her life and in Tanzania in general); how this change can/should be achieved; and, how they define gender equality. Moreover, the interviews were rounded off by inviting the respondent to ask me questions or discuss something we had not yet talked about.

However, every interview situation is unique and while some interviews followed a semi-structured design, others were relatively casual and friendly discussions. Regardless of how the interviews were carried out, this form of collecting data allowed me to describe key terms thoroughly and ask follow-up questions. It also provided me with the opportunity to be flexible and adjust some of my questions, thereby improving the quality of the interviews as the study progressed. For instance, in one of the first individual interviews a woman asked me about gender relations and the division of household labor in Sweden. By hearing me describe how I perceived the situation in Sweden she was able to relate to and compare two vastly different socio-cultural contexts. It was evident that this opened up her perspective to a different reality that she had not thoroughly thought about before hearing about it, or at least was unable to express in words. Hearing me describe something to her, instead of just asking her to describe to me, may have also leveled out the playing field between us by turning the interview from a knowledge cul-de-sac to an exchange of ideas and experiences. This approach was applied in many interviews thenceforth, especially if the interview came to a standstill or if the respondent did not provide elaborate answers. It should be noted, however, that I did not lead off any interview with this approach because that would have run the risk of affecting the rest of the interview too much.

The intention of using focus group sessions was threefold. Firstly, focus group sessions have the advantage of being able to produce a discussion amongst participants that brings forth aspects and perspectives to the issue of inquiry that is hard to conjure from individual interviews (Babbie, 2010). Thus, they can provide a more natural and relaxed setting than individual interviews normally do and thereby both enhance the capability of probing in what
some might consider a sensitive or personal topic and also increase the validity of the findings by limiting external influence (Bryman, 2002). Secondly, they provide a time-efficient method of collecting data because it allows the researcher to interview multiple persons at the same time (Bryman, 2002). Even though my field assistant, who was responsible for finding and contacting suitable interviewees, was not able to bring together more than two or three men and women who fitted the abovementioned criteria on the same occasion, thus making the sessions less than optimal, they provided a rich source of data, especially when the participants had different perspectives and opinions on the matter. Thirdly, using focus group sessions allowed me to compare my findings to similar research conducted in another part of Tanzania (Feinstein, Feinstein and Sabrow, 2010).

The first session involved two male teachers at a secondary school in Babati town. They had an open and animated discussion in which I made sure that both had the chance to voice their opinion on a few predetermined topics. The topics discussed were: what roles and responsibilities men and women have in romantic relationships; what role and responsibilities they should have; how they feel about the current division of household labor; the perceived reasons for the assignment of these roles and responsibilities; and, how they think favorable gender relations for both women and men can be achieved.

The corresponding focus session with women involved three participants in a school in rural Babati, a few miles outside of town. Neither of these women met the criteria of being married and residing in Babati town. Nonetheless, they were all involved in (heterosexual) relationships and lived with their boyfriends. In contrast to the lively discussion between the men, the women were not very talkative at all. Consequently, I took a more active role as interviewer than I did with the male focus group. While both focus groups largely involved the same discussion topics, this session was more similar to a semi-structured group interview than a focus group. The difference being that since the women often agreed with one another, and thereby nullified some of the abovementioned advantages of focus groups, the female session covered more topics with less depth. Although still qualitative in nature, a negative interview effect harmed the collection of deep and qualitative data.

Multiple factors come into play when evaluating the reliability of the primary data collected for this thesis. While providing detailed descriptions of how the data were collected is certainly of some value, it only takes one so far. One measure of good reliability is the ability
of other researchers to replicate the same study, using the same methodological design, and reach the same results (Bjereld, Demker and Hinnfors, 2009). Since interviews rely on personal connection and chemistry between the interviewer and the interviewee, there is always an interview effect that affects the reliability of primary data collected using this method. For instance, the fact that I was not able to connect with the women as well as I did with the men might indicate that my role as a man had a negative effect on the interviews. Granted, the color of my skin might also have influenced the answers provided by the women as well as the men. A female interviewer, and/or one of different ethnicity might therefore receive somewhat different data than what is presented in this thesis. This issue can furthermore be applied to all interviews throughout the study, although it was most evident in the example given above. What is more, the female focus group was interviewed just after they had completed another interview and the session ended rather abruptly because of an interruption from other teachers who had their morning tea in the room where the interview was carried out. All these factors may have contributed to the women’s lack of engagement.

Another factor that may have affected the interviews was whether or not an interpreter was used. Both focus groups and four individual interviews were carried out in English without interpretation. The remaining four individual interviews were translated from Kiswahili to English by my (male) field assistant. Interpretation of respondents’ replies can certainly lead to a formalization of interviews by interrupting a natural flow between the interviewee and the interviewer, as well as other immeasurable effects because of the mere presence of a third person, particularly if it is another man when interviewing a woman about men. On the other hand, my experience was that the presence of another local Tanzanian eased the tension of having a white man interviewing a black woman. It did create some pauses and it certainly diverted the attention from me to my field assistant, but it also had some positive effects. For instance, my field assistant was thoroughly informed on the aim of my study and we had multiple conversations in which we evaluated interview data and discussed who I wanted to interview next. Consequently, he was able to describe and phrase my questions in a way that made the interviewees understand what I wanted to know. Aside from avoiding misunderstandings regarding key terms, it might also have been easier for some respondents to talk about their personal life to a Tanzanian than with me. This is an indication that some respondents may have held some suspicions regarding the aim of my study. Rather than telling me what they truly felt, some (especially women) may have felt uneasy talking to a white man about this and consequently held back on how they truly felt. On the other hand,
some (especially men) may have given me answers that they thought I wanted to hear and that made them seem more manly or in charge of their wife.

Lastly, notes were taken during the interviews and written out in full shortly after. As such, no recorder was used. The main reason for this was because a recorder can be a disruptive element in conversations and therefore contradicts the purpose of carrying out casual discussions rather than formal interviews. On the other hand, excluding a recording device can provide some difficulties when analyzing the data if the interviewer is inattentive and fails to take exhaustive notes. Furthermore, taking notes might also prove to be a disruptive element if the interviewer gets absorbed in the notepad instead of listening and making eye contact with the interviewee, thereby raising suspicions and discouraging honest answers from the interviewee. It also makes it difficult to present catchy quotes in the presentation. While all these disadvantages were taken into account, the main priority was to provide a casual setting for the interviews, and to this end, the disadvantages were mitigated by a thorough preparation and careful design of analytical tools prior to conducting the interviews.

3.3 Analysis of data

This study did not set out to find an absolute truth about the social world, if such a thing even exists. Rather, the collected data was analyzed according to the theoretical framework, which only represents a few ways to make sense of arguments about gender. While the analysis was permeated by a hermeneutic (interpretive) element, it nonetheless followed a logic which derived from previous research with similar aims as this study. For example, Talbot and Quayle’s (2010) deconstruction of desirable and undesirable masculinities was used both as a template to identify core principles, appendages, and acceptable- as well as unacceptable violations, and to examine how different constructions of masculinities relate to one another. Additionally, the four practices that defend the ideal (or hegemonic) masculinity\textsuperscript{14} were central reference points in the analysis of how current gender roles persist by through active protection by men and women who benefit from the status quo.

In order to identify and categorize arguments used by men and women to explain the gendered division of household labor, I used a framework developed by Bonilla-Silva (2006) which has also been applied in the study of gender relations (Feinstein, Feinstein and Sabrow, 1999).
In his study on the rationalization and persistence of racial inequality after the abolishment of Jim Crow racism in the U.S., Bonilla-Silva (2006) identifies four central frames used by whites to maintain the contemporary racist order. Together, these frames generate an inconspicuous oppression that is easily hidden in the seemingly natural workings of social life.

The first frame (abstract liberalism) is largely based on notions that everyone controls his or her own destiny. Individuals are rational actors with a free choice and equal opportunities to succeed in life. Since this negates the existence of discriminatory practices, quotation of female parliamentarians and other governmental or non-governmental initiatives to level out the playing field are not necessary. Rather, they are discriminatory and contradictive to the freedom and equality that everyone (supposedly) shares.

The second frame is naturalization and derives from arguments of inequality as something that occurs naturally. For instance, instead of arguing that women are responsible for cooking because men would rather watch a game on TV or would feel emasculated if they wore an apron, it is argued that women are biologically suited to cook.

Similar to this notion of inequality as naturally given, cultural sexism pertains to the rationalization of inequality as inherent in culture. By rejecting responsibility for the current situation, men can argue that is not in their hands to change it.

Minimization (the fourth frame) can either mean that inequality is deemed as irrelevant in today’s societal context by arguing for example that `women are much better off now than they used to be.‘ It can also mean that experienced discrimination is waved off as a consequence of something else than sexism. For instance, one study found that some young women sugarcoat the fact that their older brothers are favored within the family by arguing that this is because they are older (Feinstein, Feinstein and Sabrow, 2010). A possible instance of gender inequality is therefore rationalized as ageism, thus perhaps overlooking the significance of gender. Hence, gender inequality should be understood as part of a two-way

---

15 This frame is named cultural racism by Bonilla-Silva. However, its name has later been adapted to the study of gender relations by Feinstein, Feinstein and Sabrow (2010).

16 Thereby not saying that gender always trumps age. While gender might be the most important factor to status in society or within the family in some contexts, age or ethnicity may be more important in others.
ideology that “comfort rulers and charm the ruled much like an Indian snake handler (Bonilla-Silva 2006, p.26).

Just as these four frames can be used by men (and women) to rationalize or whitewash gender inequality, they can also be used by women (and men) to explain their subordination without minimizing it. Women can for instance explain men’s role as providers by arguing that it is part of the culture. This can either be constructed as desirable or undesirable for women.

These four frames served as a template in a way that could be labeled a content-oriented analysis of ideas (Bergström and Boréus, 2005) and helped explain the persistence of an unequal division of household labor where women wanted men to help out more but at the same time did not express a strong discontentment about the current situation. Moreover, the frequency of resorting to these rationalizations was also noted to analyze whether sexism is stigmatized in Babati town (Feinstein, Feinstein and Sabrow, 2010). The most central value, however, was in how they facilitated a deconstruction of arguments that questioned the explicit wording of the interviewees by providing an approach to unveil an inconspicuously oppressive ideology without needing someone to spell it out for you. In other words, the frames were used to make the implicit explicit.

The rigidness and thorough definition of these frames, and the former application of them in a previous study (Feinstein, Feinstein and Sabrow, 2010), resulted in that they did not leave much room for interpretation. Using a more open approach in which the data guides the analysis, and not the other way around, would have been less restrictive and may therefore have yielded a different result (Esaiasson, et al., 2007). The reason for not taking this route was firstly because the frames were useful in abovementioned study and the result could therefore be placed in a wider theoretical context. Secondly, it would have been too time-consuming to analyze the material without having some clear guidelines because it would have diverted attention from the other research questions. That being said, some freedoms were taken and arguments which could not be categorized within the confines of the framework were nevertheless analyzed in accordance with previous research presented in the theoretical framework.

In contrast to the structured analysis on the construction of masculinity, the analysis of desirable gender relations was rather loosely founded on the vastly contested and much-
discussed concepts ‘feminism’ and ‘gender equality.’ Ogundipe-Leslie’s (1994) idea about liberation and responsibility was however used as a guideline in the analysis to relate women’s and men’s descriptions on what they wanted to change to the persistence of gender roles. The findings of how masculinity was constructed were furthermore used to discern gender roles that women and men either defended or wanted to be liberated from. Departing from Ogundipe-Leslie’s (1994) term STIWANISM to perceive African societies as plagued by repressive gender norms, the concept of gender equality was applied in a way that emphasized the inclusion and active participation of both women and men. Mutuality thus became a central concept in analyzing how the actions of one part affect the actions of the other.

3.4 Criticism of the sources

Research on men and masculinities is a rarity and with the exception of South Africa, “is still viewed with scepticism, if not outright dismissed, in many academic programmes in Africa” (Shefer, et al. 2007, p.52). The secondary material is therefore principally written by Western-originated authors situated in Western-located universities. The main problem with this skewed representation is that it risks reproducing an ethnocentric and postcolonial depiction of African men and masculinities, characterized by negative stereotypes, which is inapplicable to an African context.

These shortcomings are partially evened out by including writers such as Mohanty, Spivak, and Ogundipe-Leslie who write from a so-called ‘Third World’ perspective and have directed similar criticisms against Western researchers writing about Africa in general, and gender in particular. Additionally, theoretical arguments on masculinities from contexts other than Tanzania only fill a complementary role as illustrations of the context-dependent nature of gender relations, historically as well as culturally.
4. Findings

While it is important to acknowledge that all societies are more complex than they might first appear, one cannot help noticing that the streets of Babati town are heavily dominated by a male presence. Nowhere is this more palpable than at the centrally located bus station – the heart of Babati. As a hub for travelers from all over the Manyara region and far-away towns like Arusha and Dodoma, the bus station seems to produce a never-ending series of waves of people coming and going, not to mention the multitude of local commuters trying to catch a bajaji (tuk-tuk). Disregarding their different tribal affiliation, ethnicity, religious faith, class, etc., what they do have in common is that (almost) all of them are men.

The bus station is but the most evident example of the prevalent gender imbalance that leaves almost every public setting heavily dominated by a male presence. Because even if the streets are crowded with people at pretty much all times of day, men make up the vast majority of these people. Some work; some are jam-packed into trucks on their way to work on one of the many construction sites in the area; some are hawkers on the market; some (often under the influence of drugs or alcohol) are loitering; and some seem to accompany a friend who is working in one of the many `grocery shops.' Furthermore, Babati town at night is an odd display of tipsy men staggering from one bar to the next without a single woman in sight.

With so many men roaming the streets or working, it would seem as if the gender discourse largely reflects a public-private divide in which men are free to work and socialize in public while their wives are secluded at home performing domestic chores and making sure that dinner is on the table when the husband gets home.

The women and men of the study largely agreed on what role and responsibilities men have in the household. Having a job and making sure that the basic needs of the family are met was often explained as the essence of what it means to be a man. In fact, two unmarried women said that they would not engage in a romantic relationship with a man who was unemployed because that would leave him unable to fulfill his manly duties. This definition of manliness was validated by the interviewed men who strongly identified themselves as head of household and primary caretaker of the family.

---

17 These should not be mistaken for grocery shops in the common understanding of the term. Rather than resembling a small type of supermarket selling various items for cooking, their selection is mostly made up of beer and other beverages.
In contrast, both women and men described women’s primary role as the one responsible for taking care of children, cooking, cleaning, washing, and doing the dishes. Although women’s right to work outside the home was rarely questioned, the consensus was that they do not have a responsibility to provide for the family financially.

As primary caretakers of the family, most men said that they were not exempt from doing women’s duties, such as cooking and cleaning, if their wife was sick or otherwise incapacitated. Regardless, men’s responsibilities concerning household labor in less financially endowed households in rural Babati have been found to be minimal (Ennab, 2010). A husband is often not expected to do these chores if his wife is not seriously ill or busy taking care of a sick relative, nor will he perform them by his own volition. Instead, this burden usually falls on the children, a neighbor or a relative. Even though it is not particularly common for children to miss school because of this, when it does occur, it is usually girls rather than boys who have to stay at home. Wealthier husbands who had the financial means to stay at home from work tended to be more helpful than those who struggled financially (Ennab, 2010).

Rather than being described as emasculating or something that would interfere with their manliness, the most cited reason as to why men do not help out with these chores in less ‘extreme’ situations is because African (or Tanzanian)18 culture and tradition will not tolerate this kind of behavior. Nevertheless, one man who strongly identified with these traditions implied that whereas men should not do these chores in front of other people, it is okay if no one is looking. However, most men said that boys are often taught from an early age not to do women’s duties, such as doing the dishes or cleaning. In the instances when the interviewee took a clear distance from these cultural practices he still said that he felt pressure from other members of the community to stay away from performing these duties. One man who elaborated on the influence of culture and traditions argued that because men are culturally exalted as breadwinners and head of household, they also have more power than women. For example, several women argued that since the husband is the primary earner of income, it is only fair that he gets to decide how the money is spent, such as which school their children should attend. Moreover, this power is also translated into an ability to command his wife to do the things he prefers to avoid.

---

18 The respondents usually spoke of “African” culture and tradition, rather than “Tanzanian,” although the latter term was used on some occasions. However, no respondent made any distinction between these terms.
`African culture´ was often used in combination with other explanations to rationalize the lack of involvement in household labor. For instance, one financially less endowed man rationalized his low level of involvement in household labor by first claiming that society does not allow him to cook or clean. Later, he argued that he is too busy taking care of his self-owned business to help out more at home. When asked if he would like to see a change in the current division of household labor, he said that it was impossible because his wife does not have the necessary education to work outside the home. That being said, he would hire a maid if he had the money for it because he wanted to ease the burden his wife was carrying as lone caretaker of household labor. In another instance, one man combined cultural- with biological explanations. According to this man, it is more natural for men to be providers, because in contrast to women, who are controlled by emotions, men are rational actors who are able to plan for the future.

Women’s explanations of men’s lack of commitment to household labor differed somewhat from men’s. While most women highlighted African culture as the major explanation for the current situation, they differed from men in the sense that whereas men often said that they are not allowed to do certain things, such as cooking and cleaning, women said that men think that they are superior to women and therefore do not have the same responsibilities as women have. Some women talked about how friends of theirs cannot work outside the home because their husbands do not allow them to.

Women who were allowed to work and worked full time (as much as their husbands), used other explanations for the division of household labor. Their explanations did not emanate from a cultural standpoint. One woman even said that men who live in Babati town do not feel pressured to live up to a male role that excludes them from cooking and cleaning. Instead, they either said that they wanted to spend time with their child and therefore took on more responsibility, or the husband did not have time to do more household labor.

In addition to an apparent division of responsibilities concerning men’s and women’s role as provider and `cleaner,´ respectively, there was also a clear division of chores between men and women who shared responsibilities in and around the household. Two married women, each with a hired maid who takes care of pretty much every household chore on weekdays, talked about how their husbands were responsible for outside chores, such as taking care of the chickens and cows, or tending to the garden. The amount of time spent on these chores
was significantly less than what wives spent on inside chores on weekends when they could not afford to keep a maid. In fact, one woman mentioned men’s ability to hire a maid as a tool for them to avoid helping out more at home. The women who had a maid sometimes helped her with the chores she was paid to perform. The division of household labor was thus a matter between the maid and the wife, rather than the husband and wife. One married woman talked about how their maid does everything on weekdays when both she and her husband work full time, but that she spends the whole Saturday cooking, cleaning and doing the dishes because they could not afford to keep a maid every day of the week. The reason for this division of responsibilities was that her husband, who earned more, was busy at work or needed his rest on weekends.

Gender equality
The women of rural Babati are overloaded with work; they prepare breakfast, catch fish and sell it at the local market, buy groceries, and cook dinner (Ennab, 2010). Consequently, the well-being of families and the maintenance of domestic chores, such as making sure that the children are fed and can go to school, rely on the heavy workload of women.

That being said, wives want their husbands to help out with time-consuming and tiresome chores, such as cooking and washing, and take the same responsibilities as they do in the household. Women felt that they often have to carry a heavier burden than men do at home and they also expressed a desire to have the same chances and rights to earn a living by working outside the home as men have. One married woman in her lower 20s adamantly argued that this was her deepest wish to change in her current life situation. She wanted to work and earn her own money. This was not possible, however, because she did not think her husband would allow it. Occasionally, she worked in her husband’s store, but this was more perceived of as an extra burden rather than something fulfilling or empowering. Other women also mentioned the need to level out the balance of power in both the domestic- and the public sphere so that women and men have equal power in all levels and spheres of society.

It should be noted, however, that not all women ascribed the division of responsibilities or unbalanced power relations between men and women as sources of gender inequality, or even problematic in its own sense. For instance, two women emphasizes how gender equality can carry varied meanings for different couples. A marriage in which the man is the sole financial provider with a housewife who is responsible for the household labor is not necessarily
unequal if it benefits the family. From this perspective, men and women were regarded as having complementary roles and the most important thing is that they take care of each other and the rest of the family. One woman argued that gender equality means to totally disregard preconceived notions of male and female roles which hold back the well-being of families and the community at large. According to this line of thinking, gender equality is not about dividing responsibilities perfectly equal so that men and women spend the same amount of time cooking or cleaning every week, but rather for husband and wife to complement each other and recognize each other’s needs and wants.

Men’s notion on the meaning of gender equality and optimal gender relations was somewhat different, yet also similar to women’s. Several men thought husband and wife should share every responsibility equally. They also recognized a need for men and women to take care of each other and be sensitive to their respective needs. Women and men should have equal rights and an equal say in decision-making, both domestically and in public forums. However, a few men differed from women in the sense that while they acknowledged how different cultural and traditional practices can have negative effects on women’s status, they nonetheless placed a value in adhering to and preserving cultural legacies. For instance, one man argued that preserving established ways of living contributes to community development and stability. He refrained from cultural practices which are harmful to women but nonetheless argued that the cultural practices people have been brought up with are part of their identity and should be respected when the Government and civil society raise awareness and educate women about human rights and gender roles.

Many women were quick to label African culture as a major culprit and expressed a need to leave some traditions behind. This opinion was far less common among men. Instead, some argued that every marriage and every domestic setting is unique because of the different needs and conditions every family face, as well as their often mixed cultural background, each with a different set of customs and traditions. Rather than proceeding from a rigid and predefined template or definition of how for example household labor should be divided, these men insisted that cultural traditions need to be taken into account to reach gender relations that are most suitable for every household. As already mentioned, this opinion was not shared by all men and there were those who adamantly argued for a need to liberate both men and women from gender roles that are often thought of as inherent and given in African culture, but are not appropriate in today’s societal context.
One man spoke openheartedly about how he perceived gender relations in Tanzania and why gender equality might be hard to achieve. According to him, men and women have different social responsibilities that need to be taken into account when setting up a strategy to promote gender equality. Men have more responsibilities outside the home than women, and this makes it difficult to achieve perfect equality. While he is expected to go out with his male co-workers and other friends after work to discuss sports and socialize, women’s social responsibility is largely confined to church activities and is not nearly as extensive as men’s. However, he argued that men have to balance their social responsibility with their responsibilities at home so it does not interfere with women’s social responsibilities.
5. Analysis

If gender relations in Babati town were a play in which women and men made up the cast, the latter would be the protagonists and the stars of the show. The women, on their hand, would be supporting characters. In other words, men would be the driving characters whereas women would serve the demeaning, albeit necessary, purpose of `completing´ and enabling the stars to shine, or let `men be men´ to put it bluntly. It is hard to imagine how women can be co-writers of this script that so obviously favors men. Appearances can be deceiving, however, and women are not the passive actors above analogy makes out them to be, nor are they co-writers on equal terms with men.

As previously discussed, the hegemony of men in gender relations is sustained through either consent from women and other men (Talbot and Quayle, 2010; Connell, 2005), or because the ruling ideology has left women oblivious to the inequalities they live under (Ogunipe-Leslie, 1994; Bonilla-Silva, 2006). To claim this authoritative status without at least some level of consent from women, consciously or unconsciously, men would have to use direct violence to intimidate and crack down every act of disobedience. As the findings of this study did not suggest this to be the case, the construction of masculinity has to be explicated by using one (or both) of the former theoretical suppositions.

It’s a man’s world

The interviews with men and women in Babati town suggested that men are recognized as the central figures of African culture and tradition. For instance, men’s role as provider and protector of the family was repeatedly constructed and agreed upon by both women and men. In contrast to the active and normative construction of masculinity, femininity and women’s role were rarely constructed actively at all. Instead, femininity was assigned a place in gender relations that complemented and enabled a hegemonic masculinity.

Men were assigned a set of responsibilities that they were expected to live up to. The core principles of masculinity were to have a job and to make sure that the basic needs of the family were met. A failure to live up to these criteria would make them undesirable men, as suggested by two women who said that they would not engage in a romantic relationship with an unemployed man. Unemployment was therefore an unacceptable violation to masculinity. Moreover, since women did not have a responsibility to provide for the family financially
(regardless of their employment situation), men were expected to do this single-handedly. However, a failure to meet this criterion was an acceptable violation if women wanted to work. This was suggested by how one woman explicitly expressed a readiness to shoulder the responsibility of being the provider of the family, as well as the high number of women who wanted to work outside the home. Doing household labor was an appendage to the ideal masculinity because even though many women wanted their husbands to help out more with domestic chores, they did not openly resent them if they did not. It was desirable for men to help out more, but a man who can single-handedly provide for the family was more desirable than a man who cannot because he is preoccupied with helping his wife at home.

Whereas masculinity was constructed in a way that signified how men are supposed to be and what they do, femininity was constructed as that which is not masculine. In other words, urban women’s role in the household was largely unspoken and can therefore be regarded as natural and taken for granted. When discussing male and female roles and responsibilities in the household, the emerging pattern was that since men had more responsibilities outside the home, women had to have more responsibilities in the home. As two different places in gender relations, masculinity and femininity can only exist in relation to each other (Connell, 2005). By assigning the abovementioned place for masculinity, women were constructors of femininity as well. Consequently, by expecting men to have a bigger responsibility outside the home, women left themselves with a bigger responsibility in the home. What is more, the entering of maids as intermediaries between husband and wife in financially well endowed households almost makes wives redundant. It is therefore no wonder that social life in Babati town is so strongly permeated by a male domination when men are constructed as the doers of society and women as mere beneficiaries.

Nevertheless, it would be foolish to repeat the mistake of sex role theory and disregard the unequal capabilities men and women have in constructing gender roles. While women might be able to change their own place in gender relations by constructing masculinity differently, this is certainly easier said than done.

Although there was a consensus of men’s responsibilities towards the family, other notions of masculinity were contested by women as made-up constructions that only serve the purpose of exalting men’s status and disfavor women. For example, one man argued that men have a greater social responsibility than women and that this made it difficult to divide household
responsibilities equally. Moreover, many men argued that they felt a pressure to stay away from performing “women’s duties” because of how they were raised. Interestingly, this supposed pressure to live up to a male norm that exonerates them from doing household labor came from men themselves, not from women. In fact, no woman thought that men have a greater social responsibility than women. Since the socialization of male and female roles in the upbringing of children was beyond the aim of this study, a pressure from childhood cannot be totally discarded as irrelevant or nonexistent. However, the so-called pressure on men to hang out with male friends and co-workers instead of fulfilling responsibilities in the home seem to be rationalizations used by men to sustain their privileged position in gender relations and avoid doing household labor. This suggests that men have been able to construct a masculinity that accommodates their interests and that this masculinity is only partially supported and constructed by women. Nevertheless, the normative definition of masculinity does provide some level of pressure on men and helps explain how this male role, which is officially contested in the National Strategy for Gender Development (MCDGC, 2005), persists. The balance of power in constructing gender roles is however skewed in the favor of men and suggests that men will not change just because women want them to.

**Defending the hegemony**

Having identified the *ideal man* as one who has a job and can single-handedly provide for his family and that the construction of a man who is exonerated from doing household labor is a male gender project, it is due time to analyze how this hegemonic masculinity is sustained.

Previous discussion dealt with how men’s role as providers seems largely accepted. There is therefore no need for men who live up to the core principles of ideal masculinity to use direct violence to defend this position. However, men who only live up to some of these criteria are in greater need to assert their authority and defend it through violence and rationalizations.

The interviews with married men in Babati town revealed a pattern that was founded on the different economic status of the respondents. Financially well endowed husbands kept a maid in order to avoid doing household labor while at the same time making sure that their wives were not overloaded with work at home. This led to a complacency among many women since by being somewhat liberated from having to work until exhaustion, they felt that they did not get the low end of the bargain. Put differently, the married men who lived up to the role as sole financial provider did not have an urgent need to defend their hegemony because
their wives were happy with the way things were. However, as one man aptly noted, men’s status as culturally exalted breadwinners leads to a skewed balance of power in the household. Men’s role as breadwinner therefore results in a male leverage over women in how to divide household labor. To argue that women’s lack of explicit resistance suggests complacency might therefore be a bit of a stretch. Men’s role as breadwinner can instead be seen as a form of economic violence through which women become dependent on men’s income and are therefore deterred from challenging men’s hegemony.

On the other hand, some women seemed to have been deceived by the ruling ideology which allows men to avoid doing household labor by paying someone else to do it and which rates remunerative work higher than work within the household. In the instances where both husband and wife worked full time, but where women nonetheless were the ones who prepared the children for school or were responsible to cook and clean on weekends when they could not afford to keep a maid, men were exempt through minimization from women. Instead of recognizing these scenarios as inequalities, women argued that they performed these chores either because they wanted to spend time with the kids or because their husbands were too busy or tired to help out. While it is hard to argue against the fact that a mother want to spend time with her children, it is difficult to see how men would be more tired than women if they both work full time. One woman argued that because her husband earns more than her, they rely on his income. Furthermore, she described his work as more important and demanding even though they had similar work tasks. This suggests two things: that economic violence can exist even when the wife is allowed to work; and that men’s time and effort are valued higher than women’s, especially when the work is performed outside the household. Both result in further entrenching men’s role as provider and head of household.

In contrast to ideal men’s ´smooth sailing´ to a hegemonic position, men who struggled to provide for their families were more insecure because their hegemony was more fragile. They therefore had to rationalize inequalities to a much higher degree than wealthier men did. One man who was not responsible for any domestic chores used both cultural sexism and abstract liberalism to rationalize the unequal division of responsibilities and freedoms in his marriage. He started off by arguing that there is a pressure from within African culture which makes it impossible for him to perform “women’s duties” before claiming that he was too busy earning money to feed the family. As shown above, the so-called pressure he refers to is not as prevalent as he claims and the second argument does not explain why he did not allow his
wife to work and be a contributor as well. Although he argued that he did not have anything against it personally, he said that it would be impossible for his wife to work outside the home because she did not have the necessary skills. Interestingly, his wife argued that the reason she did not work was because he would not let her. In fact, she used to work part-time but all she does now is to take care of the household and help her husband in his store. By denying that she was forced to work for him, both in the home and in his store, and thus severely restricted (if not entirely eliminated) her opportunity to work outside the home, this man used abstract liberalism to rationalize gender inequality in his marriage. They did not have an equal opportunity to be and do what they wanted to, but this was denied by the husband who basically blamed his wife for not working outside the home.

The reason why he did this was because he tried to defend the hegemonic masculinity. By allowing his wife to work and possibly be successful, he would have risked compromising his role as provider of the family. This would have made it difficult for him to rationalize his lack of involvement in household labor. Despite being in economic hardship, he chose to defend his privileged position with tooth and nail and resort to economic violence by depriving his wife of the freedom to work outside the home and to live in poverty, bound to the shackles of domestic servitude to please her “master.” Relating to how some men did not welcome an additional income if it came from their wives despite economic turmoil in the 1970s and 1980s because of feelings of insecurity and jealousy (Tripp, 1989), this finding suggests that gender roles can become more rigid if the privileged position of masculinity is threatened. Economic hardship can therefore become a vicious circle if men refuse to let go of their hegemony. While the marker of hegemony is the ability to not having to use direct violence (Connell, 2005), the fragility of this man’s hegemony is indicated by his denial to let his wife work and how he felt a need to richly rationalize the current division of household labor. This is a contrast to wealthier husbands whose status as provider for the family was not threatened. These men could therefore allow their wives to work outside the home without jeopardizing their hegemony. What is more, in combination with the aforementioned man’s rich use of rationalizations, this suggests that there is a high level of stigmatization involved in denying women the right to work outside the home in Babati town.

Even though this man did not live up to the ideal masculinity, he was a complicit supporter of it because the ruling patriarchal ideology in Babati town gave him a position of power from which he was able to avoid doing household labor. Men are therefore not liable to challenge
or construct masculinity differently as long as they earn privileges from keeping the status quo, despite their failure to live to the ideal masculinity. In juxtaposition to *complicit* men who defend the ideal masculinity, poor rural men are *marginalized* and *subordinated* because they do not live up to the core principles.

It is worth pointing out that rural men were only indirectly described as subordinate to urban men. For instance, neither men nor women referred to rural men as an example of how men should not be or act. However, the ideal masculinity they constructed was largely incongruent and unachievable for the majority of small-scale farmers in rural Babati, as described by Ennab (2010). In contrast to wealthy men in Babati town, most rural men cannot afford to keep a maid and therefore lack an effective device that shields them from doing household labor and does not place a heavy workload on women. As noted above, keeping a maid is a powerful way to keep women complacent about the hegemony of men. The hierarchy of masculinities therefore rests on the economic means a man has to ensure his hegemony over women. Poor rural men are therefore marginalized because they fail to single-handedly provide for their families without placing a heavy burden on the backs of women and/or children.

Whereas urban men who were less financially endowed, but who nonetheless could provide their family with the basic needs, were marked by an insecurity that compelled them to claim their authority by denying women the right to work outside the home, poor rural men are even more inferiorized because they do not even live up to this standard. The ideal man is one who can provide. The binary opposition to that is a woman who is provided for. Granted, this might be something of a simplification but the active-passive dichotomy is in fact a pertinent analogy of how gender roles in Babati town are constructed. As such, poor rural men do not fit the bill of the active man who can provide (and control) his woman. As Ennab (2010) notes, rural women are faced with a heavy burden that includes doing chores inside- as well as outside the household and leave them exhausted at night. The distinction between the male provider and the female beneficiary, who is supposed to be exempt from responsibilities outside the household, thus becomes blurry. Poor rural men are thereby subordinated by wealthier urban men, who embody the normative male role in romantic relationships, through feminization.
The illustrations of the urban man who struggled to provide for his family and the poor rural men with toiling wives suggest that the most important distinction among men is between rich and poor rather than urban or rural residence. Since lower-class men can become wealthier, they also have a shot of rising in the ranks of men. Poor men are subordinated because they cannot be ideal men as long as they are poor. Rural men, on the other hand, are marginalized because they are negatively stereotyped as backward and primitive. For instance, while some men used cultural sexism to rationalize their low involvement in household labor, they only used it to denote what men could not do in order to avoid being feminized. They did not use cultural sexism to denigrate women’s status. In fact, both men and women argued that there is a need to leave some traditions behind because they are not appropriate in the “modern” African life where most men and women do not work on the field. The inappropriate and discriminatory elements of African culture were therefore connoted to rural farmers rather than “modern” urban residents. Since backwardness and poverty are perceived as one and the same in this line of reasoning, rural men can overcome this marginalization and become the top-dogs of men in society if they have enough money to single-handedly provide for the family.

**Gender equality – an elusive concept**

Men are an obstacle to gender equality because they are all attached to the notion that they are somehow superior to women (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994). So far, the analysis of the construction and defense of an ideal and hegemonic masculinity has suggested that men are far from eager to change the division of household labor. However, this could not be deduced by listening to how they argued for changes that were often quite similar to those women wanted to achieve. For instance, a majority of both women and men argued for a need to level out the balance of power in both the domestic- and the public sphere and that women and men should respect and take care of each other. Granted, respect is a particularly fuzzy concept and current gender norms certainly do not exclude men and women from taking care of each other. Yet for the wealthy and educated men that were interviewed for this study, this seems to have been mere rhetoric. They were obviously aware of current inequalities and knew what the “right” answer was when asked about what they wanted to change in current gender relations. However, by taking men’s defense of their hegemony into account, it seems as if the politically correct language used does not respond to their actual wants. The fact that men concerned themselves with outwardly welcoming an equal division of power despite being
zealous defenders of hegemonic masculinity suggest that it is stigmatized to support gender inequality among the middle-class in Babati town.

It would nevertheless be libelous to homogenize men as a coherent social group and label them sexists based solely on this premise. In fact, optimal gender relations, as described by both women and men, were highly context-dependent. Women and men alike founded their arguments on the uniqueness of every household, which led them to conclude that there is no predefined template of gender equality that is appropriate for every family. The description of optimal gender relations put forth by men might therefore be a utopian depiction which they would like to see come true some day, but perhaps not in the near future. The dominant notions of masculinity and femininity as binary oppositions with contrasting areas of responsibilities do however provide an obstacle to the realization of an equal balance of power between men and women. On the other hand, men seemed to emphasize the uniqueness of every family in an attempt to protect their hegemony by drawing on an argument that reminded of sex role theory. For instance, some men argued that it was important to preserve traditions because they are part of one’s identity and they contribute to community development and stability. Consequently, they referred to a script that was thought to hold some immeasurable value and therefore needed to be respected. In contrast, women did not use cultural sexism at all to rationalize or defend arguments that gender relations should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Instead, some argued that gender equality is about recognizing what is best for the family, even if it means that women do all the housework and men work outside the home. While this argument does not rule out a division of responsibilities in which men are stay-at-home husbands while women are providers, at least not in theory, it leads to a situation in which women’s seclusion to the domestic sphere is rarely recognized as gender politics, and therefore remains largely unquestioned. On the other hand, it might be a practical solution for families to divide responsibilities this way if men earn more money from working than women and therefore have a better chance to provide for the family, thus reflecting a sexism that pervades all spheres of society.

The bumpy road to change
As argued above, hiring a maid is a powerful way for men to keep women complacent about men’s hegemony. That being said, most women desired an equal opportunity to work outside the home as men have. While Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) argues that women are the most important obstacle to overcome in the struggle to establish more equal gender relations in
Africa because of their supposed blindness to the oppression they live under, the ambitious desires of women in Babati town suggest otherwise. Granted, many of the interviewed women belonged to the upper echelons of society, indicated by their level of education (most were either college graduates or had vocational education), their fluency in English, and their high economic status. Thus, these women are far from representative of the Tanzanian population and are therefore perhaps not the women Ogundipe-Leslie primarily had in mind when she argued that women are obstacles to gender equality. Nonetheless, as discussed above, some of the interviewed women minimized inequalities. While they only constituted a minority, this suggests that not even the wealthiest and most educated women are completely shielded from the deceptive and inconspicuous nature of patriarchy.

However, the fact that virtually every interviewed woman wanted men to help out more at home\textsuperscript{19} and have an equal opportunity to work outside the home indicates that women in Babati town are aware of gender inequalities and that they would change the way household labor is divided if they could. Nevertheless, women’s notion of how responsibilities should be divided between husband and wife seems to be an obstacle that may even surpass men’s rationalizations.

Women who were not unburdened by a maid expressed a strong desire for an equal division of household labor but did not match this with a wish to divide other responsibilities equally. They wanted their husbands to take the same responsibilities as they do in the household but they were not ready to admit that they had a responsibility to provide financially for the family. In other words, women wanted to ‘eat the cake and have it too.’ As Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) argues, liberation and responsibility should go hand in hand. These women’s unwillingness to allow a mutual liberation of restrictive gender roles risks alienating men and dichotomize men’s and women’s interests so that men become tenacious defenders of the current division of responsibilities. It seems highly unlikely that men will relent to women’s desires to divide household labor equally if women are not ready to unload men’s burden to single-handedly provide for the family, especially if this means that they are feminized. Given African men’s skepticism towards (Western) feminism and its supposed objective to feminize men (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994), and the similarities with women’s notion of optimal gender relations in Babati town, it is no wonder that gender roles persist in Babati town. In fact, the

\textsuperscript{19} Women who had a maid and did not express this desire for themselves nonetheless talked in general about how they think Tanzanian men should take on the same responsibilities in the home as women do.
interviewed men seemed rather accommodating regarding a change in the current division of responsibilities. In contrast to women, they argued that there should be an equal division of every responsibility inside- as well as outside the household. This does not necessarily mean that men would be highly involved in household labor, since keeping a maid seems to be a rather convenient `solution´ to the problem, but it does suggest that men are more inclined to adopt a positive approach regarding women’s active role outside the household if this corresponds with a greater responsibility. However, as shown above, the likelihood that women are allowed this role is highly contingent on the stability of men’s hegemony.

Although women in general did not acknowledge that they have a responsibility to provide financially for the family, not all were completely foreign to the idea. For instance, one financially less endowed woman listed the opportunity to work outside the home as her deepest wish. She could consider being the provider of the family if her husband would allow it. Similar to how women stepped up and took on the role as provider during the economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s (Tripp, 1989), this finding suggests that women’s definition of gender equality, and how gender relations should be, depend on the economic well-being of the household. While men are more likely to use rationalizations and economic violence when they feel insecure about their hegemony, women who are faced with economic hardship are more prone to accept a responsibility to provide for the family financially. Since men tend to assert their hegemonic masculinity even more when they feel that it is threatened, however, economic hardship in itself cannot be linked to a loosening of gender roles. It can however be linked to how women perceive gender relations. While wealthier women seem to think of gender equality as a one-way street in which they should have more rights but no new responsibilities, financially less endowed women are more liable to think in terms of mutuality.
6. Closing discussion

Babati town and Sweden are both examples of a global performance-oriented culture in which people are defined and valued according to what they have achieved, how much money they have, and how they look. Although all these aspects intersect to create a hierarchy even among wealthy and ‘beautiful’ people, money seems to be the principal point of reference in the categorization of men and women as either successful/attractive or unsuccessful/unattractive.

However, while it often seems to be more important for women to be physically attractive, it is more important for men to have money. Although this might be somewhat of an obsolete and sexist cliché, women’s construction of ideal masculinity in Babati town as the ability to provide for the family, as well as three women’s rejection of the importance of men’s physical appearance, at least confirms the interconnectedness of masculinity and wealth. Thus, money makes the man and men make the money. Meaning, men are categorized as attractive or unattractive based on their ability to provide for the family. Since masculinity is usually considered superior to femininity, it is often men who occupy high positions in corporations and government agencies. Consequently, men are more likely to end up with a well-paid job than women. This creates a competitive situation between men, who strive to outperform each other and get the well-paid job and through this attract women by offering them a life of comfort. Since women are disadvantaged in the job market, it is no wonder they desire men who have enough money to support them.

This categorization of attractive and unattractive men brings forth a problematic situation for gender relations because men can (and often will) use money to maintain their hegemonic position in gender relations. As this thesis has shown, women who are well provided for in Babati town tend to be complacent about ‘minor’ inequalities because at least they do not have to toil in the household like many poorer women do. Similarly, many women in Sweden appear to be relatively complacent about seemingly given gender norms which entail that they are expected to prepare dinner most nights of the week even though they work as much as their husbands. On the other hand, a tax deduction on household services\(^2\) has enabled many

\(^2\) Known as "RUT-avdraget."
middle-income households to hire a maid to take care of their household labor,\(^{21}\) and thereby largely nullified the gendered division of household labor.

Replacing one woman with another to do household labor is not a sign of gender equality, however. Women who have attended higher education and can compete with men in the job market have achieved a marker of masculinity that makes them harder to suppress in gender relations that exalt masculinity and denounce femininity. Consequently, it is not women per se who are oppressed in Sweden. Instead, it is often immigrants and uneducated women (and men) who are feminized by being exploited as poorly paid houseworkers for middle-class women and men. Although arguably more subtle than in Babati town, this state-endorsed sexism in a country that is often considered a role model of gender equality in the world provides a cross-cultural example of how household labor is denigrated as feminized labor and how men (and sometimes women) can buy their way out of doing these “demeaning” chores. Thus, there seems to be a deep-rooted and globally pervasive attitudinal problem in how masculinity and the performance of household labor are perceived as mutually exclusive.

The source of the problem of both complacency and complicity among women and men is the all-pervasive individualism and greed that is characteristic of a performance-oriented culture that was largely confined to Western countries a few decades ago. Colonialism was arguably the first disruption of horizontal communal social structures in Africa. Neocolonialism in the form of structural adjustment programs, implemented in Tanzania during the 1980s, was perhaps even more important because it wreaked havoc on Julius Nyerere’s noble idea of *Ujamaa* and replaced it with a system in which every “man” was left for himself and where few people now rarely look beyond what is best for the family (at least in Babati town). In Sweden, the family as a social unit has lost much relevance in the last few decades. One reason for this is because women and men alike are expected to pursue a professional career for themselves, an endeavor which is largely incompatible with reciprocal family relations. Rather than mutually taking care of one another and what the family has in common, the “solution” is to either hand over the responsibility to the welfare sector or to private “helpers.”

The masculinization of educated and/or wealthy women in Sweden and Babati town thus

\(^{21}\) This is not to argue that the majority of so-called “middle-income households” keep a maid, but rather that there is a significant number of households with the financial means to intermittently do so. Moreover, “middle-income households” is a rather vague and ill-defined social category that in this discussion simply pertains to households which do not have to struggle to make ends meet.
diverts the attention from the persistent problem of the subordination of femininity by exalting women to a hegemonic position in gender relations.

In a social climate obsessed with comparing and hierarchizing women and men according to merits, a feminism that encompasses women (and men) from all layers of society seems counterintuitive and will probably not see the light of day unless people start looking beyond their immediate proximity and adopt a mindset based on solidarity rather than individualism. One could argue that it is a matter of capitalism versus socialism, and that might be partially correct. On the other hand, gender equality will not be achieved by simply changing the economic- or political system, or by educating everyone about the equal rights of women and men. Ultimately, gender equality is a mindset which cannot be achieved unless both women and men become true humanitarians and stop regarding gender relations as a zero-sum game in which any concession of hegemony is by definition a defeat.
7. Conclusions

- How is ideal masculinity in romantic relationships constructed by women and men?

The construction of ideal masculinity in romantic relationships among women and men in Babati town were strongly similar to Talbot and Quayle’s (2010) findings. The core principles of ideal masculinity were to have a job and to make sure that the basic needs of the family were met. Although men were expected to financially provide for the family single-handedly, a failure to live up to this quality was acceptable if women wanted to work. Moreover, doing household was merely an appendage to ideal masculinity because while many women wanted their husbands to help out more with these chores, it was not an essential masculine quality.

- Do women and men construct masculinity differently?

Although there was a consensus between women and men on the core principles of ideal masculinity, there were some discrepancies in the construction of what role and responsibilities men have in romantic relationships. Firstly, only men constructed ideal masculinity and performing ‘women’s duties,’ such as cooking and cleaning, as mutually exclusive. Secondly, one man argued that men have a greater social responsibility than women. Neither of these constructions were validated by any interviewed woman, nor by most men. Thus, the construction of masculinity (and gender roles in general) is contextually contingent and varies from household to household, depending for example on the financial status of the family.

- How do women and men explain the gendered division of household labor?

This study identified all four of Bonilla-Silva’s (2006) frames to explain a gendered division of household labor. Cultural sexism was the most commonly used rationalization for why most men tend to stay away from doing ‘women’s duties,’ such as cooking and cleaning. In contrast to men’s use of this frame to rationalize an unequal division of household labor, the women who used it merely did so to explain how men often exempt themselves from taking an equal responsibility in household labor, and not as a rationalization. Although only constituting a minority, some women minimized the gendered division of household labor by arguing that their husband was too tired or busy to help out, or that they took on more responsibility voluntarily. One man used abstract liberalism to rationalize why his wife was responsible for all household labor and another man used naturalization to explain why men
are natural providers and why it is not practically possible to divide household labor perfectly equally.

- **What do they want to change?**

Many women wanted men to help out more with household labor and take the same responsibilities as they do in the household. However, this should not come at the expense of men’s primary responsibility, which was to provide financially for the family. Men, on the other hand, were ambiguous in how they talked about change. Although they often spoke in similar terms as women, it seems as if they are far from eager to change the division of household labor. Nevertheless, to reiterate the importance that liberation and responsibility go hand in hand (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994), it appears reasonable to suggest that some men might be willing to divide household labor equally if the responsibility to provide financially is also shared equally between husband and wife.

To conclude, the persistence of officially contested gender roles can be attributed to men and women alike, as both are involved in constructing men as breadwinners with leverage over women in the household. As this male role is contingent upon a contrasting role for women as houseworkers, the acceptance of the former leads to the persistence of the latter, regardless of whether there is a desire to liberate women from the confines of the home and the burden of household labor.
8. References


Appendix 1: List of respondents

Below is list of interviewed person and information on the interviewee’s sex, approximate age, relationship status, residence, form of employment, language spoken, and religion.

- **Respondent 1:** Male, ca. 30 years old, married, urban, full-time, English, no maid, Muslim (focus group participant)

- **Respondent 2:** Male, ca. 30 years old, married, urban, full-time, English, no maid, Christian (focus group participant)

- **Respondent 3:** Female, ca. 25 years old, steady boyfriend, rural, full-time, English, no maid, Christian (focus group participant)

- **Respondent 4:** Female, ca. 35 years old, steady boyfriend, rural, full-time, English, no maid, Muslim (focus group participant)

- **Respondent 5:** Female, ca. 40 years old, steady boyfriend, rural, full-time, English, no maid, Christian (focus group participant)

- **Respondent 6:** Male, ca. 25 years old, married, urban, full-time, Kiswahili, no maid, Muslim

- **Respondent 7:** Female, ca. 20 years old, married, urban, unemployed, Kiswahili, no maid, Muslim

- **Respondent 8:** Female, ca. 30 years old, married, urban, full-time, Kiswahili, maid, Christian

- **Respondent 9:** Male, ca. 35 years old, married, urban, full-time, English, maid, Christian

- **Respondent 10:** Female, ca. 35 years old, married, urban, full-time, English, maid, Christian
• **Respondent 11:** Female, ca. 25 years old, married, urban, full-time, English, maid, Muslim

• **Respondent 12:** Male, ca. 75 years old, married, rural, retired, Kiswahili, no maid, Muslim

• **Respondent 13:** Male, ca. 40 years old, married, urban, part-time, English, no maid, Christian